Preface

This edited collection focuses on the possibilities, initiatives, and challenges for democratic empowerment in the European Union, extending the political rights of European citizens and their representation and participation in policy making. Departing from academic and political discussions on the European Union's supposed 'democratic deficit', debated extensively in the literature since the early 2000s, the book discusses how the European Union enhances or may enhance further processes of democratization and empowerment of EU citizens, and what are the barriers that lie in the way.

The discussions in this book touch upon three major themes. First, the emergence of new forms of democracy in the EU, at the national, regional and supra-national level, as well as the emergence of a post-national conception of citizenship and its realization in democratic empowerment initiatives. Second, the book discusses the effects of neoliberalism and capitalist markets on citizens' political rights and participating in policy-making processes, and the constraints they may impose on democratic empowerment. Third, the effects of European integration on the political rights of EU citizens are discussed.

More specifically, the chapters in this book examine possible opportunities for democratic empowerment of EU citizens, such as options for direct democracy in the EU in the form of European Citizens Initiative (ECI), the influence of the institution of the European Ombudsman, the involvement of national parliaments in EU decision making, the use of litigation as a form of regulation and different traditions of education of civic culture in the EU. The discussion of avenues and opportunities for democratic empowerment is complemented by an examination of challenges and barriers in the form of political inequality and low voter turnout in European Parliament elections, constraints posed by financial markets and technocratic decision making on political choice in the EU and the financialization of EU citizenship, the restrictions and limitations of EU competition law, and the insufficiency of democratic empowerment initiatives in securing the continued integration and flourishing of the EU.

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