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Democracy in Europe: the EU and national polities

Schmidt, Vivien Ann
Oxford: Oxford University Press
2006
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Biography

Vivien A. Schmidt (American, born in New York, 1949) is the Jean Monnet Chair of European Integration, founding Director of the Center for the Study of Europe at Boston University, as well as Co-Chair of the Future of the EU Studies Group at Harvard's Center for European Studies. Schmidt held visiting and affiliate positions at a number of European universities over the years, including LUISS in Rome (currently), Sciences Po in Paris, the Freie Universität, Berlin, Oxford University and the Max Planck Institute in Cologne. Awards and distinctions include an Honorary Doctorate at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB, 2008) and the Franqui Interuniversity Chair for Foreign Scholars (ULB and Catholic University of Leuven, 2007). Vivien A. Schmidt divides her time between Boston and Paris, and has carried out a large portion of her research in Europe. Schmidt has published widely on European political economy, institutions, and democracy as well as on political and institutional theory. She is the author of ten books, over 100 scholarly journal articles or chapters in books, and many policy briefs and comments. Her publications include 'Democracy in Europe' (2006), 'The Futures of European Capitalism' (2002), and 'Democratizing France' (1990), as well as a number of co-authored and edited works.

Summary

In 'Democracy in Europe', Vivien A. Schmidt discusses the impact of European integration on national democracies. Schmidt argues that the democratic deficit in the EU is indeed a problem, but sees it more as a problem at a national level. EU governance practices are often in conflict with traditional ideas of democracy and the democratic nation state. The real problem is not that practices have changed, but rather that the national ideas about democracy have remained the same. The author maintains that national leaders have failed to develop ideas and discourses to represent and reflect the realities of Europeanisation. The book describes two types of governance in Europe, 'simple' and 'compound' polities. In 'simple' polities, there is only one single governing authority, while in 'compound' polities governance is dispersed amongst multiple authorities. The author regards the European Union as a 'compound' polity, a form of 'regional state', with its shared national and European sovereignty and variable boundaries. Schmidt argues that institutional 'fit' is important, and that the EU is less disruptive to similarly 'compound' polities such as Germany and Italy, and more disruptive to 'simple' polities like Britain and France. The EU conceives policy in multiple areas, thus offering what the author describes as 'policy without politics' at its institutional level, while national level politics offer 'politics without policy' due to the partial loss of legal and policy making competencies to the EU. This situation creates failure in public discourse, and Schmidt argues to bring back national politics into the EU as a part solution to this problem. She warns however that this would likely result in a less efficient governance by the EU.