

### The New Economic Governance of the Eurozone

The Eurozone and the European Union have recently been confronted with a number of existential threats. The sovereign debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have forced European decisionmakers to pass important reforms that have radically transformed the nature and scope of the Union's powers in the field of economic and fiscal policy. As the new economic governance of the Eurozone emerges as the main driver of integration in today's Europe, this book seeks to assess the solidity of the constitutional foundations supporting that system and its compliance with the Union's core founding value: the rule of law. Using competence allocation, regulatory quality, access to external review and fundamental rights sustainability as analytical benchmarks, this book argues that the recent metamorphosis of Eurozone economic governance has not been accompanied by a parallel strengthening of its constitutional settlement, leading to a problematic misalignment between the Union's action in the field and its governing principles.

**Paul Dermine** is a référendaire at the Court of Justice of the European Union. Trained as a lawyer and a political scientist in Europe and the US, he holds a joint doctorate from the University of Maastricht and KU Leuven and has been a Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence. His research focuses on European Union law and the governance of the Eurozone.



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# The New Economic Governance of the Eurozone

A Rule of Law Analysis

Paul Dermine
Court of Justice of the European Union





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To Lauranne





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### Series Editors' Preface

In the 2010s, the Eurozone underwent a tumultuous decade, beginning with the sovereign debt crisis and ending with the beginnings of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this period, Europe's economic governance framework has been transformed fundamentally, from a loose structure of national economic coordination to a much more advanced framework with the potential to intervene deeply in national economic (and hence political) choices. It would be shocking if such a fundamental change to the EU's policy structure did not have serious rule of law implications. As Paul Dermine's fascinating new book tells us, the rule of law challenges emerging from the Eurozone's transformation are deep and lasting (and increasingly define the relationship between national and EU law and policy).

There is already a literature on the Eurozone crisis and its constitutional implications. Dermine's book, however, significantly adds to this scholarship in at least three ways. The first is that it offers a compelling account of "new economic governance" itself, or of what has really changed in the EU's economic structure. As Dermine shows, the lesson the Union drew from the Euro crisis was a need to radically increase the scope for supra-national intervention in domestic policy choices, allowing the EU to increasingly craft an economic policy independently of the preferences of national policymakers. This entails not just a procedural structure for vertical monitoring and supervision but a *substantive economic policy* through which the Union exerts pressure on its Member States to follow a particular policy mix. As the book illustrates, this mix is often highly prescriptive even if it changes over time (from the heavy austerity focus of the early 2010s to the more relaxed fiscal posture of today).

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#### XVIII SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

The second is the book's compelling argument for examining EU economic governance from a constitutional and rule of law perspective. As Dermine shows, the transformation discussed above significantly alters the form and normative guarantees offered by EU law. Most of the main issues scholarship in EU law addresses – from the balance of national/EU competences to the availability of judicial protection – are highly affected by the changes in EU economic governance occurring in the last decade. By developing a concept of the rule of law, adapted to the features of the EU as a polity, Dermine's book develops a robust theoretical framework to evaluate normative deficiencies in the new Eurozone. As Dermine illustrates, the new economic governance displays what he terms a "structural misalignment" with EU constitutional law, worryingly discarding many of the rule of law guarantees EU law offers (e.g. its attachment to precise and stable rules and to individual judicial protection).

The book's third novel contribution is to offer ways forward. The book is not content to point to problems but includes within each chapter a series of reforms flowing from its analysis. These range from the concrete and detailed (e.g. altering how the EU institutions conduct the prelegislative and policymaking process) to the more general (e.g. a new approach by the CJEU to judicial review and the scrutiny of economic policy-makers). As Dermine shows us, even in the absence of Treaty change, the very flexibility that allowed economic decision-makers to transform the Eurozone without transforming the Treaty itself at the same time allows the many rule of law gaps Dermine identifies to be addressed. The book is also therefore innovative in showing us how a Eurozone with firmer constitutional foundations could be built.

Dermine's thought-provoking book is a necessary read for anyone interested in the law of EU economic governance. At the same time, it shows us more broadly how the EU's response to policy crises carries the potential to fundamentally challenge and transform EU law (while giving lawyers tools to resist the most negative effects of rule of law erosion). The book therefore provides an echo well beyond the Eurozone. We are very pleased to welcome it as the newest addition to the Cambridge Studies in European Law and Policy series.

Mark Dawson Laurence Gormley Jo Shaw



### Foreword by the Supervisors

This monograph engages in a systematic and critical analysis of one of the most – if not the most – dynamic areas of EU law in the past decade, its economic governance. Paul Dermine reminds us of the early years of the policy and the key choices for its design made in the Treaty of Maastricht. He highlights the main features of the early shape of the policy as enshrined in the Stability and Growth Pact (1997), before placing considerable emphasis on the profound transformation of the policy in response to the Great Financial Crisis between 2011 and 2015 and in light of the response to the COVID-19 crisis in the form of the ambitious recovery plan for Europe, "Next Generation EU."

As powerfully argued by the author, these transformations may be seen as having considerable implications for the Member States in the Eurozone. He stresses that taken in conjunction, the resulting complex web of norms brings fiscal and economic policies of these states under the tight scrutiny of selected European institutions. These transformative effects of economic governance unfold at a particularly broad scale, with economic governance having come to affect a vast range of social, employment, cohesion and other redistributive policies. Such effects also operate in a remarkably intrusive manner owing to a diversified approach to compliance and enforcement as illustrated by the logic of conditionality underlying the recent recovery plan.

The monograph convincingly points at the weaknesses of the constitutional safeguards set up at EU level to protect the rule of law in the field. In an ambitious theoretical exercise, Paul Dermine spells out what he understands to be the essential rule of law safeguards applicable to contemporary challenges in the field. These range from traditional concerns for external review and fundamental rights protection to a call for respect for the system of allocation of competences in the European Union and demands in terms of quality of the law in a field characterized, in the past decade, by its lack of clarity and publicity.

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#### XX FOREWORD BY THE SUPERVISORS

Importantly, this book contributes to scholarship in three main respects: It contributes to theorizing the rule of law for the purpose of applying its benchmarks to new forms of governance at European level, which may be relevant for other policy areas of EU law such as the field of migration. The book also provides a sound and critical understanding of the Union's contemporary economic governance and its deep and potentially unsettling implications for the Member States. Finally, the author takes a strong normative stance in favor of greater emphasis on the quality of lawmaking in the field, closer judicial review and better protection of fundamental rights.

It is a great honor for supervisors of a doctoral research project to be invited to introduce the outcome of that project in such a prestigious form as that of a monograph published with Cambridge University Press. The author can be praised for his outstanding and independent work. We are delighted that his writing can hereby be made accessible to peers, students, practitioners and officials who will unquestionably learn from reading it.

Elise Muir and Monica Claes



### Acknowledgments

At the start of the research project that ultimately led to this book lies the Eurozone crisis, the extraordinary set of developments it brought about in the economic, political and legal spheres, and the transformations it precipitated in the Economic and Monetary Union. The idea that law should not only serve as an instrument of integration but also ought to act as an external reference that shapes, determines and eventually limits the evolution of EU policies and practices is central to this book. The book investigates the constitutional credentials that support the new economic and fiscal governance system that Europe saw progressively emerging over the past decade. It is born out of the concern that EU action, however necessary it might be, and whatever field it takes place in, ought to stay true to the foundational values and principles our Union rests on. Needless to say, the recent pandemic, and the spectacular developments it brought about (which this book also examines), has only confirmed such preoccupation.

Written between Maastricht, Brussels, Berlin, Leuven and Florence, this book truly constitutes a European endeavor. It originates from my doctoral research, which was conducted jointly at the faculties of law of Maastricht University and KULeuven between 2016 and 2020. The dissertation was later turned into a book at the European University Institute, on the hills of Fiesole, where I spent the academic year 2020–2021 as a Max Weber Fellow. The manuscript was completed in September 2021. I am grateful to a number of friends and colleagues who helped and carried me along the way.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> By then, I had already started working as a *référendaire* at the Court of Justice of the European Union. Naturally, the ideas and arguments presented in this book are strictly personal and may not be attributed to the Court.



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An academic book is as much the product of endless hours of personal research as it is shaped by inspiring exchanges with experts and brilliant minds. I wish to thank the following individuals for sharing their thoughts on the evolution of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)



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### **Abbreviations**

AGS Annual Growth Survey

ASGS Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy BEPG Broad Economic Policy Guidelines

BICC Budgetary Instrument for Convergence and Competitiveness

CAP Corrective Action Plan

CSR Country-Specific Recommendation

DBP Draft Budgetary Plan

ECA European Court of Auditors
ECB European Central Bank
ECJ European Court of Justice
EDP Excessive Deficit Procedure
EFB European Fiscal Board

EIP Excessive Imbalance Procedure

EISF European Investment Stabilization Function

EMF European Monetary Fund
EMU Economic and Monetary Union
EPP Economic Partnership Programme

ERM Exchange Rate Mechanism
ESM European Stability Mechanism

EU European Union

EURI European Union Recovery Instrument

FRA Fundamental Rights Agency

IA Impact Assessment

JER Joint Employment Report

MFF Multiannual Financial Framework
MIP Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure
MoU Memorandum of Understanding
MSP Multilateral Surveillance Procedure

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#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS XXXI

MTBO Medium-Term Budgetary Objective

NGEU Next Generation EU

NRRP National Recovery and Resilience Plan

OMC Open Method of Coordination OMT Outright Monetary Transactions

ORD Own Resources Decision

RQMV Reverse Qualified Majority Voting RRF Recovery and Resilience Facility RSP Reform Support Programme SGP Stability and Growth Pact

TEC Treaty Establishing the European Community

TEU Treaty on European Union

TFEU Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

TSCG Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in

the EMU

