



**Joseph Drew, ed.** *Redefining Europe*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005. 213 pp. \$54.00 (paper), ISBN 978-90-420-1765-8.



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**Published on** H-German (September, 2006)

## **A Work-in-Progress—Federalism and Democracy in Europe**

Since its creation in 1951, the European Union (EU) has gone through many transformations. Geographically, it has grown from six to twenty-five members and, most likely, it will be confronted with another smaller wave of enlargement in the next few years—as Bulgaria and Romania wait at the EU’s door (at the same time, Turkey’s membership—however controversial and problematic—is also under consideration). Politically, the EU has established itself as a global player, although divergent foreign policy orientations between its member states continue to undermine its international credibility, as the debate over the U.S. intervention in Iraq has shown. However, the last round of enlargement set off renewed debate about the EU’s future. Indeed, enlargement not only posed a “logistical” problem, but also represents a serious political challenge for the EU that threatens to turn into an identity crisis. This difficulty was highlighted, for example, by the two rejections of the European Constitutional Treaty resulting from votes within two of the EU’s founding countries in May 2005. As a matter of fact, the EU has never seen such a dramatic expansion—one that has not only re-defined it geographically but also has considerably altered its political and

economic shape. As a result, a revision or rather a re-envision of the European project seems all the more imperative. Joseph Drew’s book follows precisely this purpose, namely “to ask ... whether we may appropriately *redefine Europe*” (p. 1).

The volume is made up of papers given at a conference held in Prague in the spring of 2004.[1] The volume gathers the work of American and European scholars whose specializations range from law, political science, history and sociology to education science; it therefore has a distinct interdisciplinary approach. This is both the book’s main intent as well as its weakness. Although the essays mostly center on federalism and democracy, taken together they make up a somewhat disparate ensemble that certainly would have benefited from a more coherent thematic structure. The following review will therefore not follow the book’s table of contents, but rather attempt to discuss chapters thematically.

The much-discussed issue of the democratic deficit constitutes a first focal point. Maiken Umbach attempts to deconstruct some of the assumptions underpinning claims that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit. She

argues that the regions, not the nation-states, are the most legitimate bearers of democracy and identity and, as such, the most effective vehicles in forging a civic identification with the EU. She therefore advocates a stronger Europe of the regions that could provide a successful basis for a democratic EU. Xenophon Contiades puts forward a somewhat similar argument when he claims that the democratic deficit is a false issue as “democracy in the EU does not exist, at least not in the concept and form that is recognizable at the level of the nation-states” (p. 59). He further identifies two interrelated reasons why the “deficit” has become such an important issue in constitutional and political debate: first, the increasing asymmetry between economic and political integration, and second, the EU’s reaching of a phase in which the issue of its political and institutional form can no longer be postponed. He advocates defining democratic principles based on the EU, rather than on nation-states. Fausto Cappelli also sees in the EU’s institutional system the basis for a new form of democracy. He identifies two democratic institutional structures superimposed on the EU: the traditional democratic structure of member states in which legislative power is wielded by elected parliaments representing the citizens; and the EU’s innate structure, in which legislative power is exercised by two different bodies. One of these, the Council of Ministers, is not elected, but represents member states and thus indirectly their citizens. Capelli’s suggestion of addressing justifiable concerns about the European democratic deficit consists of improving how these two structures interact. Zoran Oklopcic also addresses issues of political legitimacy or, rather, the lack thereof. Oklopcic’s contribution focuses on whether constitutions can create states or only governments and asks to what extent they establish new polities. He concludes that a constitution *can* actually create a new political community. This conclusion suggests that the recent rejection of the European constitution constitutes a lost chance to create a stronger European identity. Joelle Anne Smith brings another argument to the discussion of the European democratic deficit. She notes that European institutions—specifically the European parliament—have deliberately exploited the issue in their constant struggle for enhanced relative power and autonomy. Examining Leon Brittan’s proposal to create a Committee of Parliaments, Smith supports strengthening the European parliament, rather than creating yet another external committee that would only weaken existing institutions. Moreover, she views arguments about a deficit critically, claiming that “several more recent developments further the idea of a natural progress towards greater democracy as the Union

matures” (p. 127).

European federalism, U.S. federalism and their interactions represent another theme of the volume. Approaching the concept of federalism from an historic-theological and philosophical point of view, Isabel David traces the term’s origin back to the Bible. She illustrates its progressive secularization under the influence of Enlightenment thinkers, particularly in the United States, where it was first formulated as a modern concept and implemented. Contrasting the European system with the federal constitutional system of the United States, Mark K. Gyandoh’s contribution examines in more detail how the principle of co-equal branches (legislative, executive and judiciary) has been included in the European constitution. He focuses on which institutions have the right to declare a law unconstitutional in order to highlight how institutions in both systems interact.

Finally, three articles have a somewhat disconnected theme in comparison to the previous contributions (which considered either the role of federalist principles in establishing the democratic foundations of the EU and the dynamic relations between them, or else the inclusion of the United States in these debates). Moreover, instead of coming at the issue from a juridical or politico-historical vantage point, these authors adopt a sociological approach. David Adam Landan and Lisa Vanhala study to what extent the European constitution included specific minority provisions and addressed demands of stateless nations and national minorities. They further compare Basques and Catalans under the Spanish constitution with ethnic Hungarians under the Slovak and Romanian constitution. Mirella Eberts looks at the evolution of the Polish Catholic Church’s position on European integration and specifically in the debates over Poland’s accession to the EU. She argues that the Church’s position has evolved from one of skepticism to one of conditional support. She also addresses the differences between the Catholic Church and some of its most conservative, skeptical components about the euro, as embodied by Radio Marja. Julia White examines the educational discrimination to which Roma children are subjected to in the Slovak Republic both out of racial prejudices and for social reasons. She argues that inclusive education should be seen as a human right, since it determines future integration and also reproduces social justice.

The volume ends with a rather utopian essay in which Tom Hudgens, chairman emeritus of the board of the Ashburn Institute, calls for the creation of a feder-

ation of western democracies—a “Union” resulting from the merger of the EU and the United States. The body he envisions would have competencies in three areas, namely political, military and economic. Institutionally, the “Union” would be headed by a president elected by the citizens or a prime minister elected by the assembly; it would have a foreign minister and an assembly elected by the citizens. These institutions and their powers are not very different from those described in the European constitution. But Hudgens goes even further and proposes that the EU and the United States hold a common constitutional convention to form the political side of the “Union,” while NATO would form its military part. The result would be a transatlantic political, economic and military monolith.

It is not an easy task to pass judgment on a volume of such unequal contributions. The articles address different questions and consider various dimensions of the problem of defining Europe. They certainly do not give any definitive answers to the question posed by the editor at the beginning of the book, but they do suggest some avenues of research and elements of reflection. What they also show is that the EU is still a “work-in-progress” and is most likely to remain so for the next decades.

Note

[1]. For the program, see < <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/AUD/re03cfp.htm> >.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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**Citation:** Carine Germond. Review of Drew, Joseph, ed., *Redefining Europe*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. September, 2006.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12299>

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