

Book Review

Martijn van den Brink, European University Institute

CITIZENS IN EUROPE: ESSAYS ON DEMOCRACY, CONSTITUTIONALISM AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. STRUGGLING WITH THE AWAKENING GIANT

Authors: Claus Offe and Ulrich K. Preuß

In *Citizens in Europe: Essays on Democracy, Constitutionalism, and European Integration*, Offe and Preuß collect a large number of essays – 23 in total – produced by both over the last three decades. Through a discussion of principles of citizenship, democracy, and constitutionalism the authors try to shed light on many of the EU's current crises. While much contemporary scholarship on the EU focuses on these issues, few have been able to approach such a variety of issues from such a diversity of perspectives – and offer deep and compelling arguments. Offe and Preuß contend that solutions to existing problems cannot be found without a deeper reflection on and more strictly adhering to principles of citizenship, democracy, and constitutionalism. They even go as far as to claim that 'if these principles had been more vigorously adhered to and implemented, the impact of those cumulative crises could either have been prevented from emerging ... or more effectively coped with' (3). This claim will be disputed by some no doubt, but few are likely to disagree with the strength of many of the claims made. It is a must read for anyone interested in these areas.

With the exception of the first introductory chapter, all others have already been published before as individual articles or book chapters. The first half of the chapters is not about the EU directly, but reflect on a set of theoretical issues, amongst them democracy, the welfare state and constitutionalism, and discusses them in a more abstract way. These chapters serve as an interlude to current dilemmas within the EU and the Member States, which are discussed in the last half of the book. The issues dealt with in these chapters include questions of legitimacy and democracy within the EU, that of citizenship, and the Eurozone crisis.

Offe and Preuß anticipate that the analytical and normative analyses provided by their earlier works are still relevant for our understanding of contemporary problems within the EU (1). The incisive analyses offered in many of the chapters indeed allows us to better understand some of the current challenges. Offe's 1987 paper on democracy and the welfare state (chapter 5 in the book), for example, which stresses the importance of solidarity and identity for the maintenance of welfare provisions in democratic systems, is still useful if we want to understand the pressures exercised upon national systems of social protection by processes of globalisation (and also the EU as Offe explains in chapter 21). Also Preuß' 1996 study of different conceptions of constitutionalism (chapter 7 in the book) is highly insightful and serves as a great reminder that there are forms of constitutionalism that caution against a too dominant judiciary – according to both authors one of the problems within the EU (394). Equally interesting are some of the more recently produced chapters. Offe's 'Europe Entrapped' article (chapter 23 in the book), to give an example, remains in my opinion among the best analytical accounts of the impossible situation the introduction of the Euro in combination with the financial crisis has created for the EU.

Unfortunately, the book is hardly more than a collection of individual essays. It would have been useful, not only for the reader but also for the strength of the claims made, would the authors have

made an effort to structure the book and have offered some guidance with respect to how all chapters fit together and within the broader theme. The book could have thematically subdivided all different chapters. Alternatively, the introduction could have been used to set out a clearer roadmap. Instead, the introduction offers an overview of the book's leitmotifs, but it is left to the reader to find out how all remaining chapters support the author's beliefs. This is not always immediately apparent. To give an example, how ensuring that democratic processes contribute to moral learning – produce better outcomes – and by which mechanisms (among chapters 2-4 core themes) is relevant for understanding and solving some of the EU's problem is not fully evident. This is not to deny that these issues can be relevant, but with some effort the significance of these issues could have been better highlighted.

Also the argument itself would have benefitted if the book would have been better structured, with a stronger emphasis on the overall argument. At times there appears to be an ostensible tension between some chapters. This might simply be due to them having been written in different periods or because both authors have slightly different perspectives on similar matters, but it creates some confusion at times nonetheless. So, while chapter 19 challenges the claim that in the absence of a European demos no European democracy can exist, for the no demos thesis is too concerned with homogeneity (384-385), the following suggests that within the EU there is not and cannot be the equivalent of the national demos because of the diversity and lack of unifying pressures (398-399) and that, therefore, the preconditions for democratic legitimacy are absent (403). To an extent these statements might be reconcilable. The authors claim, for example, that the challenge 'is not primarily that the EU must become democratic; it is that member states must remain democratic' (391); and even that democratisation of the EU is undesirable, for it would undermine the EU's main source of legitimacy, namely the creation and maintenance of nation-blind transnational solidarity and tolerance (408-409). This latter argument, however, seems to create further tensions, because they sit uncomfortably with earlier claims that within a diverse polity like the EU democratic contestation is necessary over the policies to be pursued (24). Furthermore, it is a claim that reminisces the standard output-legitimacy argument – which Offe and Preuß normally appear to find a weak justification for the EU (394) – that non-democratic expert rule in the long term is in the interest of all.

Now, these are just some examples of course and in no way undermine the intellectual rigour displayed in the book. While the book would have benefitted from better structuring and removing any apparent tensions between chapters, in the end it is insightful, compelling, and enjoyable to read. From each chapter something useful can be taken away. It is a book that should be read by anyone interested in the principles of democracy, citizenship, and constitutionalism, and in particular by those trying to understand how to implement those at a supranational level.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Citizens in Europe: Essays on Democracy, Constitutionalism and European Integration

Claus Offe and Ulrich K. Preuß

ECPR, 2016

ISBN 9781785522383 (hbk), £52.00, 512 pages

Keywords: European Union, Democracy, Citizenship, Constitutionalism

Abstract: The book is a collection of essays produced by Offe and Preuß throughout their career. The essays discuss the meaning of and adherence to principles of citizenship, democracy, and constitutionalism within the EU.