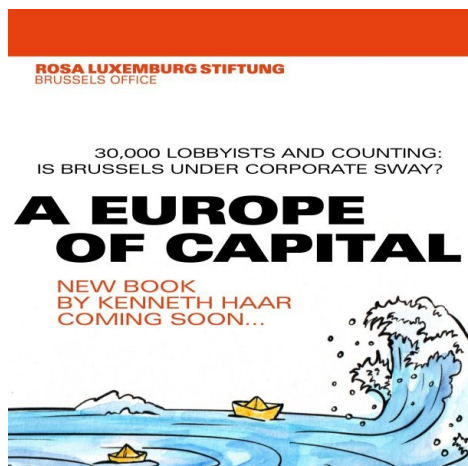


## A Europe of Capital

Mar 21st, 2024 / Kenneth Haar, Ada Regelman



Over 30,000 lobbyists walk the halls of European government buildings in Brussels. The decision-making process in the European Union (EU) affords great opportunities to these representatives of corporate interest, despite recent efforts to keep their influence in check and encourage ground-up democratic input. This imbalance between corporate and societal interests represents an existential challenge to democracy, social rights, peace and the planet. Activists are rightly calling for social, environmental and democratic interests to have more of a say in Europe's decision-making processes, as well as for greater transparency and regulation of corporate influence on EU policies. Yet the central issue is not the sheer number of corporate lobbyists who encourage decisions and set agendas, nor is it the vast financial means at their disposal. The democratic deficit of the EU decision-making process is there by design, and cannot be solved by simply replacing one set of lobbyists with another.

As this book demonstrates, business leaders and corporate representatives have been instrumental in shaping the EU's institutional foundations since its inception, inscribing their vision into the fundamental principles upon which the union was built, and which dictate its functions today. As a result, the EU firmly privileges competitiveness as the rationale behind social, economic and political integration. Its constitutional order affords pre-eminence to corporate power, exempting it from adhering to principles of equality and equity. All-encompassing bureaucratisation is the hallmark and driving force of the "European competition state," marginalising any genuine concern for the common good. This argument is what sits at the heart of the intriguing story presented by Kenneth Haar in this book.

The author draws on a wealth of expertise and original material – some of it confidentially leaked – as well as reports and analyses from his work as a researcher and campaigner with Corporate Europe Observatory, where he shines light into the darkest corners of thirty years of corporate meddling in EU institutional development. In this book, he demonstrates that the ruthless logic of competitiveness operates at every level of decision-making, be it European, national or local. From trade to big tech, from patents to weapons deals, from the European Monetary Union to the climate, regulations follow the economic model – enshrined in EU statutes – of the Single Market and its Four Freedoms. The book centres on the result of this "competitiveness at all costs" approach: a realignment of social, democratic and environmental agendas to suit the interests of transnational capital, both inside and outside of the EU (token progress and a few substantial concessions notwithstanding).

The author is clear-eyed about this current conflagration being the source of the rising populist tide. His book bears witness to shortcomings in the EU's democratic legitimacy: a limited say for "ordinary" interests; limited transparency and accountability; and limited attention to the needs of those less well-off. These failings have generated unease among many European citizens as to the "real" beneficiaries of EU integration, feeding mistrust, cynicism and opposition. This has, in turn, eroded social actors' and individuals' willingness to challenge the tutelage of "big business" and "its politicians." When trust in democratic processes falters, populist extremism and reactionary politics flourish.

This is not the path Haar is encouraging his reader to follow. His call is for a change that reflects contemporary political and class struggles; his ideal is a systemic alternative to the competition model currently in place – one that puts democracy, sustainability and prosperity for "the many" at the centre. To tackle the core elements of the EU's democratic deficit, Haar identifies several directions for reform: rolling back the EMU rules that privilege the EU economy over those of Member States; strengthening parliamentary and other forms of democratic control over the Commission to balance bureaucratisation processes; realigning the rule by standards and indicators from corporate to public interests; allowing comprehensive regulation by Member States to protect citizens from harmful application of the Competition Principle; and foregrounding social rights at an EU level.

"A Europe of Capital" is a rich resource for anyone looking to understand the role and workings of corporate interest representation in the EU, both in general or historical terms, and in a range of specific policy areas. This book is more than the sum of its constituent narratives: it provides a comprehensive argument about what has become of the EU, and where it is headed. We at the Brussels office of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung are delighted to have worked with Kenneth Haar on this important contribution to the debate about the contemporary EU and the future of democracy, solidarity, social rights, climate justice and peace, both on the European continent

and globally. These concerns are at the heart of our work, and will continue to shape public concerns and debates as the EU sets out into a new legislative period.

Ada Regelman, March 2024

Join us for the book launch on April 17. More info here: **[Book launch: “A Europe of Capital” by Kenneth, 17 April 2024, 6 pm | Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Brussels Office \(rosalux.eu\)](#)**

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