



The paradoxes of legitimate EU leadership. An analysis of the multi-level leadership of Angela Merkel and Alexis Tsipras during the euro crisis

F. A. W. J. Van Esch

To cite this article: F. A. W. J. Van Esch (2017) The paradoxes of legitimate EU leadership. An analysis of the multi-level leadership of Angela Merkel and Alexis Tsipras during the euro crisis, *Journal of European Integration*, 39:2, 223-237, DOI: [10.1080/07036337.2016.1277716](https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2016.1277716)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2016.1277716>



Published online: 08 Feb 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 181



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 2 View citing articles [↗](#)

The paradoxes of legitimate EU leadership. An analysis of the multi-level leadership of Angela Merkel and Alexis Tsipras during the euro crisis

F. A. W. J. Van Esch

Utrecht School of Governance, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

In times of crisis, political leaders are torn between calls for strong leadership and the need to maintain their license to operate amongst their constituents. The predicament of European Heads of State and Government (HSG) during crises provides a particularly strong example of this. For on top of the inherent tension between political leadership and democracy, in the European multi-level system, HSG have to balance the demands of many groups of potential followers while facing weak and contradictory vectors of legitimate leadership. This contribution presents a framework by which the inherent tensions of legitimate European leadership may systematically be assessed. It applies this framework to two HSG that were key to the management of the euro crisis, the German chancellor Angela Merkel and the Greek Prime Minister Tsipras in their attempts to walk the tightrope between legitimate and decisive EU leadership.

KEYWORDS

Leadership; euro crisis; legitimacy; Heads of state and government; social identification; ideology

Introduction

In recent years, several observers have concluded that the European Union (EU) has been facing a leadership crisis (Cramme 2011; Hayward 2008; Matthijs and Blyth 2011; McNamara 2010; Van Esch 2017; Westfall 2013). Their diagnoses of the precise nature and causes of the European leadership crisis vary: some authors argue the EU lacks sufficient and strong leadership while others have stressed that the EU is too much of an elite-project and its decline in legitimacy follows from a lack of civic participation and bottom-up governance (Bellamy 2010; Cramme 2011; Hayward 2008; McNamara 2010; Westfall 2013).

For students of national political leadership this paradoxical diagnosis of the European leadership crisis is familiar as it reflects a decade-long debate about the tension between leadership and democracy (Barber 1998; Kane and Patapan 2012; Rhodes and 't Hart 2014). In principle, democracy is about granting power to the people to govern themselves and providing everyone an equal say in this. Singling out a certain person or select group to provide them with the power to govern over others is at odds with this core premises (Kane and Patapan 2012). Nonetheless, democracies need leadership to function and enable determinate and effective action especially in times of crisis. Moreover, often the people

themselves call for strong political leadership as a solution to wicked problems and to take tough decisions on their behalf as leadership can be highly beneficial and provide followers with desirable outcomes at low costs (Bulmer 2014; cf. Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011; Nye 2008). The EU thus finds itself in a similar catch-22 that all democracies find themselves in.

What makes the problem of European leadership different is the exacerbation of the challenges of democratic leadership resulting from its multilevel nature. Firstly, while no group of followers is ever unitary, leaders in a multilevel political arena are called to cater on groups of followers at different political levels and with very different preferences, ideologies and identities. Secondly, in the EU the tension between power and equality inherent in democratic leadership not only exists at the level of individuals but, given their sovereign status, also at the level of states. Finally, like in the national political arena, in the EU several vectors of legitimate leadership exist that may provide justification for the exertion of leadership. However, the ties that bind European leaders to their followers differ more widely and the vectors of legitimate leadership are often weak and frequently work against each other (Van Esch 2017).

This contribution presents an analytical framework that unravels the inherent paradoxes involved in exerting legitimate multilevel leadership in the European Union. As these paradoxes are most salient in the case of European Heads of State and Government (HSG) under pressure, the framework will be illustrated using the cases of two national leaders that were key to the management of the euro crisis: the German chancellor Angela Merkel and the Greek Prime Minister Tsipras. These cases are especially instructive as they are extreme and opposite cases in terms of the power and (in)equality inherent to democratic leadership. Still as the contribution will show, Merkel and Tsipras faced similar paradoxes in their attempts to walk the tightrope between legitimate and decisive EU leadership.

The paradoxes of multi-level European Union leadership

As Burns noted in his 1978 seminal book: 'leadership, unlike naked power-wielding, is ... inseparable from followers needs and goals' (Burns 1978, 19). However, to this date the bifurcation between the literature on democratic political leadership and followership and public opinion that he noted and deplored in the late 1970s is still present, especially in European Studies (Burns 1978, 3). One way to overcome this bifurcation is to combine theories of democratic leadership and the legitimacy of EU governance to gain a better understanding of the democratic legitimacy of political leadership.

On the basis of these literatures, four so-called 'vectors of legitimate leadership' may be distinguished to assess the legitimacy of multi-level European leadership (Van Esch 2017). These vectors define the relationship between leaders and followers by explicating the legitimizing logic that binds them together (Figure 1; Lord and Magnette 2004). The first and most common source of legitimacy in democracies rests upon the legitimacy supplied by being democratically elected. Followers vote for politicians who promise to deliver policies and outcomes that reflect their shared preferences. In addition to this form of output legitimacy, elections are also a powerful procedural ground for legitimacy as the result of fair elections is generally accepted by the people even if they happened to vote for a different leader. The second rationale for endowing leadership upon individuals in democratic systems is the expectation that their expertise will allow them to make better decisions and deliver

Basis of Relation		Output
Election	←————→	Voters preferences
Expertise/Skill	←————→	Effectiveness, efficiency
Ideology	←————→	Values, utopia
Soc Identification	←————→	Acknowledgment, belonging

Figure 1. Four vectors of legitimate leadership (Van Esch 2017).

objectively more effective or efficient results (Lord and Magnette 2004, 185). Legitimacy may thus be assigned to actors that possess subject specific expertise or competences needed to solve complex policy problems or to realise the objectives of an governmental organisation (Rhodes 2014). These two vectors tie the idea of legitimacy to the concept of transactional leadership, for both the legitimacy of expertise and election are based on the output leaders will deliver (Burns 1978; Lord and Magnette 2004, 187; see Tömmel and Verdun 2017).

The third vector rests upon the ideological bond between leaders and followers and relies on mutual held values, moral purpose and visions of utopia. An ideological leader attracts followers through stories of ideals and aspirations and the management of meaning, and has great mobilising power (Bennister, 't Hart, and Worthy 2015). At the same time, ideological leadership may be a divisive force as its power partly derives from its contrast and conflict with the values and visions embodied in opposing ideologies. The final vector of legitimation is rooted in social identification and points to leadership legitimised by the perceived mutual belonging of leader and follower to a particular social group. The more leaders are seen to be prototypical of that group, act to craft a sense of 'us' and promote the interest of the in-group, the more their leadership is perceived as a legitimate (Steffens, Haslam, and Reicher 2014). Rooted deep in peoples' psychology, social identification has been shown to forge very strong and durable bonds. In fact, like in the case of a football club, followers' loyalty to a proto-typical in-group leader may survive many 'excruciating losses to the team' (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011, 47). The vectors of ideology and identification thus tie in closely with the notion of transactional leadership put forward by Burns (1978): They rely on the passions leaders stir in followers and are less dependent on the results leaders will deliver, especially in the short run.

Though based in the formal functions and mandates of leaders as well as their ideas and identities, the legitimising logics underlying the vectors are to some extent social constructions and therefore subject to the political craftsmanship of leaders. Leaders may, for instance, present themselves as the true voice of the people despite never having won an electoral majority, or manipulate their public persona to appear more prototypical in the eyes of the in-group. Moreover, dependent on the context, the vectors of legitimate leadership have different strength and forge bonds between different sets of leaders and followers. However, for any leadership relation to be legitimate, the inherent inequality and exertion of power it implies must be balanced by a vector of proper nature and strength. At the national political

level, these vectors of legitimate leadership are well-developed and often reinforce each other to form a broad legitimacy base from which national leaders may act.

The first factor that makes the problem of European leadership different is the multilevel nature of European governance. In the EU system, high-level political leaders are simultaneously involved in multiple leader-follower relations. Heads of State or Government, for instance, not only act as formal leaders of their national constituency, but are simultaneously a leader or follower in relation to other HSG in the European Council. Powerful national leaders like Chancellor Merkel are even looked upon to provide guidance for the EU as a whole (Bulmer 2014; Matthijs and Blyth 2011; Meiers 2015). While no group of followers is ever unitary, leaders in a multilevel political arena are called upon to cater to many different groups of followers with highly different preferences, ideologies and identities. As such, their position is much like that of leaders in international negotiations having to marry seemingly irreconcilable political pressures from their various European and domestic constituencies (Evans, Jacobson, and Putnam 1993; Putnam 1988; cf. Bulmer 2014) but (given the current level of Europeanization) on a permanent basis. As leaders' capacity to influence others always depends on who those others are' (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011, 18), the specifics of each of these leader-follower relationship must be taken into account when assessing the balance between legitimate and strong leadership.

Secondly, in the EU the tension between power and equality that is inherent in democratic leadership takes on a second dimension as it involves cooperation between sovereign people and sovereign states. The sovereign status of member states and their historical relations make leadership by one state over others a very sensitive matter (Helms 2017; cf. Teles 2015, 34). In fact, the much lamented fragmented political system was specifically designed to disperse power and prevent EU decision-making to be dominated by a single strong leader (Van Middelaar 2013). To complicate things further, some sovereign states represent more sovereign people than others. This inherent tension between the sovereign power of states and people came to a full blow-out when in July 2015, the democratic no-vote of the Greek people in the referendum on the second bail-out package clashed with the democratic right of the creditor states to link conditions to the loans they were asked to provide (Traynor 2015).

Finally, unlike national politics, the European political arena is characterised by weak vectors that often work against each other (Van Esch 2017). The weakness of the electoral vector has been well documented in European studies (Follesdal and Hix 2006). Moreover, recent crises have dealt a serious blow to Europe's capacity to deliver effective and efficient outcomes and thereby jeopardise the legitimacy of both its elected and technocratic leaders (Beukers 2013; Scharpf 2011; Verdun 2017) as these rely on transactional forms of leadership. Transformational forms like ideological and identity leadership generate more unconditional and enduring loyalties. However, at the European level, these forms of leadership are underdeveloped as the perceived character of the EU as a complex, technocratic regulatory state has rendered European politics a false aura of de-politicization (Majone 1999; cf. Van Middelaar 2016). Moreover, while many Europeans have some sense of being European stacked upon their – still dominant – national self-identification (Polyakova and Fligstein 2016; Risse 2014), when European leaders play the social identity card, it is predominantly national in nature. Finally, while at the national level leadership usually rests upon a combination of mutually reinforcing vectors, due to the greater difference in their followers' backgrounds, stacking vectors of legitimate leadership at the European level is more difficult. All

in all, while leadership and democracy are by definition hard to reconcile at any level of government, the multi-level nature of European leadership provides it with additional legitimacy paradoxes and barriers for decisive action.

Leadership in the euro crisis

To illustrate how these legitimacy paradoxes hamper EU leaders in finding a proper balance between strong and legitimate action, the vectors of legitimate leadership will be applied to the leadership exercised during the euro crisis by two pivotal European leaders: the German chancellor Angela Merkel and Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. Although these Heads of Government differ significantly in terms of their power position, the analysis shows they had to navigate similar tensions resulting from the multilevel nature of EU leadership.

Angela Merkel: Swabian housewife or empress of Europe?

Angela Merkel has been the German Chancellor since 2005 and leader of the German Christian-democratic party, CDU, since 2000. She is one of only two European leaders that have survived the euro crisis and the longest serving leader in the EU. Since the outbreak of the crisis, Merkel has presided over two coalition governments: one with the liberal FDP and the CDU's Bavarian sister party CSU from 2009 to 2013 and a Grand Coalition with CSU and the Social Democrats (SDP) from 2013 onwards. Despite having to navigate her country through the euro crisis, until the outbreak of the migration crisis in the fall of 2015 Merkel's position was never seriously challenged (Helms and Van Esch 2017).

From an international perspective this may seem curious, for the German Chancellor has been strongly criticised for failing to provide the leadership needed to guide Europe out of the euro crisis (Matthijs and Blyth 2011; cf. Meiers 2015). This critique, however, fails to recognise that as a European leader playing on multiple political chessboards, an adequate assessment of the effectiveness and legitimacy of Merkel's leadership during the euro crisis very much depends on which followers' perspective you take. As the elected leader of Europe's economic powerhouse, Merkel's potential followers include the German people, her party and other members of the German government and her fellow HSG in the European Council (Figure 2).

Domestically, Chancellor Merkel may be regarded as the legitimate political leader of the German people on the basis of the electoral vector. Merkel's bond to the German people is, however, also partly rooted in the vector of social identification. At first sight, as an East-German, female leader with a background in academia, Merkel seems to be an unlikely candidate to act as the proto-typical German. However, Merkel has always avoided mixing-up her public persona with the elements of her private life that would make it difficult for the average German to relate to her. At the same time, she has created an aura of normalcy around her persona. This provides people with a sense of knowing her that works well in an egalitarian state like Germany. Her calm, a-passionate and contemplating style of policy-making also fits the German culture very well and has earned her respect and trust as a political leader (Fried 2015; Helms and Van Esch 2017). With regard to the euro crisis specifically, as early as 2008, Merkel invoked the image of the frugal Swabian housewife which resonated

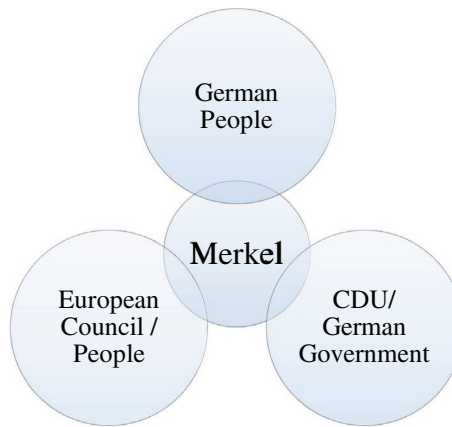


Figure 2. Chancellor Merkel's network of European leader–follower relations.

so well with the people that Merkel, who is neither Swabian, nor a housewife, became strongly associated with this female German stereotype (*The Economist* 2014).

Moreover, despite the fact that she is not a visionary leader (Olsen 2011, 349), this association with thrift tied her to her constituency in an ideological sense. Like most Germans, Merkel adheres to the ordoliberal economic school of thought (Van Esch 2014). However, she is more of an ideological follower and actually less hawkish than many in the German financial establishment. Moreover, despite having become the international poster woman for ordoliberalism, Merkel – who is not an expert in economic and monetary affairs – generally led the German Minister of Finance, Wolfgang Schäuble, take the lead in the euro crisis negotiations. She only reluctantly moved in when the vital political decisions were to be made and then often struck a more conciliatory and compromising tone (Schoeller 2016; Traynor 2015). With regard to the German people, her leadership thus rests predominantly upon the electoral vector and social identification rather than on the vectors of expertise or ideology.

As the leader of the Christian Democratic Party and German coalition government, Merkel's legitimacy also relies to a large extent on the electoral vector. As Germany has a system of constructive vote of (no)confidence, Chancellors are explicitly voted in place by a majority of the Bundestag. Moreover, within the CDU, the stature of Merkel has been virtually unchallenged for years. She was elected party-leader in 2000 and over time her re-election margin grew to 97.9% in 2012 (Detterbeck and Rohlfing 2014). In addition, Merkel has also shown to be a strong vote-getter for her party (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2013, 1), and in the sense that she thereby realises a core goal of the CDU in an effective manner, this may provide her some legitimacy via the vector of expertise.

In contrast, the vectors of ideology and social identification do not play a significant role in forging a bond between Merkel and her colleagues in the CDU or government: Merkel is simply not an ideological leader nor a prototypical representative of the core values of the Christian Democrats. Instead, part of the reason she has held on to her position as chancellor for so long is that Merkel is a master at balancing different factions, both within the CDU and the wider governmental coalitions, while not truly affiliating with any of them (Clemens 2011; Wiliarty 2008).

While the economic downturn and political instability caused by the euro crisis has dealt a serious blow to the output legitimacy of all European elected and technocratic leaders, domestically, Merkel's leadership has undoubtedly been effective. Germany has suffered from the crisis and at times its citizens have had serious doubts about the course she laid out and the compromises she made. However, at the same time, Germany is one of the few European states that has retained its Triple A status and economic strength (Nardelli 2015). Moreover, support for her European economic policies has been equally forthcoming. Despite having to agree to the establishment of the bail-out funds and not being able to stop the ECB interventions – policies that are seen as unlawful monetary easing in the German public domain – by appealing to the still widespread European vocation of the Germans, Merkel was able to secure large bipartisan majorities in parliament and public support for all of the hotly debated measures. Only the third bail-out package for Greece of July 2015 was ratified by a relative small majority and with a considerable number of party-members defecting (Meiers 2015).

Evaluating Merkel's leadership from a pan-European perspective paints a very different picture. As the head of Europe's economic powerhouse, Merkel has often been identified as the designated leader to guide Europe out of the euro crisis (Bulmer 2014; Matthijs and Blyth 2011; Meiers 2015). From the point of legitimacy, however, it is far from obvious why Merkel should be justified to exert leadership over Europe as a whole or her European peers in the European Council. Formally, the European Council has no internal hierarchy, all members represent their sovereign states and people on an equal basis. Merkel's supposed position as the 'empress of Europe' is therefore not rooted in an electoral vector of justification.

Merkel is the longest serving and most successful HSG as well as the leader most experienced in the art of high European politics. Moreover, no other Eurozone state has weathered the crisis as well as Germany. In other circumstances, this could render her pan-European leadership some legitimacy on the basis of expertise. However, Germany's economic policies are often seen as detrimental for other member states (Matthijs and Blyth 2011; cf. Hall 2014) and the other HSG can hardly be expected to accept her guidance when such a clear conflict of interest exists.

A potentially stronger case for legitimate European leadership could be made on the basis of the ideological vector. As this vector relies on mutual held values and a shared vision of the future, it does not need formal links to forge a bond between leaders and followers. Although Merkel is the antithesis of an ideological leader and has been criticised strongly for her ideological quest for austerity in the Anglo-Saxon press and academia (Blyth 2013; cf. Meiers 2015, Chap. 1), her approach did gain strong ideological support amongst the leaders and constituents of smaller member states like Austria, Finland, Slovenia and The Netherlands. To them, Merkel has been a much-appreciated ordoliberal spokesperson during the show-down on the second and third Greek bail-outs when they actually pressed her to adopt an even more hawkish position (Chassany, Politi, and Spiegel 2015). Rather than pointing to a lack of leadership, this and the outcome of this battle may be seen as an illustration of Germany's ideological hegemony (Bulmer 2014; Meiers 2015).

At the same time, ideological leadership is a divisive force and – as the proliferation of criticism of the German position and turn to the left in Europe's Southern states shows – Germany's ideological hegemony is incomplete at best. Rather than being persuaded by her ordoliberal arguments, for the debtor states, Merkel's stance in the euro crisis is a matter

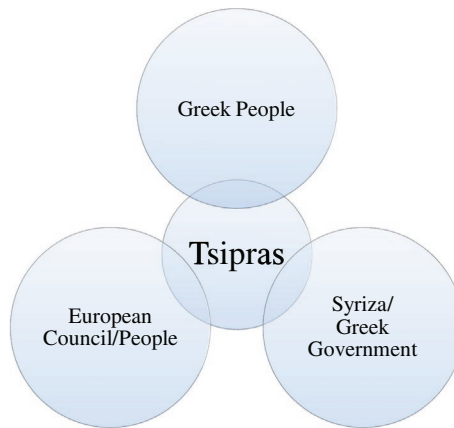


Figure 3. Prime Minister Tsipras' network of European leader–follower relations.

of the exertion of naked power, not legitimate leadership (Bulmer 2014, 1250; Featherstone 2015; Van Esch 2014).

Arguably these feelings are worsened by the association of Merkel with the prototypical Swabian housewife, the identity that boosted her leadership legitimacy at the domestic level. This identification and the passions it stirs obscure the fact that Merkel was often the most conciliatory German voice and has met her partners halfway on some crisis measures like the bailout funds, measures that fly in the face of ordoliberal thought (Schoeller 2016; Steinberg and Vermeiren 2016; Van Esch 2014). Even more devastating for her pan-European legitimacy, however, are the associations of Merkel's crisis leadership with WWII, that were fuelled by the Greek leader Alexis Tsipras in particular (see below). Hoping to defuse such associations, Merkel has consistently rejected the role of 'Empress of Europe' and insisted that she is one amongst European equals (Blome 2015). When, in July 2015, she ultimately chose to play the power-card over moving towards a Grexit, the public back-lash showed that the identification with Germany's dark past and a fear for German hegemony was still at the forefront of many Europeans' minds. This seriously limited the legitimacy of German European leadership (Chandler 2015; Myers 2013; Traynor 2015).

The analysis thus shows that the ideological and identity leadership that helped Merkel to get the crisis-measures accepted domestically have lowered the legitimacy of her leadership at the European level. Moreover, despite all the calls for Merkel to step up to the plate, there is no vector that legitimates why Merkel would be justified to speak for Europe as a whole. For, even when her national constituency or ideological supporters demand her to do so, there is no vector of legitimate leadership that authorises her to 'impose special sacrifices on the citizens of Greece or Portugal or of any other member state' who remain unpersuaded by the German ordoliberal ideology (Scharpf 2011, 29). Especially not because many perceive these policies as detrimental to debtor states' interests and the future of the European project (Meiers 2015, 3; Panagiotarea 2013).

Alexis Tsipras: strong and detrimental identity leadership

Remarkably, similar legitimacy paradoxes have haunted the Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras. Tsipras has been prime minister of Greece since 25 January 2015 and leader of the unlikely coalition of his left-wing Syriza party and the rightwing Independent Greeks. Although this coalition was based on a shared opposition against the conditions of the first two European bail-out agreements, in July 2015, Tsipras agreed to a third bail-out package under even harsher conditions. This resulted in a split within Syriza and new elections on 20 September 2015. Tsipras was re-elected as prime-minister and he continued to govern in coalition with the Independent Greeks.

Like Merkel, Tsipras has had to cater to multiple groups of followers at the domestic and European level. As prime minister he is the leader of the Greek people, the coalition government and his party. Moreover, given Greece's financial dependence on its Eurozone partner states, it has been crucial for Tsipras to gain a following amongst his fellow HSG in the European Council for his ideas (Figure 3).

Having won two general elections in one year and as the elected party leader of Syriza, Tsipras' domestic leadership is clearly legitimate in an electoral sense. In addition, his radical left-wing ideological beliefs are often invoked to explain his popularity. The turn of events during his first year in office, however, shows that Tsipras has been largely unable to provide his electorate or party with the outcome they desired or the left-wing utopia of social security, fighting capitalism, corruption and tax evasion and ending austerity. This suggests that a different vector of legitimate leadership underlies Tsipras' continuous electoral success.

Reviewing his political background and public statements, there are clear ideological aspects to Tsipras' leadership. Syriza is a coalition of several radical leftwing factions, some with Marxist and Maoist leanings and Tsipras started as the leader of the Youth movement of the radical left, the anti-globalisation party Synaspismos. Upon election, Tsipras reaffirmed his ideological colours by revealing the intention to freeze privatisation, reinstate minimum wage, hire thousands of civil servants that were laid off in the realm of earlier bail-out agreements and fight tax evasion and corruption by the wealthy. Moreover, in March 2015, the government passed a law that enabled it to provide emergency aid, free electricity and food stamps to its poorest citizens (Barber 2015). Tsipras also went head to head with his European partners to forge an adjustment of the conditions linked to the desperately needed payment of a next tranche of loans scheduled for February 2015. After six years of recession and detrimental austerity reforms, the promise of a U-turn in economic policy undoubtedly was a major factor for many Greeks to support Tsipras' leadership.

However the February 2015 deal Tsipras negotiated with the Eurozone partners to release four months' worth of loans revived pre-existing doubts about the strength of his ideological beliefs (Baker and Hope 2015; Spiegel 2015b, 2015c): The anti-capitalist 'left platform' that made up about one third of Syriza, accused Tsipras of being a closet social democrat, called his leadership into question and urged him to pursue a Grexit (Baker and Hope 2015; Hope, Spiegel, and Atkins 2015). As Greece was still at risk of default, however, new EU negotiations followed. After months of erratic bargaining on the conditions of the next deal and a serious deterioration of relations with the creditors, Tsipras walked out on the negotiations declaring the final proposal to be 'humiliating' (Traynor 2015). When subsequent debates in the Greek parliament failed to bring agreement on the issue, Tsipras called a referendum and

campaigned for a rejection of the deal. On July 5, 61% of the Greek people voted no in the referendum (Traynor 2015).

In the meantime, the dire financial situation had forced the Greek government to impose capital controls and default on a payment to the IMF. This effectively brought an end to the second bail-out package. With the government due to pay another €6.6bn to the European Central Bank and the Greek banks running out of money, Tsipras suddenly made a complete U-turn (see also Verdun 2017). Rather than honour the referendum and follow the preference of the radical left factions in his party for a Grexit, Tsipras struck a deal with three pro-EU parties in the Greek parliament and returned to Brussels to start negotiations on a third bail-out package (Foy and Hope 2015; Traynor 2015). After days of gruelling negotiations that have been described by observers as the 'mental waterboarding' of the Greeks, Tsipras secured a deal with the creditor states (Traynor 2015). Moreover, despite the fact that the conditions for this package were even more stringent than those of the previously rejected second bailout, Tsipras proceeded to win agreement of the Greek parliament for the deal with 229 to 64 votes. However, due to the resulting split within the Syriza party, the government lost its parliamentary majority and Tsipras called for new elections. Despite having gone back on his campaign promises and overturning the outcome of the referendum, on 20 September 2015, Tsipras was re-elected as prime-minister losing a mere four seats, and continued to govern with the Independent Greeks.

Even though polls showed that the Greek people did not want to leave the Euro (Clements, Nanou, and Verney 2014) and experts say that by July it would have been nearly impossible for Greece to opt to leave the euro (Munchau 2015), Tsipras clearly did not deliver on the preferences and ideological hopes of the people and his party. Moreover, observers agree that the blunt negotiating tactics of Tsipras and his team hampered achieving a better outcome for Greece (Munchau 2015; Shonk 2016; Tsebelis 2016). Still, the Greek people and majority of the members of the Syriza party continued to back Tsipras as their leader. Such loyalty in the face of what were undoubtedly 'excruciating losses for the home team' (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011), points in the direction of the vector of social identification.

The actions of Tsipras support this. Long before the election of 2015, Tsipras started to construct an inclusive Greek identity uniting seemingly different demographic groups under the common denominator of 'the ordinary people' who fell victim to the Greek and European establishment. In his speeches, Tsipras promised to 'restore their dignity and represent their interests against the Greek and European establishment, thus breaking the omertà that surrounded the "success story" of the eurozone' (Stavrakakis 2015). Identification of a clear out-group helped unite the broad in-group that Tsipras sought to mobilise. In his populist rhetoric he made a clear division between the opposing camps of 'them' against 'us': the powerful, wealthy elite versus the non-privileged suffering the brunt of years of mismanagement and austerity imposed by previous governments and the European partners, Germany in particular (Stavrakakis 2015; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014). In line with this identity leadership, Tsipras formed a government with the fellow anti-establishment and anti-austerity but ideologically distant Independent Greeks. Moreover, his first act after assuming office was to lay flowers at a memorial for Greek resistance fighters killed by German forces in WWII and to instate a committee to study Greece's claims for German war reparations (Hope, Barber, and Barker 2015). This combination of ideological, and especially, identity leadership secured Tsipras of the sustained backing of his domestic followers, for

despite having lost all battles, 'Tsipras stood up to Germany in a way no other Greek leader has' (Hope 2015).

At the EU level, however, Tsipras was seen as an ideological threat by his fellow European leaders long before his election due to his strong rejection of the austerity policies and quest for debt-relief (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014, 120). For, although numerous economists and the IMF have declared Greece's debt untenable and the Tsipras government was supported by many left-leaning citizens across Europe, granting a debt-relief would be a near impossible sell for the leaders of the other member states (Spiegel 2015a). Moreover, the large majority of the HSG belong to conservative or liberal parties and adhere to neo- or ordoliberal economic thought. Several of them also faced rising left-wing oppositions at home who saw Tsipras' election as a first step towards change 'not just for the people of Greece, but for citizens right across Europe' (Smith 2015). Ideologically, Tsipras thus posed a real political threat to his fellow leaders.

Even more detrimental, however, was Tsipras' identity leadership that served him so well domestically. By disregarding the other leaders as members of the out-group, he alienated even those that had ideological sympathies for his anti-austerity position and advocated European solidarity like Commission President Juncker or Francois Hollande. Moreover, the leaders of the other debtor states that had already gone through devastating reforms and budget cuts were reluctant to be associated with Tsipras and preferred to be identified as good students of the prevailing forces (Rachman 2015; Stephens 2015). Paradoxically, the identity leadership that eventually helped Tsipras sell the deals with his fellow Eurozone leaders domestically largely on their terms, strongly diminished his legitimacy in the European Council. This, in turn, prevented him from sealing a better deal for his people.

Finally, when neither negotiation, ideological passion nor identity leadership got him anywhere with his European partners, Tsipras tried to invoke the electoral vector of legitimacy by calling the July 2015 referendum. However, at the European level this juxtaposed the no-vote of the Greek people against the legitimate right of (the people of) the other Eurozone states to impose conditions on the loans they were asked to supply. In light of the popular will of its partners, in the interdependent, multi-level European Union the Greek wish to remain in the Eurozone was simply incompatible with a 'no' against the bail-out package.

Conclusions

In this contribution, I have argued that all democratic leadership suffers from inherent tensions between effective governance and the sovereignty of the people. In this sense, Europe's leadership crisis reflects the catch-22 that all democracies find themselves in. As Europe struggles to find a way out of its economic, leadership and legitimacy crisis it is imperative not to deepen the latter in order to solve the former.

What makes the problem of European leadership different is the exacerbation of the challenges of democratic leadership resulting from the multilevel and interdependent nature of EU governance. This added layer makes European leaders responsible for more groups of followers with different preferences, ideologies and identities while the vectors of legitimate leadership are weaker. This results in additional leadership paradoxes that the HSG have to deal with. The cases of the German chancellor Angela Merkel and the Greek Prime Minister Tsipras show that, regardless of their power position, they faced similar paradoxes in their attempts to manage the crisis.

The contribution further argues that there is no grounds on which either Merkel or Tsipras can legitimately claim leadership over other states or their people. Merkel may be the most powerful European leader and the legitimate mouthpiece for some kindred spirits, but none of the vectors legitimize her leadership over states that do not adhere to the ordoliberal ideology. Similarly, notwithstanding the outcome of the Greek referendum, there is no electoral basis for Tsipras to overrule the sovereign right of the people of the other member states to attach conditions on the loans they are asked to provide.

The discussion above further shows that the transformational vectors of ideology and social identification play a decisive and, at the same time, paradoxical role in the legitimisation of European leadership. On the one hand, such bonds help European leaders to gain the sustainable domestic support needed to implement European compromises that do not align directly with domestic short-term interests. On the other hand, in these modern days leaders' ideological and identity management does not remain unnoticed in other member states and may form formidable barriers for future European compromises. At the same time, the transnational appeals of Merkel's and Tsipras' leadership show that identity and especially ideology are not necessarily associated with nationality and could potentially be a constructive and inclusive force in the hands of able leaders. For as these cases also show, even identities are not set in stone, they are social constructions that may be moulded and redefined by identity entrepreneurs.

Finally, as to the question of the resolution of the paradoxes of legitimate European leadership: Kane and Patapan (2012) argue that democratic leadership is paradoxical by definition and that this cannot be resolved unless one wants to forego either effectiveness or equality in democratic government. In this sense, despite all its drawbacks, the system of dispersed leadership in the EU and the balance of power it implies, should be celebrated rather than lamented (Kane and Patapan 2012). Moreover, the centrality of the vectors of ideology and identity in the analysed cases act as a warning against those who see the federalisation or centralisation of European leadership as a solution to the paradoxes of legitimate leadership. For, apart from the electoral challenges involved, fostering sustainable bonds between European leaders and followers relies heavily on transformational vectors of ideology and identification, and the construction of a pan-European identity or shared ideology has proven to be elusive. In addition, such ambition neglects the fact that legitimacy also comes from the plurality of voices, from the opportunity and space for ideological opposition and from dealing with the resulting conflicts through debate (Dahl 1978). As all leadership is political and no policy or regulation benefits everyone, federal and centralised leadership would suffer from its own legitimacy paradoxes (Beukers 2013; Van Esch 2017; see Shackleton 2017).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the participants of the workshop 'Political leadership in the EU' and its organisers professors Amy Verdun and Ingeborg Tömmel for their feedback on earlier versions of this article. Finally, I would like to thank Henriette Mueller and the participants of the workshop 'Political Leadership Performance and Economic Growth' at NYUAD and the reviewers for their helpful input.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was financially supported by European Commission Erasmus+ programme – Jean Monnet ‘Policy debate with academic world’ [565351-EPP-1-2015-1-CA-EPPJMO-PROJECT].

References

- Baker, A., and K. Hope. 2015. “Aegina Gang Holds Key to Greece’s Eurozone Crisis.” *Financial Times*, February 21. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/dfd53200-b8f9-11e4-b8e6-00144feab7de.html#axzz48LpskiA2>.
- Barber, B. R. 1998. “Neither Leaders Nor Followers: Citizenship under Strong Democracy.” In *A Passion for Democracy: American Essays*, edited by B. R. Barber, 95–110. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Barber, T. 2015. “Do Not Bank on Greek Premier Ditching His Syriza Diehards.” *Financial Times*, April 15. <https://next.ft.com/content/2b6ab8d4-e27d-11e4-aa1d-00144feab7de>.
- Bellamy, R. 2010. “Democracy without Democracy? Can the EU’s Democratic ‘Outputs’ Be Separated from the Democratic ‘Inputs’ Provided by Competitive Parties and Majority Rule?” *Journal of European Public Policy* 17 (1): 2–19.
- Bennister, M., P. ‘t Hart, and B. Worthy. 2015. “Assessing the Authority of Political Office-Holders: The Leadership Capital Index.” *West European Politics* 38 (3): 417–440.
- Beukers, T. 2013. “The New ECB and Its Relationship with the Eurozone Member States: Between Central Bank Independence and Central Bank Intervention.” *Common Market Law Review* 50: 1579–1620.
- Blome, N. 2015. “The Quest for Common Ground between Greek Morals and German Maths.” *Financial Times*, March 28. <https://next.ft.com/>.
- Blyth, M. 2013. *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bulmer, S. 2014. “Germany and the Eurozone Crisis: Between Hegemony and Domestic Politics.” *West European Politics* 37 (6): 1244–1263.
- Burns, J. M. 1978. *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Chandler, A. 2015. “Germany Wins a Negotiation Battle, but May Lose a PR War.” *The Atlantic*, July 17. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/07/germany-greece-debt-eurozone/398870/>.
- Chassany, A. S., J. Politi, and P. Spiegel. 2015. “Fears over German Power as Merkel and Schäuble End the Good Cop, Bad Cop Routine.” *Financial Times*, July 18. <https://next.ft.com/>.
- Clemens, C. 2011. “Explaining Merkel’s Autonomy in the Grand Coalition: Personalisation or Party Organisation?” *German Politics* 20 (4): 469–485.
- Clements, B., K. Nanou, and S. Verney. 2014. “‘We No Longer Love You, but We Don’t Want to Leave You’: The Eurozone Crisis and Popular Euroscepticism in Greece.” *Journal of European Integration* 36 (3): 247–265.
- Cramme, O. 2011. “In Search of Leadership.” In *The Delphic Oracle on Europe*, edited by L. Tsoukalis and J. A. Emmanouilidis, 30–49. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dahl, R. A. 1978. “Pluralism Revisited.” *Comparative Politics* 10 (2): 191–203.
- Detterbeck, K., and I. Rohlfing. 2014. “Party Leader Selection in Germany.” In *The Selection of Political Party Leaders in Contemporary Parliamentary Democracies: A Comparative Study*, edited by J. B. Pilet and W. Cross, 77–92. London: Routledge.
- Evans, P. B., P. B. Jacobson, and R. D. Putnam. 1993. *Double-Edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Featherstone, K. 2015. “External Conditionality and the Debt Crisis: The ‘Troika’ and Public Administration Reform in Greece.” *Journal of European Public Policy* 22 (3): 295–314.
- Follesdal, A., and S. Hix. 2006. “Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik.” *JCMS. Journal of Common Market Studies* 44 (3): 533–562.
- Forschungsgruppe Wahlen. 2013. *Bundestagswahl 22*, September. Accessed August 19, 2015. http://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Wahlen/Wahlanalysen/News_BTW_2013.pdf
- Foy, H., and K. Hope. 2015. “Greeks Dance but Tsipras Faces Big Test.” *Financial Times*, July 7. <https://next.ft.com/>.
- Fried, N. 2015. “Im Amt Gefangen.” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 18. <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/merkel-und-das-maedchen-im-amt-gefangen-1.2570457>.

- Hall, P. A. 2014. "Varieties of Capitalism and the Euro Crisis." *West European Politics* 37 (6): 1223–1243.
- Haslam, S. A., S. D. Reicher, and M. J. Platow. 2011. *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence and Power*. London: Psychology Press.
- Hayward, J. 2008. "Introduction: Inhibited Consensual Leadership within an Interdependent Confederal Europe." In *Leaderless Europe*, edited by J. Hayward, 1–12. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Helms, L. 2017. "Introduction: Leadership Questions in Transnational European Governance." *European Political Science* 16 (1).
- Helms, L., and F. A. W. J. Van Esch. 2017. "Turning Structural Weakness into Personal Strength: Angela Merkel and the Politics of Leadership Capital in Germany." In *The Leadership Capital Index: A New Perspective on Political Leadership*, edited by M. Bennister, P. 't Hart, and B. Worthy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hope, K. 2015. "Somersaulting Tsipras Prepares Next Trick." *Financial Times*, August 22. <https://next.ft.com>.
- Hope, K., T. Barber, and A. Barker. 2015. "Greece and Global Creditors Dig in for Fresh Struggle over Austerity." *Financial Times*, January 27. <https://next.ft.com>.
- Hope, K., P. Spiegel, and R. Atkins. 2015. "Tsipras Dismisses 'Absurd' Creditors' Offer." *Financial Times*, June 6. <https://next.ft.com>.
- Kane, J., and H. Patapan. 2012. *The Democratic Leader: How Democracy Defines, Empowers, and Limits Its Leaders*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lord, C., and P. Magnette. 2004. "E Pluribus Unum? Creative Disagreement about Legitimacy in the EU." *JCMS. Journal of Common Market Studies* 42 (1): 183–202.
- Majone, G. 1999. "The Regulatory State and Its Legitimacy Problems." *West European Politics* 22 (1): 1–24.
- Matthijs, M., and M. Blyth. 2011. "Why Only Germany Can Fix the Euro." *Foreign Affairs*, November 17. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/germany/2011-11-17/why-only-germany-can-fix-euro>.
- McNamara, K. R. 2010. *The Eurocrisis and the Uncertain Future of European Integration*. Working Paper. Council on Foreign Relations. New York.
- Meiers, F. J. 2015. *Germany's Role in the Euro Crisis. Berlin's Quest for a More Perfect Monetary Union*. New York: Springer.
- Munchau, W. 2015. "Grexit Remains the Likely Outcome of This Sorry Process." *Financial Times*, July 20. <https://next.ft.com>.
- Myers, M. 2013. "Leading by Default: Perspectives and Challenges for Germany in Its Reluctant EU Leadership Role." *German Studies Review* 36 (1): 135–137.
- Nardelli, A. 2015. "Angela Merkel: 10 Years in 10 Charts." *The Guardian*, September 18. <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2015/sep/18/angela-merkel-10-years-germany-chancellor-economy-cdu>.
- Nye, J. S. 2008. *The Powers to Lead*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Olsen, J. 2011. "Leadership in Grand Coalitions: Comparing Angela Merkel and Kurt Georg Kiesinger." *German Politics* 20 (3): 342–359.
- Panagiotarea, E. 2013. *Greece in the Euro. Economic Delinquency or System Failure?* Colchester: ECPR Press.
- Polyakova, A., and N. Fligstein. 2016. "Is European Integration Causing Europe to Become More Nationalist? Evidence from the 2007–9 Financial Crisis." *Journal of European Public Policy* 23 (1): 60–83.
- Putnam, R. D. 1988. "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games." *International Organization* 42 (03): 427–460.
- Rachman, G. 2015. "Europe Should Welcome Greece's Vote." *Financial Times*, July 7. <https://next.ft.com>.
- Rhodes, R. A. W. 2014. "Public Administration." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, edited by R. A. W. Rhodes and P. 't Hart, 101–116. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rhodes, R. A. W., and P. 't Hart, eds. 2014. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Risse, T. 2014. "No Demos? Identities and Public Spheres in the Euro Crisis." *JCMS. Journal of Common Market Studies* 52 (6): 1207–1215.
- Scharpf, F. W. 2011. "Legitimacy Intermediation in the Multilevel European Polity and Its Collapse in the Euro Crisis." *MPiFG Discussion Paper* 12, no. 6. Cologne.
- Schoeller, M. G. 2016. "Providing Political Leadership? Three Case Studies on Germany's Ambiguous Role in the Eurozone Crisis." *Journal of European Public Policy*. 24 (1): 1–20.

- Shackleton, M. 2017. "Transforming representative democracy in the EU? The role of the European Parliament." *Journal of European Integration* 39 (2): 191–205. doi:10.1080/07036337.2016.1277713.
- Shonk, K. 2016. "Top 10 Worst Negotiation Tactics of 2015." *Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School: Daily Blog*, January 11. <http://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/negotiation-skills-daily/top-10-worst-negotiation-tactics-of-2015/>.
- Smith, H. 2015. "Alexis Tsipras Pays Homage to Greek Communists at Site of Nazi Atrocity." *The Guardian*, January 26. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/26/alexis-tsipras-greece-syriza-kaisariani-nazi-german>.
- Spiegel, P. 2015a. "Eurozone Leaders Wary of Tsipras but It's No Longer about Survival." *Financial Times*, January 7. <https://next.ft.com>.
- Spiegel, P. 2015b. "Radical or Realist?" *Financial Times*, January 24. <https://next.ft.com>.
- Spiegel, P. 2015c. "How Eurogroup Chief Sealed the Deal with Greece." *Financial Times*, March 2. <https://next.ft.com>.
- Stavrakakis, Y. 2015. "Populism in Power: Syriza's Challenge to Europe." *Juncture* 21 (4): 273–280.
- Stavrakakis, Y., and G. Katsambekis. 2014. "Left-Wing Populism in the European Periphery: The Case of SYRIZA." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19 (2): 119–142.
- Steffens, N. K., S. Alexander Haslam, and S. D. Reicher. 2014. "Up Close and Personal: Evidence That Shared Social Identity is a Basis for the 'Special' Relationship That Binds Followers to Leaders." *The Leadership Quarterly* 25 (2): 296–313.
- Steinberg, F., and M. Vermeiren. 2016. "Germany's Institutional Power and the EMU Regime after the Crisis: Towards a Germanized Euro Area?" *JCMS. Journal of Common Market Studies* 54 (2): 388–407.
- Stephens, P. 2015. "How Politics Will Seal the Fate of Greece." *Financial Times*, May 22. <https://next.ft.com>.
- Teles, F. 2015. "The Distinctiveness of Democratic Political Leadership." *Political Studies Review* 13 (1): 22–36.
- The Economist*. 2014. "The German Mentality: Hail, the Swabian Housewife." February 1. <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21595503-views-economics-euro-and-much-else-draw-cultural-archetype-hail-swabian>.
- Tömmel, I. 2017. "The standing president of the European Council: intergovernmental or supranational leadership?" *Journal of European Integration* 39 (2): 175–189. doi:10.1080/07036337.2016.1277717.
- Traynor, I. 2015. "Three Days That Saved the Euro." *The Guardian*, October 22. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/22/three-days-to-save-the-euro-greece>.
- Tsebelis, G. 2016. "Lessons from the Greek Crisis." *Journal of European Public Policy* 23 (1): 25–41.
- Van Esch, F. A. W. J. 2014. "Exploring the Keynesian–Ordoliberal Divide. Flexibility and Convergence in French and German Leaders' Economic Ideas during the Euro-Crisis." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 22 (3): 288–302.
- Van Esch, F. A. W. J. 2017. "The Nature of the European Leadership Crisis and How to Solve It." *European Political Science* 16 (1).
- Van Middelaar, L. 2013. *The Passage to Europe: How a Continent Became a Union*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Van Middelaar, L. 2016. "The Return of Politics: The European Union after the Crises in the Eurozone and Ukraine." *JCMS. Journal of Common Market Studies* 54 (3): 495–507.
- Verdun, A. 2017. "Political leadership of the European Central Bank." *Journal of European Integration* 39 (2): 207–221. doi:10.1080/07036337.2016.1277715.
- Westfall, A. 2013. "The Consequences of Crisis: A Call for Coordinated Leadership." *German Studies Review* 36 (1): 140–142.
- Wiliarty, S. E. 2008. "Angela Merkel's Path to Power: The Role of Internal Party Dynamics and Leadership." *German Politics* 17 (1): 81–96.