



**POLITICS AND MEDIA IN
MULTILEVEL
GOVERNANCE:
THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

POLITICAL AND MEDIA SYSTEMS

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INTRODUCTION

The EU is the first genuinely supra-national political system.

The EU evolved in half a century from an organization governing coal and steel production and a common market to a continental-scale political system, with extensive executive, legislative and judicial powers.

The EU shares many characteristics of other multi-level political systems, which allows to apply analytical tools developed in CP.

EXPLANATIONS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION (1/2)

At the early stage of EU integration, the phenomena was addressed with theories of “regional integration”. By the mid 1960s, the intensity of political/economic cooperation was already far greater than in any other region. A new theory was needed:

(1) Intergovernmental approaches:

The main actors in the EU are the governments of the member-states with a clear set of policy preferences.

- Early approaches expected that integration could not proceed further than to a minimal level. But deeper integration and delegation of power can be in national governments interest (e.g. single market).
- Model is coherent with “grand bargains” but less with day-to-day decision-making

EXPLANATIONS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION (2/2)

(2) Supra-national approaches:

EU integration is a deterministic process driven by underlying political, economic and social forces.

- Neo-functionalism theories of economic and political integration: A specific action calls for further action in order to achieve the original goal
- Other supra-national approaches stress the role of “non-state” actors in the integration process, such as economic and social interest groups
- The model is coherent with explaining the integration process, but fails to explain fields of “non-integration”

UNDERSTANDING THE EU AS A POLITICAL SYSTEM (1/3)

According to Easton (1957) there are four essential characteristics in all democratic political systems:

- (1) Clearly defined set of institutions for collective decision-making and set of rules governing relations between and within institutions
 - (2) Citizens try to achieve their political desires through a political system
 - (3) Collective decisions have an impact on distribution and allocation
 - (4) Continuous interaction between inputs and outputs of the political system
- The EU possesses all these characteristics. Hence the EU qualifies as political system (but not as a state).

UNDERSTANDING THE EU AS A POLITICAL SYSTEM (2/3)

The constitutional architecture of the EU:

The EU's catalogue of competence:

- Exclusive EU competences
- Shared competences
- Coordinated competences
- Exclusive member-state competences

UNDERSTANDING THE EU AS A POLITICAL SYSTEM (3/3)

Shared executive powers:

- Council: Medium and long term policy agenda
- Commission: Formal monopoly on legislative initiative

Shared legislative powers:

- Council: Under procedures of consultation and co-decision
- European Parliament (EP): Under co-decision procedure

Shared judicial powers:

- European court of justice
- National courts

VERTICAL DIMENSION: THE EU AS A “REGULATORY STATE” (1/6)

In contrast to the “welfare states” at the national levels, the EU is often described as a “regulatory state”. This is due to the primacy of the single market and the centrality of the EU market regulation policies.

The single market has **deregulatory** and **regulatory** elements.

- **Deregulatory side:** The removal of barriers to the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour:
 - Fiscal barriers (e.g. harmonization of VAT)
 - Physical barriers (e.g. custom formalities, border control)
 - Technical barriers (non-tariff barriers)

VERTICAL DIMENSION: THE EU AS A “REGULATORY STATE” (2/6)

- **Regulatory side:** Replacement of national with European-wide regulation:
 - Competition policies
 - Environmental policies
 - Social policies
- Whereas the EU’s social policies aim at making labour markets more efficient, national social policies are geared towards providing benefits for particular social groups.
- EU regulations impose constraints on redistributive capacities of the national welfare states.

VERTICAL DIMENSION: THE EU AS A “REGULATORY STATE” (3/6)

The Economic and Monetary Union of the European Union (EMU):

The institutional design of the EMU:

(1) The European Central Bank (ECB):

The sole responsibility of defining and implementing monetary policy.

(2) Stability and growth pact (SGP):

- Budget deficits < 3% of GDP
- Questionable credibility

VERTICAL DIMENSION: THE EU AS A “REGULATORY STATE” (4/5)

EU expenditure policies:

The direct spending of the EU is relatively small (ca. 1% the of GDP of member states).

The main fields of spending are:

- Common agricultural policies (CAP)
- Regional policy (economic and social cohesion)
- Scientific research

The EU spending is a combination of “solidarity” and “side-payments”.

Spending is difficult to terminate since EU budget decisions require unanimous agreement.

VERTICAL DIMENSION: THE EU AS A “REGULATORY STATE” (5/5)

Interior policies and external relations:

There are two areas of EU policy-making not strictly related to the EU’s main economic policies:

- Justice and interior affairs policies (immigration, asylum, police and judicial cooperation)
- EU’s external relation policies (International trade policies, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), European Security and Defence Cooperation (ESDP))

The EU is developing elements of a “security state”. But security and foreign policy remain highly conflicting among member states.

HORIZONTAL DIMENSION: A HYPER CONSENSUS SYSTEM (1/3)

In the EU there are split agenda-setting powers and multiple veto players

→ hyper consensus system of government.

This system of checks and balances means that legislation can only be adopted with support among different veto players. Risk of a “gridlock”.

Executive policies - Competing agenda setters:

- Council: Agenda is strongly influenced by the presidency of a member-state.
- Commission: Though considered to be “integrationist”, there remains a visible affiliation to the “home-party”. The commission’s policy preferences are close to the median member.

HORIZONTAL DIMENSION: A HYPER CONSENSUS SYSTEM (2/3)

Bicameral legislative politics:

- EP: The “standard legislative procedure” guarantees equal power between EP and Council. The policy preferences of the EP align along the left-right dimension.
- Council: Qualified-majority or unanimous voting. Division of policy preferences along many dimensions (geo-political, economic, net contributors vs. net beneficiaries, left vs. right governments etc.)

HORIZONTAL DIMENSION: A HYPER CONSENSUS SYSTEM (3/3)

Judicial politics:

- It was the CJEU that developed the doctrines of direct-effect and supremacy of EU law
- The CJEU frequently struck down the legislation adopted by the Council and the Parliament

POLITICS LIKE ANY OTHER?

- Hurrell and Menon disagree with Hix: there is no separation of everyday political (*policy*) decisions from high-level political ones (*politics*)
- Integration benefits national governments, who remain the key actors
- National governments are in charge of EU integration, they can change the EU treaties as they see fit
- EU institutions have no independent say in systemic decisions that concern the EU: unlike in “normal” federal systems, EU (quasi-federal) bodies are not involved in decision-making
- In times of crises, EU leaders (the European Council) visibly steer the course of EU integration

THE EU'S DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

- Jan-Werner Müller: democratic deficit can disappear only if EU citizens have enough opportunities to form **shared political views**, and ultimately political demands, through **common means of communication**
- At present, there are only “weakly Europeanized NATIONAL public spheres”
- until recently, the “permissive consensus” governed the EU affairs – EU integration worked because voters did not object to the actions of political leaders pursuing integration project → that is no longer the case! (financial & migration crises)
- Attempts to create a common European public sphere in the 1990s: *the European*, as Europe’s „first national newspaper“ and setting up of the *Euronews* TV Channel: **failure**

A EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE?

- the only truly European media are British – The Economist, The Financial Times and BBC: and the UK is not an EU member state!
- Perhaps national public spheres sensitive to EU affairs are sufficient – citizens debate the same issues in the same times
- Europeanization of national public spheres is supposed to have both a **vertical** and a **horizontal** aspect:
- **vertical** refers to the visibility of EU actors and issues in national public spheres;
- **horizontal** refers to the notion that Europeans should have a voice outside their own nation-state and that they should debate the same themes and issues at the same time

A EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE?

- the problem is with the precise forms which politicization has taken so far: many of the new conflicts have been framed as nation against nation, which is precisely the thing EU integration seeks to prevent
- these conflicts (e.g. Germany vs Greece in the Eurozone crisis) weakened existing sentiments of solidarity across borders
- the emerging state of highly fragmented (nationally bounded) public spheres in Europe in fact mirror what has emerged inside these national public spheres – these too are highly fragmented, given the decreasing impact of high quality media outlets and ascendance of new social media and social networks:
- an ever-decreasing number of citizens read the high quality press; related worry is that the high-quality press is losing not just readers but also editorial independence, due to investors with substantial political interests