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<https://doi.org/10.21697/2026.15.1.09>

Book Review: Nicolas Levrat, Yuliya Kaspiarovich, Christine Kaddous and Ramses A. Wessel (eds.), *The EU and its Member States' Joint Participation in International Agreements*, Hart 2022

Received: 2026-03-31; Accepted: 2026-04-12

Abstract: The reviewed book ‘The EU and its Member States’ Joint Participation in International Agreements’ offers, among other things, a clear and intellectually rich analysis of one of the most complex features of EU external relations: mixed agreements. Seen from this perspective, mixed agreements reveal the tension between the autonomy of the EU legal order and the role of the Member States in the international arena. The contributors demonstrate that this mixed nature should not be viewed solely as a technical or procedural anomaly, but as a structural expression of the dual legal and constitutional nature of the EU. The book also shows that this form of participation gives rise to recurring constitutional and practical difficulties, particularly regarding the delimitation of competences, the allocation of international responsibility, and the coherence of external representation. By situating the discussion within both doctrinal debates and institutional practice, the study makes a valuable contribution to scholarship on EU external action and explains why mixity remains a central issue in the law of the EU.

Keywords: book review, EU law, mixed agreements, external relations, autonomy of EU law

The European Union (EU) practice of concluding both EU-only and mixed agreements generates persistent dogmatic and practical challenges throughout the life cycle of treaties. Due to the fact that mixed agreements sit at the intersection of EU law and public international law,¹

¹ Cieśliński, „The Phenomenon of Mixed Agreements – between Public International and European Union Law”, 429.

they raise structural tensions in the EU's external relations that the book addresses in an insightful way. The central thread of the reviewed book is the specific nature of the EU and its Member States' practice in external relations. Complexities arise from the consequences of the autonomy of EU law, as recognised by the Court of Justice (CJEU or Court) in *Costa v ENEL*.²

Edited by Nicolas Levrat, Yuliya Kaspiarovich, Christine Kaddous, and Ramses A. Wessel, "The EU and its Member States' Joint Participation in International Agreements" brings together diverse contributions on the joint participation of the EU and its Member States in international agreements, especially mixed agreements as a structural phenomenon. It is divided into four parts: mixed agreements from an EU law perspective (Part I), mixed agreements from an international law perspective (Part II), the EU and its Member States' parallel participation in international agreements (Part III), and EU international agreements in uncertain times (Part IV). Each chapter is co-authored by a senior and a junior researcher,³ which reflects the theme of joint participation.

In Part I, the authors examine mixed agreements within the internal logic of EU law and demonstrate that they are deeply rooted in the practice of EU institutions and Member States, while giving rise to structural challenges for the EU legal order.

Joni Heliskoski and Gesa Kübek point out that the current practice of EU institutions and Member States confirms the ongoing evolution in identifying types of mixed agreements.⁴ Although this classification, based on the division of competences and the number of parties to an agreement, may prove valuable for research on the conclusion, application, and termination of mixed agreements, it cannot, as the authors also stress, be used to resolve specific legal issues under EU law.⁵ Mirka Kuisma and Joris Larik point out that the functional understanding of the ERTA doctrine protects the internal autonomy of the EU legal order, but from the perspective of Member States may be seen as limiting their sovereign rights by extending exclusive competences beyond the principle of conferral.⁶ Article 3(2) of the Treaty on functioning of EU

² Case 6/64, *Flaminio Costa v ENEL*, EU:C:1964:66.

³ Van de Velde-Van Rumst, "Review of N. Levrat et al.", 157.

⁴ Heliskoski and Kübek, "A Typology of EU Mixed Agreements Revisited", 23.

⁵ Heliskoski and Kübek, "A Typology of EU Mixed Agreements Revisited", 42.

⁶ Kuisma and Larik, "The Continuing Contestation of ERTA", 54–56.

(TFEU) constitutionalised the Court's case law on implied exclusive competences in external relations, raising concerns about sound legislative technique.⁷ In practice, the scope of the so-called AERT effect is determined by the CJEU alone.⁸ Although the Court has rarely identified a precise legal basis for the duty of cooperation in the field of international relations,⁹ it is reasonable to link this duty to the principle of sincere cooperation set out in Article 4(3) of the Treaty on EU (TEU) and to regard it as fundamental for the EU legal order.¹⁰ Marja-Liisa Öberg and Marcus Klamert analyse the actual limits of the principle,¹¹ determined, inter alia, by the division of competences.¹² They persuasively conclude that, on the basis of Article 4(3) TEU and the Court's case law, Member States cannot be considered legally obliged to refrain from ratifying a mixed agreement solely because it might later be viewed as incompatible with the EU legal order.¹³ Manon Damestoy and Nicolas Levrat highlight the factual and legal implications of the specific nature of the practice of the EU and its Member States in concluding mixed agreements in their case study on the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) of 30 October 2016, concluded between Canada, on the one hand, and the EU and its Member States, on the other.¹⁴ During the negotiations on that new-generation trade agreement, a dispute over the division of competences between the EU and its Member States led to CETA being blocked by the *Parlement de Wallonie* (Belgium).¹⁵ This situation shows that the practice of EU institutions and Member States in external relations affects the EU's negotiating position *vis-à-vis* third parties and that the legal certainty and legitimacy of mixed agreements could be strengthened by involving national parliaments at an early stage of negotiations within the procedure set out in Article 218 TFEU.¹⁶ The first part

⁷ Saganeck, "Art. 3", 183–200.

⁸ Dashwood, "Mixity in the Era of the Treaty of Lisbon", 360–61.

⁹ Opinion of the ECJ of 19 March 1993, 2/91, *ILO Convention No. 170 on Chemical Safety at Work*, EU:C:1993:106, para. 36.

¹⁰ Hillion, "Mixity and Coherence in EU External Relations", 89.

¹¹ Öberg and Klamert, "Foreseeability and Anticipation", 75.

¹² Niedźwiedź, *Umowy międzynarodowe mieszane w świetle prawa Wspólnoty Europejskiej*, 128–38.

¹³ Öberg and Klamert, "Foreseeability and Anticipation", 73.

¹⁴ Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada, of the one part, and the European Union and its Member States, of the other part, signed at Brussels on 30 October 2016, OJ L 11, 14 January 2017, p. 23.

¹⁵ Damestoy and Levrat, "The Mixed Nature of the EU-Canada FTA", 88.

¹⁶ Damestoy and Levrat, "The Mixed Nature of the EU-Canada FTA", 94.

of the book concludes with a reflection on the representation of the EU and its Member States in international fora established under mixed multilateral agreements. To ensure the coherence of the EU's external action, the Court developed the requirement of close association between the European Communities and the Member States in representation before international organisations.¹⁷ In *AMP Antarctica*, the Court found that the matter fell within the shared competence of the Member States,¹⁸ but concluded that mixed action was nonetheless required.¹⁹ The authors conclude that it is impossible to predict whether the effects of this judgment will be limited to the Antarctic institutional framework or become a source of further disputes concerning the representation of the EU and its Member States under mixed multilateral agreements.²⁰

Taken together, the contributions in Part I chart the main constitutional frictions of post-Lisbon mixity and their effects on both the EU's internal constitutional dynamics and its external coherence. Part II shifts the focus to public international law and the specific nature of EU and Member State practice in external relations.

Flore Vanackere and Bruno De Witte analyse a hybrid system governing the joint action of the EU and its Member States within internal economic governance mainly exemplified by the European Stability Mechanism.²¹ Such practice may influence both the choice of a mixed form of agreement and the subsequent division of responsibility between the EU and the Member States.²² Agreements classified as mixed for non-legal reasons, such as financial ones, may, according to Nanette Neuwahl, be described as 'false mixed agreements', although on the basis of the division of competences, they should fall within the EU's exclusive competence.²³ This helps explain why mixed agreements have emerged as the default option in the Union's external relations. The subjective criterion divides mixed agreements into bilateral and multilateral ones,

¹⁷ Opinion of the Court of 19 March 1993, Opinion 2/91, *Convention No 170 of the International Labour Organization concerning Safety in the Use of Chemicals at Work*, EU:C:1993:106, para. 36-38.

¹⁸ Joined Cases C-626/15 and C-659/16, *Commission v Council*, EU:C:2018:925, para. 100.

¹⁹ Chamon and Cremona, "The Representation of the EU and Its Member States in Multilateral Fora", 102.

²⁰ Chamon and Cremona, "The Representation of the EU and Its Member States in Multilateral Fora", 114.

²¹ Vanackere and De Witte, "EMU 'Mixity'", 118.

²² Vanackere and De Witte, "EMU 'Mixity'", 128.

²³ Neuwahl, "Shared Powers or Combined Incompetence? More on Mixity", 675.

and the designation of the parties may indicate whether the Member States act as separate parties or together with the EU in a single formula. In Part II contribution, Sabrina Schaefer and Jed Odermatt focus on the term 'EU Party' in public international law. Analysing the EU's practice regarding trade agreements, they conclude that this term, although used inconsistently, reflects the dynamic character of competences at the level of international law and may affect the delimitation of international responsibility.²⁴

Meanwhile, against the background of the autonomy of the EU legal system and the challenges posed by proliferating dispute settlement mechanisms,²⁵ Bartosz Soloch and Makane Moïse Mbengue trace an evolution in the CJEU's case law from requiring the EU's formal participation in such a mechanism, notably through mixed agreements, to emphasising its actual impact on the EU legal system.²⁶ However, this shift leaves open important questions about the EU institutions' margin of discretion and more broadly, about legal certainty in the adjudication of disputes involving the EU.²⁷ The final contribution of Part II addresses the international responsibility of the EU and its Member States under international agreements. Andrés Delgado Casteleiro and Cristina Contartese rightly point out that, in the case of the EU, analysis cannot be confined to formal participation in an agreement ('participation stricto sensu').²⁸ This is particularly evident where the EU or the Member States participate in implementing an agreement without being formally parties to it, but act on the basis of Article 216(2) TFEU, often within the framework of so-called 'executive federalism',²⁹ under which the implementation of an agreement may involve both the EU and the Member States irrespective of formal party status.. The authors make a persuasive case that even agreements falling within the exclusive competence of the EU do

²⁴ Schaefer and Odermatt, "Nomen est Omen?: The Relevance of 'EU Party' in International Law", 149.

²⁵ Cała-Wacinkiewicz, *Fragmentacja prawa międzynarodowego*, 339–40.

²⁶ Soloch and Moïse Mbengue, "Conformity of International Dispute Settlement Mechanisms with EU Law", 168.

²⁷ Soloch and Moïse Mbengue, "Conformity of International Dispute Settlement Mechanisms with EU Law", 170.

²⁸ Delgado Casteleiro and Contartese, "International Responsibility of the EU and/or Its Member States in International Agreements", 172.

²⁹ Delgado Casteleiro and Contartese, "International Responsibility of the EU and/or Its Member States in International Agreements", 176.

not necessarily establish clear or immutable boundaries of responsibility.³⁰ The Court's case law further shows that the division of responsibility no longer stems solely from the formal treaty architecture.³¹

These contributions show that, from the perspective of public international law, mixity complicates the delimitation of participation, adjudication, and responsibility. Part III then turns to the parallel participation of the EU and its Member States in international agreements, particularly in the multilateral setting.

Panos Koutrakos and Viktorija Soņeca rightly observe that the dispute over the Istanbul Convention, concerning, *inter alia*, the choice of legal basis, reveals a broader problem: the need for international law to take account of the distinctive character of the EU's practice, including mixed agreements as one expression of that practice.³² Their assessment proved well-founded, as on 6 October 2021 the Court issued Opinion 1/19, in which it confirmed the legality of adopting an incomplete mixed-agreement formula.³³ By accepting the permissibility of the Council's practice of waiting for a 'common accord' of the Member States, the Court in effect elided the distinction between facultative and obligatory mixed agreements.³⁴ This raises the question whether mixed agreements can still function as a pragmatic means of organising the coexistence of EU and national competences.³⁵ A second case study by Chloé Brière and Tamás Molnár, concerning the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Air and Sea, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, highlights similar concerns regarding the practical operation of mixity in the review and implementation of a multilateral mixed agreement.³⁶ The authors analyse the review process relating to the implementation of this multilateral mixed agreement and identify a potential threat to legal certainty. In the case of this

³⁰ Delgado Casteleiro and Contartese, "International Responsibility of the EU and/or Its Member States in International Agreements", 184.

³¹ Case 104/81, *Kupferberg*, EU:C:1982:362, para. 9, cited in Delgado Casteleiro and Contartese, "International Responsibility of the EU and/or Its Member States in International Agreements", 184.

³² Koutrakos and Soņeca, "The Future of the Istanbul Convention before the CJEU", 190.

³³ Opinion 1/19, EU:C:2021:832, para. 260.

³⁴ Kübek, "Facing and Embracing the Consequences of Mixity", 1484.

³⁵ Koutrakos and Soņeca, "The Future of the Istanbul Convention before the CJEU", 204–5.

³⁶ Brière and Molnár, "The New Review Mechanism of the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol", 208.

agreement, as they note, there is a possibility of updating the so-called declaration of competences.³⁷ Declarations of competences are informational and serve, in mixed agreements, to organise the division of competences between the EU and its Member States. However, it seems that in practice, the more general they are, the more helpful they may prove to be. The section concludes with a case study on the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights. Vassilis Pergantis and Stian Øby Johansen note that this would take the form of a multilateral mixed agreement requiring review by an external judicial body of the internal division of competences between the EU and its Member States.³⁸ In Opinion 2/13, the Court of Justice found that the negotiated mechanism could undermine the autonomy of the EU legal order.³⁹ The authors show that EU participation in the Convention framework would expose the structural limitations of the joint participation of the EU and its Member States in international agreements.⁴⁰

Viewed as a whole, the contributions in Part III show that parallel participation in multilateral agreements intensifies problems of legal certainty, institutional coordination, and the management of competences. Part IV approaches these issues from a more forward-looking perspective.

Elaine Fahey and Julija Brsakoska Bazerkoska analyse how some EU Member States, through their participation in China's informal Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), exceed the boundaries of sincere cooperation. Their central claim is that EU action is hampered,⁴¹ for instance by bypassing the European Commission in trade negotiations with China.⁴² The authors show that, in the absence of clear Treaty rules, structural challenges to the EU legal order may arise not only from international law's failure to recognise the distinctive character of EU practice, but also

³⁷ Brière and Molnár, "The New Review Mechanism of the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol", 230.

³⁸ Pergantis and Øby Johansen, "The EU Accession to the ECHR and the Responsibility Question", 231–32.

³⁹ Opinion 2/13, EU:C:2014:2454, para. 194.

⁴⁰ Pergantis and Øby Johansen, "The EU Accession to the ECHR and the Responsibility Question", 249.

⁴¹ Fahey and Brsakoska Bazerkoska, "Social and Legal Relevance of Sincere Cooperation in EU External Relations Law", 269.

⁴² Fahey and Brsakoska Bazerkoska, "Social and Legal Relevance of Sincere Cooperation in EU External Relations Law", 268.

from Member State practice itself. Christine Kaddous and Habib Badjinri Touré, in turn, examine the status of mixed agreements after the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU. They point to the relationship between how such agreements remain in force after Brexit – through re-negotiation or termination and the conclusion of a new agreement – and their classification as bilateral or multilateral.⁴³ Because the rights and obligations arising from bilateral mixed agreements are closely linked to EU membership,⁴⁴ uncoordinated action only by some EU Member States could, contrary to the principle of indivisibility in Article 44 of the Vienna Conventions on the Law of Treaties of 1969 and 1986, lead to the termination of only some provisions in line with the division of competences.⁴⁵ In the final contributions of the book, Yuliya Kaspiarovich and Ramses A. Wessel analyse the difficulties involved in drawing a clear boundary between EU and Member State competences, which is crucial for determining the obligatory or facultative nature of a mixed agreement.⁴⁶ Facultative mixed agreements are concluded when a given agreement falls within the scope of the EU's competences, yet those competences are not wholly exclusive.⁴⁷ The authors rightly note that the lack of full precision in the construction of mixed agreements is, paradoxically, one of their advantages.⁴⁸ Such ambiguity may enhance institutional flexibility within the EU, facilitating compromise, even though it does not eliminate the tensions arising from the dynamic nature of competences.⁴⁹

The reviewed book convincingly shows that mixed agreements remain one of the key and most problematic elements of the EU's legal architecture, and one of the least fully stabilised in doctrinal terms. It demonstrates that mixity is not a technical anomaly, but a structural feature of the EU legal order, generating recurring tensions concerning competences, responsibility, and external representation. Rather than offering a single formula for resolving these tensions, the book makes

⁴³ Kaddous and Badjinri Touré, "The Status of the United Kingdom Regarding EU Bilateral and Multilateral Mixed Agreements after Brexit", 285.

⁴⁴ Kaddous and Badjinri Touré, "The Status of the United Kingdom Regarding EU Bilateral and Multilateral Mixed Agreements after Brexit", 276.

⁴⁵ Niedźwiedź, *Umowy międzynarodowe mieszane w świetle prawa Wspólnoty Europejskiej*, 186.

⁴⁶ Kaspiarovich and Wessel, "Unmixing Mixed Agreements", 288–89.

⁴⁷ Heliskoski and Kübek, "A Typology of EU Mixed Agreements Revisited", 39.

⁴⁸ Kaspiarovich and Wessel, "Unmixing Mixed Agreements", 304.

⁴⁹ Cremona, "The Doctrine of Exclusivity", 411.

an important contribution by clarifying the structural constraints, legal uncertainties, and institutional practices that shape the striving for coherence in the EU's external relations.

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