European legislation affects countless aspects of daily life in modern Europe, but just how does the European Union make such significant legislative decisions? How important are the formal decision-making procedures in defining decision outcomes, and how important is the bargaining that takes place among the actors involved? Using a combination of detailed evidence and theoretical rigour, this volume addresses these questions and others that are central to understanding how the EU works in practice. It focuses on the practice of day-to-day decision-making in Brussels and the interactions that take place among the member states in the Council, and among the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament. A unique data set of actual Commission proposals is examined, against which the authors develop, apply and test a range of explanatory models of decision-making, exemplifying how to study decision-making in other political systems using advanced theoretical tools and an appropriate research design.

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This book examines legislative decision-making in the European Union. The analyses reported here use some of the most powerful conceptual tools available to social scientists for this task: a range of competing explanations, formalised as models, of decision-making in the European Union. Some of the explanations are grounded in previous research on legislative choice and focus on the impact of formal decision-making procedures on policy outcomes. Others draw inspiration from research on various types of informal bargaining through which actors exert influence. Most of these explanatory models have not yet been tested in the context of EU decision-making. Some have been tested on very limited data sets and in small pilot studies, while others have been developed during the course of this project.

This is not only, or even primarily, a theoretical exercise. The analyses are performed on a large data set, compiled specifically for this study, containing information on 162 controversial issues raised by recent legislative proposals in the European Union. In the following chapters, the explanatory models are presented and illustrated by applying them to examples from this broad selection of controversial issues. They are then applied to all cases in the data set. After comparing the results of these applications, we formulate insights into the processes through which controversies are resolved and decision outcomes are reached in the legislative arena of the European Union. None of the explanatory models has been tested on as large a data set as the one we have collected in this project. Never have such a variety of political decision-making models been tested against each other in a contest to evaluate their relative performance.

The idea for this project grew out of a European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) sponsored research workshop in Bergen,
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Norway, in September 1997, organised by Madeleine Hosli and Adrian Van Deemen, and assisted by Christopher Achen, to which some of the current members of the research group were also invited. At that time, discussions were taking place in the literature on European decision-making between researchers using spatial theories of voting and those employing other approaches. A few years earlier, in 1994, the volume *European Community Decision Making: Models, Applications and Comparisons*, edited by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Frans Stokman, had been published. In that exemplary study, two alternative explanatory models from a class of bargaining models were applied to Council decision-making on sixteen controversial issues. The results indicated that a more concerted effort along these lines would provide valuable insights, and might even help distinguish among competing approaches to explaining EU decision-making.

The present study expands the scope of that previous work considerably: first, by broadening the range of explanations considered to include recently developed models of legislative choice and a greater variety of bargaining models; and second, by investing in the collection of a much larger data set, including information on the European Commission and the European Parliament. After the research workshop in Bergen, which had the primary aim of drawing up a full research proposal, the research group was formed and enlarged to its current fifteen members. The group ‘Decision Making in the European Union’ (DEU) was then officially recognised by the ECPR, and our research began in earnest at the end of 1999. In addition to this book, there is an accompanying special issue of the journal *European Union Politics* (Stokman and Thomson (eds.) 2004), which contains other results of the present study.

During the course of this project, we have run up large debts of gratitude to many organisations and individuals. This is an incomplete list of the many who have helped us along the way. We received financial support from the Dutch Science Foundation (NWO), the German National Science Foundation (DFG) and the Finnish Yrjö Jahnsson Foundation. The Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS) also provided facilities for meetings.

Between the Spring of 2000 and early 2002, more than 150 in-depth interviews were held with experts on the decision-making situations we selected for study. These individuals were mainly civil servants in the European Commission, the permanent representations of each of the fifteen member states in Brussels and the European Parliament. We also interviewed experts from interest groups in Brussels. These individuals
provided detailed information on the cases we selected for study. We thank these individuals not by name, but by their institutional affiliations, to respect the discretion we promised them. Decision-making in the Council of Ministers, which has traditionally been shrouded in secrecy, is becoming more open. Jacob Visscher and his staff at the Council’s Transparency Unit opened up Council decision-making to us as much as possible.

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