

The populist challenge to European Union legitimacy: Old wine in new bottles?

Ilaria Cozzaglio  | **Dimitrios Efthymiou** 

Research Centre Normative Orders, Goethe University Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany

Correspondence

Ilaria Cozzaglio, Research Centre Normative Orders, Goethe University Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany.

Email: ilaria.cozzaglio@normativeorders.net

KEYWORDS: European Union, legitimacy, populism

1 | INTRODUCTION

The European Union's (EU's) legitimacy is currently under pressure from what is widely perceived as a populist challenge. Populists charge the EU as being undemocratic, unrepresentative, technocratic, and tied to the interests of the elite; as serving neither the will nor the interests of the people; and as simultaneously paying too little attention to the concerns of its member states while also being only timidly cosmopolitan. These claims have stimulated a debate among scholars in the social sciences on what populism is, and on the legitimacy of populists' claims. Scholars have often described populist stances as illiberal and antidemocratic (Mudde, 2004; Müller, 2017; Urbinati, 2019a) and criticized them for their antipluralistic attitude (Galston, 2018). This paper aims to assess the normative and conceptual cogency of these diverse claims.

In this regard, we make three arguments. First, the critique of illiberalism and anti-democraticism does not target populists specifically, because some populists appeal to the principle of equality, solidarity and have a cosmopolitan picture of the international society. Second, a critique of the populist conception of international legitimacy should look not only at their claims on input legitimacy, but also at those on output legitimacy, and at the incoherence that characterizes their appeal to one or the other of their preferred theories of legitimacy—Rousseauian or Hobbesian. Finally, we suggest that what is inherently problematic in any populist claim on the EU's legitimacy, regardless of any other characterization is the way in which they conceive of the distinction between the elite and the people—a distinction that grounds their political position in international relations. We conclude that populism amounts to neither a normatively distinct approach for assessing EU's legitimacy, in terms of both input and output legitimacy, nor it is conceptually necessary to grasp internal diversities within

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2022 The Authors. *Journal of Social Philosophy* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC.

political unions such as the EU, because the distinction between the people and the elite on which it is conceptually grounded often relies on a fallacy.

The article develops as follows. In Section 2 we contextualize our investigation within the scholarship on the EU's legitimacy and summarize how scholars have characterized populism by resorting to either thick or thin accounts. While the latter focus almost exclusively on the populist appeal to the distinction between the people and the elite, the former include illiberalism and antidemocraticism among the characteristics of populism. We then argue that developing a critique of populism by focusing on illiberalism and antidemocraticism is not distinctive of populism because, as we show in Section 3, the reality of populist movements is complex and variegated. In that section, we bring in examples from populists in Germany, Italy, and the UK to show that among many illiberal and antidemocratic positions, there are also many that show an interest in developing more democratic societies. The examples reported in this section will also be useful for a further argument we make in Section 4, where we show that associating the populist view of legitimacy to a solely input-oriented account is reductive. In fact, populists criticize the EU also with regard to output legitimacy, often accordingly to a Hobbesian picture of international relations, and not only via reference to a Rousseauian, input-oriented picture of politics. Still, both types of populist claims can be criticized when they either resort to a parochial understanding of Rousseau, or they are Hobbesian only when it suits them. Finally, in Section 5 we argue that even if populists were good Rousseauians or good Hobbesians, their conception of legitimacy remains controversial because grounded on a conceptually problematic distinction between the people and the elite. Section 6 concludes.

2 | POPULISM AND LEGITIMACY

To gain a better understanding of the populist challenge to EU legitimacy, one needs a clear understanding of the concepts of populism and legitimacy. Approaches to populism are not easy to pin down as they vary significantly in the literature (Mudde, 2017a; Müller, 2017; Stanley, 2008; Urbinati, 2017, 2019a; Espejo, 2017). One can broadly categorize these approaches as “thick” or “thin.” Müller's (2017, 3) canonical work uses a relatively thick account. He thinks populism has two constitutive components: (a) a critique of the elite and (b) a claim to represent a single, homogenous, and authentic people. An even thicker account is that of Urbinati (2019b), which juxtaposes populism to liberal democracy. When in power, populists exhibit authoritarian tendencies by circumventing democratic procedures and by showing contempt for political pluralism and the principle of legitimate opposition. As Urbinati puts it: “Populism in power is an ideological construct that depicts only one part of the people as legitimate” (Urbinati, 2019b, 120).

Other scholars provide thinner accounts of populism. Canovan (2004, 242), for instance, treats as populists those who claim to represent the rightful source of legitimate power: the people, whose interests and wishes have been ignored by self-interested politicians and politically correct intellectuals. Mudde (2004, 543, 2017a) treats populism as an ideology that considers society as consisting of two homogeneous and antagonistic groups—“the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”—and argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people. Finally, for Laclau (2005) and Mouffe (2018), populism consists merely in “putting into question the institutional order by constructing an underdog as a historical agent.”¹

The difference between thick and thin approaches lies primarily in the constitutive role given to antipluralism (see Müller above) and antiliberalism (see Urbinati above) when defining

populism. While one could share the normative preoccupations of Müller and Urbinati concerning antipluralist and antiliberal types of populism, one need not think that these normative concerns are intrinsic to populism (see Wolkenstein, 2015, 2019). Put differently, while these concerns are sound, they do not solely regard populist politics and, as we will see in Section 3, and they do not even regard all populist politics. In contrast to a thick definition, a thin account of populism has only two constitutive components: (a) it relies on an analytical distinction between the people and the elite and (b) it gives “the people” a positive normative appraisal versus “the elite.” Importantly, how the distinction between the people and the elite is drawn is peculiar to populism, as the account of the people is conceptually dependent on the account of the elite. This way of discriminating between the people and the elite distinguishes populism from mainstream democratic theory, as the latter can define the people independently from the elite.

In this paper, we define as populist every party or political entity that falls, at the very least, within the thin definition. This definition allows us to distinguish not just between populist and nonpopulist political discourses but also between normative assessments intrinsic to the thin conceptual core of populism and normative appraisals that focus more at somewhat peripheral and contingent characteristics of populism.

The sources of legitimacy are often distinguished into two types: input and output (Erman, 2016; Follesdal, 2006; Scharpf, 1999, 7–12). Political authority has input legitimacy only if it is the product of a particular procedure. It is ultimately the qualities of the decision-making procedure that render it a legitimate one. What precisely are these qualities? Classic political thinkers as different as Locke and Rousseau shared the view that a state is legitimate only if it comes about with the consent of those subject to its authority (Christiano, 1996, 2010; Estlund, 2007, 119; Pettit, 2012). There are ongoing debates among political theorists about whether such consent needs to be given by every person individually or can take some form of collective authorization and about the conditions under which consent is genuine rather than compelled and manufactured (Rawls, 2005; Simmons, 2016). What is widely agreed, however, is that consent is necessary for the autonomy characteristic of self-government (Peter, 2017). Democratic decision-making, in particular, is seen as the institutional embodiment of such collective self-government. Hence, as Schmidt (2012) succinctly puts it “input legitimacy represents the exercise of collective self-governing ‘by the people’ so as to ensure political authorities’ responsiveness to peoples’ preferences, as shaped through political debate in a common public space and political competition in political institutions that ensure officials’ accountability via general elections.” Thus, if input legitimacy depends on the people having the right to govern themselves democratically, then populist challenges based on input legitimacy need to provide us with both an account of who the people are and of how the EU foils their will.

Output legitimacy, on the other hand, is the status a political authority enjoys when it successfully performs according to substantive standards. Again, here there is a debate among scholars, in this case as to what these standards should be (Peter, 2017). Some argue that output legitimacy depends solely on the delivery of particular goods such as security, prosperity, or status (Hobbes, 1994). In contrast, others emphasize that this list should not only be longer and include health and education but also include the liberties and equal opportunities required to access these goods equitably (Rawls, 2005; Sen, 2011). To enjoy output legitimacy, democratic decision-making, according to this approach, needs to be solely assessed based on its record in providing these goods and delivering them justly. According to this conception of legitimacy “output legitimacy describes the acceptance of the coercive powers of political authorities governing ‘for the people’ so long as their exercise is seen to serve the common good of the

polity and is constrained by the norms of the community” (Schmidt, 2012; 2013). Hence, if output legitimacy is the product of the performance of political institutions measured by substantive standards, then populists need to provide us with their preferred account of those standards and assess EU institutions based on such standards. In the next two sections, we examine whether the populist critique of EU relies exclusively on an illiberal and input-oriented understanding of legitimacy.

3 | THE POPULIST CHALLENGE TO EU LEGITIMACY

The first terrain of contestation with the scholarship on populism regards the alleged antidemocratic and illiberal character of populists. In fact, many scholars have included illiberalism and antidemocraticism among the core characteristics of populism. In what follows, we argue that there exist versions of populism that do not give in to illiberal or antidemocratic postures and, consequently, a critique of populism grounded on these traits can be appropriate in some cases but does not target the whole phenomenon of populism. To argue so, we look at how populists develop their criticism towards the EU, by examining their stances in three European countries—Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom²—and show that they are not necessarily illiberal or antidemocratic. These examples also provide us with the grounds for a second point of confrontation with the scholarship on populism, namely that populists are not only preoccupied with input legitimacy, but rather put forward stances that concern the EU’s output legitimacy.

Brexit was only the tip of the iceberg, as stances of dissatisfaction toward the EU have widely spread in recent years, including explicit calls to leave the union. At the dawn of his political career, Beppe Grillo—the founder of the Five Stars Movement (5SM) in Italy—famously stated to the press that the main topic on the political agenda should be to figure out a way to get rid of the euro as soon as possible.³ It comes as no surprise that Nigel Farage—the leader of the UK Independence Party—happily welcomed the 5SM as comrades. An alliance of the same sort occurred in 2014 between Italy’s Lega Nord and Marine Le Pen’s Front National, as they both shared the plan of abandoning the European currency and restoring “monetary sovereignty.”

In more recent times, many of those who used to call for an exit from the EU have turned their radical positions into stances of internal critique: we want to change Europe, they say, not to destroy it. Ambivalently enough, the German populist party AfD in the European Parliament has portrayed Nigel Farage as the one who has demonstrated that it is possible to reform an antidemocratic institution such as the EU.⁴ Farage indeed defined “the whole European project” as “not just undemocratic” but “anti-democratic”⁵ and a “prison of nations.”⁶ The 5SM, especially in its current configuration guided by Giuseppe Conte, has deeply changed its political agenda and language when it comes to international politics. For example, in an interview on the war in Ukraine, Conte has claimed that the EU is called to intervene, in order to look for a political solution that⁷.

While the narratives aiming to call into question the EU’s legitimacy greatly vary with respect to which member state, and which party, they come from, they often manifest similarities in content. For example, the website [opendemocracy.net](https://www.opendemocracy.net) draws similarities between movements such as the 5SM and Corbyn’s Labour Party⁸ as they are both preoccupied with social solidarity and with reinforcing democratic participation.

Furthermore, the populist criticism toward the EU often emerges out of what they perceive as problems at the national level, such as immigration, economic decline, and so on, for which they blame the EU. It is worth noting, though, that some of the core programmatic points put forward by populist parties are compatible with the agenda of parties that we do not ascribe to the populist crew—see, for example, the institution of the basic income by the 5SM in Italy—a measure that got the favor of the Democratic Party and of other parties on the left side of the political spectrum.

The variety of the populist positions manifests not only in that they are not always illiberal and antidemocratic, but also in that their notion of legitimacy, which works as a normative leverage to criticize the EU, comprises both input and output aspects. Scholars on populism have remarked the former aspect but often overlooked the second. In fact, populists have typically resorted to the narrative of the elite versus the people to highlight the lack of democratic legitimacy of the EU: the elite, or the “Brussels bureaucrats,” populists claim, favor the interests of the bankers and the privileged and make decisions in compliance with an opaque system of alliances, without any consideration of the people’s voice. For example, the AfD’s members speak of “Klima-diktatur” to define the recent measures taken by the EU with regard to the environment⁹ and they similarly portray the Green Deal as an attack on societal freedom.¹⁰ Similarly, Farage declared that “we can be friends without being ruled by faceless bureaucrats.”¹¹ From the left-wing camp, the 5SM has attacked the European Central Bank, and Christine Lagarde in particular, for her positions on the coronavirus emergency in Italy, by claiming that once again the ECB embodies an obstacle, rather than a source of help, and that her declarations represent an “aggression” against the Italian state.¹²

To remedy these perceived injustices, some populists, such as AfD members, have invoked the idea of revoking the EU’s centralized powers and returning to “an economic union based on shared interests, and consisting of sovereign, but loosely connected nation states.”¹³ Others have called for a European direct democracy so that the voice of the people can finally be represented and popular sovereignty achieved.¹⁴ Naturally, their definition of the people varies according to their political sympathies: “Historically, right-leaning populists have emphasized shared ethnicity and common descent, while left-leaning populists have often defined the people in class terms” (Galston, 2018, 37).

Yet, importantly, populists have attacked the EU’s legitimacy with regard to its output aspects as well. One of their core claims is that the EU acts against the interests of some of its member states. For example, Italian populists have frequently argued that the EU wants to stifle their country’s economic growth.¹⁵ In very similar terms, German populists have claimed the exact opposite. They portray themselves as victims of inequitable treatment on the part of the EU: for example, Maximilian Krah, member of the AfD and of the European Parliament, has recently claimed that Germany pays more than all the other member states.¹⁶ In the same vein, the AfD has denounced Mario Draghi’s and, now, Christine Lagarde’s “endless expropriation” of the German people.¹⁷ Others, more mildly, have claimed that the EU is providing only banal and ineffective responses to international crises, such as the war in Ukraine.¹⁸

In contrast to this picture, some populists have explicitly rejected any cosmopolitan idea of the EU and have rather defended a picture of the union in which states should defend their own interests. For example, the 5SM formed an alliance for the European elections in 2019 with four other parties¹⁹ centered on five programmatic issues that address both the input and the output aspects of the EU’s legitimacy: direct democracy in Europe, the fight against bureaucracy, support for local production, anti-corruption, and a defense of national sovereignty.²⁰

Similarly, Matteo Salvini, the leader of Lega Nord, has insisted on the need to strengthen national sovereignty and to defend national identity²¹; in particular, the electoral program of MENL (Movement for a Europe of Nations and of Liberty) sees as its unifying trait “the opposition to any transfer of national sovereignty to supranational organisations and/or European institutions.”²²

The insistence on prioritizing national states is often accompanied by narratives that tend to define the people by their national identity, which, they claim, must be preserved. For example, Bernhard Zimniok, a member of the AfD and of the European Parliament, criticized President David Sassoli’s request to remove the German flag from his bench in the European Parliament. Zimniok’s response on Twitter was “Not with us! National pride is not a crime.”²³ In a similar tone, Michael Heaver, member of the European Parliament and of the Brexit Party, claimed that “Brexit will mean we can move forward as an independent, self-governing nation” and that he is “so proud of British people.”²⁴

The concern for the protection of national security, prosperity, and identity has often resulted in an anti-immigration attitude. Migrants, populists repeat, access the national welfare system without contributing to it via taxation; they are more competitive on the job market because they accept lower salaries, thereby replacing local workers; in addition, they contaminate local traditions by imposing their religious and cultural habits, which often result in a more pronounced tendency toward committing crimes and even terrorist attacks.²⁵ In a position typically coming from right-wing populists in particular, the EU is said to be culpable because it diminishes national sovereignty without compensating for the diminution by helping those countries that are geographically more exposed to uncontrolled migratory flows. In this vein, for example, Salvini has claimed that the coasts of Italy are the coasts of Europe and therefore Italy cannot be obliged by the EU to welcome people if the EU is not sharing the burdens of integrating the migrants.²⁶ The AfD delivers a narrative that depicts Germany itself as the victim of uncontrolled immigration, in contrast with the narratives spread by populists of Southern Europe (Arzheimer, 2015).²⁷ Yet still they agree with each other in pointing at mass migration as proof of the EU’s incapacity to govern. However, not all criticism on the EU’s performances has turned into an anti-cosmopolitan attitude. Rather, challenges to EU legitimacy from left-wing populist parties like Podemos and Syriza have highlighted the incomplete nature of Eurozone as a currency zone due to reluctance on the part of certain member-states to further EU integration and ceding national sovereignty (Varoufakis, 2017). These parties have also often put forward an inclusionary account of the people, especially with respect to immigration (Font et al., 2021).

In this section, we showed that reducing populists to a set of political movements homogeneously characterized by illiberal and antidemocratic traits, and mostly preoccupied only with repositioning the source of power in the hands of the people rather than in the hands of the elites, amounts to oversimplifying the phenomenon. Not recognizing so, we now show, runs three risks for a critique of populism. The first is to miss out the opportunity to broaden the critique of populists to their view of output legitimacy (Section 4). The second is to overlook that populists inconsistently appeal to liberal and illiberal, as well as to democratic and antidemocratic models of legitimacy (Section 4). The third is to overlook that a critique that targets the core of what populists claim regards the way in which they conceptualize the people as opposed to the elites (Section 5).

4 | FROM THE PEOPLE AND FOR THE PEOPLE

4.1 | In the name of the general will of the people?

The populist challenges to the EU's legitimacy outlined in Section 3 could be broadly categorized into two types. The first type takes the following form:

- (i) The EU lacks input legitimacy because it is not in line with the will of the people.

The second type takes the following form:

- (ii) The EU lacks output legitimacy because it fails to serve the interests of the people.

We now show that an internal critique can be moved to populists, because regardless which model of legitimacy they opt for to ground their critique to the EU, and regardless their alleged illiberalism and antidemocraticism, they seem to discontinuously resort to either statist or cosmopolitan views, or to embrace a controversial understanding of these positions. Some scholars argue that populists, as we saw in Section 3, consider the popular will to be necessary for input legitimacy (Mudde, 2004, 2017a; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). It is precisely this appeal to the will of the people as a prodemocracy stance that gives populism much of its normative allure. Populists rally against undemocratic institutions that give decision making to the elites and consider the EU as a prime example of this kind for two reasons: first because of the critical role that the European Commission as an unelected body has in decision-making and second because of the increasingly important role that the ECB and the European Court of Justice play in European integration (see Section 3).

At the same time, populists, especially of a right-wing variety, often oppose specific decisions taken by EU institutions, even when those are in line with the will of people (e.g., minority rights, most notably LGBTQI rights) and call for EU policies that will strengthen state sovereignty, especially concerning national security, economic policy, and cultural identity. When it comes to their normative assessment of the EU's legitimacy, this almost-exclusive emphasis on particular domains of policy sets the aforementioned populist statements apart from those critics of the EU who are prodemocratic all the way down. Put differently, for some populists the appeal to the will of the people is a matter of principle whereas for others it is instrumental when this is functional to justifying their political program. It also sets them apart from those scholars who treat democratic decision-making as intrinsically linked to the values of equality and liberty (Christiano, 1996; Harrison, 1993). As we try to show in detail below, the populist challenge to the EU neither neatly fits input legitimacy concerns with undemocratic representation nor, however, output legitimacy concerns with illiberal values.

The analysis of populism often associates its prodemocratic outlook with that of Rousseau and especially his writings on the concept of the general will. Populism scholars such as Cass Mudde (2017a) go as far as to argue that populism is not just a form of majoritarian extremism that does not accept limitations upon majority rule; it is also based on the belief that people have one general will, which means that different positions (so-called special interests) are seen not just as wrong by populists but as illegitimate (Mudde, 2017a, 2017b). In what follows we challenge this equivocation of populism with Rousseauian input legitimacy. Three aspects of Rousseau's writings appear relevant to the aforementioned understanding of populist claims that corroborate the idea that the EU lacks legitimacy.

The first is the reference to special or factional interests. Rousseau thought that democratic legitimacy could be undermined when the political community is divided into factions

(e.g., socioeconomic classes) in a way that allows one faction to impose its will on the rest of society (Bertram, 2003; Rousseau & Gourevitch, 1997). The remedy for Rousseau was a radical one. If socioeconomic inequalities make ruling by a particular faction inevitable, then these socioeconomic inequalities should be eliminated as opposed to merely being bracketed for the sake of social unity (Rousseau & Gourevitch, 1997, 78–80). Although left-wing populists occasionally endorse this remedy, it is important to note that it is not exclusive to populist discourse. Not all political actors concerned with the distortive effect of economic power on democratic politics are populists (e.g. Christiano, 1996; Vergara, 2020).

The second aspect that is relevant to Rousseau's work is his appeal to patriotism. Like some right-wing populists, Rousseau and Gourevitch (1997, 16) believed that love for one's country is a virtue. However, for Rousseau, this virtue is primarily an example of how individuals could make sacrifices for individuals they are not related to by family or personal relations. It is evidence for the social potential of human beings and a means of transcending the self-interested nature of individuals when that conflicts with the public good. This picture is not the one that right-wing populists hold (Taggart, 2017). For them, national identity, as for nationalists, has intrinsic value, and it is in itself a source of pride. One need not be a populist to be nationalist.

If neither a critique of factionalism in politics nor a glorification of national identity is exclusive to populism, could it be that what unites populists and Rousseau is an appeal to the unique general will of the people? Scholars suggest that populists share with Rousseau, and the broader tradition his work belongs to, the view that there is one authentic popular will that political authorities are bound to serve (Mudde, 2004, 33–34). Rousseau, unlike some populists, did not believe that the popular will was one and unqualified. Instead, he advocated the view that, at least in nonideal circumstances in which the choice we face is between having more or fewer factions, the public good is better served by a plurality of factions. Further, and in stark contrast to the populist picture drawn above, Rousseau differentiated between the will of all, and in that sense the popular will, and the general will. The latter is expressed, he thought, only when citizens think in terms of the common good and not solely in terms of their individual wants and impulses (Rousseau & Gourevitch, 1997, 60). This is how, for Rousseau, the general will puts limits on the will of the people. Further, to ensure that citizens take that civic perspective, he believed they need to be educated and informed as citizens (Rousseau and Gourevitch 1997, 60). This idea is again in stark contrast to populists who are not usually very keen to give education a formative role in the formation of the popular will (Mouk, 2018, 190). However, again, what scholarship on populism fails to grasp here is that populists are not alone. Demagogues also have an interest in keeping the citizenry uninformed and divided.

To sum up, it appears to us that the view that populism owes its normative appeal to a Rousseauian understanding of input legitimacy as equivalent to an antipluralist understanding of the popular will is mistaken. Populists' conception of the popular will is often fundamentally different from that of the general will and the broader theoretical tradition that view belongs to.²⁸ Concerns about the role factions and patriotism have in hindering and fostering democratic legitimacy, respectively, are not what render populism normatively unique. Further, the normative linkage of populism to the general will is overstretched, if not erroneous. A populist appeal to the normative force of the popular will need not be an appeal to the normative force of the general will, and as we will see in Section 5 in more detail, a populist appeal to the popular will need not be antiliberal or antipluralist by conceptual fiat. Finally, populist references to sovereignty, security, prosperity, and identity are difficult to fully square within a Rousseauian framework of popular will and input legitimacy. It is at this point that we need to turn to the second of the traditions mentioned above, and Hobbes, for some helpful insights on the populists' attention to output legitimacy.

4.2 | Sovereignty for the security, prosperity, and identity of the people?

As shown in Section 3, some populists criticize the EU's output legitimacy as its undermining of national sovereignty prevents states from protecting their national identity, security, and prosperity. The preoccupation with security and prosperity need not turn into "a view of international relations as an anarchic and amoral Hobbesian state of nature"; it rather means that "claims to self-determination for one group imply recognition of similar rights by others" (Bellamy, 2019, 45). However, when populists neglect these egalitarian implications and assess the EU's legitimacy on the basis of the benefits that the EU provides (or should provide) to their own national states, they seem to opt for a strictly Hobbesian understanding of legitimacy. Regardless of whether this should be an appropriate touchstone to normatively assess the EU's legitimacy, the question is whether populists consistently apply the Hobbesian model in making their claims. Posing this question does not amount to rescuing populism by associating it with output legitimacy. In fact, as we show in the following, decoupling populism from input legitimacy lends itself to a different kind of critique.

In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes famously described the state of nature as a condition of perennial war, one from which people can escape only by instituting a superior power (L, xvii, 2). While at the domestic level the insecurity of the state of nature is an expedient to explain the rise of the civil state, Hobbes seems to be persuaded that nothing similar can occur at the international level because "in all times kings and persons of sovereign authority, because of their independency, are in continual jealousies and in the state and posture of ... war" (L, xiii, 12).

By opting for a strict Hobbesian model for assessing the EU's legitimacy, populists are left with two options. If the independence and national sovereignty of states are to be preserved, as some populists claim, then no supranational power can be consistently justified in Hobbesian terms: states will be purely pursuing their interest and will not engage in any political projects that entail the (partial) transfer of national power to a supranational political entity. In this view, since the EU project is considered by populists as detrimental for the national interest, it should be rejected or abandoned. This view recalls neorealists' claim, following Hobbes, that anarchy is the ordering principle of international relations (Waltz, 1979).

If, instead, the subjection to a supranational authority is considered to be in the interest of national states—suffice it to note that the EU was born out of the ashes of the Second World War—then taking Hobbes's view all the way down would require us to see how an international society can still be stably maintained, without undermining national interest. This requires sharing a sense of common interest, having rules that provide guidance for achieving common goals, and establishing institutions that give "substance and permanence" to the states' collaboration (Bull, 1977, 64, 71). Importantly, for Hobbes, consenting to a political order implies the willingness to comply with its rules.

Let us now map populists' claims as expounded in Section 3 considering these two options. These two options allow for an internal critique of populism that targets the inconsistency of the populist appeal to output legitimacy, which is overlooked by those scholars who link populism solely to input legitimacy. On the one hand, the Brexit Party has turned to withdrawal from the EU project, thereby following the first Hobbesian option: refusing subjection to a supranational authority that acts against Britain's national interest. On the other hand, most of the populists across Europe have so far chosen to remain, contradicting the Hobbesian logic according to which subjection implies complying with the authority's directives.

If we are to say why this behavior is problematic, the standards of liberalism and democraticism are not of help. In other words, if a critique of populism is grounded on its illiberal and antidemocratic character, the behavior of Remainers should be praised no matter what. Rather, the problem lies in that they are not consistent with their supposed preferred version of output legitimacy, namely one inspired by the Hobbesian view of international relations. In fact, in the case of the European laws that are considered (by contract) to trump national laws, disobeying the former is inconsistent with the entire Hobbesian project of maintaining the stability of the political order. Our criticism amounts to the following: one cannot at the same time, without falling into contradiction, claim that national sovereignty must be supreme and call for European (economic and political) support any time the European system proves to be beneficial for national interests, when national authority alone cannot overcome internal problems.

Looking at internal inconsistencies that affect the populist understanding of output legitimacy allows us to broaden the scope of our critique to more controversial aspects of the populist stances. One example is that, strictly speaking, Brexiteers are contradicting the Hobbesian logic as well, by withdrawing from the EU to which they previously transferred power. In response, scholars might object that grounding the critique on the alleged inconsistencies of a political party would bring to a dead end, because political situations can change rapidly and inconsistencies are nothing but adaptation to new circumstances. For example, Brexiteers might claim that they indeed followed Hobbes's lesson, as they demanded withdrawal from a covenant in which the authority did not keep to the terms of the covenant itself or in which the authority does not serve the interests for which the covenant was entered in the first place. We do not judge this response here, as we remain agnostic about whether populists are right in detecting such deficits on the part of the EU. Our point is rather about the consistency with which the Hobbesian logic is applied: in this sense, if it is really the case that the covenant contrasts with the reasons why it was originally created, then Brexiteers are consistent with Hobbes. Another example comes again from Remainder countries, which display more radical inconsistencies than Brexiteers in claiming national sovereignty and at the same time claiming supranational authority when the latter is beneficial for the interests of the nation. They are more inconsistent because they treat the European project as a platform for negotiation among states, in which one member state could demand a better deal as long as it has the economic and political power to dominate the others irrespective of the needs of the others, but rather as a supranational authority that is supposed to treat member states as equals. By advancing this attitude, Remainder populists are neither consistently statist nor consistently cosmopolitans because they are willing to honor the covenant only when it suits them, without accepting the burdens of participation and the premise that other states have an equal right to pursue their interests. Take the example of the Italian government requesting for European funds in order to respond to the Coronavirus crises, without being willing to accept any restrictions or directives on their use.²⁹ In addition, they can be criticized for welcoming the EU's benefits without complying with the EU's directives whenever the latter contrast with their states' attempts to reach better deals.

However, a criticism could arise against our critique of the populist claims on the EU's output legitimacy: consistency would represent an inappropriate touchstone to assess their claims, because the populists's disobedience would only be the result of the EU's failure to fulfill the terms of the contract. Put differently, populists might claim that the promise to make national states better off by joining the EU has ultimately turned worsened national states' economic and social conditions. This case might turn into outcomes similar to Brexit, but it need not, as

national states might consider their exit as more costly than remaining and complaining. Provided that this is the case, these populists would be consistent with the Hobbesian logic, as long as they can prove that the EU is not honoring the covenant. However, let us note that reforms of the EU's politics need not pass through the enforcement of national sovereignty. A critique of the ordering principles of the EU, and the implementation of reforms that restore the terms of the covenant by guaranteeing higher levels of equality and democracy or even national prosperity, does not justify the demand for decreasing the EU's political power by transferring (part of) it back to the member states.

In sum, populists concerned about national identity, security, and prosperity have in some cases relied on a confused Hobbesian perspective, thereby undermining the consistency of their assessment.

5 | THE POPULIST CHALLENGE TO THE EU: A CONCEPTUAL ASSESSMENT

In this section, we would like to turn to what we take to be at the core of the populist challenge to the EU's legitimacy. After showing that populism is neither exclusively input nor output legitimacy oriented, we turn to what we take to plausibly be a distinct and primordial characteristic of populism. In this section we would like to examine whether the very distinction between the people and the elite, on which the populist understanding of legitimacy ultimately relies, is conceptually problematic, irrespective of its normative content.

We proceed with a conceptual assessment of populism by focusing on an account of populism that does not carry the additional normative baggage of undemocratic and illiberal conceptions of populism. Focusing on such an account, however, does not exonerate populism of critique. The very distinction between the people and the elite could be problematic for the following reasons. First, a society might be divided into more than just two groups possessing different *types* and *degrees* of social power rather than merely into the categories of the people and the elite. Second, the *threshold* for qualifying as belonging to one group as opposed to another might be poorly defined and identified or deliberately left open-ended. Third, not all members of either the elite or the people might possess the *qualities* ascribed to them by populists or these qualities might merely supervene others that have more or ultimate explanatory force or analytical value. Before we delve further into these three cases, we must add two points of clarification to the conceptual focus of this section: the first is an empirical one and the second conceptual. First, empirically speaking, one could object that all parties that invoke the distinction of the people versus the elite are also antipluralist or antiliberal or that they have at least some of the normative characteristics discussed earlier (see Section 3). A focus on the conceptual distinction between the people and the elite provides us with a conceptually coherent distinction, one could argue, but at the price of providing an empirically uninformed conception that is not particularly useful for analyzing what populists say or do.³⁰

Our response is twofold. First, empirically speaking, as we showed in Section 3, there are numerous political parties that invoke the distinction of the people versus the elite that have an anti-elitist and yet cosmopolitan stance on the EU, such as the Labour Party, under Jeremy Corbyn, in the United Kingdom; the SNP in Scotland; Podemos in Spain; and Syriza in Greece (Bernhard & Kriesi, 2019; Ingram, 2017, 656–58). Whatever their vices, these populist parties do not fail to recognize minority and individual rights or to acknowledge that the citizenry is not homogenous but divided along several dimensions. If this is true, then identifying populism

with antipluralism fails to grasp the populism of such parties. The alternative is to claim that these parties are not populist even though they use the people-versus-elite distinction, which seems like a contradiction in terms given their own actual invocation of the distinction.³¹ Second, and relatedly, something like Occam's razor should be relevant to how we think about populism. For an actor to qualify as populist, it suffices, for analytical purposes, that they are for the people and anti-elite. If the distinction, however, between the people and the elite does not capture anything novel or unique but is merely another way to refer to distinct social, economic, or political classes, then it is conceptually redundant as a case of equivocation in the case of those parties.³²

This point of clarification enables us to get back to how populism could be intrinsically problematic conceptually and allows us to discuss the three conceptual problems mentioned at the beginning of this section in some detail. A populist who thinks that society is divided into two homogenous groups is committing a fallacy if and only if the two groups in question are not homogenous. For example, if not all members of the elite are corrupt, because some of them are virtuous, then the distinction between the virtuous people and the corrupt elite is false because of its commitment to an antecedent antipluralistic understanding of sociopolitical cleavages. The distinction is also obviously false if the people, or the elite, possess more than one quality in varying degrees and if some members of one group are wrongly assigned to the other group.

Nevertheless, is it correct to claim that all forms of the people-versus-elite distinction are necessarily conceptually problematic because society is not neatly divided into two homogenous groups? We think for two reasons that this is a premature conclusion. First, not all of those who treat the category of the people as homogenous are populists. For example, nationalists who treat a group as nationally homogenous are not necessarily populists. Hence, one could be an antipluralistic nationalist without being a populist.

Second, a populist could treat the distinction between the people and the elite as one that is compatible with treating one's "friends," for example, as to some degree different and yet as members of the same category (e.g., all my "friends" are part of the 99% but not all of them are equally positioned in terms of income and wealth within that 99%, and they are not part of the top 1% [the elite]). A sophisticated version of populism, or in fact of any analogous political dichotomy, could aim to highlight the concentration of social and economic power in particular segments of society rather than claim that all those possessing such privileged social positions are equally corrupt. Populism is, in that sense, salvageable as an analytically useful *abstraction* if and only if it brackets differences within the categories of the people and the elite that do not undermine the analytical force of the distinction (O'Neill, 1996). Nevertheless, it need not be salvageable as a matter of conceptual necessity. We agree, therefore, with Wolkenstein (2015) and White and Ypi (2017) that the way populists "'over-politicise' the question of peoplehood" holds the risk of becoming "insensitive to the different ways claims are advanced in the public sphere." Nevertheless, we do not think that all populist approaches run that risk, at least to the extent that social and economic power structures resemble an elite structure rather than one in which social and economic power is widely dispersed (see the debate between Mills 1956, Dahl, 1958, Bachrach & Baratz, 1962, Kaltwasser, 2014). However, even in this case, and in its most refined formulation, the distinction between the people and the elite is not the only, or arguably not the best, way to accurately conceptualize the concentration of different kinds of advantages and privileges among members of particular socioeconomic classes. The conceptual limits of populism are most evident in the case of the EU. On the one hand, those who want to motivate a statist conception of the EU are often

portraying the peoples of Europe in national colors and hence downplaying the political differences within them. On the other hand, those who advocate a cosmopolitan picture of the EU are recurrently ignoring how a nascent European demos could be internally divided on the basis of conflicting economic interests (Bellamy and Lacey, 2018).

In this section, we have tried to buttress the claim that crucial to populism is the distinction between the people and the elite and the siding of oneself with the people. As the latter is a normative claim, what could be *conceptually* problematic in populism is how precisely one distinguishes the people and the elite and whether that distinction is the most appropriate one for accurately depicting social cleavages.

6 | CONCLUSION

In this paper we have shown what is distinct and what is not about the populist challenge to the EU's legitimacy and questioned whether the scholarship on populism captures what is at the core of this challenge, as opposed to at its periphery. While the charge of illiberalism and antidemocraticism does not target populism distinctively, populists should be criticized regarding their conceptual distinction between the people and the elite, which grounds their understanding of the EU's input and output legitimacy. In addition, we showed that not all populists are nationalists, and not all are exclusively interested in input aspects of legitimacy. Drawing attention on the complexity of the populist panorama does not, however, undermine criticisms of populist conceptions of legitimacy. Instead, developing a critique in the terms suggested here nail populists down to the platitude of their claims. The populist challenge to the EU amounts to an inconsistent picture of EU's legitimacy that draws both from input and output accounts of legitimacy whereas the distinction between the people and elite, at its very core, is neither necessarily unique nor informative. If our analysis is correct, then it renders populism redundant as an alternative to statist and cosmopolitan approaches that also draw on input and output legitimacy claims, and the unilateral or multilateral picture of the EU that accompanies them. Populism is just old wine in new bottles, after all.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

ORCID

Ilaria Cozzaglio  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8078-7648>

Dimitrios Efthymiou  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8961-9250>

ENDNOTES

¹ See Laclau in Stanley (2008, 97).

² Our choice of these three countries is motivated by their being differently positioned in the EU geographically, economically, and politically. The 5SM, Lega, the AfD, and the Brexit Party are all listed as populist parties (<https://populistorg.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/category2-2.png>).

³ Reference to the Italian source: <https://www.lastampa.it/2016/06/25/italia/siamo-in-europa-no-lue-cambia-omuore-le-giravolte-di-grillo-e-delleuropeista-di-maio-nlUZ8q25y6FntM5jUlrmIP/pagina.html>.

⁴ <https://twitter.com/AfDimEUParl/status/1206646094169591811?s=20>.

⁵ https://twitter.com/Nigel_Farage/status/1222866072266776577.

- ⁶ https://twitter.com/Nigel_Farage/status/1207255301470203905.
- ⁷ https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2022/04/04/news/conte_crimini_da_corte_internazionale_ora_bisogna_cercare_una_soluzione_politica-344011999/.
- ⁸ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/rising-precariat-and-left-transformation-examin/>.
- ⁹ <https://twitter.com/AfDimEUParl/status/1235882053264171008>.
- ¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/AfDimEUParl/status/1205125830218829830>.
- ¹¹ https://twitter.com/Nigel_Farage/status/1207255301470203905.
- ¹² https://www.facebook.com/PinoCabrasM5S/posts/622930668254695?__tn__=K-R.
- ¹³ https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/04/2017-04-12_afd-grundsatzprogramm-englisch_web.pdf, p. 15 and, more generally, paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2.
- ¹⁴ For the brochure of Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy, founded in 2014, see http://www.efddgroup.eu/images/Brochure/efd_brochure.pdf.
- ¹⁵ https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/topnews/2018/10/24/salvini-ue-contro-economia-italiana_68c718e0-f4aa-4852-8191-7e21c81ecb0f.html.
- ¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/KrahMax/status/1230923931860848641>. Similarly, from the AfD Twitter account: <https://twitter.com/AfDimEUParl/status/1230066013284290560?s=20>.
- ¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/AfDimEUParl/status/1220691111959764997>.
- ¹⁸ https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2016/10/12/news/renzi_dall_unione_europea_frenetico_immobilismo-149598493/
- ¹⁹ Zivi Zid (Croatia), Kukiz '15 (Poland), Liike Nyt (Finland), and AKEL (Greece).
- ²⁰ <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/democrazia-diretta-e-sovrano-cosa-accomuna-quattro-partiti-alleati-m5s-europa-ABPuMuUB>.
- ²¹ <https://www.leganord.org/il-movimento/europee-2019/217-notizie/16540-menl-programma-politico>.
- ²² Original: <https://www.leganord.org/il-movimento/europee-2019/217-notizie/16540-menl-programma-politico>.
- ²³ <https://twitter.com/BernhardZimniok/status/1217774677659213824>.
- ²⁴ https://twitter.com/Michael_Heaver/status/1222474677311934464. See also comment in the *Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jan/31/boris-johnson-promises-brex-it-will-lead-to-national-revival>.
- ²⁵ See, for example, the analysis of Salvini's declarations provided by Albertazzi et al. (2018, 668–69) with regard to the role of migrants' impact on economic crises, security, and terrorist attacks.
- ²⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/posts/10156783742833155>.
- ²⁷ <https://twitter.com/AfDimEUParl/status/1234823960556167169?s=20>.
- ²⁸ This is even though Rousseau arguably represents the less liberal strand of this tradition, which includes, among others, liberal social-contract theorists such as Rawls (2005) that believe that a subset of political doctrines, those that are unreasonable, deserve no role in political deliberation among persons who view themselves as free and equal.
- ²⁹ <http://www.governo.it/it/articolo/covid-19-informativa-del-presidente-conte-al-senato/14500>.
- ³⁰ We disagree with populism scholars such as Mudde, Müller, and Urbinati that find antipluralism or anti-liberalism to be shared by all populists. Communitarian versions of populism that idealize the homogeneity of the people and authoritarian forms of populism that are hostile to liberal constitutional safeguards constitute merely subsets of populism and not qualities that all populist actors exhibit.
- ³¹ See also Vergara (2020).
- ³² For a discussion of the distinction, see Stanley (2008, 103).

REFERENCES

- Albertazzi, D., and A. Giovannini. 2018. A Seddona Regional & Federal Studies 28(5): 645–671.
- Arzheimer, K. 2015. “The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?” *West European Politics* 38(3): 535–56.
- Bachrach, P., and M. S. Baratz. 1962. “Two Faces of Power.” *American Political Science Review* 56(4): 947–52.
- Bellamy, R. 2019. *A Republican Europe of States: Cosmopolitanism, Intergovernmentalism and Democracy in the EU*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bellamy, R., and J. Lacey. 2018. “Normative Political Theory and the EU.” In *European Integration Theory*, edited by A. Wiener, T. A. Börzel and T. Risse, 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bernhard, L., and H. Kriesi. 2019. “Populism in Election Times: a Comparative Analysis of 11 Countries in Western Europe.” *West European Politics* 42(6): 1188–208.
- Bertram, C. 2003. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Rousseau and the Social Contract*. London: Routledge.
- Bull, H. 1977. *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Canovan, M. 2004. “Populism for Political Theorists?” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9(3): 241–52.
- Christiano, T. 1996. *The Rule of the Many: Fundamental Issues in Democratic Theory*. Boulder: Westview.
- Christiano, T. 2010. “Democratic Legitimacy and International Institutions.” In *The Philosophy of International Law*, edited by S. Besson and J. Tasioulas. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dahl, R. 1958. “A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model.” *American Political Science Review* 52(2): 463–9.
- Erman, E. 2016. “Global Political Legitimacy beyond Justice and Democracy?” *International Theory* 8(1): 29–62.
- Espejo, P. O. 2017. “Populism and the Idea of the People.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, edited by M. Freedon. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Estlund, D. 2007. *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Føllesdal, A. 2006. “Survey Article: The Legitimacy Deficits of the European Union.” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 14(4): 441–68.
- Font, N., P. Graziano, and M. Tsakatika. 2021. “Varieties of Inclusionary Populism? SYRIZA, Podemos and the Five Star Movement.” *Government and Opposition* 56(1): 163–83.
- Galston, W. A. 2018. *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Harrison, R. 1993. *Democracy*. London: Routledge.
- Hobbes, T. 1994. *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Ingram, J. D. 2017. *Populism and Cosmopolitanism. The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kaltwasser, C. R. 2014. “The Responses of Populism to Dahl’s Democratic Dilemmas.” *Political Studies* 62(3): 470–87.
- Laclau, L. 2005. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.
- Mills, C. W. 1956. *The Power Elite*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mouffe, C. 2018. *For a Left Populism*. London: Verso.
- Mounk, Y. 2018. *The People Vs. Democracy: Why our Freedom Is in Danger and how to Save it*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Mudde, C. 2004. “The Populist Zeitgeist.” *Government and Opposition* 39(4): 541–63.
- Mudde, C. 2017a. “Populism: An Ideational Approach.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by C. R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, and P. Ostiguy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mudde, C. 2017b. *SYRIZA: The Failure of the Populist Promise*. London: Palgrave.
- Mudde, C., and C. R. Kaltwasser. 2013. “Populism.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*. edited by M. Freedon, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Müller, J.-W. 2017. *What Is Populism?* London: Penguin Books.
- O’Neill, O. 1996. *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peter, F. 2017. “Political Legitimacy.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/legitimacy/>.

- Pettit, P. 2012. *On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rawls, J. 2005. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rousseau, J.-J., and V. Gourevitch. 1997. *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scharpf, F. W. 1999. *Governing in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schmidt, V. 2012. "Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union." In *The Oxford Handbook of the European Union*, edited by E. Jones, A. Menon, and S. Weatherill. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schmidt, V. A. 2013. "Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union Revisited: Input, Output and 'Throughput'." *Political Studies* 61(1): 2–22.
- Sen, A. 2011. *The Idea of Justice*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.
- Simmons, A. J. 2016. *Boundaries of Authority*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stanley, B. 2008. "The Thin Ideology of Populism." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13(1): 95–110.
- Taggart, P. 2017. *Populism in Western Europe. The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Urbinati, N. 2017. "Populism and the Principle of Majority." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by C. R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, and P. Ostiguy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Urbinati, N. 2019a. "Political Theory of Populism." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(1): 111–27.
- Urbinati, N. 2019b. *Me the People. How Populism Transforms Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Varoufakis, Y. 2017. *Adults in the Room: My Battle with the European and American Deep Establishment*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Vergara, C. 2020. "Populism as Plebeian Politics: Inequality, Domination, and Popular Empowerment." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 28(2): 222–46.
- Waltz, K. N. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- White, J., and L. Ypi. 2017. "The Politics of Peoplehood." *Political Theory* 45(4): 439–65.
- Wolkenstein, F. 2015. "What Can We Hold Against Populism?" *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 41(2): 111–29.
- Wolkenstein, F. 2019. "Populism, Liberal Democracy and the Ethics of Peoplehood." *European Journal of Political Theory* 18(3): 330–48.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Ilaria Cozzaglio is a research associate at the Research Centre "Normative Orders" of the Goethe University in Frankfurt. Her research interests concern political realism as a normative approach to elaborating political concepts such as legitimacy, progress and trust, and to addressing political phenomena such as populism. She currently focuses on developing a realist notion of political trust.

Dimitrios Efthymiou is a postdoctoral research fellow at Goethe University in Frankfurt and PI of the project "Towards a Transnational Theory of Justice for the EU." He is principally interested in normative political theory and has a particular interest in its feasibility conditions and application to public policy. His current research project focuses on labor migration in the EU and its normative implications for the nature and scope of the welfare state. He is currently preparing a related monograph titled: For a Europe of Free and Equals: A Theory of Transnational Social Justice and Solidarity.

How to cite this article: Cozzaglio, Ilaria, and Dimitrios Efthymiou. 2023. "The Populist Challenge to European Union Legitimacy: Old Wine in New Bottles?" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 54(4): 510–525. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josp.12487>