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From Imperium to Union

Comparing Central Authority in the Roman Empire and the European Union

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Introduction

How do large political systems govern effectively across large and heterogeneous territories? Though sometimes framed as a challenge unique to modern governance, this dilemma has long confronted expansive polities throughout the history of empire. This thesis explores how two structurally distinct yet functionally comparable polities, the Roman Empire and the European Union, have addressed the perennial challenge of maintaining central authority over such diverse, large domains. Separated by nearly two millennia, these systems differ profoundly in their ideological foundations, institutional logics, and goals. Yet both must resolve the same fundamental dilemma: how to ensure cohesion, legitimacy, and compliance from the center without resorting to complete standardization or uniformity. Although sometimes perceived as a *sui generis* experiment in supranational integration, the European Union's system of governance is in many ways comparable particularly in how central authority is embedded, legitimized, and exercised across a diverse political landscape in antiquity.

This thesis investigates how the Roman imperial center maintained authority across its provinces and explores how those historical strategies can inform our understanding of how supranational institutions in the European Union assert authority across its member states. While the two systems differ fundamentally in context, scale, and institutional design, both rely on a central governing tier that must project influence across complicated political geographies without fully homogenizing them. In both cases, the challenge lies not only in issuing decisions from the center, but in ensuring that these decisions are recognized, accepted, and implemented across a wide and heterogeneous territory. Rather than focusing solely on formal institutional arrangements, this study takes a broader view of how central authority is structured, legitimized, and projected within administrative systems structured around a central authority. To structure this exploration, the following research question is posed:

How did the Roman central government maintain authority over its provinces, and in what ways can this inform our understanding of how EU supranational institutions assert authority across diverse member states?

This thesis seeks to provide new insights into the exercise of authority in political systems by investigating how the Roman central government maintained control over its provinces and how these historical strategies can inform our understanding of how EU supranational institutions assert authority across diverse member states. Rather than viewing governance as a purely hierarchical process, the study emphasizes the layered and negotiated nature of

authority in both the Roman Empire and the European Union. By drawing functional and structural comparisons, the thesis explores how both systems rely on combinations of centralized power, ideological legitimacy, infrastructural integration, and conceptions of citizenship to hold together politically and culturally diverse territories. To provide a focused and historically grounded analysis of how central authority was maintained, this thesis examines the Roman state from the late Republican period through to approximately the end of the Principate, a span marked by a relative degree of internal stability and a wealth of surviving sources that offer detailed insights into the structures and exercise of imperial power.

Structurally, following this introduction, the thesis begins with a *status quaestionis* that reviews the existing body of scholarship on Roman and EU governance. While both subjects have been extensively studied within their respective disciplines, comparative analyses remain limited. This section therefore identifies and synthesizes key works that either explicitly connect the two systems or provide a conceptual foundation for drawing historical parallels. Particular attention is paid to scholarship that situates the European Union within a longer trajectory of large, composite governance systems, thereby opening space for historically grounded reflections on authority, legitimacy, and territorial management. The methodology employed will then be detailed, clarifying the analytical framework and comparative approach used to explore historical and administrative dimensions. The main body of the thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter addresses organizational structure by offering a comparative analysis of how central authority is institutionally organized. The analysis focuses specifically on the institutions that embody the highest level of centralized authority in each system, namely, the Roman Emperor and Senate, and the European Commission and Parliament. These bodies have been selected for their central role in initiating, legitimizing, and projecting governance. While acknowledging that the Roman Empire was not supranational in the modern institutional sense, this study employs the term analogically to describe the top tier of imperial governance, whose structural function can be meaningfully compared to that of EU supranational institutions. The following three chapters are structured as thematic case studies, each focused on a key mechanism by which central authority is upheld. The first examines how symbolic and ideological narratives serve to legitimize authority at the highest levels. The second investigates how physical infrastructure enables supranational control, enhance territorial cohesion, and extend the practical reach of central institutions. The third explores how formal statuses and rights, specifically Roman and EU citizenship, reinforce belonging and loyalty to the supranational polity, thereby strengthening its authority and legitimacy. Throughout these chapters, comparisons between the Roman

Empire and the EU are interwoven. The conclusion summarizes the central findings and reflects on the value of historical governance models in interpreting the challenges and dynamics of modern supranational systems, while also identifying potential directions for further research.

Status Quaestionis

Much scholarly work has been devoted to the study of both the Roman Empire and the European Union, particularly in the fields of governance, institutional development, and political integration. Historians have long examined the administrative complexity and durability of Roman imperial rule, while political scientists have extensively analyzed the EU's evolving system of multilevel governance. However, despite the richness of both literatures, relatively few studies explicitly compare these two cases in a systematic manner. While the Roman Empire and the EU are undoubtedly distinct in terms of context, structure, and purpose, their shared characteristics as large, composite polities grappling with questions of authority, identity, and territorial management make them a compelling basis for comparative reflection. This thesis builds on scholarly efforts to situate the EU within a broader historical continuum, while also highlighting how insights from Roman governance can deepen our understanding of the EU's current challenges.

Recent scholarship has begun to challenge the traditional perception of the European Union as a wholly novel political formation. Gary Marks, for instance, offers a compelling framework in his work by arguing that both the Roman Empire and the EU grapple with a fundamental tension between the benefits of jurisdictional scale and the constraints of community.[1] His analysis highlights how both systems pursued indirect rule, relied on local elites or national governments to implement central decisions, and developed complex, multi-layered governance structures to accommodate diversity without imposing full homogenization.[2] Marks' work helps anchor this thesis in such a way that it recognizes the EU not as a sharp break from history, but as a modern iteration of longstanding governance strategies developed in the context of empire.

Another useful point of departure is the work of Dariusz Milczarek, who emphasizes the exceptional nature of the European Union as a political and civilizational project.[3] In his

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[1] Gary Marks, "Europe and Its Empires: From Rome to the European Union," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50, no. 1 (2012), 1.

[2] Ibidem, 5, 7.

[3] Dariusz Milczarek, "Genesis of the United Europe: From the Roman Empire to the European Union," *Introduction to European Studies: A New Approach to Uniting Europe*, (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2013), 21–44.

reflections, Milczarek frames the EU as a "structure in statu nascendi," and *sui generis,* constantly evolving and resisting fixed categorization, an observation that invites comparisons with earlier forms of flexible, adaptive governance such as the Roman Empire.[4] Milczarek highlights the EU's hybridity and institutional complexity, noting its combination of supranational and intergovernmental elements (such as the European Council, Council of the EU, and areas requiring unanimous agreement like treaty changes and foreign policy) and its reliance on differentiated integration.[5] These observations, though not explicitly drawing Roman parallels, help position the EU as part of a broader historical continuum of large governance systems. His argument that European integration is not only legal or political, but also civilizational in scope, opens the door for historical analogies and long-term institutional reflections, precisely the kind this thesis seeks to explore.

Michael Gehler offers a treatment of the EU as an empire in both historical and theoretical dimensions.[6] In his analysis, Gehler argues that the EU demonstrates characteristics of a "post-democratic, post-modern, and post-national empire," combining elements of historical imperial governance with contemporary structures of shared sovereignty, soft power, and regulatory/legal integration.[7] Gehler draws explicit parallels to the Roman Empire, particularly in terms of its expansive territorial structure, gradual formation, and integration mechanisms through legal and cultural instruments.[8] Of relevance to this thesis is Gehler's comparison between Roman and EU citizenship, as well as his portrayal of Brussels as a potential analogue to an imperial capital within the European system.[9] Gehler also draws analogies between the *Pax Romana* and the *Pax Europea*; he cautiously argues that the EU has a number of imperial traits, and considers the Union *sui generis.*[10]

Magali Gravier's work, titled *"The Next European Empire?",* looks at the European Union through the lens of imperial governance.[11] While Gravier does not equate the EU with traditional empires, she argues that it is undergoing a process of imperialization, marked by vertical authority structures, a composite core-periphery system, and expansion through integration and normative influence.[12] Gravier's depiction of Brussels not as a geographically

[4] Milczarek, "Genesis of the United Europe," 16.
[5] Ibidem, 71.
[6] Michael Gehler, "The European Union: A Post-Democratic, Post-Modern, and Post-National Empire?" *Integration* 2 (2018): 235-252.
[7] Ibidem, 249.
[8] Ibidem.
[9] Ibidem, 249-250.
[10] Ibidem, 250, 252.
[11] Magali Gravier, "The Next European Empire?" *European Societies* 11, no. 5 (2009), 627–647.
[12] Ibidem, 627.

dominant capital but as an institutional and decisional center parallels the Roman model of central authority asserting influence through layered governance rather than direct rule.[13] By emphasizing the EU's functional heterarchy and overlapping competencies, Gravier's analysis provides a historically informed lens for understanding how authority is negotiated, mediated, and implemented across multiple levels.[14]

Methodology

This thesis adopts a qualitative, comparative-historical approach to examine how the Roman imperial center and the European Union's supranational institutions assert and maintain authority. Rather than aiming for a direct one-to-one comparison, the study seeks to uncover structural and functional analogies that may shed light on how central authority is constructed, legitimized, and sustained in governance systems. The analysis is intentionally limited to the highest level of governance in both systems, primarily the Roman emperor and the European Commission. It also considers the institutional roles of the Roman Senate and the European Parliament, both of which act as legitimizing, and at times, constraining forces within their respective systems. Although the European Council and the Council of the European Union play critical roles in EU decision-making, they are excluded from this work's focus for two main reasons. First, both bodies are composed of national representatives, heads of state or government in the European Council, and national ministers in the Council of the EU, and thus embody intergovernmental rather than supranational authority. Since this thesis aims to explore how centralized supranational institutions exert authority, the inclusion of bodies that primarily reflect national interests would dilute the analytical focus. Second, their hybrid or rotating leadership structures differ fundamentally from the continuous and institutionalized nature of the Commission and Parliament, which are structurally more comparable to Rome's imperial core.

For the Roman Empire, as mentioned, the analysis concentrates on the period from the late Republican era through to approximately the end of the Principate. A range of primary sources, including imperial decrees, inscriptions, legal texts, and administrative documents, is used where available, supplemented by a broad body of historiographical scholarship. The investigation focuses on how the emperor and central actors exercised authority across the provinces, with attention to the formal structures of control, mechanisms of legitimation, and

[13] Gravier, "The Next European Empire?" 627.
[14] Ibidem.

strategies for maintaining cohesion across the empire. When using sources from this period, it is particularly important to consider how external conditions have shaped their survival and interpretation. Much of the available material has reached us through a selective and often fragmentary manuscript tradition, based around the copying priorities of medieval scribes and the preservation traditions of specific geographic regions. Legal and administrative texts such as the *Theodosian Code* or the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* survive not necessarily because they were representative of everyday governance, but also simply because they were institutionalized or inscribed in durable formats. Monumental texts are often propagandistic and reflect an idealized image of imperial authority, tailored to reinforce legitimacy rather than document routine practice. Moreover, the process of translation introduces slippage in meaning, especially when transcribing culturally embedded Latin terms into modern languages, potentially obscuring the subtleties of Roman political thought and cultural meaning. Thus, critical source use requires attentiveness not only to authorial intent and audience, but also to material, institutional, and linguistic methods that have shaped how we access and understand these records. Still, none of these works were created without intend. They ultimately reflect at minimum the goals and purposes from a popular group, that have remained available to us through luck, or which were considered important enough to be preserved.

For the European Union, the study draws upon institutional documents such as treaties, regulations, and official communications, alongside scholarly literature in political science, history, and public administration. Emphasis is placed on how EU supranational institutions exercise authority in a union of sovereign member states, particularly through legal, administrative, and symbolic means. While national actors are acknowledged in both cases as important in implementation, the analysis focuses exclusively on how Rome and the EU's central institutions project and sustain authority at the supranational level. The comparative dimension of this study is grounded in conceptual rather than chronological logic. Governance features such as the exercise of authority across diverse territories, the organization of central institutions, and the projection of legitimacy are treated as thematic lenses through which both systems can be examined. The aim is not to claim direct continuity or equivalence between Rome and the EU, but rather to explore how Roman precedents might inform our contemporary challenges and structures in a meaningful way.

Chapter I

As we have established, large, composite political systems face a recurring challenge: how to maintain authority across vast, politically and culturally diverse territories. This chapter examines how central authority is structurally embedded in the Roman Empire and in the European Union as a contemporary supranational polity. The aim here is not to equate these systems but to explore functional analogies in how central authority is organized.

Though the concept of 'emperorship' in Rome defies simple definition, lacking a clear origin, consistent title, or uninterrupted constitutional basis, the reality of Roman rule from the late first century BC onward was that a single individual stood at the apex of the imperial system.[15] This rule, however, was not always exercised from Rome, nor did it rely on a large or permanent administrative apparatus.[16] As the career of Marcus Aurelius illustrates, emperors could govern for years from provincial military headquarters such as Sirmium, surrounded not by vast bureaucracies but by a relatively modest circle of advisers, military officers, and secretaries.[17] Much of who the emperor was, was defined by the people who surrounded him, and it could vary between emperors.[18] Just as the concept of emperorship lacked a clear definition, there was likewise no formal system of advisory offices or standardized procedures for appointing individuals to positions of governance.[19] Senators traditionally were considered the emperor's principal advisers, and they believed themselves to be the most appropriate men to advise.[20] But the practical influence of senators diminished over time, as emperors increasingly turned to non-senatorial advisers, whose expertise and loyalty often outweighed their formal status.[21] As Hekster observes, this trend was especially pronounced when emperors governed while travelling, as in the case of Marcus Aurelius, since fewer senators were present and local elites could offer more relevant expertise.[22] The *Historia Augusta* mentions that Hadrian's council included not only his *amici* (friends, a formal category of trusted advisors and counselors often holding high office or imperial favor), but also renowned jurists such as

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[15] Olivier Hekster, Caesar Rules: The Emperor in the Changing Roman World (c. 50 BC – AD 565) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 1-4; Inge Mennen, *Power and Status in the Roman Empire, AD 193–284*, Impact of Empire, vol. 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 35.
[16] Fergus Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World: 31 BC–AD 337 (London: Duckworth, 1977), 5.
[17] Ibidem, 6.
[18] Hekster, Caesar Rules, 183.
[19] Ibidem, 184.
[20] Herodian, *History of the Roman Empire*, 6.1.1-4.
[21] Hekster, Caesar Rules, 187-188
[22] Olivier Hekster, "Emperors and Councillors: Imperial Representation between Republic and Empire," in *New Perspectives on Power and Political Representation from Ancient History to the Present Day: Repertoires of Representation*, ed. Harm Kaal and Daniëlle Slootjes, vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 18.

Salvius Julianus and Juventius Celsus.[23] Dio similarly notes that in his later years, Augustus surrounded himself with a group of close advisors, including family members and trusted supporters, whose counsel effectively stood in for formal Senate deliberation.[24] Equestrians and imperial freedmen likewise played key roles, with figures such as secretaries (*ab epistulis*) exerting substantial influence over imperial decisions.[25] Millar observes that although decisions were formally the emperor's own, their formulation would be shaped by this entourage.[26] This entourage, or the *consilium principis* as it came to be known, remained mostly informal until much later in the Empire; it could be called together by the emperor at a case-by-case basis, and could shift from one council to the next.[27]

The emperor's presence, rather than a fixed institutional seat, served as the locus of imperial authority. Millar describes this by stating that "the emperor was what the emperor did," his rule took shape through the reception of petitions, the issuing of rescripts, and the performance of judgment.[28] A rescript to Athens shows Marcus framing his decision not in terms of power but of concern (*cura*), emphasizing that imperial authority was exercised through attentiveness rather than coercion.[29] This expectation of responsive and performative leadership was central to Roman conceptions of emperorship. In a letter to Marcus Aurelius, the orator Fronto underscores that imperial rule relied as much on persuasion and presence as on legal decree. "It falls to a Caesar," he wrote, "to carry by persuasion necessary measures in the Senate… to address the people in a harangue… to correct the inequities of the law… to cow the proud."[30] Fronto's emphasis on persuasion and rhetorical presence reflects both his professional identity as a rhetorician and his conviction that eloquence held greater civic value than abstract philosophy or detached, impersonal rule, sentiments that pinned his criticism of the emperor's later turn to stoicism.[31] Imperial legitimacy thus rested not only on command but on the perception of the emperor as a ruler who listened, judged, and responded directly to his

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[23] *Historia Augusta*, *Hadrian* 18.1–3, trans. David Magie, in *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921); we must consider here that the source's late composition, anonymous authorship, and frequent use of rhetorical embellishment undermine its reliability, making such descriptions perhaps more reflective of fourth-century ideals than of Hadrian's actual court.
[24] Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 56.28.2.
[25] Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, 270.
[26] Ibidem.
[27] Hekster, "Emperors and Councillors," 18-19.
[28] Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, 607.
[29] Marcus Aurelius, *Letter to the Athenians*, in J. H. Oliver, *Marcus Aurelius: Aspects of Civic and Cultural Policy in the East*, Hesperia Supplement 13 (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1970), Plaque II, lines 26-27.
[30] M. Cornelius Fronto, *The Correspondence of Marcus Cornelius Fronto*, vol. 1, letter 8, ed. and trans. C. R. Haines (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 59.
[31] Michel P.J. Van Den Hout, A Commentary on the Letters of M. Cornelius Fronto (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 7-11, 43, 536.

subjects.[32] All this, Fronto said, must assuredly be done by speech and writing.[33] Fronto, too, highlights other key imperial duties: issuing rescripts across the empire, disciplining foreign rulers, quelling unrest, rewarding loyalty, and suppressing rebellion.[34]

Undefined too was the process by which one became emperor. There was no codified mechanism of succession, no fixed electoral body, and no constitutional protocol to determine who should rule next. An example is the elevation of Claudius in 41 AD. As Suetonius recounts, following Caligula's assassination, Claudius was found hiding behind a curtain in fear, only to be discovered by a soldier who, recognizing him, hailed him as emperor. Claudius was then carried to the praetorian camp, where he reluctantly accepted power and secured the soldiers' loyalty; a dramatic account likely influenced by Suetonius' penchant for colorful, morally charged narrative.[35] A similar episode unfolded nearly 150 years later in 193 AD, following the assassination of Pertinax. In a display of political disintegration, the imperial throne was auctioned off by the very soldiers who had murdered the reigning emperor. Cassius Dio describes how Didius Julianus, competing with Pertinax's father-in-law Sulpicianus, stood outside the Praetorian camp and literally bid for the empire. "Just as if it had been in some market or auction-room," Dio writes, "both the City and its entire empire were auctioned off." With no institutional check in place, the soldiers accepted Julianus' bid and proclaimed him emperor, though, as Hidber notes, Dio's senatorial perspective and rhetorical flair may color such dramatic depictions.[36]

While the European Union lacks a singular sovereign, the President of the European Commission (hereinafter 'President') arguably functions as its closest equivalent to a central figurehead.[37] For instance, in moments of crisis, the President emerges as the most recognizable and rhetorically unifying presence within the EU's complicated institutional landscape.[38] As head of the EU's executive arm, the President essentially has six key roles: proposing

[32] Hekster, Caesar Rules, 11-13.
[33] Fronto, *Correspondence*, 59.
[34] Ibidem.
[35] Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, "Divus Claudius" 10, trans. J. C. Rolfe, in *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914); G. B. Townend, "Suetonius and His Influence," in *Latin Biography*, ed. T. A. Dorey (London: Routledge, 1967), 79-92. Suetonius was a Roman equestrian and imperial secretary under Trajan and Hadrian, whose background as a grammarian biased him toward collecting moralizing, and often scandalous anecdotes over coherent historical interpretation. Therefore, it is important to consider the likelihood of some embellishment throughout his writings.
[36] Cassius Dio. *Roman History*. 74.11.2; T. Hidber, "Cassius Dio," in *Narrators, Narratees, and Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature*, ed. Irene de Jong, René Nünlist, and Angus Bowie (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 187–199. Hidber notes that Dio's account is shaped by his senatorial background, rhetorical style, and desire to present himself as an authoritative eyewitness, which calls for caution when evaluating dramatic or moralizing episodes.
[37] Gary Marks, "Europe and Its Empires,", 7.
[38] Aryn Baker, "Ursula von der Leyen Is Redefining What It Means to Be Powerful," *TIME*, June 1, 2022.

legislation, implementing EU policy, managing the budget, conducting external relations, policing EU laws and 'pointing the way forward'.[39] These functions echo, in structural and symbolic terms, the expectations once placed on the Roman emperor as Fronto described them. Like the emperor, the President must simultaneously lead, represent, and justify EU action to a politically diverse population. In the EU, the seat of governance is clearly located in Brussels, where many officials and staff members spend a significant portion of their professional careers.[40] Cases such as Marcus Aurelius governing the empire from provincial military headquarters like Sirmium are, perhaps obviously, unheard of in modern times, where centralized and fixed institutional seats are the norm. The President is surrounded by twenty-six Commissioners, each assigned a specific policy portfolio, forming the College of Commissioners.[41] The President of the European Commission is selected through a formalized, treaty-based process emphasizing democratic legitimacy. As stipulated in Article 17 of the Treaty on European Union, the European Council proposes a candidate for President after considering the European Parliament elections. This candidate must then be elected by a majority of Parliament members.[42] The full Commission, nominated by member states in agreement with the President-elect, is subsequently subject to parliamentary approval before formal appointment.[43] In contrast to the Roman model and the examples discussed, the EU process reflects a commitment to codified procedures and representative accountability. The President has limited control over the composition of their executive team. Commissioners are nominated by national governments, and while the President participates in negotiations, larger member states often assert significant influence over which portfolios their nominees will receive.[44]

This contrasts with Rome; we mentioned previously that an emperor such as Hadrian could elevate friends or jurists into advisory roles without formal negotiation. Still, while Roman emperors arguably had greater personal freedom in selecting their advisers, senatorial approval remained a vital source of legitimacy. Senatorial authors such as Pliny the Younger and Cassius Dio considered it both laudable and normal for individuals close to the emperor to challenge him when he fell short of expectations. In *Panegyricus,* Pliny praises Trajan for

[39] Andreas Staab, *The European Union Explained: Institutions, Actors, Global Impact*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 51.
[40] Ibidem, 47.
[41] Ibidem.
[42] European Union, *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, Article 17, Official Journal of the European Union C 326/13.
[43] Ibidem.
[44] Staab, *The European Union Explained*, 48-49.

fostering an atmosphere in which senators could once again speak freely, presenting this as a return to proper imperial conduct (though as a senator himself, Pliny had a vested interest in promoting senatorial liberty).[45] Similarly, Dio recounts Trajan's symbolic gesture of handing his Praetorian Prefect a sword with the command to use it "for me if I rule well; against me if I rule badly."[46] From Hidber, we do know however that Dio has a tendency to dramatize in service of moral or political commentary.[47] This expectation of accountability bears some resemblance to the modern function of the European Parliament, as it exercises approval power over the Commission as a whole, thereby legitimizing the executive branch of the European Union.[48]

It is clear that neither of these institutions are able to exercise authority in a vacuum. The existence of representative bodies like the Roman Senate and the European Parliament inherently complicates that. Talbert demonstrates in his work on the Senate that it comprised some 600 members during the time of Augustus and remained stable around that number for long after, even though the body regularly struggled to maintain this capacity.[49] Augustus formally made senatorial status hereditary, thereby encouraging the sons of senators to follow in their fathers' footsteps. In theory, this should have reinforced the Senate's nature as a self-replicating oligarchy. Yet in practice, this did not happen. Talbert points out that established senatorial families failed to produce members generation after generation, resulting in a significant need for replenishment through imperial intervention.[50] In response, emperors regularly filled the ranks through *adlecti*, the direct admission of qualified men, often from the equestrian order or local elites across the empire. The Senate functioned as a visible counterbalance to the emperor's supreme authority, even if, in practice, individual senators were wholly dependent on the emperor for their careers, and at times, their survival.[51] It was less the Senate's capacity to oppose imperial decisions that mattered, and more the expectation that emperors ought to act in consultation with senatorial consensus.[52]

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[45] Pliny the Younger, *Panegyricus*, 67.8; Rex Winsbury, *Pliny the Younger: A Life in Roman Letters* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 4. As a senator himself, Pliny had a vested interest in promoting the value of senatorial liberty under Trajan.
[46] Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 68.16.1.
[47] T. Hidber, "Cassius Dio," in *Narrators and Narratives* (2004), 196. Hidber observes that Dio often inserts dramatized or intimate scenes to explore broader moral or political themes, even when they go beyond what could be historically verified.
[48] European Commission, *How the Commission is Appointed;* Treaty on European Union, art. 17(7), 2008 O.J. (C 115) 25.
[49] Richard J.A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 29-31.
[50] Ibidem, 31.
[51] Hekster, Caesar Rules, 193.
[52] Ibidem.

The European Parliament performs a function analogous in form, if not in substance, to that of the Roman Senate. According to Article 14(2) of the Treaty on European Union, the Parliament "shall be composed of representatives of the Union's citizens," and this number "shall not exceed 750 in number."[53] The Parliament currently has 720 members.[54] Its composition is determined by the principle of degressive proportionality, an innovation that balances equality between states with representation by population.[55] This means that while larger member mtates are allocated more seats in the European Parliament than smaller ones, they have fewer Members of Parliament per capita. Conversely, smaller states are overrepresented relative to their population size. Members are democratically elected every five years through direct universal suffrage in each of the EU's member states.[56] Though the election is simultaneous across the Union, it is essentially a collection of twenty-seven parallel national elections, each governed by domestic political parties.

[53] European Union, *Treaty on European Union*, art. 14, October 26, 2012, EUR-Lex.
[54] European Union, "European Parliament,"
[55] Staab, *The European Union Explained*, 65.
[56] European Union, *Treaty on European Union*, art. 14.

Chapter II

This chapter investigates how central authority in each case is legitimated not only through formal mechanisms, but also through representation and narrative. It begins by establishing the conceptual framework of legitimacy and continues with an analysis of the ways in which Roman and EU authority have relied on symbolic and ideological narratives to secure support and coherence.

Before we can consider how authority is legitimized, we must first clarify what we mean exactly by 'legitimate authority.' Max Weber defines it as "a belief in legitimacy" -- that is, a shared recognition among political subjects that rule is rightful.[57] This idea later informed the development of new survey techniques to measure legitimacy in terms of aggregate levels of public support and institutional identification**.**[58] Such metrics remain central to legitimizing rule in modern times. Thinkers like Rousseau in *The Social Contract* added that legitimacy also requires representation, arguing that rightful authority arises from the collective will of the people, expressed through institutions that ensure participation and consent in governance.[59] It is these two dimensions that are relevant when examining how the legitimacy of EU rule is constructed and maintained. But we cannot conclude this without recognizing the debate on whether these criteria are appropriate for evaluating the EU at all.

Nentwich argues in his work that the EU's legitimacy is fundamentally derivative from its member states, grounded in legal authority and intergovernmental recognition, and that the criteria of nation states (such as we have established) should not apply.[60] Likewise, Cerutti argues that since the EU is not, and is not meant to be, a nation-state, its legitimacy must be understood in terms of post-national, flexible identity structures and functional integration rather than traditional democratic unity.[61] I argue that for the purposes of this thesis, applying democratic criteria is relevant, particularly as we take into consideration the EU's only directly elected institution. Moreover, as the EU continues to grow more supranational in scope (even formally committing itself to "an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe" in Article 1

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[57] Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischoff et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 213.
[58] Thomas Banchoff and Mitchell P. Smith, "Introduction: Conceptualizing Legitimacy in a Contested Polity," in *Legitimacy and the European Union: The Contested Polity*, ed. Thomas Banchoff and Mitchell P. Smith (London: Routledge, 1999), 3-4.
[59] Ibidem, 4; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin Books, 1968), Book I, Chapter VI.
[60] Albert Weale and Michael Nentwich, eds., *Political Theory and the European Union: Legitimacy, Constitutional Choice and Citizenship* (London: Routledge, 1998).
[61] Furio Cerutti and Sonia Lucarelli, eds., *The Search for a European Identity: Values, Policies and Legitimacy of the European Union* (London: Routledge, 2008).

TEU), such standards should increasingly apply.[62]

Legitimacy in Rome cannot be judged by the standards of democratic theory. Yet, the concepts of recognition and representation remain analytically useful. Even so, Egon Flaig has argued that modern theories of legitimacy may be inadequate for describing imperial power in Rome. In his *Akzeptanztheorie*, Flaig proposes that Roman rule should not be judged according to normative or institutional criteria, but rather in terms of *acceptance* by key societal groups, those being the Senate, army, and urban populace.[63] According to this model, imperial authority was neither constitutionally grounded nor legally confirmed; it was contingent and situational, subject to withdrawal at any time.[64] No legal act, neither a *senatus consultum* (a decree of the senate) nor a *lex de imperio* (a formal law conferring imperial power), conferred the right to rule; instead, emperors remained in power so long as they secured and renewed the practical support of decisive actors (especially the army).[65] We know from the previous chapter that senatorial approval was an important source of legitimacy, Pliny praises Trajan in the *Panegyricus* for restoring senatorial freedom, even if senatorial acknowledgment was no longer formally needed to legitimate imperial rule.[66] But even so, in legal terms, every emperor's position rested upon investiture by the Senate.[67] Hekster remarks that senatorial acclamation was still an expected elements of taking up the purple, and that their lack of choice did not diminish the symbolic importance of their role.[68] In addition to that, Senators were perhaps the richest group in the Empire, so it hardly needs saying that their influence carried considerable weight, even when their formal power waned.[69]

Cassius Dio recounts that Septimius Severus advised his sons to "enrich the soldiers and scorn all other men."[70] In these cases, legitimacy was rooted in the recognition of authority by those whose support was most politically consequential. Tacitus similarly observed (often through indirect hints and careful phrasing) that the backing of the military was the true

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[62] European Union, *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, Official Journal of the European Union C 326/13 (October 26, 2012), Article 1.
[63] Egon Flaig, *A Coherent Model to Understand the Roman Principate: "Acceptance" Instead of "Legitimacy" and the Problem of Usurpation* (2012), 86.
[64] Ibidem, 85.
[65] Ibidem, 84-85.
[66] Pliny the Younger, *Panegyricus*, 67.8; Mennen, *Power and Status*, 45; Winsbury, *Pliny the Younger*, 4. To remind, Pliny as a senator naturally praises the emperor for restoring such freedoms.
[67] Talbert, *Senate of Imperial Rome*, 354.
[68] Hekster, "Emperors and Councillors," 20.
[69] Ibidem, 48.
[70] Cassius Dio, *Roman History,* 77.15.2; T. Hidber, "Cassius Dio," in *Narrators and Narratives* (2004), 196. To note again, Dio is said to present himself as an omnipresent narrator, crafting private scenes to convey political messages.

foundation of power in the empire.[71] A significant shift was also gradually underway around the end of the 2nd century AD, as legitimacy increasingly came from military backing rather than senatorial approval; emperors rose from equestrian and provincial backgrounds, distanced themselves from Rome, and no longer prioritized senatorial consent as they once had.[72]

And according to Ammianus Marcellinus, it was the reverence felt for the city of Rome, and the Roman name, that won the respect of the world, a view that, as Barnes notes, may reflect Ammianus' personal convictions and subjectivity, and being a former soldier rather than objective reality.[73] Thus, it was the narrative of Roman power and glory that conferred legitimacy on those who could visibly uphold and embody the grandeur of the empire. When we look beyond glory, the military, and institutions like the Senate, we see that emperorship in Rome was also deeply constructed through visual and symbolic figures. Statues of the emperor contributed strongly to this visual rhetoric, offering not only a likeness of the ruler, but a carefully staged, intentionally ambiguous embodiment of imperial ideals.[74] As Michael Squire's analysis of the *Prima Porta Augustus* shows, these sculptures were not just representations, but active instruments of political strategy. By blending nudity with military costume and divinity with mortality, the statue collapses traditional oppositions to present Augustus as both human and more-than-human, Roman and Greek, conqueror and cosmic mediator.[75] Such ambiguity was not accidental; it was central to the statue's influence. In embodying these contradictions, the emperor's image served as an expression of Roman authority, legitimizing his rule through visualised power and symbolism. Emperors were furthermore judged by their personal characteristics, even their physical appearance. Gallienus' extravagant festivities with elaborate spectacles and his apparent obsession with entertainment rather than governance, allowed critics to portray him as frivolous, thereby undermining his

[71] Tacitus, *Histories*, 1.4, 1.5; Ryberg, Inez Scott. "Tacitus' Art of Innuendo." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 73 (1942): 387, 391. Using stylistic innuendo and selective presentation of motive and hearsay as to not take accountability for his words, Tacitus consistently portrayed emperors as reliant on military power while masking tyranny behind formal legitimacy, emphasizing that real authority stemmed not from institutional rule but from control over the army.

[72] Mennen, *Power and Status*, 47.

[73] Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354–378)*, trans. Walter Hamilton, rev. and intro. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (London: Penguin Classics, 1986), 14.6.6; Timothy D. Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 355. Barnes argues that Ammianus' portrayal of events is inevitably shaped by his own subjectivity, especially given his background as a former soldier and his increasingly pessimistic tone. This suggests that depictions, such as reverence for the Roman name, may reflect his personal conviction or literary agenda rather than objective reality.

[74] Michael Squire, Embodied Ambiguities on the Prima Porta Augustus, Art History, Volume 36, Issue 2 (2021), 270-271.

[75] Ibidem, 244, 267, 265.

imperial legitimacy.[76] Commodus's repeated appearances as a gladiator, described by both Cassius Dio and Herodian, shattered expectations of imperial dignity. Rather than reinforcing authority, such performances undermined his legitimacy by reducing the emperor to a spectacle.[77] Hidber does note that both authors shaped their accounts through constructed narrative voices.[78] Narratives surrounding emperorship demanded not only symbolic distance from the masses, but also restraint and decorum in public and, for instance, the Senate, where breaches of conduct, though tolerated, could still undermine imperial dignity.[79]

Legitimacy did not depend solely on the Senate and the army; as Tacitus notes in *Annals*, the people were mentioned alongside them in the oath of allegiance to Tiberius, making clear that their support, too, was considered important to imperial authority.[80] This symbolic anchoring in popular legitimacy is echoed in the *Lex de Imperio Vespasiani*, whose final clause retroactively declares all of Vespasian's actions valid "just as if they had been undertaken according to the order of the people or plebs," reaffirming the enduring rhetorical power of the Roman people as a source of rightful rule.[81] Millar demonstrates that the Roman populace played a critical role in constructing imperial authority too; in 22 BC, a famine-stricken crowd shut the Senate inside the Curia and demanded that Augustus accept the dictatorship, effectively forcing the Senate to act until Augustus publicly rejected the offer in a dramatic appeal.[82] Public spectacles became vital stages where imperial authority was tested and affirmed, as emperors were expected not only to appear but to visibly engage with the people, whose cheers or protests in the arena could legitimize or undermine a ruler's claim to power.[83] Millar demonstrates (through citing Suetonius) that the relevance of the emperor's actual presence is made especially clear in the case of Tiberius, who not only avoided giving shows of his own, but, after being pressured by the people into freeing an actor at one point,

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[76] *Historia Augusta*, Gallienus, 16.4; David Rohrbacher, *The Play of Allusion in the Historia Augusta* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), 140–141; as argued by Rohrbacher, the author of HA clearly dislikes Gallienus, so such portrayals should perhaps be taken with a grain of salt.

[77] Herodian, *Historiae*, 1.15; Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 73.20.3.

[78] T. Hidber, "Cassius Dio," in *Narrators and Narratives* (2004), 188-191, 206. As Hidber notes, Dio presents himself as uniquely qualified to record contemporary events and claims authority through personal presence and privileged access, which may have shaped how he portrayed such spectacles as signs of imperial degeneration. Herodian, while more reserved, similarly adopts an omnipresent stance, describing intimate scenes and emotions that suggest narrative construction rather than pure eyewitness reporting.

[79] Talbert, *Senate of Imperial Rome*, 270-271.

[80] Tacitus, *Annals*, I.7. Ryberg, "Tacitus' Art of Innuendo," TAPA 73 (1942), 387. In the opening chapters of the Annals, Tacitus attempts to summarize popular opinion regarding Augustus and Tiberius. He claims to provide an impartial recollection, yet the unfavourable comments are given in greater number and detail, thereby implying meaning he does not explicitly state.

[81] *Lex de Imperio Vespasiani*, clause VIII, in M.H. Crawford, ed., *Roman Statutes*, vol. 1 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1996).

[82] Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, 370.

[83] Ibidem.

deliberately stayed away from spectacles given by others to avoid facing similar demands.[84] Millar uses this example to show how emperors could be constrained by the expectations and collective will of the people, pressures which, if resisted or mishandled, could lead to public discontent and ultimately undermine the perceived legitimacy of imperial authority.

We have now seen that legitimacy in the Roman Empire emerged from a complicated set of factors. The European Union, and its President of the Commission confronts a comparable challenge: legitimacy must be secured and sustained across a broad and diverse political landscape. Unlike Rome, the EU explicitly grounds its authority in a shared commitment to values such as human dignity, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.[85] According to Article 2 TEU, these values are common to all member states and are meant to form the foundation of a pluralistic and just society.[86] Moreover, Article 3 TEU emphasizes that the Union's aim is to promote peace, well-being, and a high level of environmental and social protection through balanced economic growth and a competitive social market economy.[87] The basic principles of legitimacy in the modern world – and as we have established in this chapter, through *representation*, are democratic.[88] Yet it is precisely this democratic narrative that places the EU in a position of contestation. While it proclaims democratic legitimacy as a core value, the EU faces enduring criticism over its so-called democratic deficit.[89] [90] The President of the Commission is not directly elected by EU citizens; instead, election results are merely "taken into account" during the nomination process.[91] Although the European Parliament must formally approve the nominee, the general public has virtually no influence over who ultimately assumes the role. Like the Roman emperors, the President of the European Commission is expected to embody dignity and decorum. Former President Jean-Claude Juncker, for instance, faced public ridicule for unusual behavior during official events, such as stumbling or slurred speech, which led to speculation about excessive drinking and ultimately undermined perceptions of his credibility.[92]

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[84] Ibidem, 371.
[85] European Union, *TEU*, OJ C 326/13 (2012), Art. 1; Weale and Nentwich, *Political Theory and the European Union*, 103.
[86] European Union, *TEU*, OJ C 326/13 (2012), Art. 2.
[87] Ibidem, Art. 3; Michael Gehler, "The European Union: A Post-Democratic, Post-Modern, and Post-National Empire?," 253.
[88] Weale and Nentwich, *Political Theory and the European Union*, 3.
[89] Ian Cooper, "A Virtual Third Chamber for the European Union? National Parliaments after the Treaty of Lisbon," in *The European Union in Crisis: Explorations in Representation and Democratic Legitimacy*, ed. Kyriakos N. Demetriou (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 186.
[90] Weale and Nentwich, *Political Theory and the European Union*, 143.
[91] European Union, *TEU*, OJ C 326/13 (2012), Art. 17.
[92] Sky News, "EU Denies 'Insulting' Claim Jean-Claude Juncker Was Drunk at NATO Summit; Bruno Waterfield, "Fears over Jean-Claude Juncker's Drinking," *The Telegraph*, June 25, 2014.

We know from previous sections that the Roman military was used to legitimize its rulers; the European Union has no formal military.[93] Yet the EU does deploy military power from its member states selectively to support its values in its name, and using its symbols. In missions like EUFOR Althea in Bosnia, the Union maintains peace in neighboring regions, reinforcing its self-image as a stabilizing, principled force.[94] Here, military presence serves as a legitimizing narrative aligned with the EU's founding commitment to peace.[95] The European Union's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 serves as a powerful narrative tool in legitimizing its role on the world stage. Awarded "for over six decades [of contribution] to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe," the prize reinforced the Union's foundational identity as a peace project.[96]

In terms of law, the Roman emperor held the capacity of supreme judge, and in the later days of the empire, became the sole and absolute lawmaker.[97] [98] Article 17 TEU states that the Commission is the only body capable of proposing Union legislative acts.[99] This centralization of legislative power reinforces narratives of legal unity and control, casting both the Roman emperor and the European Commission as foundational to the maintenance of law and order.

In sum, this chapter has explored how, despite the some 2,000-year gap between them, both the Roman Empire and the European Union face the same essential challenge: making power feel rightful and legitimate. Though one ruled with swords and statues, and the other with treaties and technocrats, both rely on narratives, symbols, and recognition, whether from soldiers and senators or citizens and parliaments.[100] We've looked at legitimacy through representation and recognition, and while comparing such vastly different systems is far from simple and comes with many complications and, inevitably overlooking many complicated institutional and historical nuances, the takeaway is clear: legitimizing authority is never only about formal rules, it's about being seen as the right power, in the right hands, at the right time.

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[93] Magali Gravier, "The Next European Empire?", 7, 10; Michael Gehler, "The European Union: A Post-Democratic, Post-Modern, and Post-National Empire?," 254.
[94] Trineke Palm, "The Changing Character of EUFOR Althea: Power Politics or Learning?" *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2017): 67–86
[95] European Union, *TEU*, OJ C 326/13 (2012), Art. 1.
[96] Norwegian Nobel Committee, *The Nobel Peace Prize 2012: European Union (EU)*, Nobel Media AB, 2012,
[97] William L. Burdick, *The Principles of Roman Law and Their Relation to Modern Law* (Clark, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2004), 141.
[98] Ibidem, 119.
[99] European Union, *TEU*, OJ C 326/13 (2012), Art. 17.
[100] Gary Marks, "Europe and Its Empires,", 7.

Chapter III

"The roads served to unify the Roman world and, at long remove, to create modern Europe."
— Raymond Chevallier [101]

It begins with a road. Cut into the landscape, connecting distant provinces to the imperial core, the Roman road was more than infrastructure, it was a statement of presence. Each route extended the reach of authority, making the empire legible, traversable, and governable. As Chevallier suggests, such infrastructure not only unified the Roman world but laid the groundwork for a connected Europe. While ideology and institutional structure provide the scaffolding of centralized governance, it is infrastructure that renders authority tangible across space. No matter how compelling the political vision or how sophisticated the governing elite, central authority remains inert if it cannot be made present, especially across a large and heterogeneous territory. This chapter considers how the Roman Empire and the European Union use infrastructure as a tool of integration. We explore how roads, administrative networks, communication systems, and trade extend the reach of central governance into the edges of their domains. The aim is not to catalogue infrastructure projects, but to analyze how such systems function as conduits for authority, enabling central institutions to coordinate, enforce, and symbolize their presence across provinces or member states. Infrastructure in this sense is not merely technical or utilitarian, it is deeply political.[102] The ability of a central authority to connect, organize, and coordinate far-flung territories relies not only on consent and delegation, but on the material and organizational systems that make such coordination practically possible.[103]

In Rome, the road system was not merely a practical necessity, as it became a defining feature of Roman rule itself; central authority essentially sought to control the empire through a deliberately constructed network of connecting lines.[104] By restoring and expanding Republican-era routes, figures like Augustus and Trajan embedded their rule in a narrative of historical continuity, drawing on the symbolic weight of earlier traditions to legitimize their power in the present.[105] They made personal investments (such as Augustus' restoration of eighty-two temples, the Via Flaminia, and the aqueduct Marcia, as recorded in *Res Gestae Divi*

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[101] Raymond Chevallier, Roman Roads (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023), 206.
[102] Ibidem, 181.
[103] Ibidem, 85.
[104] Anne Kolb, "Transport and Communication in the Roman State: The Cursus Publicus," in *The Impact of the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Tenth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire*. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 67.
[105] Ray Laurence, *The Roads of Roman Italy: Mobility and Cultural Change* (London: Routledge, 1999), 39.

Augusti 20) and these were not neutral acts of development; they were calculated performances of benefaction that marked the emperor as a unifying figure, and made central authority visible in the daily lives of subjects.[106] In provinces like Hispania, this visibility was quite literal: milestones along roads from Bracara to Asturica, Emerita to Salmantica, and along the *via Augusta* regularly bore inscriptions naming the emperor responsible for construction or repair.[107] For instance, CIL II 4943, a milestone from the *via Augusta*, records how Augustus, identified with full titulature as son of the deified Julius and *pontifex maximus* (chief priest), had the road built.[108] Similarly, a multitude of milestones from the early second century, such as CIL VI 6813-14 on the *Via Appia* or CIL XI 6619-22 on the *Via Flaminia*, commemorate extensive repair works under emperors Nerva and Trajan.[109] Despite the inscription on Trajan's Column (dedicated to him for his work on infrastructure) crediting its construction to the senate and people of Rome, Cassius Dio attributes the monument to Trajan himself, reflecting that public works reinforced the image of the emperor as the supreme source of authority and benefaction.[110] Through such inscriptions, emperors inscribed their presence into the landscape itself, ensuring that every journey through imperial space was also an encounter with imperial authority.[111]

For many of the central authority's logistical needs, such as the transport of goods, officials, and messages, the Roman state developed a system known as the *cursus publicus*, a state-run transportation network dependent on private service obligations.[112] The ability of provincial officials to travel swiftly and with legitimacy depended on access to the *cursus publicus*, regulated through official warrants (*diplomata*) issued by the emperor; as Pliny the Younger illustrates in a letter to Trajan, even high-ranking governors required explicit authorization to make use of the system, underscoring that mobility itself was a controlled extension of imperial authority.[113] Rather than relying solely on imperial resources, the system drew on local populations, who, through municipal obligations (*munera*), were required to provide animals, wagons, and other equipment to ensure the movement of state agents across

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[106] Laurence, *Roads of Roman Italy*, 39; Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 20.
[107] Chevallier, Roman Roads, 157.
[108] *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL) II 4943, milestone from the via Augusta (Hispania), recording road construction by Augustus.*
[109] For early second-century repairs under Nerva and Trajan, see CIL VI 6813-14 (Via Appia) and CIL XI 6619-22 (Via Flaminia).
[110] Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 68.16.3.
[111] Chevallier, Roman Roads, 157; Laurence, *Roads of Roman Italy*, 62.
[112] Anne Kolb, "The Impact and Interaction of State Transport in the Roman Empire," in *The Transformation of Economic Life under the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Second Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire, c. 200 B.C.–A.D. 476),* 68.
[113] Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae,* 10.14.

the empire.[114] Local populations also frequently carried out the construction and upkeep of infrastructure, yet the emperor consistently claimed credit (as is the case with Commodus in Dalmatia 183 AD), again maintaining his role as a visible source of imperial authority.[115]

With a population nearing one million in the early empire, Rome depended on massive food imports, up to 300,000 tons of grain annually, requiring stable trade routes, efficient taxation, and a robust logistical system to sustain both supply and imperial authority.[116] The movement of goods and commercial exchange depended fundamentally on the pre-existing infrastructure of roads, harbours, and canals.[117] Taxes in kind, such as grain shipments from Egypt and North Africa, bypassed market exchange and reflected imperial authority, enabling the state to extract resources from the provinces and, through roads, ports, and storage facilities, redistribute them unidirectionally to Rome, making power materially visible.[118] The high transport costs acknowledged in *CTh.* 11.1.22, where moving goods cost more than the obligation itself, indicate that inefficiencies existed, and were likely long-standing issues within the imperial logistics system.[119] Such high costs were eventually alleviated through reforms that reduced the distances between tax collection and consumption, enabling more efficient use of regional infrastructure and reinforcing imperial control through localized provisioning and redistribution.[120] For instance, by stationing smaller military units near frontier zones, the empire minimized long-distance transport, allowing local supply networks to meet logistical demands more directly and embedding state authority more firmly within provincial territories.[121] Through all of these functions, the Roman roads served as powerful symbols of imperial unity; the sheer scale of the network (the 53,638 or so miles of main roads, as Chevallier notes) was itself a material manifestation of Roman order and ambition.[122]

Transport infrastructure has been for a long time the cornerstone of the European Union's regional development policies.[123] The Treaty of Lisbon formally established territorial

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[114] Kolb, "The Impact and Interaction," 68.
[115] Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL) III 3202 = ILS 393, inscription from Dalmatia (183/4 CE), recording bridge restoration credited to Commodus but executed by local communities; Anne Kolb, "Communications and Mobility in the Roman Empire," in The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 659.
[116] Peter Temin, "The Economy of the Early Roman Empire," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20, no. 1 (2006), 137.
[117] André Tchernia, *The Romans and Trade*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 106.
[118] Hopkins, Keith. "Taxes and Trade in the Roman Empire (200 B.C.–A.D. 400)." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980), 103.
[119] *Codex Theodosianus* 11.1.22
[120] Hopkins, *Taxes and Trade*, 123.
[121] Ibidem.
[122] Chevallier, *Roman Roads*, 205; Gary Marks, "Europe and Its Empires,", 3.
[123] Riccardo Crescenzi and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, "Infrastructure and Regional Growth in the European Union," *Papers in Regional Science* 91, no. 3 (2012), 487.

cohesion as a core objective of the European Union, with infrastructure recognized as a key instrument in achieving balanced and inclusive regional development.[124] Indeed, some 10 to 15 percent of the total EU budget is devoted to infrastructure investments.[125] Endowment in transport infrastructure varies greatly across EU regions: in 2010, seven member states had a road density less than half the EU average, though targeted investment between 2000 and 2008 in underdeveloped areas, especially in Spain and Portugal, sought to address these disparities and promote greater territorial cohesion through improved connectivity.[126] A flagship EU mechanism for these efforts is the Trans-European Transport Network, a long-term project aimed at integrating the EU's regions through a unified, multimodal infrastructure grid of roads, rail, inland waterways, ports, and airports.[127] TEN-T serves not only economic goals but also strategic cohesion, similar to Rome's use of road networks to physically embed imperial authority into the edges of the empire.[128] In Rome, we also see similar investments in the transport infrastructure of the underdeveloped Iberian Peninsula, where political decisions, such as Agrippa's coordinated network planning, sought not only to enhance economic potential but also to assert territorial cohesion and extend imperial authority into newly conquered regions.[129]

Earlier in this chapter, we considered Roman inscriptions as deliberate instruments of imperial self-representation. In the European Union, it is equally important for the central authority to make its role in infrastructure projects visible to the public, as seen in prominent examples like the Vasco da Gama Bridge in Lisbon or the Pelješac Bridge in Croatia.[130] This is achieved through mandatory visibility guidelines that require signage, plaques, and public acknowledgements stating that projects are, for example, "co-financed by the European Union," often accompanied by the EU emblem.[131] These markers are not only symbolic; they

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[124] European Union. *Treaty of Lisbon Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community*. Official Journal of the European Union C 306/1, 13 December 2007; Judith Clifton, Daniel Díaz-Fuentes, and Marcos Fernández-Gutiérrez, "Public Infrastructure Services in the European Union: Challenges for Territorial Cohesion," *Regional Studies* 50, no. 2 (2016), 358.
[125] Jorge Núñez Ferrer and Moni Katarivas, *What Are the Effects of the EU Budget: Driving Force or Drop in the Ocean?* CEPS Special Report No. 86 (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, April 2014), 3-4,
[126] European Commission, *Investing in Europe's Future: Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion* (Brussels, 2010); Crescenzi and Rodríguez-Pose, "Infrastructure and Regional Growth," 487.
[127] European Commission, *Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on Union Guidelines for the Development of the Trans-European Transport Network and Repealing Decision No 661/2010/EU* (Brussels: Official Journal of the European Union, 2023).
[128] Ibidem; Magali Gravier, "The Next European Empire?", 11.
[129] Cèsar Carreras and Pau De Soto, "The Roman Transport Network: A Precedent for the Integration of the European Mobility," *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 46, no. 3 (2013), 123-124.
[130] European Commission, *EU Emblem Guidelines* (2021); "Bridging Gaps with EU Funds" (2022); "Building a Better Europe" (2022).
[131] European Commission, *EU Emblem Guidelines* (2021).

are part of a formal communication strategy designed to reinforce the EU's presence as a benefactor and integrator across its member states, making infrastructure a tangible expression of supranational authority and solidarity, much like milestones once did in the Roman world.[132]

As the old saying goes, all roads lead to Rome, and in the Roman Empire, that was more than a metaphor. It was a statement of logistical reality and imperial intent: infrastructure rendered authority visible, facilitated territorial cohesion, and turned geography into governance. Roads did not simply connect cities; they connected subject peoples to power, integrating the far reaches of empire with its ideological and administrative core. Today, while no one would claim that all roads lead to Brussels, the European Union's infrastructural ambitions follow a similar logic, using transport networks, symbolic visibility, and regional investment not by conquest, but through cohesion, mobility, and shared direction.

[132] Ibidem.

Chapter IV

Power may radiate from the center, but it is sustained through the people who recognize it, identify with it, and are formally bound to it. In both the Roman Empire and the European Union, the notion of *citizenship* has served as a crucial mechanism for forging unity across politically and culturally diverse territories. For central authorities, citizenship is a means of extending authority through inclusion, aligning individuals with the structures and values of the state or supranational polity. It legitimizes rule by binding people to the center through shared rights, obligations, and identity. While Roman citizenship was governed by a complicated and sometimes inconsistent legal framework (such as the *lex Minicia* and the rules surrounding *connubium*), these intricacies fall outside the scope of this chapter. In this chapter, we examine to what extent citizenship was/is used by the Roman and EU central authorities to foster unity and assert authority across these diverse territories. We consider whether it was a conscious strategy to create a shared identity, and how this, in turn, reinforced the reach and authority of central governance.

Roman citizenship in the Empire was regarded as a prized status, associated with legal status, social prestige and access to imperial institutions.[133] We know the importance legal status held in Rome; Gaius, for instance, opens his *Institutes* by dividing all Roman law according to persons, things, and actions, placing the law of persons and their status at the very foundation of legal understanding.[134] We also know there were various ways to acquire Roman citizenship; Gaius speaks of manumission as one such route, noting that "slaves may be manumitted in various ways... those who are manumitted according to Roman law become Roman citizens."[135] And from Suetonius, we know that citizenship could be granted collectively as a reward for military service, as he recounts how Caesar gave Roman citizenship to an entire legion he had raised from men of Gallia Transalpina.[136] As early as Cicero, the tension between local identity and Roman authority was acknowledged: in *Pro Balbo* 29–30 (approx. 56 BC), he distinguishes emotional attachment to one's native city from the legal status of Roman citizenship, which gradually became a privileged extra layer of identity held alongside local civic affiliation.[137] Pliny the Younger's correspondence with Trajan in further

[133] Myles Lavan and Clifford Ando, eds., *Roman and Local Citizenship in the Long Second Century CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 103.
[134] Gaius, *The Institutes of Gaius*, trans. W. M. Gordon and O. F. Robinson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1.1.
[135] Ibidem, 1.56, 1.57.
[136] Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 24.
[137] Cicero, De Legibus 2.3; Cicero, Pro Balbo 29–30.

shows that Roman citizenship could be granted on a case-by-case basis by imperial discretion. In *Epistulae* 10.6, Pliny thanks the emperor for bestowing citizenship on his physician Harpocras, demonstrating how legal status could be extended as a personal favor and remained firmly under the control of the imperial center.[138] Yet beneath all this, citizenship also functioned as a mechanism through which the central authority exerted control, shaping personal relationships, regulating inheritance, and reinforcing the boundaries of lawful belonging across the empire.[139] For instance, there was a strict regime governing the transmission of citizen status to the children of so-called 'mixed unions' (between Romans and non-Romans).[140] Gaius explains in *Institutes* 1.55 that legal marriage (*conubium*), and thus the right to pass on Roman citizenship to one's children, was only available to those whom the state permitted.[141] By limiting this right, the central authority used citizenship as a regulatory tool to control social reproduction and reinforce its authority over legal identity and belonging.

As the empire progressed, the figure of the emperor and the broader identity of the empire became increasingly intertwined.[142] Symbols like the toga, once tied to Roman citizenship, gradually gained imperial meaning, signalling both legal status and connection to imperial authority.[143] Being a Roman citizen became increasingly synonymous with being a subject of the Roman emperor, and more people became Roman citizens as time went on.[144] This process reached its peak with the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in 212 AD, which led to the universal grant of citizenship to all free inhabitants of the empire.[145] As Sherwin-White explains, by the early third century the Roman world had effectively internalized the idea of imperial belonging, even in regions where citizenship was not yet formally granted.[146] With the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, the central authority completed this process by legally affirming what had already taken shape socially and ideologically, binding nearly all free inhabitants to Rome not just through governance, but through shared legal identity, consolidating imperial authority.[147] Hekster adds an important dimension to this interpretation by highlighting the religious significance of the act: Caracalla, he notes, "expressed the hope that universal

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[138] Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 10.6.
[139] Ibidem.
[140] Lavan and Ando, *Roman and Local Citizenship*, 104.
[141] Gaius, *Institutes*, 1.55.
[142] Hekster, *Caesar Rules*, 83; Lavan and Ando, *Roman and Local Citizenship*, 293.
[143] Hekster, *Caesar Rules,* 83.
[144] Ibidem.
[145] Lavan and Ando, *Roman and Local Citizenship*, 41; Hekster, *Caesar Rules,* 83; A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 174.
[146] Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship*, 279-280.
[147] Ibidem.

citizenship would unite the people under the Roman state gods, and guarantee good relations between men and gods."[148] In this reading, the extension of citizenship was not only political but spiritual. Dio presents a more skeptical view. Writing as a contemporary observer, he suggests that the edict was less about fostering unity or recognition of shared status than it was a fiscal maneuver designed to expand the imperial tax base.[149] In his account, the extension of citizenship served as a pretext for new taxes on inheritance and manumission, reflecting not a benevolent strategy of inclusion but a calculated effort by Caracalla to extract revenue from newly enfranchised subjects.[150] Either way one interprets it, the extension of citizenship clearly contributed to strengthening imperial authority.

Citizenship itself became a tool of integration: as newly conquered peoples were granted citizenship, they could begin to identify with the empire rather than resist it.[151] Such a shift fostered loyalty and allowed imperial victories to be framed not as foreign subjugation but as internal triumphs.[152] This integration deepened further through so-called 'dual citizenship', as described by Dio Chrysostom in ca. 100 AD, who for example noted that citizens of Prusa were often also citizens of neighboring Apameia, sometimes even holding seats in its council.[153] The correspondence between Pliny and Emperor Trajan concerning the physician Harpocras offers a window into the mechanics and meaning of dual civic status in the Roman Empire. As Pliny explains in *Ep. 10.6-7*, Harpocras could not be granted Roman citizenship without first being made a citizen of Alexandria (an additional requirement that is presumably not enforced outside of Egypt).[154] Roman Egypt had at least three civic status levels: Romans, astoi (citizens of poleis), and Aigyptioi (rural Egyptians), and each tier came with specific rights and obligations.[155] The Harpocras case reflects how these layers functioned not just administratively but hierarchically, with local citizenship serving as a legal gateway to Roman status. However, as Maria Nowak notes, the emperor's ability to override Alexandrian

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148 Olivier Hekster, "The Roman Empire," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Edward Bispham, Thomas Harrison, and Brian A. Sparkes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 111.
149 Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 78.9.5; T. Hidber, "Cassius Dio," in *Narrators and Narratives* (2004), 189-190, 196, on his account, we should remember that Dio was writing not as a neutral chronicler, but as a senator with privileged access to imperial affairs and a strong moralizing voice. Rather than taking Caracalla's rhetoric at face value, Dio interprets the edict through a senatorial lens, framing it as another example of imperial self-interest under the guise of public benefaction.
150 Ibidem.
151 Hekster, *Caesar Rules,* 83.
152 Ibidem.
153 Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, vol. 3, trans. J. W. Cohoon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), Oration 40, 106–107.
154 Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 10.6-7.
155 Maria Nowak, "Citizenship in Roman Egypt before 212 CE," in *Citizenship in Antiquity: Civic Communities in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Jakub Filonik, Christine Plastow, and Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), 643.

procedures and bestow local citizenship directly, served as a reminder and demonstrates that ultimate authority remained with Rome.[156]

On this note of dual citizenship, we now move into the territory of the European Union, where EU citizenship similarly operates as a supranational layer atop national identity. Article 9 of the Treaty on European Union codifies this by stating that "every national of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union," and that "citizenship of the Union shall be additional to and not replace national citizenship."[157] One interesting parallel is that European citizenship, does not exist in a national-cultural sense, it carries no singular official language, ethnicity, or shared historical narrative, but functions instead as a legal and political status layered atop diverse local identities.[158] Roman citizenship was complicated and socially layered, with various paths to acquisition. And they were often governed by shifting legal rules. In contrast, EU citizenship has a single entry point: one must be a national of an EU member state, currently 27 in total, though gaining such nationality as a foreigner typically involves lengthy and challenging naturalization procedures that vary by country. Birth too, as it was in Rome's time, has once again become a politically charged gateway: some EU member states now warn they may restrict access to nationality by birth in order to curb immigration and limit indirect access to Union rights.[159] But what, from the perspective of the Union's central authority, is the actual function of EU citizenship? Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union offers part of the answer, stating that the Union aims to "offer its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers."[160] By positioning itself as the guarantor of these fundamental rights and freedoms, the EU strengthens its authority; the more citizens rely on the Union for protection, mobility, and legal recourse, the more they come to recognize and accept its role as a central power within their lives.

In the early stages of European integration, the concept of citizenship was situated within a wider federalist ambition, as seen in the Schuman Declaration (1950), where a reference is made to "the first concrete foundation of a European federation" and the Treaty of Paris's (1951) vision of "an organised Europe", both framing citizenship as a tool for

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[156] Ibidem, 644.
[157] European Union, *TEU*, OJ C 326/13 (2012), Art. 9.
[158] Percy B. Lehning, "European Citizenship: Towards a European Identity?" *Law and Philosophy* 20, no. 3 (2001), 264; Gary Marks, "Europe and Its Empires,", 14; Michael Gehler, "The European Union: A Post-Democratic, Post-Modern, and Post-National Empire?," 249-250.
[159] Dora Kostakopoulou, "The Origins, Evolution and Political Objectives of EU Citizenship," *German Law Journal* 15, no. 5 (2014), 815.
[160] European Union, *TEU*, OJ C 326/13 (2012), Art. 3

legitimizing and strengthening supranational authority.[161] One might then expect that, as the Union shifted toward economic cooperation and away from overt federalism, the concept of political citizenship would have receded. Yet the persistence of Union citizenship, and its development into a status that grants directly enforceable rights to individuals, reveals an enduring ambition: to construct not just a market, but a community that transcends nationality.[162]

As Herman van Rompuy observed, Europe cannot define itself merely through markets and transactions, its citizens are more than consumers; they are Europeans, united by an identity that reaches beyond the borders of their nations and the ties of their peoples.[163] In that shift from interest to value lies the Union's quiet strength and its key to maintaining authority. Citizenship becomes not merely a legal status, but a story of belonging, one through which the central authority weaves itself into people's identities. And in that bond, the shadow of early dreams of federalism still lingers: the idea that a shared citizenship can bind a continent together. Churchill's 1946 dream echoes here too, a Europe where one can say, with quiet pride, "I am a European."[164] In that declaration lies not just sentiment, but recognition, recognition that gives the center its strength.

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[161] Robert Schuman, *The Schuman Declaration – 9 May 1950*, European Union; *Treaty Establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (Treaty of Paris)*, April 18, 1951.
[162] Kostakopoulou, "Origins, Evolution and Political Objectives," 818.
[163] Herman van Rompuy, *The Political Challenges of Europe* (Brussels: European Policy Centre, 2010).
[164] Winston S. Churchill, *Speech at the University of Zurich*, September 19, 1946, in *Churchill: Speeches 1945–1959*, ed. Robert Rhodes James (London: Cassell, 1980).

Conclusion

From imperial roads and milestone inscriptions to trans-European networks and EU plaques, from Roman citizenship decrees to supranational identity rights, and from divine emperors to Commission presidents armed with treaties, this thesis has explored how two of history's most ambitious political projects have grappled with the age-old challenge of making central authority both effective and legitimate. Of course, drawing parallels between such temporally, structurally, and ideologically divergent systems has not been without complications, as any attempt to compare a premodern empire with a modern supranational union inevitably encounters tensions -- but even so, this thesis has demonstrated that meaningful analogies can be drawn.

One of the first insights emerging from this work in Chapter I is that authority in both Rome and the EU is not exercised in isolation but is structurally embedded in leadership figures supported by legitimizing institutions. In Rome, imperial power was performed through presence, persuasion, and an ever-shifting entourage rather than fixed bureaucracy, just as the President of the European Commission, though formally appointed, must embody and legitimize supranational authority before a diverse European public. While the two institutions clearly differ in their structural specifics, making direct functional comparisons challenging, both systems nevertheless reveal that effective central authority relies heavily on visibility, recognition, and the presence of representative assemblies tasked with oversight and legitimization.

In the second chapter, we saw that Roman emperors maintained authority through symbolic visibility, statues, spectacle, and public presence, analogous to the EU's symbolic use of peace awards and visible leadership. Both systems relied significantly on representative assemblies for legitimacy and approval. Central authority consistently depended on strategically cultivated support from key societal groups, such as the military in Rome and member states in the Union. Ideological narratives further reinforced legitimacy: Roman imperial grandeur parallels the EU's narratives of peace, prosperity, and democratic values. Just as emperors' authority rested heavily on personal decorum, the President's credibility similarly hinges upon dignified conduct and positive public perception, arguably becoming even more essential in today's era of intense media scrutiny and public accountability.

The third chapter explored how infrastructure functions as a tool for maintaining authority. Inscriptions along Roman roads often credited emperors, turning any journey into an encounter with imperial power. A clear parallel emerges in the EU, where plaques and signage

form part of an intentional communication strategy, making the Union's presence visible in everyday infrastructure. This visibility reinforces the EU's role as benefactor and integrator, thereby strengthening legitimacy and public recognition. Both Rome and the EU also use infrastructure to enhance territorial cohesion, integrating peripheral regions and enabling governance through connectivity. Roman infrastructure, as Chevallier aptly put it, "created modern Europe."

The final chapter considered citizenship. Parallels emerge when examining dual citizenship in the Roman Empire and the European Union. In the EU, it is codified in treaties; in Rome, legal clarity is lacking, though evidence suggests dual status existed, especially in provinces like Egypt. In both cases, citizenship was not tied strictly to national identity. Ongoing debates around birthright and entitlements echo concerns from two millennia ago. Despite complexity and contestation, both systems used citizenship to foster belonging and formal attachment to central authority, though Roman subjects likely felt a closer bond to the emperor than EU citizens do to Brussels.

In the end, this thesis shows that the Roman Empire offers more than just a distant mirror, it provides a framework for rethinking how we understand the European Union today. The challenges of governing across difference, of holding together a mosaic of peoples, laws, and identities, are not new. By drawing Rome into the conversation, we chip away at the idea that the EU is something entirely without precedent. The notion of the Union as *sui generis* begins to soften when seen in the longer arc of history. This comparison helps us reframe the EU not as an exception to the rule, but as part of a much older tradition of managing unity without demanding uniformity. That, perhaps, is the real inheritance: not empire, but experience, of building structures that endure not through domination, but through negotiation, symbolism, and shared purpose. In this light, the EU's motto, *In varietate concordia*, "United in diversity", resonates all the more. It captures the very balancing act that both Rome and Brussels have attempted in their own ways: to make many into one, without losing the many.

Future research could build on this comparative framework by examining how both the Roman Empire and the European Union have responded to threats of territorial fragmentation and secession. While this thesis has focused on mechanisms of cohesion and centralization, an equally revealing line of inquiry would be to analyze moments of rupture — from the breakaway Gallic and Palmyrene Empires in the third century to the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU. By shifting the focus from integration to fragmentation, future research could deepen our understanding of how large-scale political systems confront the limits of their authority, and how those moments, paradoxically, help to define the resilience or

fragility of central power. In a similar vein, future research could turn to the governance of borderlands and frontiers, the liminal spaces where central authority is most contested or conditional. In Roman context, this could involve the *limes*, client kingdoms, or military zones that marked the boundaries of imperial reach. In the EU, comparisons can be found in Frontex operations, association agreements, and the European Neighborhood Policy.

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