

**Book Review: LEGISLEULAB der Europäischen Rechtslinguistik /  
LEGISLEULAB for the European Legal Linguistics 2020-2023**

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*Introduction*

This book review discusses four volumes with almost identical names that were published between 2021 and 2024. They are all about the legal-linguistic analysis of EU texts and legislative procedures. While I find the topic of the volumes very interesting also for the readers of this journal, I was sceptical about the fact that they are all based on the same summer school sessions and document the work carried out during them. In my review, I will address the reasons for my scepticism, but also demonstrate why characteristics of the volumes mitigate it.

*Background information*

Until 2021, it was possible to study a so-called “Verbundstudiengang Europäische Rechtslinguistik” at the Universität zu Köln (University of Cologne). This study programme was located in the Faculty of Arts and was affiliated with the Department of Romance Languages. Students had to study French and work with English and potentially other foreign languages, and pass exams to obtain a basic qualification in law. The programme aimed to educate professionals for employment in law firms and within the EU, equipping them with the legal skills necessary for interpreting legal texts in accordance with standard legal principles, as well as the multilingual proficiency required for understanding, comparing and translating legal texts in multiple languages.

Prof. Dr. Isolde Burr was the main initiator and head of the study programme throughout its existence. As well as being a professor of French Philology with thorough linguistic skills, she has long-standing experience of working with communication, especially the development and interpretation of meaning, in legal settings. This makes her an effective bridge builder between law and language, and she has established an impressive network of professionals interested in both fields and their intersection. Prof. Burr is the main editor of the four volumes.

Thanks to Prof. Burr’s network, students on the programme were able to visit the Court of Justice of the EU and gain a thorough understanding of legal interpretation theory and practice in a multilingual setting. Furthermore, workshops with professionals and linguistic and legal scholars were organised for students in Cologne.

The experience from such excursions and workshops functioned as a basis for establishing a series of summer schools in this field, titled “Cologne Summer School in European Legal Linguistics”. Focusing on the legislative and judicial process of the EU, these summer schools have been held every year since 2020. Following each event, a book has been published to document the work carried out during the summer school. As already indicated, this review focuses on the four volumes published in connection with the 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 events. I have chosen this somewhat unconventional format because the books are part of a series with some repeated elements, making it most relevant to present and evaluate them as a whole.

*Structure and content of the books*

The books relate to each year's summer school sessions. They have a combined character: on the one hand, they document the students' group work on specified assignments during the sessions, as well as the work of researchers and practitioners who act as lecturers and commentators before or after the group work. On the other hand, parts of the book seem to be aimed at a larger audience than just the participants. Probably for this reason, the books carry the label 'Dossier'.

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In more detail, the books contain the following elements:

- Participants
- Schedule for the event
- Brief report
- Welcome speeches
- Reading list
- Preparatory tasks for working groups before the event as well as tasks specifically for the attendance phase
- Slides from lectures at the event
- Final results of group work on the above-mentioned tasks
- Academic works on questions extracted from especially the preliminary results of the preparatory tasks

Elements such as the lists of participants, the schedule and the welcome speeches are primarily of interest to those attending the summer schools. However, the books contain a majority of elements that are also of interest to non-participants, especially those interested in comparative legal linguistics and EU lawmaking. I will therefore focus my presentation of the books on these elements.

As the books have their roots in the summer schools, the central focus is on the EU's legislative procedure. During the pre-event phase, participants work together online to complete preparatory tasks described in the books. With the exception of the first volume, these tasks are always connected to ongoing legislative processes at the time of the summer school. Participants (and readers) have access to texts from all the institutions involved in the legislative process under study, with a particular focus on the EU institutions Parliament, Council and Commission. There are two types of tasks reported in the volumes. The first type involves participants working with questions of a more linguistic nature, such as comparing words chosen for specific central concepts in different languages based on their respective profiles in each language. The second type of task is more legal and institutional in nature. Participants are asked to reformulate articles from the perspective of one of the involved institutions, with the aim of achieving the intended legal effect and reaching compromises during the EU's trilogue process, in which the institutions collaborate to create a unified version of the legislation. Thus, the tasks require linguistic and legal expertise.

The following legislative projects are treated in the four books:

- 2021: Directive 2008/115/EC (return directive) on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals.
- 2022: 2020/0340/COD on European data governance, amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1724.
- 2023: 2021/0050/COD on equal pay for equal work between men and women
- 2024: 2021/0106/COD, Artificial Intelligence Act

The results of the preparatory work of the groups on these projects are reported separately in the volumes.

During the attendance phase, participants are given the same set of tasks (mainly comparative linguistic and institutional comparative legal, respectively) and the tasks are included in the volumes. Participants receive introductions to EU institutions, legislative procedures and the general European legal linguistic approach developed by the organisers of the summer schools, as well as presentations by practitioners from the European institutions, in connection with their work on the tasks. The volumes contain these presentation slides, as well as the results of the attendance phase tasks in slide format.

The final type of element, which is, however, not present in the most recent volume, is academic work by the editors on legal-linguistic and comparative legal topics. These academic works depart from the topics covered in the tasks and are inspired, to some extent, by the problems experienced by students when working on them. The works in the first three volumes have the following titles:

- 2021
  - Terminology in language for special purposes: “compassionate reasons”



- The concepts of “public order” and “public policy” in the Directive 2008/115/EC and in the legislative procedure 2018/0329(COD)
- Linguistic issues in Directive 2008/115/EC and its recast
- 2022
  - (Data) Altruism and the Law
  - “Act” – Remarks on Short Titles of EU Legislation
  - Modal Expressions in EU Legal Acts
  - Relational Expressions Signalling the Legal Relationship between Provisions – Concurrency, Conflict, Concession or Condition
  - Legal Definitions – Mediating between their Legal and Linguistic Descriptions
- 2023
  - Sanctions vs. Penalties
  - Modification, Coordination, Scope Ambiguity, Structural Ambiguity and Crosslinguistic Mismatch - Beware of the Comma
  - A Short Note on Intersectionality and EU Law – The Concept, its Prospects and Potential Pitfalls

As can be seen from the lists, there is a bias towards works with a linguistic starting point, but this perspective is always informed by legal considerations.

#### *Evaluative remarks*

As previously mentioned, the books under review are characterised by their strong relationship with the summer school sessions from which they emerged. Consequently, most of the texts that make up the books document the results of the participant groups. However, the topics covered are chosen to be generally relevant to the field of comparative legal linguistics in the EU. Furthermore, the tasks generally concern legislative procedures that were ongoing at the time of the sessions and are therefore still recent enough to be of general interest. Finally, the group work is based on extensive reading in line with the reading lists included in the volumes. Consequently, the results are valuable contributions to ongoing discussions in the field based on their content. However, the chosen presentation format (slides from oral presentations) limits the value of the results for such ongoing discussions. Here, the documentation function takes precedence over a more general academic function that could have been achieved through a format more akin to an article, where, for example, it would have been possible to include references to the underlying publication more thoroughly.

On the other hand, such a format has been chosen for the part of the volumes that, in my view, constitutes their major contribution to scholarly discussions in the field: the academic works. These works are of general interest and are based not only on discussions in the summer school sessions, but also demonstrate a broad foundation on relevant scholarly writings. Actually, the academic works in themselves justify the publication of the 'Dossiers'. It is therefore a pity that the fourth volume does not contain this element.

Apart from this contribution, the 'Dossiers' may also provide inspiration for planning teaching sessions in comparative legal linguistics. The topics covered are of general interest, and the volumes offer reading lists, introductions, tasks and even possible solutions, making it easy to develop new assignments and course elements based on them.

Therefore, notwithstanding my initial scepticism expressed above, my final evaluation is that the volumes constitute an interesting source of knowledge and experience which may play an important role in the further development of the field of comparative legal linguistics, especially concerning the EU, specifically from the point of view of its teaching practice.