Ioannis D. Stefanidis
School of Law, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

ANTIDOTE TO CIVIL WAR?

'SMALL STATES' AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY IN WORLD WAR II EUROPE

Abstract

This paper seeks to reopen the question of legitimacy, and in particular democratic legitimacy, as an important factor affecting the course of European 'small states' involved in World War II. It draws attention to previously neglected or understudied but crucial aspects of wartime legitimacy, eminently the role of recognition by foreign powers, the rhetoric of the 'Big Three' Allies regarding post-war Europe, and the relevance of democratic legitimacy as a powerful antidote to civil conflict during the period of transition into peacetime.

I. What kind of states?

Even before the Second World War broke out, Europe was proving a very dangerous place for 'small states' or 'minor powers', i.e. states weaker than those conventionally recognized at the time as 'great powers' – i.e. Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Soviet Union and the United States. At least two definitions seem relevant in this respect. The first is premised on quantifiable parameters, including size, population, resources, armed forces, while the second focuses on their ability to withstand financial/political pressure and/or defend themselves with any chance of success against any 'great power'. The first definition attempts to reflect fairly objective criteria, while the second implies the test of a crisis

situation. There is also a third, 'systemic' approach, which stresses the ability of a state to influence the form and operation of the state system.[1]

Given the absence of a universally accepted definition,[2] this study adopts a combination of the second and third views. It regards the interwar states system as consisting of great powers and the rest, the former defined by their generally presumed ability to fight a major war, if need be, against any other great power. In comparison, smaller states – some of them, e.g. Poland, rather large by certain standards – were generally considered unable to stand their own unaided against a great power. This was the case with the majority of European states during the late 1930s, when the hopes of collective security placed upon the League of Nations had proved illusory and regional pacts were fast becoming meaningless. Nazi Germany and fascist Italy were following a revisionist foreign policy bent on destroying the Paris Peace Settlement of 1919 and expanding at the expense of lesser neighbouring powers. The German annexation of Austria and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, the Italian invasion of Albania and the involvement of both totalitarian states[3] in the Spanish Civil War, in addition to their brutal domestic record of repression, manifested their disrespect for the rule of law at home and abroad. Their disdain for democratic government, in particular, was shared by the third totalitarian great power, which was lurking in the background. Under Stalin, the world's only socialist state was preparing itself to take advantage of the 'inevitable' clash between the capitalist powers in order to promote its own concept of security through 'revolutionary' expansion beyond the borders of the Soviet Union.

War came when the two remaining democratic great powers, Britain and France, refused to acquiesce to yet another manifestation of Nazi expansionism. Their reaction did little to help Poland which Germany quickly overpowered in partnership with the Soviet Union. During the following twenty months, a string of smaller European states, all of which had originally opted for neutrality, were invaded and subjugated or were pressed into more or less complete alignment with Berlin, Rome or Moscow. This element of external coercion was the apparent common feature of the condition in which 'small states'

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[1] Matthias Maass, *Small States in World Politics: The Story of Small State Survival, 1648–2016* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2017), 18-32.

[2] For a discussion of various approaches to the phenomenon from the perspective of International Relations, see: Matthias Maass, 'The Elusive Definition of the Small State', *International Politics*, 46.1 (2009): 65-83. In p. 70, he observes that, although small states are generally accepted as 'a distinct category of states', a consensus definition 'remains elusive'. The need to approach 'smallness' as a 'comparative and not an absolute idea' is stressed in: 'Introduction,' in *Small Nations: Crisis and Confrontation in the 20th Century*, edited by Madelon de Keizer and Ismee Tames (NIOD Amsterdam and Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2008).

[3] The author uses the term 'totalitarian' as pertaining to political systems which, in addition to penalizing opposition and suppressing political liberties, sought to control and reshape society according to their particular worldview. This definition he considers applicable to Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and the Soviet Union.

found themselves during World War II. Otherwise, their experience of war and occupation or collaboration varied widely as did their transition into the post-war era.

The very different experience of the European states – victims of aggression during World War II and its aftermath is apparently due to various factors, both external and domestic. Among the former, the impact of the policies of foreign powers, conquering or liberating, can hardly be exaggerated. With regard to domestic factors, those affecting the cohesion of a society and its ability to withstand the rigours of war and/or occupation apparently stand out. In his attempt to explain the very different impact of German conquest across Europe, Polish historian Wacław Długoborski has identified the following variables: first, the stability of pre-war social structures; secondly, the 'endurance' of different types of society and their ability to preserve their distinct identities under occupation; thirdly, the '**social legitimacy of pre-war domestic institutions**', especially in comparison with those imposed by the occupier; and fourthly, the relative importance of social or ethnic groups which fell victim to policies of dislocation or extermination implemented by the occupying power(s).[4] In other words, the disintegration of a country's social cohesion, the fragmentation of its national identity and the incapacity of its institutions to resume their pre-war authority, i.e. their loss of legitimacy, rendered its post-war restoration an all but impossible task.

This paper aims to test the assumption that, in comparison with the authoritarian alternatives prevalent in interwar Europe, a democratic tradition and culture provided a more enduring basis for **political legitimacy** of national authority during the critical war years; and that this element of legitimacy, external and, especially, internal, not only helped a state and its people to withstand wartime travails but also, significantly, facilitated a relatively smooth restoration of national institutions while minimising the risk of civil war in the wake of liberation or capitulation.

II. What kind of legitimacy?

Ever since Max Weber offered his definition and typology of legitimacy in a famous lecture in Munich, a century ago,[5] the concept remains much debated among political scientists.[6] Weber identified three 'internal' or 'inner justifications' of legitimate rule, all related to

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[4]   Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8-9.

[5]   Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation,' in *Max Weber: The Vocation Lectures*, edited by David Owen and Tracy B. Strong (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2004), 32 ff. Cf. Sheldon S. Wolin, 'Max Weber: Legitimation, Method, and the Politics of Theory,' in *Legitimacy and the State*, edited by William Connolly (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 75.

[6]   Weber used the term *Herrschaft* which can be translated as 'domination' in the sense of 'established

different value systems, which, in the eyes of its subjects/citizens, entitle an authority to exercise power: tradition, charisma and legality. Weber did not consider democracy integral to any of these types of legitimacy. In his view, a 'legal' authority or 'servant of the state' can equally be appointed or elected, provided his/her rule rests on rational rules.[7] Moreover, he apparently considered democratic politics compatible with both 'charismatic' and 'legal' forms of legitimacy. As Jürgen Habermas has observed, in Weber's analysis the 'pluralism of competing' sources of legitimacy is 'rationally irresolvable'. 'Our highest values', he pointed out, are 'a matter of faith'.[8]

Still, Weber did not miss the advantages of democracy, especially the consent-generating potential of its decision-making process and the safeguards of accountability built in the parliamentary system of government, which positively distinguished it from the authoritarian versions of 'legal' rule, e.g. the 'bureaucratic absolutism' of his native imperial Germany.[9] A further advantage lies in the capacity of liberal democracy to prevent crises of succession through free and fair elections, an option which is not available to other political systems. At the same time, Weber was aware of the 'potentially dictatorial element of mass appeal' present in democratic politics,[10] an element which would become evident in the rise of totalitarian movements *via* formally democratic procedures in Italy and Germany, after Weber's lifetime.

An epistemological clarification of the concept of legitimacy in historical perspective would require a project of a different order. This paper focuses on its importance as a factor of political development in wartime Europe. Therefore, it entails the study of different cases on the basis of available secondary sources which, it is proposed, are open to reinterpretation. A point of departure is offered by two important collective works, both edited by historians Martin Conway and Peter Romijn. These deal with the issue of legitimacy in various European states on the eve of, during and in the immediate aftermath of World War II.[11]

In addition to being a period of escalating uncertainty and insecurity in relations among states, the 1930s witnessed painful setbacks for liberal democracy across much of

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authority that allocates the right to command and the duty to obey': Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (London: Methuen, 1966), 290-291.

[7] Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation', 34. An interpretation of these concepts see in Bendix, *Max Weber*, 294-297.

[8] Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 100.

[9] Bendix, *Max Weber*, 454-455.

[10] Ibid., 455-457.

[11] *Contemporary European History*, special issue: *Political Legitimacy in Mid-Twentieth Century Europe*, 13.4 (2004); and Peter Romijn and Ben Frommer, 'Legitimacy in Inter-War Europe,' in *The War for Legitimacy in Politics and Culture 1936-1946* , edited by Martin Conway and Peter Romijn (Oxford: Berg, 2008). It should be noted that neither work covers the states of Southeast and Eastern Europe.

Europe. As has been noted, the three totalitarian great powers aspired to dominate the international scene in both territorial and ideological terms. Yet the radical forces of fascism, national socialism and communism, unleashed by the unprecedented catastrophe of the Great War and fuelled by the great economic world crisis and depression, were not the only enemies of democracy. Anti-democratic ideologies with roots to Europe's dynastic and religious *Ancien Régime* were equally prepared to challenge the legitimacy of elected governments in the name of pre-Enlightenment value systems; and if the totalitarian movements owed much to the charismatic leadership provided by figures such as Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler, the authoritarian regimes which imposed themselves upon several smaller European countries exalted 'tradition'.

In the process, the rather conservative alternatives to democracy adopted certain vestiges and techniques of their radical counterparts in Russia, Italy and Germany, especially the use of propaganda which was proving effective as a means of 'organizing' consent.[12] All of them used the, real or perceived, threat which communism represented for the 'bourgeois' social order and capitalist economy as a pretext for terminating democratic politics which the Soviet experiment also rejected. Of course, they had benefited from the apparent failure of their parliamentary predecessors to achieve the degree of consensus required for meeting the multiple challenges generated by conflicting nationalisms, economic woes and the rise of radical alternatives to themselves. This, however, should not conceal the fact that a number of democracies, especially in north-western Europe, survived the test with certain 'adjustments' in favour of executive power.[13] There, the existence of a strongly democratic political culture meant that a non-democratic model of government would only be imposed as a result of coercion from without.[14]

When war came, the nature of a country's domestic regime did not predicate its **foreign orientation**. For most governments of European small states, both democratic and authoritarian, neutrality was the most popular option and they tried to stick to it for as long as possible. Yet, in conditions of total war, this option proved untenable in most cases.[15] By spring 1941, the remaining democracies had been engulfed in Hitler's war with only three exceptions.[16] This was also the fate of authoritarian regimes, again with three excep-

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[12]   The term 'consent' is used throughout the text as denoting a minimum level of agreement with decisions taken by a delegated authority, elected or otherwise. It is distinguished from 'consensus' in the sense of a high level of agreement with a decision collectively reached.

[13]   This could entail not only greater state intervention in the economy, but also bans on labour action and 'extremist' political activity.

[14]   For a thorough discussion of the crisis of legitimacy facing liberal democracies in Europe during the 1930s, see Romijn and Frommer, 'Legitimacy in Inter-War Europe', 29-65.

[15]   Efraim Karsh, *Neutrality and Small States: The European Experience in World War II and Beyond* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 4, and, specifically on Finland and Norway, 85-89 and 101-106 respectively.

[16]   Ireland, Sweden, and Switzerland.

tions,[17] one of which, Spain, was still reeling from the ravages of its devastating civil war. Eventually, two in every three continental states succumbed to the aggression of Europe's three totalitarian great powers. Only one (Finland) managed to maintain its independence throughout the war, while the rest experienced mostly complete or, in fewer cases, partial enemy occupation.

This grim reality triggered a variety of institutional responses. Governments-in-exile were formed and recognized by the Allies as representing the occupied states (with the exception of Albania, Austria, and the three Baltic States, the Soviet annexation of which the United States and Britain refused to recognize). In most cases, the Axis powers formally upheld the Fourth Hague Convention of 1907 respecting the laws and customs of war on land, which rested on the principle that occupation did not entail the transfer of sovereignty from the 'legitimate power' to the 'occupant', at least until a peace treaty ruled otherwise.[18] With the exception of Bohemia-Moravia and Poland, *de facto* indigenous civilian authorities were formed as part of the new occupation regime. In Yugoslavia, as had been the case with the Slovak secession from a defunct Czechoslovakia, the occupying powers dismembered the defeated state and recognized a secessionist entity, Croatia. Only one defeated country, Denmark, managed to preserve its state institutions unchanged for much of the war, albeit under German tutelage.

These turned out to be temporary arrangements which owed more to expediency than to planning for a new post-war order. Eventually, the defeat of the Axis powers in Europe was followed by a variety of political outcomes. Not all formerly occupied countries were reconstituted as sovereign and integral states. Some emerged independent but territorially truncated, and the three Baltic States were reabsorbed into the Soviet Union.

Although the return to peacetime conditions in Europe was nowhere uneventful, only in a minority of cases liberation (or capitulation) was preceded and/or followed by **civil strife**, with or without foreign intervention. It is argued that, however crucial the policies of foreign powers have been, the transition process owed much to circumstances prevailing in each state and extending back to its pre-war regime. It is also submitted that, among these circumstances, the existence of a domestic authority with broad recognition of its right to rule was important, if not critical, in making the difference between a peaceful and a crisis-ridden transition. A valid claim to **legitimacy** significantly facilitated a government's task to reclaim the monopoly of violence throughout the national territory, inspire loyalty among the majority of the population, secure foreign recognition and deter domestic rivals. Even in cases where 'liberation' meant the advent and more or less temporary

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[17]   Portugal, Spain, and Turkey.

[18]   See Articles 43, 48 and 55 of the Fourth Hague Convention, which seek to salvage the legal and administrative continuity of a state under enemy occupation: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague04. asp#art43. See also Gerhard von Glahn, *The Occupation of Enemy Territory: A Commentary on the Law and Practice of Belligerent Occupation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), 27-37.

presence of foreign armies, the existence of a legitimate authority could have far-reaching effects not only for the character of transition from war to peace, but also for the political future of a given state. In simple terms, legitimacy facilitated restoration, while delegitimation produced revolution; and it was *democratic* legitimacy that, as World War II drew to its end, appeared to guarantee a rather peaceful restoration.

Stressing the historically conditioned nature of legitimacy,[19] Conway and Romijn identify three broad types of countries in transition from war to peace. At the one end of the spectrum, where Scandinavia predominates, they place states with a strong legitimacy background. A clear case in point is Denmark, a country with an exceptional record of political stability and social cohesion during the inter-war years, where national institutions remained operative even after the initially indirect German control turned into outright occupation. Such **continuity** is considered a potent safeguard (or deterrent) against the emergence of alternative poles of legitimacy.[20] At the opposite end of weak legitimacy, one finds what these authors define as 'civil war states', e.g. Hungary, Italy and, of course, Greece and Yugoslavia. There, it is argued, the absence of a commonly accepted notion 'of what constituted political legitimacy' led to extreme polarization. This in turn facilitated the rise of 'alternative pretenders to power' who pursued 'a strategy of revolutionary legitimation'. Finally, countries such as Belgium, France and Poland are located in an intermediate space, where political legitimacy was fragmented among different agents, 'each of which sought to build upon different forms of legitimacy'.[21]

At this point, it is necessary to distinguish between internal and external legitimacy, and to attempt a definition of these concepts in the specific context of World War II. It is rather easier to define **external legitimacy** as recognition accorded to a government by third countries. This in principle secures its acceptance as the incarnation of a state's continuity at the international level. It is all the more important wherever foreign military intervention is indispensable for restoring national sovereignty to states-victims of aggression.

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[19]   Martin Conway and Peter Romijn, 'Introduction,' in *Contemporary European History*, special issue, 13.4 (2004), 383; Conway and Romijn, 'Political Legitimacy in Mid-Twentieth Century Europe,' in Conway and Romijn eds., *The War for Legitimacy*, 3-4, 9-10.

[20]   For a succinct account of the Danish experience during World War II, see Niels Wium Olesen, 'The Obsession with Sovereignty: Cohabitation and Resistance in Denmark 1940-45', in John Gilmour and Jill Stephenson, eds., *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 45-72.

[21]   Conway and Romijn, 'Introduction', 387; id., 'Political Legitimacy', 15-16; Mark Pittaway and Hans-Fredrik Dahl, 'Legitimacy and the Making of the Post-War Order', in Conway and Romijn eds. *The War for Legitimacy*, 179-185. This typology does not include the vast, western parts of the Soviet Union occupied after June 1941. There, it has been pointed out, 'legitimacy lost relevance', as the Germans did not care to replace Soviet authority with a local, collaborationist regime, and, one might add, none of the western Allies was prepared to recognize an émigré alternative: Pieter Romijn, Martin Conway and Denis Peschanski, 'National Legitimacy – Ownership, Pretenders and Wars', in Conway and Romijn eds. *The War for Legitimacy*, 84. Exceptional in this respect were the three Baltic States, which retained western recognition for some time, but to no practical effect until after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

External recognition is facilitated if the government in question controls at least part of national territory or, in case of complete enemy occupation, it can claim a title of continuity or succession in relation to the last national government before the loss of territorial sovereignty. Of course, in the case of a government-in-exile, it matters a great deal if its aims are in harmony with those of the foreign powers which recognize it.[22] Otherwise, as the cases of Yugoslavia and Poland prove, such recognition may be rendered meaningless to the extent that one or more of these powers abet a pole of authority operating beyond the control of the government-in-exile.

Internal legitimacy is a trickier issue, since it is not so easy to gauge. Various indices have been proposed for 'measuring' legitimacy, such as a regime's 'practice of power, the evidence of consent', and the compatibility of its actions with the prevailing political culture.[23] While noting that the variety of political systems and cultures in pre-war Europe renders a general interpretation problematic, Conway and Romijn stress the importance of **political culture** as a factor of **continuity**, which reinforces legitimacy, in so far as it provides recognizable and durable 'frames of reference' to which the exercise of political power must conform in order to be acceptable to the ruled.[24] As these authors rightly observe, even the most arbitrary, authoritarian form of government is 'embedded' in a political culture 'from which the state derive[s] its authority but which also constrain[s] it'.[25] Conway and Romijn are careful to stress the variety of political cultures across pre-war Europe and their inherent 'fuzziness' – what they describe as the 'murky textures of socially rooted norms and assumptions in which the traditional and the modern, the democratic and the anti-democratic, and the secular and the religious were intertwined'.[26]

At this point, one might consider whether it is possible and useful to try and identify prevailing trends, e.g. towards liberal democracy or otherwise. Conway and Romijn warn against the assumption that the values of today's liberal democratic polities enjoyed more widespread acceptance than alternative – authoritarian – models of government, which claimed legitimacy on the basis of *Volkisch*, nationalist or class ideologies.[27] In their view,

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[22]   In connection with the governments-in-exile formed in the aftermath of Germany's stunning victories in 1939-41, it has been remarked that their recognition and reception in London owed less to their ability to command allegiance at home or continue the war and more to the anxiety of the British to legitimize their own war effort as part of an 'Allied front': Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 27-28.

[23]   Conway and Romijn, 'Political Legitimacy', 10, 13; Romijn and Frommer, 'Legitimacy in Inter-War Europe', 46, 57.

[24]   Conway and Romijn, 'Political Legitimacy', 2-5.

[25]   Ibid., 6. Here, **political culture** is understood as a constructed set of core values, beliefs, attitudes and practices, which, despite a degree of 'fuzziness', are shared by a decisive majority of citizens and, as such, define the limits within which legitimate authority can be exercised.

[26]   Conway and Romijn, 'Introduction', 383; id., 'Political Legitimacy', 11.

[27]   Conway and Romijn, 'Introduction', 384; id., 'Political Legitimacy', 13. 'Democracy', these authors argue, 'in its various contested definitions, was not a hegemonic principle in European political culture', before

only in 'some fortunate territories', such as Scandinavia, legitimacy became predicated on 'constitutional rule, democratic accountability and respect for legality'.[28] Elsewhere, in the absence of free and fair elections, consent or, rather, acquiescence could be extracted through the restoration of traditional modes of authority or charismatic leadership, with the aid of modern devices, especially mass propaganda and pseudo-representation in the form of rigged plebiscites and single-ticket 'elections'. Yet, given the fact that authoritarian rule is inherently arbitrary and ultimately rests on coercion, there arises a legitimate question whether such methods can ultimately displace democratic politics with their potential for building consent and securing the peaceful alternation of power in complex 20th century societies.

The indeterminacy of European political cultures before World War II, especially the relative importance of democracy and the rule of law among their values, needs to be substantiated, by taking into account the experiences of both the states which maintained their representative pluralist system during the pre-war crisis and those which resorted to more or less authoritarian methods. However, as much as they emphasize variety and fuzziness, Conway and Romijn identify important common elements. Among these, a politically 'neutral' one is what they call the 'culture of bureaucratic uniformity' which is typical of the modern nation state and stresses 'due process, predictability, legality and equity' – with the emphasis on **legality**.[29] Legality of authority, it is argued, was an important value across Europe as was the demand for other core elements of legitimacy: national liberty, just and good government, relative prosperity and respect for 'the will of the people', expressed through some form of participatory politics.

In practice, these values could be interpreted in ways quite remote from the tenets of popular sovereignty.[30] However, when discussing the scope and effectiveness of **the democratic principle** as a legitimizing factor even before World War II, one needs to consider the ultimate **failure of authoritarian regimes** to translate their tactics of legitimacy-building

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and during World War II. This view overlooks the public rhetoric of the great powers of the anti-Axis coalition. It also does not take into account cases such as Czechoslovakia or Greece. The latter's long tradition of parliamentary rule (1844-1936) experienced only brief interruptions (1922-1923, 1925-1926).

[28] Conway and Romijn, 'Political Legitimacy', 7-8; Romijn and Frommer, 'Legitimacy in Inter-War Europe', 35, 43, 53-54, 60.

[29] Following the Weberian analysis of legitimacy, Romijn and Frommer observe that the principle of legality binds 'both rulers and ruled to proper procedures of political decision-making'. This entails respect for the 'rules of the game', guarantees predictability and provides the security necessary for much social and economic activity. See id., 'Legitimacy in Inter-War Europe', 38-39.

[30] For instance, the authors observe different sources of legality which, to some extent, could co-exist 'like the accretions of successive geological periods': succession, election, anointment and performance: Conway and Romijn, 'Political Legitimacy', 10-13; similarly, Romijn and Frommer, 'Legitimacy in Inter-War Europe', 37; Romijn, Conway and Peschanski, 'National Legitimacy', 69-73.

into 'constitutional reality' – or even legality. Despite their carefully orchestrated rituals of popular participation and their known capacity for Orwellian 'Newspeak', especially the distortion and (mis)appropriation of the semantic toolkit of liberal democracy, these regimes generally failed to shape durable popular perceptions of legitimacy which could survive total defeat in war or, as in the case of the Soviet empire, implosion and disintegration. In the long run, 'authoritarian visions' of a community based on race or class and predicated on a high degree of coercion could not compete with the essential attachment to the sovereign nation, its culture and its representative/participatory institutions.[31]

III. Sampling 'small states' experience during World War II

As already noted, in order to substantiate the thesis that the kind of political legitimacy was crucially related to a small state's experience and exit from World War II, a detailed empirical research and country-by-country comparisons would be required. Moreover, the number of explanatory variables may increase in proportion to the accretion of historical evidence. This preliminary approach offers tracers only, which, in addition to affirming variety, draw attention to legitimacy as an important variable affecting the wartime record and post-war transition to peace of European small states. As a first step, it sketches up five individual cases.[32] The main parameters of this overview are listed in Table 1, while Table 2 depicts a classification of European small states on the basis of two intersecting axes of correlation, the horizontal one denoting types of legitimacy, the vertical introducing three indicators: foreign orientation and two key outcomes of the war period, i.e. the cost of war and/or occupation and the sort of exit from war and the transition to peace.

Following the defeat and dismemberment of Poland, the next country to be sucked into the vortex of war was Finland. The secret protocols appended to the Nazi-Soviet Pact consigned it to the Soviet sphere of influence. Moscow initially tried to negotiate its territorial and other claims, which would have rendered Finland a vassal state. When, in late

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[31] Conway and Romijn, 'Political Legitimacy', 13-14; Mary Vincent and Erica Carter, 'Culture and Legitimacy', in Conway and Romijn eds. *The War for Legitimacy*, 165. Romijn and Frommer also acknowledge political participation as a 'dominant concept' in their discussion of inter-war legitimacy in Europe: id., 'Legitimacy in Inter-War Europe', 41.

[32] A general overview of the wartime experience of Europe's peoples and states is provided in: Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008). The Scandinavian countries are treated in: Gilmour and Stephenson, eds., *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*. On Finland, in particular, see: Olli Vehviläinen, *Finland in the Second World War: between Germany and Russia* (London-New York: Palgrave, 2002). Belgium is the subject of Martin Conway's monograph: *The Sorrows of Belgium: Liberation and Political Reconstruction, 1944–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For solid introductions to Bulgaria and Greece during the period under study, see the relevant chapters in: Richard J. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria*, and Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, both by Cambridge University Press (2nd edition, 2012, and 3rd edition, 2013, respectively).

November 1939, the latter's government rejected certain of these demands, the Red Army attacked. During the ensuing 'Winter War', the Finns put up stiff resistance and repelled the invader. With minimal help from the Western powers and foreign, mainly Swedish, volunteers, Finnish defence exploited the arctic conditions of the terrain in order to offset the material superiority of the aggressor. However, by March 1940, the Finnish leadership was forced to realize that, come spring, the sheer numbers of the Red Army would prove decisive. Helsinki capitulated and conceded territory and bases to Moscow. On 26 June 1941, Finland re-entered the war as 'co-belligerent' but not allied to the Axis powers invading the Soviet Union. The aim was to retake lost territory and, subsequently, to expand into Eastern Karelia. The Finns were able to resist German demands for more active participation in operations after they had achieved their objectives. The so-called 'Continuation War' lapsed into stalemate before, in September 1944, the Finns finally sued for peace while still in control of much of their pre-war territory.

Finland was the only functional democracy to fight alongside Nazi Germany before being forced to switch sides, as a result of its armistice with the Soviet Union. Throughout the war, multi-party governments, excluding the extreme nationalists and the communists, managed to retain a high degree of domestic consensus over their slaloming between the Axis and its opponents. Fears that the bitter precedent of the 1918 civil conflict might be repeated did not materialize. The high command of the armed forces also served as a factor of cohesion. The post was entrusted to field-marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, who had defeated the Finnish 'Reds' in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution. Mannerheim had refused to head a dictatorship when the opportunity arose in the turbulent 1930s, advised a compromise with the Soviets before the Winter War and was instrumental in limiting the Finns' part in Hitler's war and in the timely decisions to stop the fighting both in 1940 and 1944. Despite its defeats, Finland avoided enemy occupation in all but a fraction of its national territory and, given its four long years of belligerence, its war-related fatalities reached a comparably low 2,5 per cent of the population. The painful experience of the Red Army from its fighting against the Finns and the all but impregnable domestic front in the country must have convinced Stalin of the high cost involved in the total subjugation of Finland. As a result, the latter was able to retain its democratic institutions and free market economy, at the price of neutrality benevolent to its imperious neighbour.

On 9 April 1940, as Hitler began his invasion of Norway, German troops entered the Danish soil unannounced. In Copenhagen, the democratically elected coalition government, in unison with King Christian X, decided that the small, flat country was unsuited for defence against an infinitely stronger adversary. Thus, Denmark turned into virtual German protectorate, though the government strove to defend its domestic jurisdiction to the extent possible. In fact, Denmark had the privilege of being the only country in Nazi-dominated Europe to hold free and fair elections, in March 1943, with disastrous results for the local National-Socialist party. This peculiar status was terminated in August of that

year, when Copenhagen refused to introduce the repressive measures demanded by the Germans, who consequently imposed their own martial law. The government resigned but the civil service continued to function effectively, while the king remained in the country, turning the throne into the focal point of national unity. With the exception of the great strike of July 1944 and a number of skirmishes on the eve of liberation, Danish resistance was largely non-violent. At the same time, some 6,000 citizens, many of German origin, volunteered for the Waffen SS Danish Corps, whose 2,000 dead accounted for one-third of Denmark's war-related losses of about 0.2 per cent of its population. Never a battlefield, the country also suffered limited material damage. In their effort to protect the population as a whole, the Danish authorities succeeded in saving the Jews of Denmark. With the citizenry's assistance, more than 95 per cent of these people made their way to safety in neutral Sweden.

As German war planning had provided since the early 20th century, the decisive attack against France was launched through the territory of Belgium and neighbouring Luxemburg. The Belgian policy of neutrality announced as early as 1936 failed to deter the aggressor. At the end of May 1940, after eighteen days of fighting, King Leopold III, in his capacity as commander-in-chief, overruled the democratically elected government in Brussels and surrendered with his army to the Germans. Appearing to share the fate of his captive people, Leopold at first enjoyed high levels of popularity, especially as he attempted to mitigate the effects of defeat and extract from Hitler the release of the 200,000 Belgian prisoners of war. Intending to exploit the country's ethnic dichotomy to its own ends, Berlin chose to release the Flemish and keep the Walloon rank and file interned until the end of the war. The harsh realities of occupation and the turn of the tide of war against the Axis eventually tipped the scales in favour of the London-based Belgian government-in-exile. As a symbol of continuity with pre-war legality, this government helped to keep the spirit of resistance alive both at home and abroad, unlike the authoritarian-inclined Leopold, who had practically resigned himself to the Nazi New Order. The king's attitude would trigger a regime crisis at the end of the war, which was aggravated by the initial refusal of the leftist resistance to give up its arms. At a time when Belgium was still a theatre of war, the returned government-in-exile was able to maintain its cohesion minus the communists, reaffirm the confidence of the pre-war parliament and, most crucially, secure the support of the omnipresent Allied factor. If civil conflict on account of disarmament was thus averted, the regime issue continued to plague the country until 1950, when Leopold was finally persuaded to resign in favour of his successor. It was the last chapter of the war legacy which involved much destruction and human losses in excess of 1 per cent of Belgium's population, including one third of its 75,000-strong Jewish community.

At the south-eastern corner of Europe, Bulgaria had also opted for neutrality, its revisionist outlook notwithstanding. Having suffered bitter defeats in the Second Balkan and the First World War, it was the Balkan country most exposed to German economic

penetration, cultural influence and diplomatic leverage – though one should not over-look a considerable tradition of Russophilia, especially among the peasantry and the small working class. However, even after the country joined the Tripartite Pact on 1 March 1941, King Boris and his loyal government, supported by a hand-picked chamber of deputies, sought to avoid involving their militarily weak state in Axis operations. The Bulgarian contribution to Hitler's war was limited to occupation duties in parts of Yugoslavia and Greece, which lay conveniently away from the main theatres of war and which Sofia aspired to annex. Moreover, Bulgaria never declared war on the Soviet Union. This, however, did not prevent Moscow from declaring war itself at exactly the time when the Sofia government, as part of its effort to come to terms with Britain and the United States, turned against its erstwhile ally, Germany. The unopposed invasion of the Red Army, on 8 September 1944, immediately placed the country under the control of the local communists who, two years later, would establish a single-party 'people's democracy'. Meanwhile, the Bulgarian army was obliged to withdraw from the occupied territories and fight against the retreating Germans inside Yugoslav territory. However, Bulgaria exited the war with territorial gains, as it was permitted to keep Southern Dobrudja, a region which Romania had been forced to cede under German pressure, in 1940. Its 'calculated' involvement in the war and its distance from the main theatres of operations saved Bulgaria from the grue-some fate of its neighbours – except Turkey. The country neither experienced the lethal famine, large-scale destruction and civil conflict that befell Greece and Yugoslavia, nor suffered the massive human casualties of these two countries and Axis satellite Romania. It is estimated that Bulgaria's war-related fatalities amounted to roughly 0.33 per cent of its population. It also protected its Jewish population of Bulgarian nationality, at the expense, however, of the Jews in occupied Greek and Yugoslav territories, who were turned over to the Nazi 'final solution'.

Whereas all preceding cases share a strong element of continuity of national institu-tions and, at least in Finland, Denmark and Belgium, the presence of governments with democratic legitimacy, Greece entered the war under an unpopular dictatorship. The im-position of the '4th of August' regime by King George II and Ioannis Metaxas, in 1936, had only superficially ended the intermittent crisis of legitimacy which had plagued the country since the eruption of the so-called National Schism in 1915. Despite its fascist inclinations, that regime remained firmly orientated towards Great Britain. Metaxas' deci-sion to reject the Italian ultimatum in the early hours of 28 October 1940 corresponded to the national mood and probably turned him into the most popular Greek until his death, in January 1941. However, the spirit of unity engendered by fascist aggression did not sur-vive the ordeal of defeat and occupation.

Following the German conquest, in May 1941, three indigenous contenders would try to fill the apparent vacuum of domestic authority: the king and his government-in-exile, the collaborationist regime in Athens and the communist-controlled National Liberation

Front (EAM), which had grown into the strongest resistance organization. Each disputed the legitimacy of the other two. Their rivalry would plunge the country into bitter civil strife well before the withdrawal of the German troops from mainland Greece, in October 1944. The formation of a government of national unity, which the communists eventually joined as junior partners on the eve of liberation, failed to prevent another round of internecine fighting over the issues of disarmament of the resistance and the composition of the future army, with the questions of the monarchy and the treatment of army officers with a record of collaboration looming in the background. A communist take-over was forestalled owing to the massive intervention of British troops, but their presence and the incipient American involvement did not deter yet another phase of full-blown civil war, in a country whose human losses during the war and occupation were variously estimated between 7 and 11 per cent of its population, including 87 per cent of its 77,000 strong Jewish community. One is entitled to wonder whether the presence of a representative, lawfully constituted government on the eve of occupation could have facilitated an undisputed restoration of legitimate authority at the time of liberation and prevented the descent into civil war.

Table 1. Five small states: Legitimacy, wartime record and transition to peace, 1939-1945

Country	Side	Democratic Legitimacy	Fighting War(s)	Foreign Occupation	War-related Fatalities (% of population)*	Civil Unrest	Civil War	✡ Holocaust
Finland	Axis/–	X	X/X	–	2.3-2.57	–	–	–
Denmark	–	X	–	X	0.16	–	–	–
Belgium	Allied	X	X	X	1.05	X	–	X
Greece	Allied	–	X	X	7.02-11.17	X	X	X
Bulgaria	Axis/–	?	X	X	0.33	X	–	–

* Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties.

Table 2. Types of legitimacy and wartime experience: European small states, 1939-1945

Foreign Orientation	Cost of War and/or Occupation			Exit from War / Transition to Peace					
Type of Legitimacy when Involved in War	pro-Allied	pro-Axis	Neutral	Heavy	Medium	Light	Continuity	Fragmentation	Civil War
Democratic	B, DK, N, NL	SF	CH, IRL, S		B, N, NL, SF	DK	DK, N, NL, SF	B	
Semi-authoritarian	YU	BG	TR	YU		BG		BG	YU

Foreign Orientation	Cost of War and/or Occupation			Exit from War / Transition to Peace					
Type of Legitimacy when Involved in War	pro-Allied	pro-Axis	Neutral	Heavy	Medium	Light	Conti-nuity	Frag-meta-tion	Civil War
Authoritarian	GR, PL	HU, RO, SK	E, P	GR, HU, PL, RO	SK			RO, SK	GR, HU, PL

Abbreviations: B: Belgium, BG: Bulgaria, CH: Switzerland, DK: Denmark, E: Spain, GR: Greece, HU: Hungary, IRL: Ireland, N: Norway, NL: Netherlands, P: Portugal, PL: Poland, RO: Romania, S: Sweden, SF: Finland, SK: Slovakia, TR: Turkey, YU: Yugoslavia

IV. Legitimacy and transition from war to peace

As the case of the Metaxas dictatorship in Greece demonstrates, war may enhance the acceptability and prestige of even non-democratic regimes but only in the short run. A prolonged war and, even more so, defeat and foreign conquest severely test the political, social and economic structures of any country and trigger a **crisis of confidence** in pre-war institutions, especially national governments. The extent of the crisis depends on a number of external and internal factors. Military defeat followed by a harsh occupation regime humiliates national ruling elites and may destroy their credibility as guarantors of national existence; and the ability of these elites to protect essential values, such as life and livelihood, is the ultimate justification of their claim to rule, the basis of their **legitimacy**.[33] The strength of the bonds between rulers and ruled is in turn crucial for the ability of a society to withstand the tribulations of war and occupation and make its transition to peace with the least trouble possible. Even indirect enemy control, rather than outright occupation, premised on the 'routine' or 'political collaboration' of national authorities,[34] risks alienating a defeated population, especially if or when resistance proves a viable alternative, and favours the **fragmentation** of legitimacy.[35] Only highly cohesive Denmark scored a narrow escape from this predicament.

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[33] Conway and Romijn, 'Political Legitimacy', 16-17; Romijn and Frommer, 'Legitimacy in Inter-War Europe', 35; Romijn – Conway – Peschanski, 'National Legitimacy', 70, 74, 81-84; Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 2, 28.

[34] Political collaboration is defined as 'an arrangement in which institutions and persons being considered by a majority of the population as their legitimate representatives, collaborate with the (foreign) organs of the occupation': Ole Kristian Grimnes, 'Hitler's Norwegian Legacy', in Gilmour and Stephenson, eds., *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, 167.

[35] For an elaboration of 'fragmented legitimacy' among different contenders in pre-war and wartime Europe, see Romijn – Conway – Peschanski, 'National Legitimacy', 74ff. The fragility of the public approval for

In much of wartime Europe, defeat and occupation undermined social cohesion and national unity by accentuating pre-existing and generating new political, socio-economic and ethnic cleavages. Only the Scandinavian states stand out as exceptions of countries with a high level of cohesion.[36] Elsewhere, the state of political and social flux enabled various pretenders to dispute the legitimacy of pre-war ruling elites and national institutions and stake their claim to the post-war dispensation of power. Some, if not all, of these counter-claimants may have been politically marginal before the war. This was mostly the case of extreme right or left wing movements, including communist parties.

Both extremes sought to profit from the break-down of national institutions and the ensuing insecurity and disorientation of a population stunned by defeat. In Axis-occupied countries, with the exception of the completely subjugated Czech and Polish lands, it was Right-wing forces which, in most cases and at least initially, opted for **collaboration** with the enemy in return for their recognition as legitimate authority. In some cases, among which the reduced *État Français* stands out,[37] this course did not immediately alienate a majority of the population. The collaborators' authority was eroded gradually, as the occupation powers' brutality increased in proportion to their receding prospect of victory.[38] The Axis defeat totally discredited collaborators and, eventually, resulted in the radical Right's exclusion from mainstream politics. At the opposite extreme, after a period of prevarication due to the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, communist parties were prominent in actively organizing **resistance** to Axis – though, obviously, not Soviet – occupation.[39] They were determined to exploit their record in this respect in order to disadvantage their domestic rivals, including the moderate, mainstream parties which often proved less inclined or adept at using mass mobilization and violence against the forces of occupation. In most

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collaboration, which was initially observed in many European countries, is demonstrated by Nico Wouters, Niels Wium Olesen, and Martin Conway, 'The War for Legitimacy at the Local Level', in Conway and Romijn eds. *The War for Legitimacy*, 128-130.

[36] On the Danish experience of 'active co-operation' with the enemy as the price for salvaging internal sovereignty, see Olesen, 'The Obsession with Sovereignty', 52-59. In Norway, the German occupation helped to overcome the acute polarisation between the 'bourgeois' parties and the Labour left during the interwar period: Tom Kristiansen, 'Closing a Long Chapter: German-Norwegian Relations 1939-45', in Gilmour and Stephenson, eds., *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, 96. For the Finnish case of co-belligerency with the Axis, see: Oula Silvennoinen, 'Janus of the North? Finland 1940-44', ibid., 129-146; Juhana Aunesluoma, 'Two Shadows over Finland', ibid.: 200.

[37] Arguably, Vichy France counted as a 'small state', in the sense that it was indefensible against the major belligerents of World War II.

[38] Bloody reprisals and plunder easily spring to mind, but, as Romijn, Conway, and Peschanski observe, the requisitioning of workforce, especially for labour in the German Reich, may have been 'the single most important factor' in alienating populations from collaborationist regimes: id., 'National Legitimacy', 88-89.

[39] Communist minorities could be relied upon to offer their services in the territories annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939-1940 and, again, in 1944-1945.

cases, the grim reality of occupation eroded the appeal and, hence, the legitimacy not only of mainstream political forces but also of national institutions: faced with the impotence of central authority, people turned their eyes to either traditional sources of support, such as the family, a local community and the Church, or to new agents, hatched in wartime conditions. However, this trend could prove reversible, once a national authority was able to restore its power at the end of the war.[40]

In many cases, the pressures exerted by war and occupation ultimately triggered a degree of convergence based on the values of national independence and survival. As Conway and Romijn acknowledge, on the eve of liberation, legitimacy could be claimed by those possessing the nationalism of self-preservation, restitution and, in some cases, aggrandizement,[41] which, it should be noted, was *not* inherently democratic. The hegemony of this patriotic discourse dictated identification with (and appropriation of) the **resistance**, which offered not only a moral high ground but also a handy constitutive myth for post-war unity. The obvious exception were those who found themselves on the wrong side, especially after the defeat of the Axis looked increasingly certain, and were subjected to more or less extensive retribution.[42] Usually with some delay, governments-in-exile became the chief beneficiaries of this process, at least where their return was not vetoed by an Allied great power – as was the case in Poland. Given the continuity with pre-war actors and institutions, one may speak of **restoration** which, with a few notable exceptions such as Greece and Yugoslavia, the forces of the Resistance, however grudgingly, finally accepted.[43] Things turned out differently where the erosion of national institutions had been combined with a strong and defiant resistance or a separatist movement. Wherever the latter had tasted power, they were simply reluctant to relinquish it.

It should be kept in mind that, in terms of political orientation, resistance movements were for the most part sceptical towards, if not dismissive of, existing models of liberal democracy.[44] They often advocated far reaching, even revolutionary changes after liberation

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[40] Various authors agree that, despite the ascendancy of the local at the expense of the national and the boosting of supranational designs, the occupation did not really signify the demise of the nation-state as the focal point of loyalty and framework of political agency: Romijn, Conway and Peschanski, 'National Legitimacy', 98; Wouters, Olesen and Conway, 'The War for Legitimacy', 136-141. An obvious exception was secessionist movements which led to the formation of puppet entities under Axis tutelage.

[41] What Conway and Romijn term 'the sacred conch of a revivified patriotism': id., 'Introduction', 383.

[42] Ibid., 385; Richard Overy, 'Scandinavia in the Second World War', in Gilmour and Stephenson, eds., *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, 31-32; Romijn, Conway and Peschanski, 'National Legitimacy', 94. Significantly, it was in Norway, with its high degree of national unity, where a greater number of collaborators, proportionate to its population, were executed or imprisoned, than in 'any other nation of occupied Europe, including Communist Yugoslavia': Allan Little, 'Conclusion,' in Gilmour and Stephenson, eds., *Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy*, 227.

[43] Romijn, Conway and Peschanski, 'National Legitimacy', 95.

[44] A notable exception to this rule was the Norwegian resistance which remained committed to the

(or, in the case of Axis satellites, capitulation). These forces, mostly but not exclusively on the left of the political spectrum, were bound to come up against those who aimed to either restore their pre-war status (mostly governments-in-exile and their supporters at home) or protect interests acquired during the period of war and/or occupation (including groups and institutions with a record of political collaboration with the forces of occupation).[45] There usually followed an uneasy period, during which different projects for the future of the nation competed with each other. For the sake of argument, we can distinguish between 'restoration' and 'revolution'. It is submitted that the forces of restoration enjoyed an important advantage vis-à-vis their radical rivals, to the extent that the former were recognized as the agents of constitutional legitimacy by a domestic majority and of state continuity by powerful foreign powers.

A relevant argument pointing at a close relationship between legitimacy and **continuity** is offered by Conway, Romijn and another prominent historian of the legacies of occupation, Pieter Lagrou. They dispute the widespread view of liberation and its immediate aftermath as a window of opportunity for radical change or even revolution which was abruptly shut owing to foreign intervention and the impact of the incipient Cold War. The reverse was the case at least in Eastern Europe, where radical change was effected at the behest of the Soviet 'liberators'. The afore-mentioned authors have observed **a high degree of continuity**, implying a hard core of legitimacy common to many countries, especially in north-western Europe. In these cases, long-established institutions and social agents, of both 'modern' and traditional provenance, such as elected local authorities, political parties and trade unions, professional and civil society associations, plus the Church, proved able to serve as focal points of loyalty and factors of cohesion and relative stability. Their tradition, skills, even clientelistic networks combined with remarkable adaptability to sustain their influence at a time when day-to-day survival was the overriding consideration. This short-term legitimacy crucially helped them to defend their turf against radical pretenders of power from both the resistance and the collaborationists.[46] Their influence in society proved invaluable to the post-liberation governments in their effort to resume the mantle of long-term legitimacy. Both sides feared a communist takeover. It was this threat, possibly more than the apparent failure of the pre-war state to defend the fatherland, which

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restoration of democracy and loyal to the government-in-exile: Kristiansen, 'Closing a Long Chapter,' 93; Grimnes, 'Hitler's Norwegian Legacy,' 162-163.

45 Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 24, 29-30. The effectiveness of resistance in terminating the occupation was of secondary importance. As Lagrou rightly observes, mass resistance movements 'were first of all concerned with the future reconstruction of their national political life; the fight against the occupier took a much lower priority': ibid., 29.

46 On the importance of local institutions and their adaptability under German occupation, see Wouters, Olesen and Conway, 'The War for Legitimacy', 109-146. On the cultural and psychological preconditions of this phenomenon, see Vincent and Carter, 'Culture and Legitimacy', 147-176.

forced them to realize that a straightforward restoration of the old order was not the best strategy.[47] In their effort to steal off the wind out of the sails of their radical opponents, these essentially conservative forces adopted the rhetoric of **renewal** and supported programmes of reform which ushered in the remarkably 'durable politics of consensus' that prevailed in much of non-communist Europe after the war.[48]

The political fortunes of resistance figures at both the national and the local level seem to justify the premium put on continuity, with the exception, of course, of Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia. Far from being able to fulfil their wartime pledge of a, more or less, clean break with the past, resistance fighters-turned-politicians could generally play their part in post-war West European politics only by joining forces with pre-war political parties.[49] Lagrou mentions General Charles De Gaulle as a successful example of an exiled leader who tapped the legitimizing potential of the resistance from the outset, while presenting himself as the principal agent of continuity and republican restoration.[50] For those who insisted on the path to revolution, it would soon become clear that they had little to offer other than revenge for past wrong-doings and a millenarian vision to a public which largely looked forward to a return to conditions of 'normality' and a peaceful future; and if ideology may serve to undermine legitimacy in the short run, revenge hardly provides a basis for building a viable alternative.[51]

The analysis by Conway and Romijn implies a further argument in favour of the democratic component of legitimacy. As has been noted, in the widespread delegitimization of the enemy's collaborators these authors perceive a clear indication that **'norms of legitimate government'** were still relevant 'amidst the chaos of wartime Europe'.[52] And it was during such exceptional circumstances that 'shared basic goals or beliefs' between a people and its leaders become vitally important.[53] The essence of these goals and beliefs, it is

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[47] The word 'restoration', Lagrou notes, was to be avoided in favour of 'renewal' which better served the need to legitimize the post-war order. Its meaning was that the appropriate lessons had been learned, and pre-war weaknesses would be overcome: Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 22.

[48] Conway and Romijn, 'Political Legitimacy', 17-18; Pittaway and Dahl, 'Legitimacy', 177-179, 198-199; Romijn, Conway and Peschanski, 'National Legitimacy', 101-103; Conway, *The Sorrows of Belgium*, 9; Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 1, 35.

[49] Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 26; Pittaway and Dahl, 'Legitimacy', 190-191; Geoffrey Warner, 'Allies, Government and Resistance: The Belgian Political Crisis of November 1944', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 28 (1978), 45. The same conclusion with reference to local politics is reached in Wouters, Olesen and Conway, 'The War for Legitimacy', 141.

[50] Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 31. Cf. Romijn, Conway and Peschanski, 'National Legitimacy', 93-94.

[51] Wouters, Olesen and Conway, 'The War for Legitimacy', 120; Vincent and Carter, 'Culture and Legitimacy', 161, 169.

[52] Conway and Romijn, 'Introduction', 386; Conway and Romijn, 'Political Legitimacy', 5.

[53] Wouters, Olesen and Conway, 'The War for Legitimacy', 126-127.

noted, were 'freedom and civil rights', apparently including the right to freely elect one's government, which starkly contrasted with the arbitrariness and oppression of the occupation regimes.[54] These observations point at a **strong core of democratic legitimacy** broadly shared by societies in several individual states, an element which tended to eclipse alternative forms of justifying authority by the later stages of the war.

The case for the ascendancy of democratic legitimacy seems to be corroborated by successive **declarations** of the leading powers of the anti-Axis coalition. Among them most prominent are the Atlantic Charter,[55] the United Nations Declaration,[56] and the Yalta declaration of liberated Europe,[57] which alluded to or explicitly acknowledged the right of every people to freely choose their government. The Yalta declaration, in particular, expressed the commitment of Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union to assist the peoples of former Axis-occupied or even Axis satellite states 'to solve by democratic means their pressing political and economic problems ... during the temporary period of instability in liberated Europe'. Beyond this transition period, the three powers pledged to assist these peoples to establish 'through free elections' governments 'responsive to the will of the people'. Of course, Stalin treated such declarations as little more than window-dressing, a view already confirmed by the practice of the Soviet authorities in 'liberated' Poland and occupied Bulgaria and Romania.[58] Nor Winston Churchill was prepared to acquiesce to a communist take-over in Greece by constitutional means. Still, it is important that Stalin did not refer to the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' any more than Churchill publicly evoked Britain's imperial considerations; and, of course, no one alluded to discredited notions of 'alternative legitimacy', which seemed to consign states like Spain beyond the pale of international respectability. The repetition of the democratic principle at the highest level by the powers which would eventually win the war

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[54]   Ibid., 136. Similarly, Vincent and Carter, 'Culture and Legitimacy', 153-154.

[55]   The Charter, signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill on 14 August 1941, acknowledged the democratic principle through its recognition of self-determination as a foundation of a 'better future for the world'. The leaders of the United States and the United Kingdom pledged to 'respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live'.

[56]   Signed by the representatives of 26 states on 1 January 1942, the Declaration endorsed the Atlantic Charter and expressed commitment to the defence of 'life, liberty, independence and religious freedom', and the preservation of 'human rights and justice'.

[57]   The Yalta declaration was signed by Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin on 13 February 1945. It also reaffirmed the commitment of the 'Big Three' to the principles of the Allied Charter. Significantly, it interpreted the 'right of all people (sic) to choose the form of government under which they will live' enunciated in the Charter as identical with their right 'to create democratic institutions of their own choice'.

[58]   Stalin's attitude towards liberated or former enemy countries has long been identified with his remark recorded by Yugoslav communist leader Milovan Djilas, two months after Yalta: 'This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army has power to do so. It cannot be otherwise': Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), 90.

could not but have helped to foster a widespread belief that **legitimate government was a freely elected one**.[59]

Ultimately, legitimacy depended on the ability of national authorities to construe an image of **efficiency and accountability** to their citizens.[60] In most countries, liberation marked the lowest point of national economic output and the extreme compression of the standard of living for the vast majority of the population. In these conditions, the principal non-democratic alternative, communism, could easily gain new recruits by offering an impoverished public 'at least a share out of what remain[ed]'.[61] It was thus of the utmost importance that governments and state institutions should at least appear to be doing something in order to meet the most urgent needs of their citizens, from food and clothing to the resumption of public utilities. To that end, they relied not so much on scarce local resources as on the substantial foreign aid which the anti-Axis coalition, especially the United States and the British Empire, were prepared to provide in the aftermath of liberation.[62] Thus, indirectly, the foreign factor could further enhance the domestic legitimacy of transition regimes. Delays or mismanagement would produce the opposite result.[63]

A closer examination of defeated and occupied nations of Europe during World War II may reveal that where the elements of external and internal legitimacy concurred (as in Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, but also in Axis co-belligerent Finland), the transition from war to peace was relatively smooth. By way of contrast, wherever domestic turmoil and lawlessness were the rule, one or both types of legitimacy were missing or were being disputed, no matter how this 'dynamic' concept was understood by the public of each country. Moreover, in cases where, at the moment of liberation, there existed governments which could claim continuity with the last *elected* pre-war leadership (as was the case in Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway or Finland, but not in Greece, Italy or Hungary), these governments succeeded in overcoming whatever domestic challenge to their authority presented itself, with or without foreign interference. Therefore, perhaps

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[59] This principle, which is central to the political culture of parliamentary democracy, would eventually be enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948, which stated in Art. 21.3: 'The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures'.

[60] Conway and Romijn, 'Political Legitimacy', 19.

[61] Political Intelligence Report on the Netherlands to the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Forces Europe, 31 March 1945, quoted in William I. Hitchcock, *Liberation: The Bitter Road to Freedom, Europe 1944-1945* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 110.

[62] This was done chiefly through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). For a succinct account of its activity in liberated Europe see Hitchcock, *Liberation*, 215-248.

[63] Ibid., 212. Hitchcock quotes Dean Acheson, then US assistant secretary of State for economic affairs, elaborating on the vulnerability of destitute liberated populations to 'agitation, unrest' and, ultimately, 'arbitrary and absolutist control'. See also, Pittaway and Dahl, 'Legitimacy', 196-198.

one should not light-heartedly downplay the element of democratic legitimacy conferred by free elections in the framework of a pluralist representative system, which since the liberal revolutions of the late 18th and early 19th centuries had been integral to the notion of popular sovereignty and to the political practice and culture of countries, otherwise as diverse as Denmark, Belgium or Greece.

Of course, the benefit of internal and external legitimacy is not by itself sufficient to determine the outcome of a crisis centred on the future form of government, the social regime and the international orientation of countries weakened by war and/or occupation. It is no coincidence that legitimacy in the form of continuity with pre-war institutions proved easier to restore wherever the Western Allies had been able to establish a strong military presence.[64] Foreign aid or intervention may decisively tip the balance in favour of one or the other side. What is more, a militant minority may manage to prevail thanks to superior leadership, control of the necessary resources, or some other material advantage. However, the existence of a government which enjoys broad legitimacy within and without the country, and can thus be deemed worthy of support by foreign powers, disadvantages the forces of revolution, even when they can count on help from abroad.

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64   For a discussion of this, all important factor, see Romijn, Conway and Peschanski, 'National Legitimacy', 103; Pittaway and Dahl, 'Legitimacy', 194-196.

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