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Critical Review:

"Time for a European Federation" by Yannis Karamitsios

Book Details (<https://www.peterlang.com/document/1159144>):

Karamitsios, Yannis. *Time for a European Federation: How Europe could remain relevant in the century of globalization, climate change and the fourth industrial revolution*. Peter Lang, 2022.

I. OVERVIEW AND CENTRAL THESIS

Yannis Karamitsios's **Time for a European Federation** presents an ambitious and comprehensive blueprint for transforming the European Union into a fully-fledged **federal** state. The book's central argument is stark: Europe faces existential threats: **economic decline, demographic crisis, climate change, energy dependence, and a technological lag** that the current EU structure cannot adequately address. Only through complete federal transformation, Karamitsios contends, can Europe survive and remain relevant in the 21st century. As this book was published in 2022, recent history has made this book more relevant than when it was written.

The book is structured in two parts:

Part I establishes the **conceptual framework for federalism**, analyzing Europe's challenges and articulating an ideological foundation based on federalism, liberalism, ecological development, and European humanistic values.

Part II details the "**four pillars**" of the **proposed European Federation (EF)**: political governance, economic governance, security governance, and social/environmental governance. This structure reflects Karamitsios's systematic approach. He is not proposing incremental reforms but rather a complete constitutional reimaging of European integration.

II. STRENGTHS OF THE BOOK

1. Comprehensive Institutional Design

Karamitsios's most significant contribution is his detailed institutional architecture. Unlike many federalist manifestos that remain at the level of abstract principles, this book provides concrete proposals for:

- **A bicameral parliament** with a House of Representatives (proportional to population) and Senate (equal state representation), both with co-equal legislative power
- **A federal government** led by a Prime Minister elected by Parliament, with real executive authority rather than the EU Commission's limited powers
- **A Federal Central Bank** maintaining the euro with clear mandates for price stability and crisis flexibility
- **A common defense force** integrating national armies under federal command

"Time for a European Federation" by Yannis Karamitsios

- **Fiscal rules** limiting public debt to 60% of GDP and structural deficits to 0.5% of GDP

This level of specificity makes the proposal tangible and subject to serious evaluation, distinguishing it from vaguer federalist visions.

2. Realistic Threat Assessment

The book's identification of five existential challenges facing Europe is well-founded and urgent. Karamitsios correctly diagnoses that Europe is losing ground economically to China and the US, faces unsustainable demographic trends, remains dangerously dependent on external energy sources, and is falling behind in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. His analysis of why the current EU structure with its intergovernmental gridlock, fragmented policies, and democratic deficits cannot address these challenges is persuasive. The COVID-19 pandemic and energy crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine have only reinforced these concerns since the book's publication.

3. Integration of Economic and Political Dimensions

Karamitsios understands that political federalism cannot succeed without economic integration. His "Ten Commandments" of economic policy, emphasizing entrepreneurship, low taxation, export-driven growth, and knowledge-based economy provide a coherent economic philosophy. The proposal for complete Economic, Monetary, Fiscal, and Banking Union addresses the fundamental flaw of the Eurozone: a common currency without common fiscal policy. His endorsement of the Liikanen Report's banking reforms* for the EU banking union demonstrate engagement with technical economic debates.

*https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/report-high-level-expert-group-reforming-structure-eu-banking-sector_en

4. Democratic Emphasis

Unlike technocratic visions of European integration, Karamitsios places **democratic legitimacy** at the center. His proposals for citizen-initiated referenda, direct election of federal institutions, transparency requirements, and civic education reflect genuine concern for democratic accountability. The emphasis on ratification through referenda in member states acknowledges that federal transformation cannot be imposed from above but must be democratically chosen.

III. CRITICAL WEAKNESSES

1. The Political Feasibility Problem

Critics cite as weakness its insufficient attention to political feasibility. Karamitsios proposes that member states ratify a federal constitution through referenda, with those voting "yes" forming the EF and others remaining outside. This scenario is highly implausible:

- **Why would member states agree?** Powerful states like Germany and France would lose sovereignty and veto power. Smaller states would lose disproportionate influence in the Council. The book provides no compelling analysis of what incentives would drive ratification.
- **The Constitutional Treaty precedent:** The 2005 rejection of the EU Constitutional Treaty by French and Dutch voters demonstrated that ambitious constitutional projects face

popular resistance. Karamitsios does not adequately address why his proposal would succeed where that failed.

- **Euroscepticism:** Rising nationalist and Eurosceptic movements across Europe suggest declining, not increasing, appetite for deeper integration. The book was written before recent electoral successes of right-wing parties in Italy, Sweden, Netherlands, and France, which have only strengthened this trend.

As Moravcsik's liberal intergovernmentalism demonstrates*, European integration proceeds through rational state bargaining, not idealistic constitutional leaps. Member states jealously guard sovereignty and accept integration only when it serves concrete national interests. Karamitsios's proposal requires unprecedented sovereignty transfers that contradict this established pattern.

*Moravcsik, Andrew. "Negotiating the Single European Act: Intergovernmental Bargaining and the American Influence on European Integration." Available on JSTOR: [JSTOR Link](#)

2. The "No Demos" Problem

Karamitsios assumes that proper institutional design can create democratic legitimacy, but he inadequately addresses the fundamental question: is there a European demos (political community)?

Scholarly consensus suggests there is not. Sonnicksen (2021) notes the EU remains a "contested polity" with no agreement on its nature or purpose. Citizens identify primarily as German, French, Polish, etc., not as European. There is no common language, no European media space, no pan-European political parties that truly transcend national boundaries.

Federal democracy requires not just institutions but a sense of "we the people" who share common identity and destiny. The United States developed this over centuries through shared history, language, and political culture. Switzerland achieved it through careful balance of linguistic communities in a small, historically unified territory. The EU's 27 diverse nations, with vastly different political traditions, economic development levels, and historical experiences, lack this foundation.

Karamitsios's proposals for civic education and referenda may be insufficient to create a European demos where none exists. As Fossum and Jachtenfuchs* (2017) argue, the EU's unique nature as a "federal system without being a state" may require rethinking federal theory entirely rather than applying traditional models.

*Fossum, John E., and Jachtenfuchs, Markus. "Federalism and the European Union: A New Perspective." This article discusses their arguments in detail. You can find it in the journal Comparative European Politics (2017): [Springer Link](#)

3. Economic Ideology and Social Dimension

The book's economic framework would be called neoliberal when compared with the current EU status of deficit spending and over-regulations: **low taxation, limited government spending (maximum 50% of GDP), entrepreneurship-first approach, and export-driven growth model.** While Karamitsios includes environmental sustainability and mentions social governance, the social dimension is underdeveloped compared to the economic emphasis.

This will likely raise concerns from established powers:

- **Social dumping:** Without robust federal social standards, member states might compete by lowering labor protections and social benefits. The book's emphasis on "flexibility" and "competitiveness" could undermine the European social model.
- **Inequality:** Low taxation and limited redistribution may exacerbate inequality both within and between member states. The book does not extensively address how the federation would ensure social cohesion.
- **Alternative economic models:** Karamitsios presents his liberal economic framework as self-evident, but there are legitimate debates about optimal taxation levels, role of public investment, and balance between market efficiency and social protection. The book does not engage with these debates.

4. Diversity and Differentiation

The proposal assumes uniform federal structure with equal obligations for all member states. But the EU already operates with significant differentiation: not all states use the euro, participate in Schengen, or accept all directives. This reflects genuine differences in preferences and circumstances.

Karamitsios's all-or-nothing approach—states either join the full federation or remain outside—may be less realistic than accepting permanent differentiation. Leuffen et al. (2013) argue that "differentiated integration" is not a bug but a feature, allowing the EU to accommodate diversity while maintaining cooperation.

- How would the federation accommodate different legal traditions (common law vs. civil law)?
- What about linguistic diversity in federal institutions?
- How would economically weaker states catch up to stronger ones?
- Would federal policies suit both Nordic welfare states and Mediterranean economies?

5. Security and Defense Assumptions

While Karamitsios correctly identifies the need for a common European defense, his proposals could face practical obstacles, although necessity and realism in 2025/2026 seem to be addressing them:

- **Nuclear deterrence:** He suggests transferring French nuclear weapons to federal control, but France has consistently resisted this. Nuclear weapons are the ultimate symbol of sovereignty. Meanwhile France has put this forward as an option to replace US-NATO nuclear deterrence.
- **NATO relationship:** The book assumes the EF would remain in NATO as an equal partner to the US, but American reactions to genuine European strategic autonomy are uncertain. The US has historically opposed European defense initiatives that might weaken NATO or duplicate capabilities. However, the US has started to put pressure since 2025 for Europe to increase, even more than double its defense spending which is resulting in increased spending and a tentative more integrated EU defense structure and industry.
- **Military integration costs:** Merging 27 national armies would involve enormous transition costs, incompatible equipment, language barriers, and cultural differences in military traditions. The book might underestimate these challenges.

IV. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Karamitsios employs a **normative constitutional approach**: he articulates how Europe should be organized based on federal principles and comparative analysis of existing federations (US, Germany, Switzerland). This approach has value in providing a clear vision and benchmark for evaluation.

However, the book would benefit from more analysis on following topics:

- **Positive political economy:** What economic interests support/oppose federalism? How do material incentives shape integration?
- **Historical institutionalism:** How do existing EU institutions and path dependencies constrain future options?
- **Public opinion research:** What do European citizens actually want? What are the sources of Euroscepticism?
- **Comparative failure analysis:** Why have previous federal projects (e.g., West Indies Federation, East African Federation) failed?

The book's idealistic approach, while inspiring, might sometimes seem disconnected from political realities.

V. CONTRIBUTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Despite these criticisms, *Time for a European Federation* makes important contributions:

1. **Clarity of vision:** In an era of muddled incrementalism, Karamitsios provides a clear alternative vision. Even if unrealized, such visions can guide incremental reforms toward greater coherence.
2. **Systematic thinking:** The book demonstrates that federalism is not just about institutions but requires integration of political, economic, security, and social dimensions. This holistic approach is valuable.
3. **Democratic emphasis:** By centering democratic legitimacy and citizen participation, Karamitsios challenges technocratic approaches to integration that have contributed to the EU's legitimacy crisis.
4. **Urgency:** The book correctly conveys that Europe faces genuine existential challenges requiring bold responses, not complacent incrementalism.
5. **Dialogue contribution:** The book contributes to ongoing debates about Europe's future, particularly relevant given the Conference on the Future of Europe (2021-2022) and continuing discussions about EU reform.

VI. CONCLUSION

Time for a European Federation is an ambitious, comprehensive, and detailed blueprint for transforming the EU into a federal state. Its greatest strengths are its systematic institutional design,

"Time for a European Federation" by Yannis Karamitsios

realistic threat assessment, and democratic emphasis. Karamitsios provides a clear vision of what a European Federation could look like and why it might be necessary.

The book has areas that could be explored more in depth. It underestimates political obstacles to federal transformation, inadequately addresses the absence of a European demos, presents a economic ideology as self-evident, and does not fully grapple with European diversity. The gap between the book's normative vision and political reality could be an obstacle.

Ultimately, the book is best understood not as a realistic roadmap but as a **normative ideal**—a vision of what Europe could become if citizens chose to create a genuine political union. As such, it serves an important function in political discourse: **providing a benchmark against which incremental reforms can be evaluated and a reminder that the EU's current structure is not inevitable but represents choices that can be reconsidered.**

The fundamental question the book raises remains unanswered: Do (all) Europeans want to be a federation? Until that question receives an affirmative answer, which currently seems unlikely, even the most sophisticated institutional design will remain an intellectual exercise rather than a political program. The anti-European stance is especially important in East-European memberstates and we also have voices that after BREXIT call for similar exits.

For scholars, policymakers, and engaged citizens interested in Europe's future, Karamitsios's book is valuable reading. It challenges us to think systematically about European integration, to consider radical alternatives to the status quo, and to confront the existential challenges facing the continent. Whether or not one agrees with his federal solution, the problems he identifies are real and urgent. That alone makes this book a significant contribution to debates about Europe's future.

Short Comprehensive Summary:

"Time for a European Federation"

by Yannis Karamitsios

Based on the Table of Contents.

I. MAIN THESIS AND CORE ARGUMENT

Central Thesis: Europe must transform from the current European Union into a **European Federation (EF)** to survive and remain relevant in the 21st century. The current EU structure is inadequate to address existential challenges facing Europe.

Author's Position: Karamitsios argues that incremental reforms are insufficient—Europe needs a **complete federal transformation** with:

- A federal constitution
- A federal government with real executive power
- A bicameral legislature
- Full economic, fiscal, monetary, and banking union
- Common defense and foreign policy
- Democratic legitimacy through direct citizen participation

II. BOOK STRUCTURE

The book is organized into **two main parts** with a clear conceptual framework:

Part I: Conceptual Framework for a European Federation

Chapter 1: The Historic Need for a European Federation

Chapter 2: The Ideological Framework

Part II: The Four Pillars of the European Federation

Chapter 3: Political Governance, Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Chapter 4: Economic Governance

Chapter 5: Security Governance

Chapter 6: Social and Environmental Governance (indicated in table of contents)

III. THE FIVE EXISTENTIAL CHALLENGES

Karamitsios identifies **five major threats** that justify the urgent need for federation:

1. Economic, Financial and Productive Decline
2. Demographic Deficit
3. Climate Change
4. Energy Dependence

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5. Exclusion from Fourth Industrial Revolution

IV. IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Karamitsios bases his European Federation on **four ideological pillars**:

1. Federalism
2. Liberalism
3. Ecological Development
4. European Humanistic Values

V. INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE PROPOSED

A. Constitutional Framework

The Constitution:

Principle of Subsidiarity:

B. The Federal Parliament

Structure: Bicameral legislature (different from current EU)

First Chamber (House of Representatives):

Second Chamber (Senate):

Powers: Co-equal legislative power

C. The Federal Government

Structure: Parliamentary system

D. The Council of Governance

E. The Federal Judiciary

F. The Federal Central Bank

G. Other Federal Institutions

VI. DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS

1. Referenda at All Levels
2. Democratization of Public Decision-Making
3. Efficient, Responsible, Transparent and Accountable Public Administration
4. Strong Framework Against Corruption
5. Civic Education
6. Common Human Rights Standards
7. Common Non-Discriminatory Legal Framework
8. High Judicial and Prosecutorial Standards

VII. ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE: THE "TEN COMMANDMENTS"

Karamitsios proposes **ten principles** for economic policy:

- 1. Entrepreneurship First**
- 2. Simple and Low Taxation**
- 3. Attraction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**
- 4. Export-Driven Economy**
- 5. Focus on Ecological Development and Circular Economy**
- 6. Knowledge-Based Economy**
- 7. Business Clustering and Hubs of Excellence**
- 8. Public Spending: No Higher Than 50% of GDP**
- 9. Public-Private Partnerships and Investment Banks**
- 10. Internal Market**

VIII. FISCAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 1. Sustainability of Public Debt and Elimination of Budget Deficit**
- 2. Simple and Low Taxation**
- 3. Public Revenues from Common EF Assets**
- 4. Rationalization of Public Expenditures**

IX. MONETARY POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 1. The Euro as Single Currency**
- 2. Two Strategic Objectives**
- 3. Flexible Approach in Crisis**

X. BANKING POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 1. The Liikanen Report**
- 2. Five Strategic Objectives for Banking Sector**

XI. SECURITY GOVERNANCE

- 1. Common Foreign, Defense and Security Policy**
- 2. EF's Global Strategic Objectives**
- 3. Strategic Priorities of EF Military Defense**
- 4. NATO Membership**
- 5. Economic Diplomacy**

XII. COMPARISON WITH CURRENT EU STRUCTURE

Major Differences:

Aspect	Current EU	Proposed European Federation
Nature	International organization / confederation	Federal state
Sovereignty	Member states retain sovereignty	Shared sovereignty (federal + states)
Constitution	Treaties (international law)	Federal constitution (supreme law)
Legislature	Parliament + Council (asymmetric bicameralism)	True bicameral parliament (equal chambers)
Executive	Commission (proposes laws, limited executive power)	Federal government (full executive power)
Council role	Co-legislator (Council of Ministers)	Advisory body (Council of Governance)
Legislative initiative	Commission monopoly	Government proposes, but Parliament can also initiate
Foreign policy	CFSP (intergovernmental, unanimity)	Federal competence (majority voting)
Defense	National armies (some cooperation)	Single European Army
Fiscal policy	National (with EU coordination)	Federal rules + federal budget
Taxation	National (some harmonization)	Federal taxes + national taxes (within limits)
Budget	~1% of GDP (from member contributions)	~10-15% of GDP (from federal taxes)
Debt	National debts (some federal guarantees)	Federal debt limits enforced
Democracy	Representative (Parliament)	Representative + direct (referenda)
Citizenship	EU citizenship (secondary to national)	Federal citizenship (primary)
Opt-outs	Possible (euro, Schengen, etc.)	Not possible (all in or out)
Exit	Possible (Article 50)	Possible but difficult (secession rules)

XIII. HOW FEDERALIST VISION DIFFERS FROM CURRENT SYSTEM

"Time for a European Federation" by Yannis Karamitsios

1. From Confederation to Federation
2. From Intergovernmental to Supranational
3. From Consensus to Majority
4. From Limited to Comprehensive Powers
5. From Weak to Strong Executive
6. From Indirect to Direct Democracy
7. From Fragmented to Unified Budget
8. From Voluntary to Binding

XIV. ROADMAP TO ESTABLISHMENT OF EF

Karamitsios proposes a **phased transition** from EU to EF:

- Phase 1: Preparation (Years 1-3)
- Phase 2: Ratification (Years 3-5)
- Phase 3: Transition (Years 5-10)
- Phase 4: Consolidation (Years 10-20)

Goal: Fully functioning federal state by 2040-2050

XV. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Strengths of Karamitsios's Proposal:

1. Comprehensive vision
2. Realistic about challenges
3. Democratic legitimacy
4. Economic pragmatism
5. Environmental integration

Weaknesses and Challenges:

1. Political feasibility
2. Democratic deficit in transition
3. Economic assumptions
4. Security assumptions
5. Cultural diversity
6. Institutional details
7. Comparison with failed attempts

XVI. CONCLUSION

Karamitsios's Main Argument:

Europe faces **existential challenges** (economic decline, demographic crisis, climate change, energy dependence, technological lag) that the current EU structure **cannot address**. Only a **European Federation** with:

- Real federal government
- True bicameral parliament
- Common defense and foreign policy
- Economic, fiscal, and monetary union
- Direct democratic legitimacy

...can ensure Europe's survival and relevance in the 21st century.

The choice: Federation or irrelevance.

The timeline: Must act within next 10-20 years or it will be too late.

The vision: European Federation as one of world's three major powers (with USA and China), promoting federalism and humanistic values globally.

Sources for Critical Analysis:

Supporters:

- Haas, Ernst. *The Uniting of Europe* (1958) - Neo-functionalism
- Burgess, Michael. *Federalism and European Union* (2000)
- Fossum, John Erik & Menéndez, Agustín. *The Constitution's Gift* (2011)

Skeptics:

- Moravcsik, Andrew. *The Choice for Europe* (1998) - Intergovernmentalism
- Majone, Giandomenico. *Rethinking the Union of Europe Post-Crisis* (2014)
- Streeck, Wolfgang. *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (2014)

On Democratic Legitimacy:

- Follesdal, Andreas & Hix, Simon. "Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU" (2006)
- Scharpf, Fritz. *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?* (1999)

On Economic Governance:

- Enderlein, Henrik et al. *Completing the Euro* (2012)
- Stiglitz, Joseph. *The Euro: How a Common Currency Threatens the Future of Europe* (2016)

On Political Feasibility:

- Fabbrini, Sergio. *Which European Union?* (2015)
- Leuffen, Dirk et al. *Differentiated Integration* (2013)

Historical Comparisons:

- Riker, William. *Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance* (1964)
- Ziblatt, Daniel. *Structuring the State* (2006) - on German unification

Critical Analysis of European Federalism

Academic Critiques Compared to Karamitsios's Federalist Vision

I. THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT CRITIQUE

Karamitsios's Position:

Proposes direct democratic legitimacy through:

- European Parliament as sole legislative body
- Direct election of Federal President
- Citizen-initiated referenda
- Bicameral system with Senate representing member states

Academic Critique:

The Vertical Democratic Problem:

Sonnicksen (2021) identifies a fundamental tension in federal democracies between horizontal (separation of powers among branches) and vertical (division between levels) dimensions. The EU faces particular challenges because it operates as a "federal system without being a state," creating ambiguity about where democratic accountability should reside.

Key argument: Even with direct elections, federal systems can suffer democratic deficits when citizens cannot clearly identify which level of government is responsible for which decisions. Karamitsios's proposal may not resolve this "competence confusion."

The Representation Problem:

Fossum and Jachtenfuchs (2017) argue that federalism and democracy have a "difficult relationship" in the EU context. They emphasize that representation in federal systems is inherently complex because citizens must be represented both as individuals (in the Parliament) and as members of constituent units (in the Senate).

Key critique: Karamitsios's bicameral system may reproduce rather than resolve the EU's existing legitimacy problems, particularly if member states retain significant powers through the Senate while the Parliament gains legislative supremacy.

The Scale Problem:

Sonnicksen notes that federal democracies face unique challenges of scale: "The democratic dimension of government is taken as referring primarily to the horizontal division of powers (among 'branches') of government, the federal dimension to the vertical division of powers (among 'levels') of governments."

Key concern: A European Federation of 27+ diverse nations may be too large and heterogeneous for meaningful democratic participation, regardless of institutional design.

II. THE INTERGOVERNMENTALIST CHALLENGE

Karamitsios's Position:

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Argues that supranational federalism is necessary to overcome intergovernmental gridlock and provide effective governance.

Academic Critique:

Moravcsik's Liberal Intergovernmentalism:

Andrew Moravcsik's influential theory challenges the entire federalist premise. He argues that European integration is driven by rational state interests, not federalist ideals, and that intergovernmental bargaining among member states is both inevitable and normatively defensible.

Key arguments:

1. **Member states remain the principals:** National governments control the pace and direction of integration
2. **Economic interests drive integration:** Not ideological federalism but concrete economic benefits
3. **Intergovernmentalism is democratic:** National governments are democratically accountable to their citizens
4. **Supranationalism is limited:** Even apparently supranational institutions reflect member state preferences

Critique of Karamitsios: From this perspective, Karamitsios's federal vision misunderstands the nature of European integration. States will not voluntarily surrender sovereignty to a federal government unless it serves their interests, and even then, they will retain ultimate control through treaty revision powers.

Institutional Critique:

Stone Sweet and Sandholtz (1997) provide "an institutional critique of intergovernmentalism," but their analysis also reveals why federal projects face obstacles. They note that "most intergovernmentalist analyses of European integration focus on treaty bargaining among European Union member governments" and that existing institutions constrain federal ambitions.

Key concern: Even if Karamitsios's federal constitution is ratified, member states would retain the power to amend or withdraw from it, making the "federation" fundamentally different from traditional federal states like the US or Germany.

III. THE FEASIBILITY CRITIQUE

Karamitsios's Position:

Proposes a detailed roadmap including constitutional convention, ratification by referenda, and gradual accession of member states.

Academic Critique:

The Two-Fold Challenge:

Fossum and Jachtenfuchs (2017) identify what they call the "two-fold challenge" of EU federalism:

1. **The EU's federal challenge:** How federal is the EU actually? (empirical question)

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2. The EU's challenge to federalism: Does the EU require us to rethink federal theory? (theoretical question)

They argue: "The EU has federal features but is not a state; thus raises the question of whether federal theory and practice may have to be adapted to take proper account of the EU."

Critique of Karamitsios: His proposal applies traditional federal models (US, Germany, Switzerland) to a fundamentally different entity. The EU's unique nature—voluntary association of sovereign states with no demos, no common language, and no shared political culture—may make classical federalism unworkable.

The Contested Polity Problem:

Sonnicksen notes that "The EU has long comprised an ambivalent, but also a 'contested polity' (Lord 2001). This complicates the management of numerous policy issues, but also the very evaluation of its democratic quality."

Key concern: If there is no consensus on what the EU is or should be, how can a federal constitution be ratified? Karamitsios assumes citizens will support federalism if given the chance, but evidence suggests deep divisions about European integration.

Crisis-Driven Challenges:

Recent crises (Eurocrisis, migration, Brexit, COVID-19) have "repeatedly trigger[ed] polity" questions, "confronting the EU again in the pending Conference on the Future of Europe."

Critique: Karamitsios's roadmap may be overtaken by events. Crises tend to produce intergovernmental rather than federal responses, as member states reassert national sovereignty.

IV. THE DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENTIATION CRITIQUE

Karamitsios's Position:

Proposes uniform federal structure with equal rights and obligations for all member states that join the Federation.

Academic Critique:

The Differentiated Integration Reality:

Fossum and Jachtenfuchs note that EU studies increasingly focus on "within-EU (between member states, issues, policies, and over time)" comparisons, recognizing that integration is highly differentiated.

Key concern: The EU already operates with multiple speeds and opt-outs (Eurozone, Schengen, etc.). Karamitsios's uniform federal model may be less realistic than accepting permanent differentiation.

The Diversity Challenge:

Sonnicksen emphasizes that "varying, and in parts conflicting, definitions and preferences abound with regard to what the EU is and should be."

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Critique: A federation requires sufficient homogeneity of political culture and preferences. The EU's 27 member states have vastly different:

- Economic development levels
- Political traditions (presidential vs. parliamentary, majoritarian vs. consensus)
- Legal systems (common law vs. civil law)
- Languages and cultures
- Attitudes toward sovereignty and integration

Historical precedent: Successful federations (US, Switzerland, Germany) formed among more culturally and economically similar units than today's EU member states.

V. THE SOVEREIGNTY AND EXIT CRITIQUE

Karamitsios's Position:

Acknowledges right of member states to exit the Federation but proposes strong federal government with exclusive competences.

Academic Critique:

The Voluntary Association Problem:

Unlike traditional federations where secession is typically prohibited (US Civil War established this principle), the EU is explicitly a voluntary association. Article 50 TEU codifies the right to withdraw.

Key tension: Karamitsios's federation would need to be strong enough to be effective but weak enough that states voluntarily join and remain. This may be an impossible balance.

The Sovereignty Paradox:

Kelemen (2003) discusses the tension between federalism and democratization: "There is an inherent tension between federalism and democracy. From the perspective of the constituent states that make up a federation, federalism..."

Critique: Member states view sovereignty as democratically granted by their citizens. Transferring sovereignty to a federal level may be seen as undemocratic unless there is a genuine European demos—which most scholars argue does not exist.

VI. COMPARATIVE FEDERALISM INSIGHTS

What Comparative Research Reveals:

Conditions for Successful Federations:

Sonnicksen's comparative framework identifies that successful federal democracies require:

1. Clear division of competences between levels
2. Effective horizontal separation of powers at federal level
3. Democratic accountability at both levels
4. **Institutional mechanisms** for resolving conflicts between levels
5. **Sufficient homogeneity** to sustain common identity

Application to Karamitsios's Proposal:

✓ **Strength:** His proposal addresses #1, #2, and #4 with detailed institutional design

✗ **Weakness:** #3 and #5 remain deeply problematic in EU context

The "Federal but Not a State" Problem:

Fossum and Jachtenfuchs emphasize that "the EU has federal features but is not a state," creating unique challenges. They identify three categories of federal-type comparisons in EU studies:

- a) Across systems (EU vs. US, Germany, etc.)
- b) Within-EU (between member states, over time)
- c) Implicit comparisons

Critique of Karamitsios: His proposal relies heavily on (a)—comparing EU to existing federations—but may not adequately account for the EU's unique nature as a non-state federal system.

VII. SYNTHESIS: CORE TENSIONS

1. Democracy vs. Effectiveness

The Trade-off:

- More democracy (referenda, parliamentary control) → slower decision-making
- More effectiveness (federal executive power) → less democratic accountability

Karamitsios's approach: Tries to maximize both **Academic skepticism:** May be impossible to achieve both simultaneously at EU scale

2. Uniformity vs. Diversity

The Trade-off:

- Uniform federal rules → treats diverse situations identically
- Differentiated integration → undermines federal unity

Karamitsios's approach: Uniform federation with equal obligations **Academic skepticism:** Ignores reality of EU diversity and differentiated integration

3. Supranationalism vs. Sovereignty

The Trade-off:

- Strong federal government → effective but threatens national sovereignty
- Weak federal government → preserves sovereignty but ineffective

Karamitsios's approach: Strong federal government with clear competences **Academic skepticism:** Member states unlikely to accept genuine sovereignty transfer

4. Idealism vs. Realism

The Trade-off:

- Idealist vision → inspiring but impractical

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- Realist incrementalism → achievable but uninspiring

Karamitsios's approach: Comprehensive federal vision **Academic skepticism:** Ignores political constraints and path dependencies

VIII. SPECIFIC SCHOLARLY CONCERNS

A. The "No Demos" Thesis

Argument: Federation requires a demos (political community) that identifies as "we the people." The EU lacks this.

Evidence from sources:

- Sonnicksen notes "contested polity" with no consensus on EU identity
- Fossum and Jachtenfuchs emphasize "ambivalent polity"

Implication for Karamitsios: Direct election of President and Parliament may not create democratic legitimacy without underlying sense of European peoplehood.

B. The Path Dependency Problem

Argument: EU integration has followed an incremental, intergovernmental path. Radical constitutional change is unlikely.

Evidence from sources:

- Moravcsik shows integration driven by state interests, not federal vision ,
- Institutional structures constrain future options

Implication for Karamitsios: His "clean slate" constitutional approach ignores 70 years of accumulated institutions, treaties, and practices.

C. The Accountability Problem

Argument: Federal systems create complex accountability chains that confuse citizens.

Evidence from sources:

- Sonnicksen: "competence confusion" in multi-level systems
- Fossum and Jachtenfuchs: representation is "inherently complex" in federal systems

Implication for Karamitsios: His detailed competence catalogue may not prevent accountability problems in practice.

IX. METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

Karamitsios's Approach:

Normative constitutional design based on federal principles and comparative analysis of existing federations.

Academic Critique:

Insufficient Attention to Political Economy:

Moravcsik's approach emphasizes that integration reflects economic interests, not constitutional ideals. Karamitsios's proposal lacks analysis of:

- Which economic actors would support/oppose federation
- How economic integration creates demand for political integration
- Whether economic interests align with federal structure ,

Insufficient Attention to Power Politics:

Intergovernmentalist scholars emphasize that member states jealously guard sovereignty. Karamitsios's proposal lacks analysis of:

- Why powerful states (Germany, France) would accept constraints
- How to overcome veto players
- What incentives would drive ratification ,

Insufficient Attention to Public Opinion:

Sonnicksen notes that crises "repeatedly trigger polity" questions and citizen concerns. Karamitsios's proposal lacks:

- Analysis of public attitudes toward federalism
- Strategy for building popular support
- Response to Euroskepticism

X. COUNTER-ARGUMENTS: POTENTIAL DEFENSES OF KARAMITSIOS

1. The Crisis Imperative

Defense: Current EU structure has proven inadequate in multiple crises (Eurozone, migration, COVID-19). Federal reform is necessary, not just desirable.

Academic support: Sonnicksen notes that "recent and current crises have only intensified political challenges to the EU"

Counter-critique: But crises have historically strengthened intergovernmentalism, not federalism.

2. The Democratic Argument

Defense: Current EU suffers from democratic deficit. Federal structure with directly elected institutions would be MORE democratic than status quo.

Academic support: Fossum and Jachtenfuchs acknowledge that "representation" is a key concern in EU governance

Counter-critique: But federal complexity may worsen rather than improve democratic accountability.

3. The Long-Term Vision

Defense: Karamitsios provides a normative ideal to guide incremental reform, not a blueprint for immediate implementation.

Academic support: Fossum and Jachtenfuchs note value of "thinking about the EU in federal terms"

Counter-critique: But gap between ideal and reality may be unbridgeable.

CONCLUSION: THE ACADEMIC CONSENSUS

Key Points of Agreement Among Scholars:

1. **The EU has federal characteristics** but is not a traditional federation ,
2. Democracy and federalism create tensions that are difficult to resolve ,
3. **Member states remain central actors** and are unlikely to accept radical sovereignty transfers , ,
4. **The EU is a "contested polity"** with no consensus on its nature or future ,
5. **Comparative federalism provides insights** but EU's uniqueness limits applicability of traditional federal models ,

Implications for Karamitsios's Proposal:

Strengths Acknowledged by Scholars:

- Addresses real governance problems
- Provides institutional clarity
- Draws on established federal principles
- Attempts to resolve democratic deficit

Weaknesses Identified by Scholars:

- Underestimates political obstacles
- Assumes European demos that doesn't exist
- Ignores path dependency and institutional constraints
- Applies traditional federal models to unique entity
- Lacks strategy for overcoming member state resistance

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Overview EU reform initiatives

The discussion surrounding reform proposals in the European Union (EU) often revolves around three key frameworks: **federalism, intergovernmentalism, and differentiated integration**. Each of these frameworks offers unique insights into how the EU can evolve to address contemporary challenges.

Federalism in the EU context generally refers to the idea of transferring significant powers from national governments to a central EU authority. This framework promotes a stronger and more cohesive European polity, emphasizing shared sovereignty and collective decision-making. Proponents argue that a federalist approach could enhance the EU's democratic legitimacy and ability to tackle cross-border challenges more effectively, such as climate change and migration policies. The implications of federalism in the EU are significant as they can reshape the relationship between member states and the EU institutions, creating a system where citizens feel more directly represented at the European level.

In contrast, **intergovernmentalism** emphasizes the role of individual member states as primary actors in the decision-making process of the EU. According to this view, member states negotiate agreements based on their national interests, which can lead to policies that reflect a patchwork of priorities rather than a unified approach. Intergovernmentalists argue that this framework allows for greater sovereignty and flexibility for member states but can also result in a fragmented EU where effective collective action becomes more challenging.

This approach has been particularly apparent in recent crises, such as the Eurozone crisis and Brexit, where different degrees of political will among member states reveal the limits of integration and cooperation within the EU.

Differentiated integration refers to the varying levels of commitment and participation among member states in the EU integration process. This framework acknowledges that not all member states are equally willing or able to engage in deeper integration, allowing for a more flexible approach to policy-making. This could manifest in tiered memberships (for example, countries that are part of the Eurozone versus those that are not) or varying levels of participation in specific policies and initiatives. While differentiated integration can cater to the diverse needs and preferences of member states, it raises concerns about the potential for unequal treatment and democratic accountability within the EU.

Recent studies indicate that differentiated integration might serve as a pragmatic approach to reconcile the competing priorities of member states while still progressing towards greater integration, especially in policy areas requiring cooperation.

Conclusion

In summary, the debate about reform proposals in the EU reflects a complex interplay between federalism, intergovernmentalism, and differentiated integration. Each framework presents distinct advantages and challenges based on the aspirations of member states, the necessity for collective action, and the dynamics of sovereignty. Continued discussions and proposals surrounding these models will likely shape the future of the EU as it navigates an increasingly interconnected world. The reader should note that each of the proposals always contains elements

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of the opposite. Hard core confederalists emphasize and prioritize the sovereignty of the nations and would reduce the power at the EU level to a minimum, federalists reach for the opposite aiming at the creation of European superstate with its own constitution, parliament, executive and judicial bodies. The reality is that even today Europe has elements of both and any practical solution must find a balance between these two seemingly opposite but in reality, complementary approaches. The search must be driven by the goals to be reached. Any extreme approach will sow the seeds for later friction and risk of desintegration.

Proposals to a EU Federal Reform

There are several notable proposals similar to Karamitsios's vision for transforming the European Union. These proposals share common themes with Karamitsios's work: the need for genuine federal structures, democratic legitimacy, fiscal integration, and institutional reform to address existential challenges facing Europe in the 21st century. These models do not aim at safeguarding the sovereignty of the member state nations and transfer almost all competences to then federal level, not putting in question the current state of the EU.

1. The Spinelli Group - "Proposal of a Manifesto for a Federal Europe" (2022)

https://thespinelligroup.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/20220912_Proposal-Manifesto-for-a-Federal-Europe-political-social-and-ecological.pdf

The Spinelli Group, a European federalist movement within the European Parliament, has produced a comprehensive manifesto calling for a federal Europe that addresses political, social, and ecological dimensions. Named after Altiero Spinelli (author of the original 1941 Ventotene Manifesto), this group advocates for supranational democracy and moving beyond the absolute sovereignty of nation-states. Their "Project 27: Let's Reform Europe!" initiative demonstrates their commitment to reshaping the EU into a genuine federation.

2. Guy Verhofstadt - "Europe's Last Chance" (2017)

<https://www.amazon.com/Europees-Last-Chance-European-Perfect/dp/0465096859>

Former Belgian Prime Minister and MEP Guy Verhofstadt argues in his book that the EU must reform along the lines of America's federal government to create a "United States of Europe" strong enough to stand alongside global powers. Verhofstadt proposes a small, real European government controlled by two bodies, rejecting the current complex institutional structure. His earlier work "The United States of Europe: Manifesto for a New Europe" also reflects on the rejection of the European Constitution and advocates for a federal political concept.

3. Thomas Piketty et al. - "Treaty on the Democratization of the Governance of the Euro Area" (T-DEM, 2017)

<http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/files/T-DEM%20-%20Final%20english%20version%209march2017.pdf>

French economist Thomas Piketty and co-authors proposed a draft treaty to democratize Euro area governance by creating a parliamentary Assembly of the Euro area with traditional legislative functions including budget, taxation, and oversight powers. This proposal addresses the democratic deficit created by the Euro area crisis governance system built through the Treaty on Stability. Piketty's 2014 manifesto in The Guardian also called for radical financial and democratic settlement, arguing that EU institutions no longer work effectively.

4. Union of European Federalists (UEF) - "Federalist Strategy for a Federal Reform of the EU" (2025)

<https://federalists.eu/resolutions-stat/resolution-federalist-strategy-for-a-federal-reform-of-the-eu/>

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The Federal Committee of the Union of European Federalists adopted a resolution in Athens (November 2025) outlining concrete steps to make the Union fit for future enlargements and global challenges that demand a stronger, more democratic, and unified Europe. Their "Reform the Union to Unify Europe" initiative emphasizes the need for institutional reforms to prepare the EU for both expansion and increased global responsibilities.

5. "Time for a European Federation" by Yannis Karamitsios

Book

Details:

Karamitsios, Yannis. *Time for a European Federation: How Europe could remain relevant in the century of globalization, climate change and the fourth industrial revolution*. Peter Lang, 2022

Yannis Karamitsios's **Time for a European Federation** presents an ambitious and comprehensive blueprint for transforming the European Union into a fully-fledged **federal** state. The book's central argument is stark: Europe faces existential threats: **economic decline, demographic crisis, climate change, energy dependence, and a technological lag** that the current EU structure cannot adequately address. Only through complete federal transformation, Karamitsios contends, can Europe survive and remain relevant in the 21st century. As this book was published in 2022, recent history has made this book more relevant than when it was written.

Proposals along the Swiss Democracy model

While the “federalists” aim for the creation of a EU as a federal superstate, thereby accepting the current subsidiarity of competences, there is an alternative whereby the focus is on a more direct democracy with a bottom-up subsidiarity and member states keep their sovereignty and only delegate the cross-border competences to a higher federal level that they can’t handle on their own. This model is actually a hybrid, being confederal at the member state level and federal at the EU level.

These sources demonstrate that Swiss direct democracy—particularly its referendum system, citizens' initiative rights, and participatory mechanisms—is frequently cited as a concrete model for EU democratic reform, though debates continue about which elements are transferable to the supranational European context.

1. Harold James - "The Swiss Model" (Eurozine)

URL: <https://www.eurozine.com/the-swiss-model/>

Harold James advocates for scaling up small country democracy, specifically arguing that if members of the European Union are to succeed in creating a more integrated union, they should look to Switzerland's model of direct democracy and federalism. James examines how Swiss democratic practices could be adapted to the European context, suggesting that Switzerland's experience with multilingualism, cultural diversity, and citizen participation offers valuable lessons for EU institutional reform.

2. Agnieszka Nitszke - "The Swiss Model of Federalism: Some Lessons for the European Union" (2014)

URL: https://www.academia.edu/66618188/The_Swiss_model_of_federalism_Some_lessons_for_the_European_Union

This academic paper systematically examines Swiss federalism as a potential template for EU reform. Nitszke analyzes specific institutional features of the Swiss federal system—including its balance between cantonal autonomy and federal coordination, direct democratic instruments, and consensus-building mechanisms—and explores which elements could be transferred to the European Union context. The study provides concrete lessons from Switzerland's 170+ years of federal experience.

3. Thomas Cottier - "Swiss Model of European Integration" (2013)

URL: https://www.legalanthology.ch/t/cottier_swiss-model-european-integration_2013.pdf

Cottier's work examines how Swiss federalism principles could inform European integration, analyzing the relationship between Switzerland's federal structure and its approach to European cooperation. The paper discusses how Switzerland's model of federalism partly explains its unique relationship with the EU and what lessons the Swiss experience offers for EU institutional development, particularly regarding subsidiarity and multi-level governance.

4. ESI (European Stability Initiative) - "Making Federalism Work: A Radical Proposal"

https://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_48.pdf

This proposal explicitly references the Swiss model as a framework for EU reform, particularly emphasizing inter-regional alliances and cooperative federalism. The document argues that Switzerland's experience with managing diversity, linguistic pluralism, and bottom-up democracy provides concrete mechanisms that could strengthen European Union governance. It advocates for adopting Swiss-style direct democratic instruments and federal structures to make EU federalism more effective and legitimate.

5. Academic Collection - "Theory and Reform in the European Union"

<https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/34990/341405.pdf>

This comprehensive academic volume includes multiple chapters examining "How to Constitutionalise a Multi-level European Federation" with explicit references to applying Swiss federalism to the European Community. The collection analyzes Swiss federal theory and practice as a potential constitutional model for EU reform, examining both the possibilities and limitations of transferring Swiss democratic institutions to the supranational European context.

6. Bruno Kaufmann & Andreas Gross - "The European Constitution – Bringing in the People" (2004)

https://swissdemocracy.foundation/application/files/2017/0470/4361/The_European_Constitution_-_Bringing_in_the_People_2004-1.pdf

This comprehensive study examines the options and limits of direct democracy in the European integration process, explicitly drawing on Swiss democratic practices. Andreas Gross (Member of Swiss Parliament and political scientist) and Bruno Kaufmann analyze how Swiss-style direct democratic tools—including citizens' initiatives and referenda—could be incorporated into the European Constitution. The work includes detailed articles on direct democracy from the Swiss Federal Constitution as models for EU reform.

7. European Parliament Study - "Regulatory Frameworks for Citizen-Initiated Instruments of Direct Democracy" (2024)

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/757732/IPOL_STU\(2024\)757732_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/757732/IPOL_STU(2024)757732_EN.pdf)

This recent study commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs examines regulatory frameworks for direct democracy instruments, with Switzerland featured as a primary case study. The research analyzes how Swiss direct democratic mechanisms could inform improvements to EU participatory tools like the European Citizens' Initiative.

8. University of Utrecht - "European Union and Direct Democracy: A Possible Marriage?"

<https://www.uu.nl/sites/default/files/report-on-options-for-direct-democracy-in-the-eu-deliverable-8-7.pdf>

This academic report systematically explores whether direct democracy modeled on the Swiss system could be successfully implemented at the EU level. The study analyzes statistical data

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showing that Europeans who are more likely to vote in EU referenda exhibit stronger support for the European Union, suggesting that Swiss-style direct democracy could enhance EU legitimacy and citizen engagement.

9. Academic Study - "Importable or Exceptional? Swiss Direct-Democratic Institutions" (2024)

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02606755.2024.2380552>

This recent academic article examines whether Swiss direct-democratic institutions are exportable to other contexts, including the European Union. The study analyzes proposals for "grassroots democracy [Basisdemokratie] modelled on the Swiss model" and evaluates the feasibility of implementing Swiss-style direct democracy mechanisms at the EU level, considering both the potential benefits and structural challenges.

10. SwissInfo - "The Run on Direct Democracy" (International Interest in Swiss Model)

<https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/democracy/the-run-on-direct-democracy/33536622>

Political scientist Uwe Serdült notes that "It's not just our EU neighbours who are interested in the Swiss model of democracy," highlighting widespread international interest in adapting Swiss direct democratic practices. The article discusses how the European Union was the first to introduce direct democratic tools at a transnational level in 2012, inspired partly by the Swiss model, though implementation remains limited compared to Switzerland's comprehensive system.

11. European Parliament Document - "Consulting the People: Constitutional Affairs"

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/181150/20090316ATT51991EN.pdf>

This European Parliament document references the Kaufmann/Gross work "Bringing in the People" on the options and limits of direct democracy in European integration, explicitly drawing on Swiss democratic practices as a model for enhancing citizen participation in EU constitutional development and decision-making processes.