The European Parliament’s quest for representative autonomy: An internal perspective

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This book deals with the difficult question of whom the European Parliament represents. Some legal provisions indicate that the European Parliament represents the peoples of the member states; others frame it as the representative body of the Union citizens. Parliament’s representative status is still a work in progress. Its evolution is driven in particular by actions of the European Parliament itself. Step by step it Europeanises its electorate and the representation thereof.

The treaties of the European Union have provided the European Parliament with only limited rule-making power to define whom it represents. However, Parliament’s need and capacity to act are also determined by what is considered appropriate behaviour. As the present study reveals, it is generally accepted that elected parliaments ought to have substantial ‘representative autonomy’. The existence of this norm explains why, in defiance of formal limitations, the autonomy of the European Parliament to define itself and its electorate has effectively increased since the moment it was directly elected in 1979.

The European Parliament’s Quest for Representative Autonomy provides better insight in the nature of the European Parliament, and of the developments of parliaments in general.

Kathalijne Buitenweg (1970) served from 1999 to 2009 as a member of the European Parliament for the Dutch Green party. She became known for her role in the rejection of candidate-Commissioner Buttiglione and the adoption of equal opportunity directives. Currently she is Commissioner of the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights and President of the Association of Childcare Organisations.