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Is the European Union legitimate? To what extent?

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Is the European Union legitimate? To what extent?

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It is widely agreed that the European Union (EU) suffers from a serious democratic deficit (Alliès 2005; von Arnim 2006; Bach 2000; Chrystsochou 1998; Giorgi *et al.* 2006; Haller 2008; Höreth 1999; Pollak 2007; Weiler 1999).

Its weak legitimacy came to the fore most spectacularly in the negative outcomes of the referenda in 2005 in France and The Netherlands, when large majorities of citizens rejected the EU Constitution, even though it was supported unanimously by the governing political elites. Ever since the Maastricht Treaty a widening split between elites and citizens has emerged, with the latter being much more enthusiastic about integration than the former.

One way out of this weak public support is to try to make the political system work for all participants, in order for it to be considered as legitimate. This is an argument frequently used by politicians who feel that EU citizens do not recognise the real achievements of integration. Some political scientists have adopted this view and developed the concept of output legitimacy. The aim of this article is to investigate if the EU can claim to possess output legitimacy and to what extent this kind of legitimacy can substitute for the EU's weak input legitimacy, that is, the restricted possibilities of citizens to influence EU politics directly.

Legitimation through output: potentials and pitfalls of a new normative concept of democracy

Input legitimacy is based on the normative principle that citizens should participate, either directly or indirectly, in government (government by the people). Output legitimacy is based

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on the functional principle of the utility of governmental decisions (government for the people). This distinction seems particularly suited to illustrate the specific situation of the EU. The institutional composition of the EU deviates significantly from the principles of normative democracy, both in terms of the possibility to elect and vote out of office a government, and in terms of the division of power between the elites, where it represents a kind of consociational democracy (Lijphart 1984). A focus on the achievements of the EU seems to compensate for these deficiencies. It is not surprising, therefore, that the concept of output legitimacy has become quite popular (Grande and Jachtenfuchs 2000; Majone 1996; Scharpf 1999).

From the viewpoint of output legitimacy it is not necessary for a society to possess a high degree of social or political integration. Here,

the question is only to what extent a political community achieves the aims it has set for itself and whether it is able to care for the welfare of its citizens. Therefore, several authors discuss systematically the characteristics of multilevel government in the EU as well as the possible reforms of this system in order to improve its achievements (Cini 2003; El-Agraa 2004; Grande and Jachtenfuchs 2000; Moussis 2006; Ohr 1996; Pollak and Słominski 2006; Scharpf 1999). However, in these kinds of analyses the issues of effective governing and legitimacy are divorced from each other. It is also true that dictatorial regimes can sometimes be quite efficient. In this view, efficient governing becomes a normative, self-legitimizing quality independent from its form and structure; thus, the possibilities of input legitimacy are degraded to a mere addition or façade (Abromeit 2000, p. 59).

Moreover, the concept of output legitimacy seems problematic from the viewpoint of classical political theory. For Max Weber (1978, p. 36) the essence of legitimacy is that an order is actually seen as legitimate by the persons involved. Weber mentions four kinds of reasons why people may accept an order: (a) tradition; the validity (*Geltung*) of something which has always existed; (b) affective (emotional) belief; (c) value-rational belief; the validity of something that is considered to be absolutely right; and (d) the belief in a positive legal charter.

When discussing the problem of legitimacy, the relation between elites and citizens is of central importance for four reasons. Firstly, citizens will look at the aims and actions of the governing elites and the situational context within which they act. Elites will have a definite interest in presenting the output of the system as positive. We have to look critically, therefore, at all public relations activities of governments in this regard. Secondly, it is not necessarily the case that a positive output leads to high legitimacy and a negative output to low legitimacy. Sometimes even a seemingly successful government is rejected; a closer look typically shows that the behaviour of the elites in other respects (for example, clientelism and corruption) has been evaluated negatively. The complementary case can also be observed: an elite (and the system it represents) continues to enjoy trust and support among the population in spite of very hard times for society as a whole (this is

typically so in the case of a war). Thirdly, it is often not a straightforward issue if a certain output can be considered as positive or negative at all. Positive outcomes often have problematic or negative concomitants. Fourthly, input and output legitimacy are closely related. There are several cases in which the output efficiency of the EU is low just because of a low input legitimacy, that is, a lack of possibilities for citizens to participate in relevant political decisions.

The achievements of European integration as presented by the political elites

Politicians and the representatives of the EU itself have a very positive view about the integration process and its consequences. Let us give just a few examples. Jacques Chirac (2000): "The EU today is world-wide the largest economic and trade power, a giant in the area of research and innovation". Tony Blair (2005): "When the war was finished, Europe was in ruins. Today, Europe stands there like a monument for political accomplishments. Nearly 50 years of peace, 50 years prosperity, 50 years progress" Angela Merkel (2006): "All positive turning points in German post-war history are connected inseparably with Europe. If it is the re-integration into the EU or the re-unification of Germany, we owe to European integration an unparalleled time of peace, freedom and prosperity".¹ The Vice President of the European Commission, Günther Verheugen: "There are no winners and losers in European integration. Integration benefits all. It creates a win-win situation for all participants" (Verheugen 2005, p. 20).² For the influential Cecchini Report, published in the late 1980s, non-integration would have entailed massive welfare losses. The EU Commissioner Lord Cockfield, in the introduction to this report, states that European integration is "a prospect of inflation-free growth and millions [of] new jobs ... we all stand to gain if they succeed, to lose if they fail" (quoted in Allen and Woolley 1994, p. 167).

There is probably no other modern political community which invests so much in public relations efforts to justify its actions and to

improve its image as the EU. It uses extensively the strategy of persuasion as an instrument of political steering (Lindblom 1977; Meyer 1999; Valentini 2006), including the careful recording of public opinion (mainly through the Eurobarometer survey series), continuous public relations activities and well-financed public relations campaigns in order to get the approval of citizens of important single steps of integration, for instance, before referenda about the accession of new countries and the introduction of the euro (Shore 2000, pp.97–100; Valentini 2006). The cumulative effect of all these public relations activities and campaigns can be quite successful over long periods of time. However, they lead only to traditional legitimacy (Weber 1978, pp.226–228) in the sense that people take the legitimacy of political institutions for granted just because they are in existence and working.

Objective socioeconomic developments in the EU-15, 1995–2004

In this section we concentrate on the relationship between the objective developments in the EU over the last one and a half decades (1995–2008) and their subjective perception by the populations. This analysis gives us a direct answer to the question of the degree of the output legitimacy of the EU. We consider the 12 old member states of the EU because only in their case does it make sense to investigate the effects of EU membership.

EU socioeconomic data will be compared with those of the USA and Japan since their achievements have often been taken as an occasion to ask for an enforced integration of Europe (Servan-Schreiber, 1968). Table 1 shows the developments in four central social and economic areas. The findings are quite clear and, for the EU, not very positive:

- In terms of economic growth, the USA had the best values in nine out of the 14 years; also the EU had the best values in four years (2000, 2001, 2006, 2007); and Japan had the worst score.
- In terms of inflation, Japan showed the best achievement, with the lowest rate for 13 out

of 14 years; here also the EU scored well in about half of these 14 years.

- In terms of unemployment and overall levels of employment, the EU appears to be a complete failure. It had the worst values for all 14 years. Unemployment levels were between 2 and 5 per cent in Japan and the USA, but between 8 and 10 per cent in the EU. The level of employment was about 70–72 per cent in the first two countries but around 60 to 65 per cent in the EU. Although in recent years the EU has caught up in both respects, its values are still less good than those of the USA or Japan.

It is also of interest here to compare the EU member countries that introduced the common currency, the euro, in 2001 (the Eurozone) with those that did not. Here, it turns out that the latter, (Denmark, Sweden and the UK), scored much better than the former, with the best values in four indicators: unemployment, level of employment, inflation and level of welfare spending.

Thus, the data clearly demonstrate that in terms of its overall social and economic policy the EU cannot be praised as a success story. In terms of employment its politics was a failure until recently. Even its success in inflation rates has been modest. The claim that it is a success story in this regard is true only for those few countries (such as Italy) that had high inflation rates before the introduction of the euro. In many other countries of the Eurozone, particularly in Germany and in countries whose currencies were closely connected to the Deutsche Mark (Austria, The Netherlands, Luxembourg and Denmark), inflation was already very low or even lower before the introduction of the euro.

During the period under consideration, patterns of development and socioeconomic achievements varied significantly in the different member countries of the EU. Let us summarise briefly the main facts in regard to five central areas of politics (for detailed figures, see Haller 2008, pp.247–255). Economic growth varied from only 1.5 per cent and less in Germany and Italy, to between 1.5 and 2 per cent in France, Denmark, The Netherlands, Austria and Belgium, up to more than 3 per cent in Greece, Finland, Luxembourg and Ireland. In 1990–1995 the EU-15 had a negative rate of

Table 1. Indicators of socioeconomic development in the EU-15, USA and Japan, 1995–2004

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2006	2008
Real growth of GNP	EU-15	2.6	1.7	2.6	2.9	3	3.9	2	1.1	1.1	2.3	2.0	3.2	2.9
	USA	2.5	3.7	4.5	4.2	4.4	3.7	0.8	1.6	2.5	3.9	3.1	2.7	2.1
	Japan	2.0	2.6	1.4	-1.8	-0.2	2.9	0.4	0.1	1.8	2.3	1.9	2.0	2.3
Inflation rate	EU-15 ^a	2.8	n.a.	1.7 ^b	1.3	1.2	1.9	2.2	2.1	2	2	1.7	1.9	1.7
	USA	2.8	3	2.3	1.6	2.2	3.4	2.8	1.6	2.3	2.7	3.4	3.2	2.8
	Japan	-0.1	0.1	1.8	0.6	-0.3	-0.7	-0.7	-0.9	-0.3	0	-0.3	0.3	0
Unemployment rate	EU-15	10.1	10.2	9.9	9.3	8.6	7.7	7.3	7.6	8	8.1	8.1	7.7	7.0
	USA	5.6	5.4	4.9	4.5	4.2	4	4.8	5.8	6	5.5	5.1	4.6	4.6
	Japan	3.1	3.4	3.4	4.1	4.7	4.7	5	5.4	5.3	4.7	4.4	4.1	3.9
Employment rate ^c	EU-15	60.1	60.3	60.7	61.4	62.5	63.4	64	64.2	64.3	64.7	64.8	65.4	66.2
	USA	72.5	72.9	73.5	73.8	73.9	74.1	73.1	71.9	71.2	71.2	71.5	72.0	71.8
	Japan	69.2	69.5	70	69.5	68.9	68.9	68.8	68.2	68.4	68.7	69.3	70.0	70.7

^aEurozone (EA11–2000, EA12–2006); ^bEstimated value; ^cPercentage employed among the working-aged population aged 15–65. N.a., not available.

Source: *Eurostat* (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm)

growth (-0.3 per cent), compared to 1.2 per cent in the USA and 0.7 per cent in Japan. Only the Celtic Tiger, Ireland, showed an exceptionally high value of 6.5 per cent.

The situation in different member countries also varied in regard to employment. Unemployment was between 7 per cent and 10 per cent in France and Germany, Greece and Spain; it was rather low (around 5 per cent or less) in Denmark, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, Ireland and the UK. In smaller member states and in states that had not adopted the euro the employment situation was better. Overall, the EU-15 has been able to create new jobs (mainly in the countries which were supported by EU-structural funds, namely Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Greece; it was much less so in France and Germany) but not enough to satisfy the growing demand.

Since 2000 the mean inflation in the EU-15 was mostly around 2 per cent (in 2008 it was 3.6 per cent). Higher rates can be observed in the southern European countries (Portugal, Spain and Greece) and in Luxembourg, where they have had to pay a price for their high rates of growth. Rather low inflation rates can be observed in all countries that did not adopt the euro and in Finland and Denmark. From 1995 to 2000 Greece and Italy managed to curb inflation greatly. Economists argue that the restrictive hard currency policy of the Economic and Monetary Union and then of the European Central Bank has reduced economic growth and contributed to the high levels of unemployment in the

Eurozone (Eichengreen 2005; Hankel 1998; Tobin 2001; Wyplosz 2006).

An issue that plays an important role in public opinion are crime rates. This is another area that is directly affected by European integration. In the Schengen Treaty (1985) the member states of the EU (except for Ireland and the UK) agreed to remove all controls for border crossings of individuals. This new freedom of movement, however, has also facilitated cross-border criminality. Kapteyn (2003, p.71) has demonstrated this with some examples from interviews with highly mobile and clever European criminals. In six of the 15 member states cross-border crime has increased considerably (Belgium, France, Finland, UK, Portugal and Spain), while it decreased in four (Denmark, Sweden, Ireland and Luxembourg).

The picture given by these figures of the modest success of European integration is supported by scientific analyses and evaluations of EU policy in different areas. In regard to the effects of the EU on economic growth, even a high-level EU study group of economic advisers concluded that “the EU-system failed to deliver a satisfactory growth performance” since the early 1980s, when decisive steps toward deeper integration were taken (Sapir *et al.* 2003, p.1). In a careful survey of many studies on the effects of economic growth on integration, Ziltener (2004) found that most of them report surprisingly little evidence for such effects.

Experts have also been quite critical of the Common Agricultural Policy, the largest

spending system of the EU, and regional and structural policy, the second main EU policy area. There is not enough space here to discuss the success and failures of the EU in these and other areas. The general picture remains the same: in some areas the EU has had some success (for example, in research and development policy), or was able to preserve earlier accomplishments (for example, social expenditures), but in others, such as foreign and security policy, it still cannot qualify as a real success.

The perception of the objective developments among the populations

Let us now look at the perceptions and attitudes of the people in the 15 old EU-member countries regarding specific areas of politics and investigate systematically how these are related to objective developments, that is, examine how objective changes have been perceived by the citizens.

Figure 1 presents the results of the general evaluation of the role of the EU in the same five areas investigated before. No rosy picture emerges: in three out of the five areas – inflation, unemployment and social standards – the percentage of citizens who believe the EU has played a positive role is lower than those who believe it has played a negative role. It is only in regard to the fight against crime that the positive percentage clearly exceeds the negative one (respondents choosing the “neither/nor” option were not taken into account). In most areas, only about one-quarter of the citizens in the EU-15 member states believe the EU played a positive role in 2004. Even concerning economic wealth and the fight against crime, less than half of the respondents believe the EU has had a positive influence. On the other hand, the negative effects of EU policies are felt by 20 per cent of the respondents in the area of preservation of social standards, and between 29 and 51 per cent in all other areas.

We have seen that objective developments were quite different in the several macro-regions and member countries of the EU. Let us also look briefly, therefore, at the inter-country differences in the evaluations of the political impact of the EU. Luxembourg leads the areas whose populations saw a positive impact of the

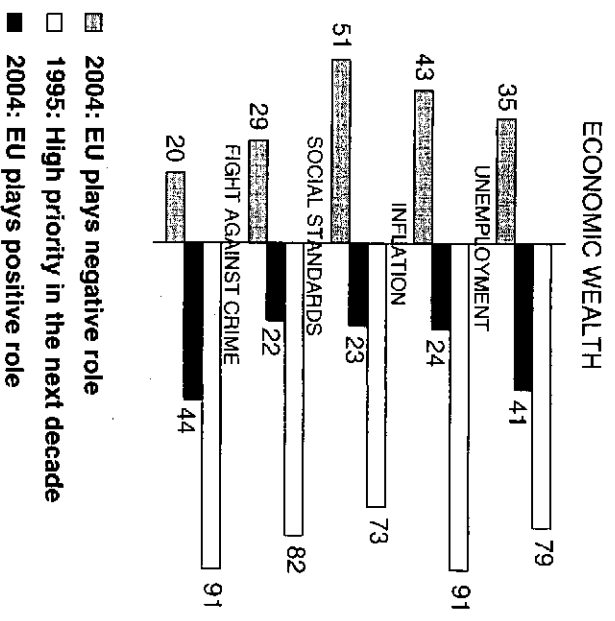


Figure 1. Attitudes of EU-15 respondents on political priorities (1995) and their evaluation of the actual role of the EU (2004) in five areas (in %)

Source: *Eurobarometer* 43.1, 45.1, 61.0, 15 EU-member states, n = 16216.

EU. Positive evaluations are also more frequent in Spain, Greece and Ireland than in the EU-15 as a whole. In all other countries except Denmark, negative evaluations are predominant.

How realistic are these perceptions and how much do they correspond to objective developments? The answer is unambiguous: most of the perceptions seem to be quite accurate; only in a few areas do discrepancies seem to exist. In order to interpret these findings correctly, the personal experiences of the different groups of the population must be taken into consideration. We have seen that the objective developments were rather negative in terms of employment and they were also modest in regard to economic growth and level of criminality; only in the cohesion countries of the South and Ireland were many developments positive. The same is true for the evaluations: among the latter group of countries, positive evaluations preponderate; in the others, the negative ones are in the majority.

In concluding this section, let us look at some general findings concerning perceptions of the efficiency of the EU in different areas of politics. In the spring of 2004 the Eurobarometer asked two questions that are directly relevant to this question. The first was related to several political accomplishments of the EU, the other to specific fears that the respondents might have

TABLE 2. Perceived achievements of the EU and fears about the building of Europe in 2004 (percentages)

	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree ^a
Perceived achievements		
I feel I am safer because (our country) is a member of the European Union	43.0	46.6
I feel we are more stable economically	43.7	45.7
I feel we are more stable politically	40.0	47.7
My voice counts in the EU	31.8	55.0
(Our country's) voice counts in the EU	62.8	26.9
The biggest countries have most power in the EU	76.0	14.3
Fears about integration		
A loss of power for smaller member states	49.4	42.0
An increase in drug trafficking and international organized crime	68.2	27.2
Our language being used less and less	39.7	55.7
Our country is paying more and more to the EU	64.4	26.5
The loss of social benefits	53.6	38.5
The loss of national identity and culture	42.2	52.3
An economic crisis	47.7	42.5
The transfer of jobs to other member countries that have lower production costs	74.1	19.9
More difficulties for (our) farmers	62.2	26.2

^aPercentages missing up to 100% answered "don't know". Source: *Eurobarometer 61* (Spring 2004). Questions 12 and 15; $N = 16,216$. (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm)

about the building of Europe (see Table 2). Among the six topics mentioned there is only one area where most people saw any positive effect at all, namely the influence of their own country in the EU. In two areas negative evaluations far outweigh the positive ones. One is the disproportional influence of the big countries and another is their very weak personal influence in the EU, as perceived by public opinion.

An even more negative picture of the consequences of integration emerges if we look at the fears that the respondents associate with the EU. In only one among the nine items asked, the loss of national identity and culture, did most respondents answer that they were not afraid. In contrast, large proportions (between 62 per cent and 74 per cent) answered that they had fears in connection with European

integration in four areas: job transfers to other member countries, drug trafficking, national payments to the EU and difficulties for farmers.

Winners and losers of integration. A multilevel analysis of the perceived effects of integration

Let us now investigate systematically the effects of individual and macro-level characteristics on the perceptions of the achievements and failures of the EU. We have already seen that objective developments and their subjective perceptions are correlated positively with each other. Multivariate analysis enables us to check if a significant effect of the objective developments exists, even if we control for relevant individual characteristics. It is also of interest here to ask which social groups see integration more positively or more negatively. We can assume that social groups that are able to utilise the new possibilities offered by the large free market will have more positive attitudes than those who may not be able to do so or who are affected negatively by integration. In order to distinguish between the effects at individual and macro-levels according to national characteristics a multilevel regression analysis was carried out. Using this method we can distinguish between the effects of individual and country characteristics on individual attitudes or behaviour. The dependent variables in this analysis were the perceptions and evaluations of the achievements of the EU in the five different areas of policy discussed above. For reasons of space, we cannot present the detailed results of this analysis here (Haller 2008, pp.252–253). They are, however summarised as follows.

As far as the individual characteristics of the respondents are concerned, it turns out that women have a significantly less positive perception of the EU's performance in most areas than men. Similarly, age plays a role in perceptions of the EU, in that older individuals are less positive than younger ones. Concerning economic growth and tackling unemployment, better-educated people see a more positive influence of the EU than those who are less well-educated.

Thus, it seems, in fact, that those who are more able to make use of the new opportunities afforded by the common market have more positive perceptions of the effects of integration. They may be seen as the winners of European integration, and people in the opposite groups as the “losers of modernisation” (Hadler 2004; Mau 2005, Vobruba 2001, p.58). Employed people more frequently perceive that the EU has a positive influence than unemployed people, but they see also more frequently that the EU has had a negative influence on social standards. One finding concerning occupational positions was clearly in contradiction to what one might have expected: individuals in high status white-collar positions more frequently perceived that the EU has had a negative effect on economic growth and inflation than those in other positions.

What about the relevance of the macro-social characteristics of the 15 EU-member countries on the subjective perceptions of the citizens about the effects of European integration? Here, for the different dependent variables (the subjective evaluations concerning growth, unemployment and so on), only sets of independent variables that seemed to be of substantial relevance were considered. So, for instance, the growth of the gross national product in the period 1995 to 2004 has been considered a determinant of popular perceptions of EU effects on growth; for the evaluation of the EU effects on inflation, the inflation rate in 2004 and the mean inflation rate from 1995 to 2004 have been considered.

These findings are in line with many other studies on public support for European integration (Brettschneider *et al.* 2003; Dalton and Eichenberg 1998; Gabel and Anderson 2002). They can be summarised as follows. Firstly, we find a further confirmation of the thesis that the subjective evaluations of the people are based on the objective developments in their countries. In four out of the five dimensions, objective levels or changes in a specific aspect had a significant impact on the subjective evaluations of this aspect. If economic growth was high, the evaluation of the role of the EU in this regard was more positive; the same was true for the change in the level of unemployment. In regard to social standards and crime levels, it is the actual level that is related significantly to the perception. If the proportion of social spending was low in 2002 the respondents more frequently

perceived the EU as having an influence on this (in fact, social spending in absolute terms increased much more in such countries). However, if the level of crime was low, they perceived the EU as having a positive influence on this.

We can conclude that public opinions about integration are clearly based on objective developments. It is simply wrong to state that most of the public “does not credit the EC/EU with a significant role in shaping those conditions [that is, the living and working conditions]” (Moussis 2006, pp.189–190). Contrary to statements of many politicians, the public perceives real developments quite accurately, and the former must be denoted as eulogists (Haller *et al.* 2005). In terms of output legitimacy, therefore, the EU enjoys a rather limited degree of consent among its citizens.

The overall evaluation of membership in the EU and its social determinants

Before going on to deduce some conclusions from these findings, let us look at some further survey data on the general level of legitimacy of the EU among its citizens and on the outcomes of the 2009 elections to the European Parliament. Three questions are relevant: What is the level of consent to integration in the different countries of the EU? Which are its determinants at the micro-level and macro-level? How did these attitudes develop over the past decades? Two Eurobarometer questions are used in order to measure the overall attitude toward integration: “Generally speaking, do you think that [our country]’s membership of the EU is a good thing/a bad thing/neither good nor bad (don’t know)?” and “Taking everything into consideration, would you say that [our country] has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the EU? Benefited/not benefited (don’t know)?”

Table 3 presents the overall results about positive or negative perceptions of the membership of one’s own country in the EU. In general, the findings are rather positive: clear majorities of citizens of Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Italy, France, Belgium, Germany and Greece have positive views. Considerably less positive views exist in the UK, the Scandinavian countries and Austria, Spain and Portugal.

TABLE 3. Overall evaluation of EU membership by countries, 1995 and 2004 (in percentages)^a

	Membership of the EU is ...			
	... a good thing		... a bad thing	
	1995	2004	Diff. 1995	2004
Founding members				
Belgium	68.5	59.3	-9.2	8.9
Luxembourg	82.5	75.8	-6.7	5.2
The Netherlands	81.8	66.3	-15.5	6.0
Germany: East	63.4	49.6	-13.7	12.1
Germany: West	56.4	41.5	-14.9	7.0
France	56.2	44.3	-11.9	13.1
Italy	78.6	57.2	-21.4	5.8
Accession 1973-1995				
Denmark	54.8	55.4	0.7	22.4
UK	50.1	32.1	-18.0	21.7
Ireland	82.5	74.4	-7.8	4.9
Greece	65.9	72.4	6.5	9.6
Portugal	49.1	59.5	10.3	14.2
Spain	46.7	66.8	20.1	22.7
Austria	43.6	30.7	-12.9	23.2
Finland	50.9	46.0	-4.9	18.9
Sweden	42.1	37.6	-4.5	35.7

^aMissing values to 100%: fall in the categories "neither good nor bad" and "don't know".

Source: *Eurobarometer* 43.1, 61.0 (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm)

Multilevel regression analyses were carried out separately for the two dependent questions (variables) indicated above. The findings confirm those already presented. At the individual level, individuals who are less able to utilise the benefits of integration or who can be considered to be the losers of integration (women, older people, people with a low income and people who perceive their own economic situation as rather bad) have significantly less positive views about the EU. Furthermore people with higher education and those who are interested in and well-informed about the EU show more positive attitudes toward integration.

Particularly interesting is the fact that satisfaction or dissatisfaction with politics at the national level seems not to be transferred into satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the EU. Several indices about trust in and satisfaction with the national government and parliament showed no significant association with attitudes towards the EU. It is satisfaction with the EU that is important here. All three relevant variables in this regard – trust in the EU, satisfaction with democracy in the EU and the feeling that "my

voice counts in the EU" – have significant effects on the general attitude toward integration. Many have argued that the negative voters in the referenda on the European Constitution in France and The Netherlands considered mainly the negative political situation in their home country, but did not vote against the Constitution as such. Our findings clearly disprove this thesis.

Finally, among the macro-level indicators, only one variable has a significant (positive) effect on integration, namely if a country is a net beneficiary of the EU budget. A dummy variable distinguishing Luxembourg and the province of Wallonia-Brussels in Belgium from all other EU regions and countries showed a significant effect. Since Luxembourg and Brussels house the most important EU institutions they are direct beneficiaries of the EU. Thus, we can conclude that citizens living in these two countries' respective regions have also recognised accurately the objective facts.

Finally, let us look at the development of attitudes toward European integration over time by looking at the Eurobarometer survey results from 1973 to 2006. While, in general, there exists a rather positive evaluation of EU membership (about three-quarters of the respondents think that EU membership of their country is a good thing), the attitudes show no linear trend. Up to the early 1990s the positive responses increased; in 1991, 71 per cent of all European gave a positive answer. From 1991 until the mid-1990s a remarkable downward trend exists; afterwards, attitudes stabilised at a lower level. In 1991 63 per cent of respondents gave a positive answer. Since that time the proportion of positive answers has varied between 46 per cent and 56 per cent; in autumn 2007, it was 58 per cent but in 2009 it dropped again to 52 per cent. Between 12 and 16 per cent see the EU as a bad thing and 25 to 30 per cent see it as neither good nor bad.

Similar results emerge in the time series results for the following question: "If you were told tomorrow that the EU (Common Market) had been scrapped, would you be very sorry about it, indifferent or very relieved?" Here, the results show a low degree of identification of Europeans with the EU. In 1973 41 per cent said they would be very sorry about the scrapping of the EC, 36 per cent were indifferent and 10 per cent said they would be very relieved. These percentages also varied during the last three

decades, but the ratio between positive and less positive answers did not change considerably. Thus, contrary to what one would expect, there is no increase of positive attitudes in terms of attachment to the EU. Most Europeans accept the EU as a *fait accompli* but their attachment appears to be rather limited.

A rather low degree of legitimacy must also be inferred from the results of the elections to the European Parliament, both in terms of voters' turnout and of trends in voters' party preferences. Since the formation of the Parliament in 1979 turnout has continuously been declining: from 63 per cent in 1979 to 43 per cent in 2009. Moreover, in the last two elections, political parties that are highly critical of the whole system of the EU have gained considerable proportions of votes. This was the case for the UK Independence Party, which obtained 17.5 per cent of the votes, the list of Hans-Peter Martin in Austria (17.9 per cent), and the Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom) of Geert Wilders in The Netherlands (15 per cent). Also in other countries, parties with EU-critical attitudes became strong (for example, in Bulgaria and Italy). In the European Parliament elected in 2009, the leader of the British Tories, David Cameron, established a new EU-critical group, European Conservatives and Reformists Group, together with more than 50 deputies from the European Parliament emanating from half a dozen countries.

Conclusion: can the output of the EU provide a substitute for the lack of its input legitimacy?

Since the Second World War Europe has certainly made enormous economic and social progress. Integration as such, however, did not contribute as much to this progress as did other factors, such as technological inventions, the rise of productivity, the expansion of welfare states, and the downfall of dictatorial regimes in southern and eastern Europe and of the Iron Curtain. The advantages of the latter developments, however, have so far mainly accrued to the enterprises that were able to invest heavily and profitably in post-communist countries. When seen from this point of view it becomes

understandable why citizens are much less enthusiastic about integration than political elites, and why sceptical attitudes about integration are widespread among large segments of the population. It also explains why there is no increase of consent to European integration over time. What can we deduce from these findings about the legitimisation of the integration process and the possibility of substituting the missing input legitimacy with output legitimisation?

It seems that the idea that input legitimacy can be substituted by output legitimacy must be rejected. Firstly, the great achievements of the EU are not the main bases of the legitimisation of the integration process, as two other factors are responsible. The first is that integration occurred in such a way that its legality cannot seriously be questioned. This was one of the main factors enumerated by Weber as constituting a significant base for the legitimacy of a political order. Another base for the legitimacy of the process of integration mentioned by Weber may also be relevant. This is legitimacy based on tradition, that is, the belief that something, that has existed for a long time must in some way be legitimate. Since the EU continues to take over more and more tasks and its withdrawal would cause perceptible deprivations for concrete social groups, it is becoming an integral part of the European political and welfare state system. Individuals and groups are always very reluctant to give up rights even if these are difficult to justify after some time.

A second issue concerns the relationship between input and output legitimacy. It would be highly problematic to separate these two aspects and to rely mainly on output legitimacy. This is not only because the output of the EU policy has been modest in many areas. The weakening or neglect of one can also lead to a weakening of the other; a strengthening of input legitimacy will often improve output efficiency as well. A good example is the regional policy of the EU. This policy is characterised at present by many negative side effects, including the poor definition of development aims and allocation of means, bureaucratic waste, clientelism and corruption. Moreover, politicians often complain that the inhabitants of the regions that profit from the programmes do not appreciate them. In fact, citizens often know little, even about EU-sponsored development programmes

carried out in their immediate neighbourhood or region (Haller and Ressler 2006, pp. 57–70). This is hardly surprising considering that the decisions about these programmes and their implementation are made only by politicians and experts, with little involvement by concerned citizens. Much the same is true for the research policy of the EU, which is now strongly centralised in Brussels, and patronises scientists by predefining substantively the programmes to be funded and deciding in highly bureaucratised ways about projects to be financed (Haller 2001).

A third issue concerns the lack of information among the general population about the process of integration. The EU Commission has intensified its efforts to “communicate Europe” among the public (European Commission 2005; see also Meyer 1999; Valentini 2006). Our analyses in this article have shown, however, that it would be wrong to hope for a significant change in public attitudes from public relation campaigns alone. Rather, these might have the opposite effect, namely, to increase public distrust in the political class as a whole if they seem to contradict objective facts and people’s personal experiences.

A fourth issue concerns the issue of the relationship between the legitimacy of the EU in regards to output. F.D. Weil (1989) compared the development of five European countries and the USA since the Second World War. He found that state performance was not related significantly to support for democracy as a whole. However, a

strong polarisation of the party system does have a negative impact on support. If the game as a whole is accepted, the players are unlikely to reject it solely because of its outcome; rejection will come about, however, if at least one “extremist or anti-system party is in quasi-permanent opposition. . . . Citizens judge democracy less by what it ‘gives’ them than by whether it presents them with real (but not polarised) alternatives and responds to their choices” (Weil 1989, p. 699). This may be the most serious problem facing the EU. There are, in fact, political movements and parties that stand in a kind of fundamental opposition to the whole EU system; and these are particularly strong in the UK. Since they are supported by significant proportions of people and because they can denounce serious weaknesses and deficits of this system, they cannot be dismissed as simply populist or demagogical. As long as most political parties and interest groups give only a positive and, in many regards, one-sided picture of integration, citizens will remain suspicious. Thus, the development of a higher level of legitimacy of the EU, based also on value-rational and affective belief, calls in the first instance for a reduction of the split between elites and citizens. This can be achieved by reforming the political system of the EU in a way that grants more effective possibilities for citizens’ participation and that arrests the trend towards transferring more and more competencies from the level of national democracies to the level of the EU (see also Alesina and Wacziarg 2001; Hellström 2006; Langer 2008; Münch 2008).

Notes

1. All quotations are taken from Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (n.d.).
2. Europa (n.d.) translation from German by M.H.

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