Book Review

Cristina Ares Castro-Conde *University of Santiago de Compostela*

The Impact of European Integration on Political Parties: Beyond the Permissive Consensus by Dimitri Almeida
Routledge (2012), ISBN: 9780415693745 (hb)

This volume presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of the positions of more than 100 national parties towards the European Union (EU) covering all current member states from the beginning of the integration process to the present day. The main research question focuses on the extent to which common ideological traditions lead to the emergence of convergent attitudes and programmatic responses to European integration. The author studies party-based positions towards the EU within those party families which shaped the integration process (social democratic, liberal and Christian democratic party families) or embodied partisan opposition to the EU (radical left and right-wing party families).

According to Almeida's cleavage-based approach, national party attitudes and responses to European integration are dependent on their perception of the closeness of fit between their party-based identity and the political course of European Union as revealed by the direction of domestic policy change. Intra-family variations are attributed to specific domestic contexts and the author reveals large cross-family variations concerning the extent to which party origins shape partisan positions in respect of the integration process.

The 202 pages of the volume contain an introduction entitled "Political Parties and the Politicization of Europe", six chapters, and a conclusion. To begin with, the introduction contextualises the contribution to the field of EU Studies, presents the research design and makes explicit the relevance of an analysis centered on the notion of party families. Chapter one develops a general model for describing the main drivers of party behaviour prior to elucidating the relevant factors for explaining party positions on specific policy issues such as European integration. Subsequently, the rest of the chapters are devoted to examining partisan responses to the EU in respect of national parties from each one of the political families covered (one family per chapter). Finally, the conclusion includes a section about the limitations of the study and a final one dealing with the future research agenda concerning the Europeanization of national parties and party systems. Additionally, throughout the book, ten figures and seven tables clearly and efficiently summarise the research agenda and the evidence gathered.

Although the author´s theoretical model of party behaviour is not capable of predicting future partisan responses to European integration, and at least green and regionalist party families would be very much welcome in a broader research design, The Impact of European Integration on Political Parties is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to the fields of EU Studies, Comparative Politics, and Political Parties and Party Systems. The

main reasons are two. First, it develops a theory of party behaviour by putting forward a general model to explain the whole spectrum of party positions on European integration. The model, a "junction point between actor-centered and historical institutionalist approaches" (p. 160), considers both the ideological and strategic drivers of party positions as well as a broader than usual spectrum of goals that parties seek to attain. Second, using party programmes and quantitative data, the author provides a large amount of valuable data on national party reactions to the EU across the 27 member states.

Added to this, the book provides cause for academics working in the field of EU Studies to consider in greater depth the contribution that a comparative research approach can make to our understanding of party-political attitudes and behaviour at this stage in the integration process.

The volume would be of interest for both scholars and experts on partisan issues and those people concerned with the politicisation of the EU.

Very much recommended.

***