# Presenting debates on eu democratic deficit

Without being perceived as legitimate, the European Union (EU) is not able to continue or further integrate its regulations on a European level or expand with new member states, and therewith it only has limited power over its member states. According to a still growing number of authors the European Union is losing legitimacy among its member state citizens and that the Union should be concerned with the matter (Eriksen and Fossum, 2000; FØllesdal, 2006; Moravcsik, 2002; Weale and Nentwich, 1998). This loss of legitimacy for EU actions as it is perceived by its citizens is caused by the 'democratic deficit'. This loss of legitimacy is probably best illustrated by the Dutch and French voting against the European Constitution (2005) and the decreasing number of citizen members voting for the elections of the European Parliament (FØllesdal, 2006).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

One of the explanations for the decrease in legitimacy from its member state citizens is the EU political integration and enlargement with new member states. Many scholars, scientists and journalists have asked themselves the question whether member state citizens support such European integration, however, the research on the effect of EU integration on the legitimacy is very scattered up to now. This literature review will present the discussion which is going on about this topic.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How legitimate is European integration regarded to be by its member state citizens according to the literature?

RESEARCH GOAL

The goal of this literature research is to present the abstract discussion on the influence of EU integration upon the perceived level of legitimacy as found in the literature based upon a theoretical explanation.

RELEVANCE

This literature review is contributing to the existing literature by presenting the debate about the legitimacy deficit that the EU is faced with by highlighting the scattered argument of EU integration. Thereby, this study is a small step in better understanding the loss of legitimacy that the EU is confronted with.

# THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Both variables are very broad, however, when putting them into a European context, they can be narrowed down to more tangible terms. In this paper, legitimacy is specified into political legitimacy and refers to support given to the EU by its member state citizens. Defining integration in this sense is a bit more complicated. The EU is integrating on several matters. This study focuses on political integration which is explained in the abstract terms of 'deepening' and 'widening'. This section contains the operationalization of both variables and provides the background in a European context.

LEGITIMACY

It must be stated that legitimacy is a very complex term and no single definition of legitimacy has been universally accepted (Ansell, 2001). However, a definition stated by Ansell (2001) which was originally set up by

Max Weber touches upon the intentions for this literature research rather well: 'Weber linked legitimacy to the willingness to comply with a system of rule ('legitimacy orders') or to obey commands ('imperative control')(p. 8704)'. For a proper understanding of this literature review this definition must then be specified into the direction of political legitimacy. According to Ansell (2001) 'political legitimacy refers to the moral and normative principles by which governments, regimes, and institutions justify their right to demand compliance, obedience, or allegiance'(abstract). Toorn et al. (2010) state that legitimacy is a necessity for authorities because it is a vital source of power and evokes voluntary deference among its followers, in this case EU member state citizens. This, in its turn is needed for voluntary obedience of citizens to the authority. Without such obedience, citizens do not comply to the rules and other regulations of the authority and opposition, conflict or even war could occur.

DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

In an EU context, being a liberal democracy, legitimacy seems to go together with democracy, the more democratic the Union is appearing, the more legitimate it is perceived (Blondel, Sinnot & Svensson, 1998). Key elements which make a polity democratic are competitive elections, transparency of the decision-making process and active organs in it, the interest groups around those organs and the accountability of the political leaders (Blondel, Sinnot & Svensson, 1998). A political institution could be confronted with a democratic deficit, meaning that it lacks democracy and that the methods of operating are too complex for the ordinary citizen that it becomes inaccessible to them (Electronic Glossary: 'Democratic Deficit, EU

Commission). In this research it is assumed that the democratic deficit is leading to a lack of legitimacy or better said: a legitimacy deficit. According to Beetham (1991) a legitimacy deficit is a 'discrepancy between rules and supporting beliefs, absence of shared beliefs criteria of legitimacy (p. 20)'.

SUPPORT

In their book, Blondel, Sinnot & Svensson (1998) argue that legitimacy stems from the support which citizens give to the authority in question. This is indicating that legitimacy is not a dichotomous variable, meaning that a polity is not either legitimate or not, but the level of legitimacy can fluctuate and is more or less legitimate. The explain support by the 'distance distance between what individuals wish to see the institution doing and how this 'what' should be done, on the other hand, and what the institution is regarded as doing and how it is doing it' (p. 7). The level of support is then determined by looking at the size of the distance: when the distance is considered to be small by citizens, the level of support will be greater. This indication is making support something which can be measured on an individual level. However, the level of support given to an institution can also be measured on a group level (e. g. in a nation, Benelux, Western nations belonging to the EU, or all EU member states). The level of support can be positive or negative of which the latter one would indicate an opposition to the state (Blondel, Sinnot & Svensson, 1998).

Individuals may support certain fields of areas of an institution and may not support other fields, therefore, institutions may only receive support on some matters but not on others. As a consequence, institutions can never be

fully legitimate to all involved individuals, either direct or indirect. In the case of the EU, it cannot be regarded to be legitimate since not all EU citizens grand their support to all fields of area on which it is actively involved, designating that the level of legitimacy of the EU is variable and is limited to some fields (Blondel et al., 1998).

Moreover, the EU can receive support in different ways. For example, a citizen might support the main aim of the Union but not all specific activities and another citizen might be supportive towards many EU activities but not agree to the overall aim of it fields (Blondel et al., 1998).

This research is focused on the support given to the EU by its current member state citizens, not potential ones such as the Croatian or Turkish. The effect on new member state citizens[1]is only taken into account after their admission.

INTEGRATION

One of the major reasons why France, West Germany, the Benelux and Italy founded the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) by means of the Treaty of Paris in 1951 was to create possibilities for a common market of steal and coal in order to maintain peace and stimulate economical growth. The participating countries started to make an attempt to integrate their resources, knowledge and capabilities in order achieve these goals. The ECSC was the first pan European polity, being a common institution with common rules with a responsibility to the common interests instead of merely to the own nation (Monnet, 1962). Such a treaty should lead to European unity among its member states. In the institutions which followed

upon the ECSC, of which the European Union (EU) is the institution as we know it today, unity has always been one of the very core issues. The current shape of the EU is defined as follow: 'the European Union is a treaty-based, institutional framework that defines and manages economic and political cooperation among its 27 member states. It is governed by several institutions (Congression Research Service [CRS], Report for Congress 2008, p. 2.)'.

Deepening

More recently, in 1999, Alesina and Wacziarg described the EU as being 'somewhere in between a free market area and a political federation with too many centralized policies to be a simple free trade area, but its central political institutions are not sufficiently developed for it to be a federal state as we normally think of (p. 2)'. Because Europe was integrating on an economical level in that time, some scholars regarded an increase in the process of political integration necessary. At that time the role of the EU had become questionable and according to Alesina and Wacziarg, the EU was standing at the 'crossroads in terms of institutional design (p. 2)'.

Over the years the EU is becoming a political union ever more and is taken over aspects of everyday life which were previously regarded to be the domain of national governments. Creating such a political union can be done by extending the policy prerogatives of Europe and reforming its political institutions (Alesina and Wacziarg, 1999). For this research, these matters are referred to as deepening.

Widening

At the last enlargement moment, in 2004, ten new countries were included in the Union and in 2005 the negotiations have started with potential member candidates, Turkey and Croatia.

It should be noted that widening does not involve integrating national governments because that could have a different impact on the perceived legitimacy compared to the other forms of integration that were mentioned because the supportiveness of the EU by citizens might depend on their supportiveness on their national governments. This exclusion must keep the distinction between national support and EU support clear.

Concluding on this section, EU integration remains a broad term and includes many different forms and aspects. However, in most literature no clear definitions of integration is given as such and is used as a general term. For this research, as mentioned, the distinction is made between political integration and enlargement with new member states.

## METHODS

In order to be able to answer the research question a literature study is executed. First, a broad literature search is done in which the author seeks articles that touch upon the research topic. Important research terms are political legitimacy, EU, expansion/enlargement/integration, normative pressures, democracy and power. Databases used for searching are the Tilburg University database in which Science Direct and JSTOR are considered to be of major importance. Additionally, databases such as the European Journal of Political Research and European Journal of Political Theory (of Sage, journals online) contain many articles which touch upon the

research topic and are used intensively. Besides those databases, the White Paper on Governance (COM, 2001b) is of major contribution to the research for this review.

Continuously, a selection of the articles will be made which will result in the list of articles used and/or cited in this paper. This is done by reading the abstract and, when considered relevant, the conclusion and discussion of the gathered articles. In addition to scientific articles, the author searches for news articles regarding the topic. All the relevant articles that are found are presented in a so-called monster matrix including the name of the author(s), year of publication, title, key concepts, variables, key findings and contribution. This monster matrix is presented in table 1 on page nine and ten. And it presents an overview of all the opinions of the authors of the matter. The findings are used as a basis for the results and data analysis.

Furthermore, when researching political legitimacy, two different approaches can be chosen, namely the normative- or the empirical approach. The latter one focuses on 'why or when people do obey, respect, or show allegiance to a particular government, regime, state, policy, or institution (Ansell 2001, p. 8704)'. Whereas the 'normative approach is used by political philosophers to identify the standards by which a regime or action must be judged if it is to be regarded as legitimate (Ansell 2001, p. 8704)'. In his 2005 article, Tsakatika states that 'the question of (normative) legitimacy is brought up when (empirical) legitimacy is missing or deficient (p. 193)'. This makes sense in relation to the topic of this paper since the EU is confronted with a so-called 'democratic deficit' causing a decrease of legitimacy. The vast amount of articles on which this review relies are based on the normative

approach. However, according to Ehin (2008), the relationship between support and legitimacy is an empirical matter. The articles which the author of this research found relating this issue are indeed empirically oriented and make use of measurable variables. The results will present a mixture of normative and empirical oriented data.

**Author(s)**

**Title**

**Variables (DV & IV)/ core concepts (CC)**

**Contribution of paper**

**Key findings (Table 1, monster matrix)**

**Alesina, A. & Wacziarg, R. (1999)**

**Is Europe going too far?**

**CC: economic integration, political integration, authority**

**This paper examines the process of European political integration.**

**In many areas in which there are no clear externalities or economies of scale justifying centralization, " Europe" is taking over. Europe has acquired responsibilities in areas that should remain national or local.**

**Beetham D. (1993)**

**The legitimation of power, chapter 1: Towards a Social-scientific Concept of Legitimacy.**

**CC: power, legitimacy, legal validity, dimensions of legitimacy, authority, significance legitimacy.**

**The ambition of the book is to rescue the concept of legitimacy from the confusion into which it has sunk, so that its place in the analysis of power relations can be securely located.**

Criteria of legitimacy = justifiability of rules in terms of shared beliefs. Legitimacy deficit: discrepancy between rules and supporting beliefs, absence of shared beliefs + is the form of non-legitimate power. ( key findings relevant for this research)

Bellamy, R & Castiglione D. (2003)

Legitimizing the Euro-'Polity' and its 'Regime': The Normative Turn in EU Studies

CC: constitutionalism, EU, governance, legitimacy, normative theory

This article discusses the normative implications of the European integration process by addressing the question of the legitimacy deficit in the EU and its member states.

The result is that the EU conforms neither to the materialist realism of many theorists of intergration nor the high idealism of certain European federalists.

Blondel J., Sinnot R. & Svensson P. (1998)

People and Parliament in the European Union - Participation, Democracy, and Legitimacy. Chapter 1: Electoral Participation, Democracy, and Legitimacy in the EU.

Democracy, EU integration, support, legitimacy, power, Elections, public opinion.

The aim of chapter 1 is to give in introduction of the core concepts and methodology for the next chapters of the book.

A problem which worries many integrationists is the alleged lack of legitimacy of the process on integration, particularly in a period when that process faces some far-reaching changes and challenges. Lack of legitimacy, in turn, is frequently regarded as being due, at least in part, to the 'democratic deficit' of the European Union.

Ehin P. (2008)

Competing Models of EU Legitimacy: the Test of Popular Expectations.

CC: EU, legitimacy, democracy, integration, normative legitimation criteria, support

- Whether the European citizens expect the EU to conform to the liberal-democratic criteria of legitimacy or not.

- The findings should help pave the way for a normative agreement on holding the EU to the liberal-democratic standard.

- The relationship between support and legitimacy should be construed as an empirical question.

- Data from 25 countries showed that European citizens expect the EU to conform to all three principles at the core of the liberal-democratic standard of legitimacy.

- Perceived correspondence of European-level governance to the norms of democracy, shared identity and performance are strong predictors of trust in the EU and support for membership.

FØllesdal A. (2006)

Survey Article: the Legitimacy Deficits of the

European Union.

CC: EU, legitimacy deficit, normative theory

This review presents some of the central approaches and research issues, as well as an account of legitimacy that accommodates several but not all contributions.

Trust seems necessary for the long term support of the multilevel

political order, and for authorities' ability to govern. From this point of view, actual compliance and diffuse support, as measured by opinion polls, are highly relevant not only for empirical studies of perceived legitimacy, but also for normative assessments.

Eriksen E. O. & Fossum J. E. (2000)

Europe in Search of Legitimacy: Strategies of Legitimation Assessed.

CC: citizenship, deliberation, democracy, European identity, legitimacy

The purpose of this assessment is to offer a contribution to the closing of the gap between normative standards and principles on the one hand and empirical realities on the other.

Yes, legitimacy deficit.

Our conclusion is that the EU has taken a stride forward from just a few years ago in that it has embarked on a self-conscious process of forging a constitution.

Gabel, M. (1998)

**Public Support for European Integration: An Empirical Test of Five Theories.**

**DV's: support (membership & unify)**

**IV's: support for bourgeois Party, support for proletariat party.**

**This article seeks to contribute to the resolution of this controversy by empirically examining five prominent theories of support for integration.**

**- Across various sets of nations and years, citizens' support for integration is positively related to the level of economic benefits they expect to derive from European integration.**

**- Class partisanship exerts an influence on support for integration independent of a variety of socioeconomic characteristics that might confound the relationship.**

**- The support for government theory provides a systematic explanation for support for integration except in the original member-states in the post-SEA period.**

**- Political values and cognitive mobilization theories only clearly provide valid explanations for citizens in the original EU member-state.**

**- The analysis identified differences in the substantive significance of the five theories.**

**Glencross A. (2010)**

**A Post-National EU? The Problem of Legitimising the EU without the Nation and National Representation.**

**CC: democratic legitimacy, governing, sanctioning, accountability.**

This article explores whether the supranational EU polity can be legitimised without the nation state.

Yes, legitimacy deficit.

Modern political representation depends on establishing a tripartite distinction between state, government and civil society.

Hooghe L. & Marks G. (2005)

Calculation, Community and Cues, Public Opinion on European Integration

CC: EU integration, public opinion, support.

This article summarizes and extends the main lines of theorizing on public opinion on European integration.

The more national elites are divided, the more citizens are cued to oppose European integration, and this effect is particularly

pronounced among citizens who see themselves as exclusively

national.

Moravcsik A. (2002)

In Defence of the 'Democratic Deficit': reassessing Legitimacy in the European Union.

CC: democratic deficit, legitimacy.

Posing counter arguments why there is no democratic deficit. (own interpretation)

- Concern over the democratic deficit appears to result, above all, from a tendency to privilege the abstract over the concrete.

- we cannot draw negative conclusions about the legitimacy of the EU from casual observation of the non-participatory nature of its institutions - a dictum that could usefully be applied in many contexts outside the EU.

Tsakatika, M. (2005)

Claims to Legitimacy: The European Commission between Continuity and Change

CC: EU governance, EU unity, integration, diversity, legitimacy.

This article attempts to spell out the Commission's present position on the following set of questions: according to which normative criteria can European integration, European governance and the Commission's own roles in the two processes be considered legitimate?

Legitimacy in the European Union in the future may demand a politicized and impartial European Commission. Politicization may well be required if democratic 'deepening' of the Union is to take place.

Vreese de, C. H. & Boomgaarden H. G. (2005)

Projecting EU Referendums

Fear of Immigration and Support for European Integration.

DV's: support for EU, voting intention,

IV's: gender, age, education, occupational status.

**This study tests competing hypotheses about public support for European integration and projects referendum voting behaviour.**

**In our analysis of the forces that drive popular support for European integration, three explanations emerge as particularly powerful: anti-immigration sentiments, economic evaluations, and support for the domestic government. FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

This chapter will present the results of the conducted literature study. As mentioned, the content of the monster matrix set the basis for it. First, the vision of the EU on the integration process is presented. Second, the reasons why citizens would be supportive or not for the process. This will be based upon the empirical approach. Following, the next two sections will present the opinions of authors about to what extend the process of integration is legitimate. Those two sections will follow the normative line of reasoning.

A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE ON INTEGRATION

In general, one can say that it is more hard for the EU to reach forms of legitimacy than it is for national governments since the EU is a new type of political system (Ehin, 2008). Moreover, given the levels which integration has already achieved so far, people are developing similar expectations for the EU ass they have for national politics. (COM, 2001b). However, according to the White Paper on European Governance (COM, 2001b), the 'Union cannot develop and deliver policy in the same way as a national government; it must build partnerships and rely on a wide variety of actors. Expectations must be met in different ways. (P. 32)'.

In the White Paper it is stated that the EU is faced with a paradox concerning legitimacy. On the one hand, European citizens expects the Union to take care of problems that their society is confronted with by imposing law, regulations, subsidy or any other action. On the other hand, there is an increasing amount of people who distrust certain EU bodies and/or policies or do just not have any interest in them. The main reason that the Commission gives for the decreasing level of legitimacy and support is that 'people are losing confidence in a poorly understood and complex system to deliver the policies that they want. The Union is often seen as remote and at the same time too intrusive (P. 3)'.

In order to fight the decreasing level of legitimacy and support the EU is constantly continuing its integrating process. In that, the Commission states to strive for more openness and better policies, regulation and delivery, refocused institutions and simplification (COM, 2001b). The EU has a positive attitude towards the political integration process and states the following about it:

'European integration has delivered fifty years of stability, peace and economic prosperity. It has helped to raise standards of living, built an internal market and strengthened the Union's voice in the world. It has achieved results that would not have been possible by individual Member States acting on their own. It has attracted a succession of applications for membership and in a few years time it will expand on a continental scale. It has also served as a model for regional integration across the world (COM, 2001b, p. 7).'

In the process of integration the EU is focused on the principles on which the European Community was founded (1999) namely to 'integrate the people of Europe, while fully respecting individual national identities (p. 32)'. The process of political integration goes hand in hand with the process of enlargement. The Commission also has a positive attitude towards the progress which has been made and the concept of EU enlargement in general. The report of the CRS (2008), prepared for the members of Members and Committees of the Congress, clarifies the position of the EU towards enlargement as follow:

'The EU views enlargement as a historic opportunity to help in the transformation of the countries involved, extending peace, stability, prosperity, democracy, human rights and the rule of law throughout Europe. The carefully managed process of enlargement is one of the EU's most powerful policy tools that has helped to transform the countries of