

Book Review

Yves Bertoncini and Thierry Chopin
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*Politique européenne. États, pouvoirs
et citoyens de l'Union Européenne*

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Is the EU becoming a more politicised system? Does it need clearer political cleavages to overcome its legitimacy crisis? This book by Yves Bertoncini and Thierry Chopin, two French EU scholars and practitioners, so far only available in French, is an interesting contribution both to the availability of manuals for in depth courses on EU politics and beyond this to the ongoing reflection on the politicisation of the EU. Despite being conceived as a teaching manual the book is not only an interesting recommendation for students of the EU but a relevant contribution to the debate on the EU's politicisation because it addresses a common weakness of approaches to EU history, law or political science, the tendency to consider the EU as a separate set of institutions without considering the role of Member States and citizens as part of the EU. The approach of the manual is not to analyse and explain the EU institutional system but the political processes happening at EU level. The book examines the constitution of a European political field where contradictory political forces seem to be involved. The lack of a more explicit elaboration of their own theoretical approach, which is probably due to the style requirements of a manual and the authors' will to proceed from the empirical analysis of what the EU is by studying what it does, is probably the most disappointing aspect of the book.

The broad approach to EU politics allows the authors to explore a number of issues usually disregarded in manuals rooted in a specific discipline, making it a very original contribution which approaches the importance of understanding national political cultures and public opinions, the question of the EU's legitimacy crisis, the impact of the EU in national politics, the structure of the EU's executive and legislative power and the importance of symbolic factors in EU politics. In briefly presenting the content of the book these more original aspects will be particularly underlined.

The first part of the book deals with the structural relations between the EU and the member states. The decisive importance of this approach is to consider member states and the national political and administrative field as a part of the functioning of the EU instead of limiting the approach to national government representatives in Brussels. In this sense the book does not oppose this EU political field to Member States but rather seems to include them in a complex emerging transnational political field. The EU appears as a new space of sovereignty exercise as well terrain for inter-state power relations which are not limited to objective dimensions such as voting rights but as well to "soft" dimensions

such as language use, leadership and the success of national policies, in particular economic ones. They also address the way in which the EU impacts at home in particular by offering an accurate account of budgetary and legislative pressures dispelling some prevalent myths.

Although the authors suggest the omnipresence of the Member States in EU politics, from impulsion of new policies to execution of policy details, they do not seem to endorse intergovernmentalism as they emphasise the specifically European political stakes such as legitimacy, the public sphere and controversies about the extension of sovereignty transfers. Unlike intergovernmentalists, they do not conceive the relations between Member States as diplomatic relations but as political ones in that preference formation is not exclusively done at member state level but is shaped by the specific stakes discussed at EU level. In particular the authors use insights from political theory and history to suggest that national governments are far from having a monopoly on their countries role in the EU which is as also shaped by diverging national political cultures regarding EU integration based on very different rationales that have Member States join the EU.

The second part of the book addresses European institutions in a way most manuals seldom do, by departing from the separate analysis of each part of the institutional triangle and concentrating on the concrete powers that the EU exerts. This takes into account the changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty and is accompanied by a series of invaluable annexes summarising the decision making procedures in force in each policy area. Emphasis is put again on the role of the Member States. Unlike most available manuals, their role is not confined to the exercise of political impulsion in the European Council or co-legislation in the Council, but it is clearly shown that seats in the EP and national quotas in the Commission are, despite the common taboo, considered by member states as a part of their representation in the EU. More importantly, the book presents the role of Member States not only in the exercise of the EU's legislative power, but as well as in its executive and regulatory powers via structures such as comitology. The section includes a chapter on the EU's increasing recurrence to "soft" policy-making tools such as the open method of coordination. Additionally, students are reminded in the chapter on jurisdictional power that national judiciaries are the first instance of the EU's jurisdictional power. This makes this manual unsuitable for an introduction to EU politics, but a most advisable reading for more advanced courses.

The third part of the book analyses the role that citizens play in EU politics. Following a similar logic to the previous chapters, the importance of Member States in the EU's political life is emphasised in that citizens are represented in the EU via their national representatives, but as well because it is in the national context where citizens have more chances to influence EU politics by using referenda or voting in elections. By contrast to traditional presentations, the authors do not emphasise the political party dynamics in the Parliament, but rather the blurred political logic in their election, since EP elections are national ones and the configuration of the EP and its affirmation as an institution conducts major parties to cooperate more often than competing. The authors suggest that more recent emphasis on participatory logics including the involvement of civil society and interest groups has not put a substantial remedy to the democratic problems identified with the EP. This gives place to a series of chapters analysing in detail aspects of the EU's legitimacy crisis, with particular emphasis being put on the difficulty that citizens have to understand and thus participate in a political system in which political stakes seem to be completely blurred. The chapter on the EU technocracy is a good example in that the role of unelected officials in the Commission's competition policy or in the ECB could be justified in terms of the needs of independence for providing regulatory goods, although this is blurred by the representative role that Member States attribute to their nationals in these institutions. In this sense the last chapter on the weakness of the European public

sphere shows that despite the formal representation of citizens in different instances, the blurred logic according to which citizens' elect these representatives is a serious threat to a substantial representative link.
