

## Introduction

At present, European integration is entering the most difficult stage in its short history as the European Union has to tackle simultaneously the challenges of integrating ten (and potentially more) member states and of achieving a working political union. Never before have deepening and widening, the two dimensions of European integration, put such a dramatic strain on the Community. The European Union needs to integrate different political cultures and internally fragmented and divergent societies with differing historical legacies by enabling conflict and consensus among them. At the same time, it needs to secure what has been achieved by integration in order to further the Community's capacity to act in a globalised world.

The Union is an unprecedented political animal, and whilst it incorporates some characteristics of state-like structures it lacks the central integrating and legitimising devices that are at the disposal of its component member states: most significantly a historically evolved and consolidated identity and the notion of being the organisational expression of a united and sovereign people. Therefore, the Union needs to constantly activate the support of those subjected to its rule much more than its constituent member states do. Overall, the European Union works on an indirect and rather fickle basis of legitimacy.

In general, representation is a means to legitimise rule and the workings of multiple channels of representation are crucial for the viability of political systems. More specifically, given the particular construction of European integration interest representation sits at the very heart of its workings: By and large, European integration is built on the idea of engaging the various interests that are affected by the integration project. Thus, interest representation is central to the Union's functioning.

More than any other political system, the European Union is based on the notion of evolution and, accordingly, the schemes of European interest representation have been adapted to changed realities over time. Currently, the perhaps most far-reaching adaptation

process is taking place at the European level. Questions are being debated as to how the institutions should be made up so that they can work effectively under the conditions of an increased membership, bring about the integration of member states and European societies, and, at the same time, meet the requirements of democratic legitimacy. Simultaneously, interest group representation is attracting increased attention as it came to be placed within the framework of the Union's quest for legitimacy.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study is to understand and analyse the European Union as an arena of interest representation. The principle question is whether, and how, the representational patterns of the European Union are suited to bringing about integration and legitimating common action under the condition of a further enlarged political union. In other words, is the Union endowed with a working representational scheme that fulfils the theoretical pre-condition for a Union that can cope with the current challenges? Following a pluralist approach according to which the legitimate common good is a result of the interplay of the different interests that are represented within a polity, interest representation will be understood as being comprised of European institutional representation as well as the representation of organised interests at the European level.

The representation perspective is not meant to replace other theoretical approaches to European integration. Rather, it offers a view on European integration from a different angle by taking into account existing theories. Representation as a lens of analysis builds on the theory of pluralist democracy, insofar as working channels of representation are regarded as being vital for the functioning of a democratic regime. By including the analysis of European interest groups in addition to that of European institutions a representation approach builds on neo-functionalism, inasmuch as it takes on the assumption that the representation of organised interests is important to the integration process. A representation approach takes into account the centrality of law for the integration process, inasmuch as it investigates the representative bodies through which law is made and the decision-making process that is based on the representation and mediation of interests. Representation as a lens of analysis enriches approaches that are directed toward the democratisation of European governance, in that it

includes non-democratic types of representation that are equally pertinent to the viability of pluralist democracy at the European level and in that it offers a view on European integration that is not embedded in the ideological mould of the nation-state. A representational perspective is suited to coping with the categorical newness of European integration because representation is such an open concept of human thinking that can operate in all kinds of political systems. On the whole, a representational perspective on the European Union complements existing theories, allows for a comprehensive analysis of both institutional and interest group representation within one theoretical framework, and is suited to assessing the quest for democratic legitimacy of the European Union.

Accordingly, the quest for the Union's legitimacy is the starting point of this study. Drawing on Max Weber's conception of legitimacy, the first chapter sketches out the parameters of the Union's legitimacy and shows how representation is related to them. Ultimately, the legitimacy of a political system hinges on the subjects' belief in its legitimacy. The Union's current quest for legitimacy basically stems from the fact that, while integration has reached a political stage and keeps proceeding at a rapid pace, the 'permissive consensus' that was deemed sufficient to endow the early phases of European integration with legitimacy did not turn into substantial support. This is the empirical problem to which representation as a lens of analysis is aimed at providing a normative answer. Yet, representation can take a number of different forms that work in different ways. In order to gain the deeper understanding of representation necessary for the analysis of the different representational schemes existing at the European level, chapter two is dedicated to presenting an overview of the different concepts of representation that have been developed throughout European history. This, however, does not provide a fully sufficient theoretical basis for the analysis of all the European representational schemes, since the emergence of the concept of modern democratic representation was coupled with the assumption that the representation of partial group interests is incompatible with democratic rule. Interest groups came to be conceived of as constituting a threat to democracy, and, consequently, their capacity to represent in the strict sense of the word was completely repudiated. Pluralists, however, found that groups do not necessarily undermine the fundamental principles of democratic rule. The third chapter,

therefore, traces back the evolution of pluralism and, by drawing on the theory of Joseph Kaiser, introduces the concept of factual group representation with the help of which we can conceive of interest group representation that is placed within the framework of pluralist democracy.

The applied part of the study uses this theoretical background to understand and assess the European representational schemes in the light of the Union's current challenges. While representation is generally a means to achieve integration and to legitimise rule, institutional and factual group representation function differently and are related in different ways to the Union's bases of validity. Chapter four examines whether, and how, European institutional representation can be said to meet the theoretical pre-conditions for political integration and sound foundations for the Union's legitimacy. On the other hand, chapter five examines whether the European interest group sector is suited to bringing about social integration and whether the rules governing interest group representation are placed within the overall framework of pluralist democracy. The findings with regard to the individual European institutions and the institutional make up of the Union as a whole as well as the findings on interest group participation in European politics might be understood as a normative contribution to the ongoing reform debate.