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The Politics of the European Union

A new introduction to the European Union which uses the lens of comparative politics. This approach helps students understand the EU through comparisons with domestic politics and links with broader debates in political science. The text is supported by numerous examples, and chapters include briefings, fact files and controversy boxes which highlight important information and controversial issues in EU politics to widen and deepen student understanding. The authors have developed online 'Navigating the EU' exercises that introduce students to useful sources of information on the Internet and help them to analyse policy-making in the EU. This textbook is a comprehensive introduction to EU politics and covers history, theory, key institutions and participants, as well as policies and policy-making.

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and
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Middelburg/Utrecht,
January 2011

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AECR	Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists
ALDE	Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CEECs	Central and Eastern European Countries
CEFIC	European Chemical Industry Council
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJ	Court of Justice
CoR	Committee of the Regions
Coreper	Committee of Permanent Representatives
CPME	Standing Committee of European Doctors
CVCE	Virtual Resource Centre for Knowledge about Europe
DG	Directorate-General
EC	European Community
ECB	European Central Bank
ECOFIN	Economic and Financial Affairs
ECPM	European Christian Political Movement
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
ED	European Democrats
EDC	European Defence Community
EDP	European Democratic Party
EEC	European Economic Community
EFA	European Free Alliance
EFD	Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group
EGP	European Green Party
EL	Party of the European Left
ELDR	European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party
EMS	European Monetary System
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
EPC	European Political Community
EPP	Group of the European People's Party

List of abbreviations and acronyms

ESC	Economic and Social Committee
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Democrats
EUL/NGL	Confederal Group of the European United Left-Nordic Green Left
Euratom	European Atomic Energy Community
GAC	General Affairs Council
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
G-EFA	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
GNI	Gross National Income
GMOs	Genetically Modified Organisms
GSM	Global System for Mobile Communications
IAR	International Authority for the Ruhr
IGC	Intergovernmental Conference
IR	International Relations
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MLG	Multi-level Governance
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Co-operation
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
PES	Party of European Socialists
PP	Partido Popular (Spain)
PS	Parti Socialiste (France)
QMV	Qualified Majority Voting
S&D	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament
SEA	Single European Act
SPÖ	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (Austria)
TEC	Treaty establishing the European Community
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UMP	Union pour une Mouvement Populaire (France)
UMTS	Universal Mobile Telecommunications System
UN	United Nations
VAT	Value Added Tax
VLD	Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats)
WEU	Western European Union
WHO	World Health Organization

Country abbreviations used in tables and figures

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
UK	United Kingdom
EU-12	The twelve - 'new' - member states who joined in 2004 and 2007
EU-15	The fifteen - 'old' - member states
EU-27	All member states

Preface

Why yet another textbook on EU politics? And why in a series on comparative politics? For us, the answers to these two questions are closely linked. Having taught EU politics for several years, both of us grew increasingly dissatisfied with the introductory texts on EU politics available on the market. Our dissatisfaction stemmed from two facts. First, existing textbooks on EU politics tend to be too descriptive for our liking. Vast parts of those texts are devoted to discussing the details of the EU's institutional set-up or the intricacies of EU decision-making procedures. By contrast, we are more interested in the political processes that take place within the EU. Knowledge of the EU's institutions and procedures is necessary in order to study those processes fruitfully, but our objective in teaching EU politics is to give students an understanding of how politics in the EU works, not of the EU's institutions and procedures per se. Second, most textbooks still look at the EU as a 'one-of-a-kind' system or, as it is commonly put in the EU studies literature, as an organization 'sui generis'. The focus on the EU's uniqueness makes it difficult for students to relate their understanding of EU politics to what they know about other political systems. We believe that, increasingly, the EU can best be studied from a comparative politics perspective, and that this should form the leading premise of a textbook on EU politics. In that sense, we build on the pioneering work of the one textbook on EU politics that does discuss the EU in a comparative politics framework: Simon Hix's *Political System of the European Union*. At the same time, Hix's text is both too difficult as an introductory text for students who are new to the EU and looks at the EU from one specific theoretical lens – that of rational choice theory. What we were looking for was a book that we could use for undergraduate students new to the subject and that would draw upon a wider range of theoretical approaches. Hence this book.

■ Why comparative politics?

For us, the core assumption underlying a comparative politics approach to the EU is that most of the questions that can be asked of domestic political systems can also be asked of the EU – even if the answers to those questions are not always the same. The latter addition is crucial because we do not

Preface

mean to imply that the EU is ‘essentially’ (whatever that may mean) or even just for practical purposes a ‘state’ or ‘like a state’. What we do claim is that the kind of questions that we normally ask of domestic political systems can (and should) also be asked of the EU. These include questions such as: How are relations between the ‘executive’ and the ‘legislative’ organized? In what ways do citizen opinions play a role in political decision-making? What role do political parties play in politics? How much influence do interest groups have over policy-making? How do issues reach the political agenda? How are policies implemented once they have been adopted? It is not self-evident that these questions can be asked of any political institution. For instance, we doubt whether it would yield useful insights to ask about the role of political parties in the World Trade Organization or executive–legislative relationships in the United Nations Organization. In order for these questions to make sense, the actors that we commonly look at when studying domestic politics at least need to be present in the political system we are interested in. In the case of the EU, so we argue, this is indeed the case.

Having said that, the answers that we give to those questions will often be different in the EU than in domestic political systems. Although it makes sense to study political parties in the EU, their organization and the role they play in EU politics are quite different from the way they operate in most EU member states. Likewise, we can study executive–parliamentary relations in the EU but in doing so we will have to acknowledge that ‘the executive’ is much less clearly defined in the EU than in domestic politics. This, however, is exactly the point of looking at the EU from a comparative politics perspective: by asking the same questions, we can see more clearly both where EU politics is similar to domestic politics and where it is different. This is not unlike the benefit of applying a comparative politics perspective to domestic political systems – after all, no two countries are identical and in studying them comparatively we will see both commonalities and points at which specific countries are unique.

■ **How this book is organized**

In taking a comparative politics perspective, we have made a number of choices about the organization of the book. Since our focus is on gaining an understanding of how EU politics works, our treatment of the history, institutions and policies of the EU has been structured in such a way that it invites comparisons with other political systems and concentrates on the political dynamics of the EU.

This book consists of three parts plus a concluding chapter. The first part (Chapters 1–4) lays the foundation for studying EU politics by developing a working knowledge of the historical development of the EU (Chapter 1), theoretical approaches to studying EU politics (Chapter 2) and the institutions and procedures of the EU (Chapters 3 and 4). We do not see this knowledge as an end in itself. Although we acknowledge that an understanding of history,

institutions and procedures is important for understanding political systems and political processes, we also believe that – in a political science textbook – discussions of history, institutions and procedures should be instrumental to discussions of political processes. Hence, we seek to place the EU's history, institutions and procedures within the framework of the EU's political system as a whole and we elucidate the logic behind the EU's institutional and procedural framework.

The second part (Chapters 5–7) moves on to discuss the role of three key actors in politics: citizens (Chapter 5), interest groups (Chapter 6) and political parties (Chapter 7). In these three chapters, we show what role they play in EU politics and how this compares to the roles of citizens, interest groups and political parties in domestic political systems. In this way, a better insight can be obtained of how the EU works and what it is that makes EU politics 'tick'.

The third part focuses on policies. Policies are arguably a key 'output' of any political system. It is in making policies that politics has its greatest impact on society. Therefore, much of what political actors do is linked, one way or another, to influencing policies. In discussing EU policy-making, we take a thematic approach. After an overview of policy-making and the main policy fields in Chapter 8, we take a closer look at three important aspects of policy-making processes: agenda-setting (Chapter 9), decision-making (Chapter 10) and implementation (Chapter 11). By reading these chapters, students will be equipped with the conceptual and theoretical tools that they can subsequently use to study and analyse specific policies and policy areas.

Finally, Chapter 12 brings together a number of threads woven throughout this book. It does so by reflecting on three important issues in debates on the EU. First, it takes a look into the future and shows how the insights presented in this book can help analyse developments in the EU. Second, it discusses the issue of democracy in the context of the EU. Having compared the EU with other (democratic) political systems, what can we say about the democratic credentials of the EU itself? Finally, we come back to the comparative method itself, reflecting on the added value it has provided in this book.

■ Features to help you learn

Learning a subject is not just about substance, it is also about the appropriate ways of bringing the substance to life. Therefore, we have sought to aid students' understanding of the EU by adding a number of learning tools that link abstract concepts and theories to concrete issues and debates:

- In briefings, important issues are highlighted and background information is given without distracting from the argument in the main text.
- Fact files provide concise overviews of key facts for easy reference.
- Small boxes in the margin of the text define and explain key concepts.

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- Students are engaged in debating EU politics through controversy boxes that discuss topical debates in the EU and invite students to reflect on them.
- In addition, we have developed a number of ‘navigating the EU’ exercises for each chapter. In these exercises, students are encouraged to further explore EU politics by making use of the vast amounts of information now available on the Internet. Because of the changeability of Internet sources, these exercises are not included in the book itself but are available on the website www.navigatingthe.eu.

All in all, we have sought to write a book that will be attractive to students and instructors alike. It will be of interest to those studying or teaching courses in the fields of political science, government and European studies. For those, we hope to have written a book that is accessible, stimulating and clear – the kind of book we wanted to use in our own courses.