

The European Union

By Amber Curtis and Joseph Jupille

INTRODUCTION

In a world dominated by Westphalian states, the European Union (EU) stands unique. Never before have independent countries collectively ceded so much authority to a supranational polity. The European ‘experiment’ begun nearly sixty years ago has resulted in unprecedented economic and political integration. Precisely for this reason, the EU has captivated scholars’ attention from its inception. Although interest has fluctuated in conjunction with real-world developments, political scientists remain fixated on this *sui generis* organization.

Yet empirical uniqueness need not preclude theoretical generalization. We interrogate the political science of the European Union along two dimensions. First, to what extent do scholars conceptualize the EU as *sui generis* versus a test case for broader theoretical development? Second, in the latter case, to what extent do scholars endeavor either to export EU-derived theories outward toward other fields, geographic regions, and political phenomena or to import outside explanatory theories and tools into the political science of the EU?

We proceed as follows. First, we briefly review the various stages of European integration and describe the European Union as it exists today. Next, we appraise past waves of EU scholarship, devoting particular attention to their explanatory priorities in terms of capturing the specificity and/or articulating the generality of the EU experience. We conclude with an optimistic assessment of the current state of the field. Recent work is ample, diverse, and represented in multiple venues that spotlight all types of EU-related political science. We propose that the most promising programs for future research are those which engage the EU both in its empirical specificity and in its opportunities for theoretical generality.

THE *SUI GENERIS* EUROPEAN UNION

Following the devastation of World War II, Western European elites committed themselves to peace through economic cooperation. In 1951, six countries—France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands—formed the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) through the Treaty of Paris, carrying out designs for a united Europe envisioned by Jean Monnet and influentially proposed by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman. The 1957 Treaty of Rome extended this cooperation to a broader functional sphere by calling for the establishment of a common market (the European Economic Community, EEC) within which goods, services, labor and capital could circulate freely. The European Community (EC) which emerged in the 1960s covered a wide range of economic and related policies through an institutional framework comprised most importantly of an executive and supranational European Commission, a legislative and intergovernmental Council of Ministers, a consultative supranational European Parliament (EP) and a supranational European Court of Justice (ECJ).

Spurred by the EC's early success, Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom (UK) joined in 1973, followed by Greece in 1981, and Spain and Portugal in 1986. A new treaty, the Single European Act (SEA), entered into force in 1987. It called for completion of the single European market and undertook significant institutional reforms, including a return to majority voting in the Council of Ministers and an enhancement of the powers of the EP, the members of which had been directly and democratically elected since 1979. The 1993 Treaty on European Union ("Maastricht Treaty") expanded the sociopolitical ambitions of the new European Union (EU) and outlined a future Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), resulting in the 1999 adoption and 2002 circulation of a new single currency, the euro. Additional reforms further empowered the EP, renamed the Council of Ministers into the Council of the EU, institutionalized the European Council (gathering heads of state and government of EU member states) and laid the groundwork for expanded membership, to include Austria, Finland, and

Sweden in 1995, ten Mediterranean and Central/Eastern European countries in 2004,¹ and Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. The present EU encompasses nearly 500 million citizens within twenty-seven member states and manages an economy of nearly \$15 trillion (GDP, 2008 estimate). Its functional scope now ranges across most of the policy terrain once monopolized by the Westphalian state.

The EU is unquestionably the most successful regional integration effort in the world. Nowhere else has a group of national governments repeatedly concentrated such extensive decision-making power in the hands of a largely supranational entity. Throughout its history, European integration has provided ample fodder for political scientists, who have approached its study in a variety of ways.

POLITICAL SCIENCE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Our narration of the history of political science research on the European Union (EU) is largely conventional, closely following accounts offered by Caporaso and Keeler (1995) and Keeler (2005). Our main departure is to focus on the disciplinary contours of this evolution and to emphasize the interplay between the specific and the general in the political science of the EU.

First Wave: Generalizable Intentions, late 1950s-early 1970s

Conventional accounts date the first wave of political science research into the present-day European Union to the late 1950s, lasting into the 1970s. Three broad-scale “grand theories” of European integration emerged, all of which aspired to generalization either from the outside-in (assimilating Europe to patterns identified from geographically- and historically-different cases) or from the inside-out (deriving general lessons from the postwar European experience).

The first major approach began with a collective, interdisciplinary project led by political scientist Karl Deutsch of Princeton University. Focused on the question of international community formation, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Deutsch *et al.* 1957) examined ten historical cases to generate propositions about the prospects for North Atlantic community, including Western

¹ The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta.

Europe. Deutsch's "transactionalism" argued that integration was a function of social interconnectedness, as produced by such things as flows of goods, mail and people and as measured by these and by survey data tapping mutual sympathies among individuals. The greater the extent to which members of the units were assimilated into a common social space, the greater the prospects for community formation and political integration. While political scientists undertook considerable and quite sophisticated research along these lines during the next decade and a half, transactionalist research petered out by the early 1970s with an overall decline in political scientific interest in integration and the EU.

The second, and most prominent first wave integration theory—one that has never disappeared from political science research on the EU—emerged with the publication of Ernst Haas's *The Uniting of Europe* (1958). Analyzing the ECSC in the 1950s, Haas derived four general conditions for political integration: (1) well developed central institutions that could argue for and respond to integrative demands; (2) elite activation around those central institutions; (3) embrace of "inherently expansive tasks" so as to promote "spillover" from initial to later steps; and (4) "continuity of national policy aims" (Lindberg 1963, 7-12). Haas's "neofunctional" approach to regional integration married the practice of Europe's "founding fathers," Jean Monnet and Robert Schumann, with the methods of modern political science.

Neofunctionalism became a vibrant political science research program in the 1960s. First, it gave rise to a spate of research on regional integration beyond Europe (e.g., Haas and Schmitter 1964; Nye 1971). While ambitious in their intent to generalize from the European experience, these efforts proved unsuccessful, especially insofar as less developed countries were concerned. Second, and at the same time, neofunctionalism grappled with challenges presented by developments within Europe itself. French President Charles de Gaulle's 1965-66 refusal to countenance further integrative steps laid out in the Treaty of Rome posed a special challenge to the theory, which had been predicated on more or less

continuous progression toward deeper integration. The resulting proliferation of concepts, variables and measures (e.g., Schmitter 1970), suggested that neofunctionalism was an increasingly degenerating research program.

The last approach in this wave (and the major alternative to neofunctionalism), intergovernmentalism, insisted on the primacy of nation states and national experiences in delimiting European integration. Most forcefully articulated by Stanley Hoffmann (1966), it argued that integration would proceed only so far as national governments conspired to work together, as national interests would always retain precedence and thereby hinder the emergence of a truly supranational organization. This would be especially true in areas of “high politics,” including political and security issues, where the *pouvoirs régaliens* of nation-states would remain intact. Intergovernmentalism drew its inspiration from realist theories of international relations (IR), imbuing national governments with concrete security preferences that, in conjunction with uncertainty over other states’ future intentions, would constrain their willingness to put European interests above national ones. Supranational and transnational efforts to transcend these hard constraints would only antagonize states and retrench state sovereignty in core areas further.

All three first wave approaches aspired to general theoretical accounts of European integration. Deutsch *et al.* worked from the outside-in, assimilating the postwar North Atlantic experience to patterns of community formation identified from other times and places. By contrast, Haas approached generalization from the inside-out, analyzing the ECSC in order to “advance generalizations about the processes by which political communities are formed among sovereign states” (Haas 1958, xi). Hoffmann holds a middle position. Hoffmann held the middle ground. While he sought to draw inferences from the European experience to “contemporary world politics” and “unification movements elsewhere” (Hoffmann 1966, 867), his major contribution was arguably to bring general IR theory (in his case, realism) into the study of the EU. In all three cases, theoretical elaborations and limitations, while

aspiring to generality, mirrored facts on the ground, with the relatively optimistic neofunctional and transactionalist approaches holding sway when the EU was working well as a supranational organization and intergovernmentalism ascending when it was not.

Second Wave: *Sui Generis* Approaches, early 1970s-late 1980s

The second wave of political science research into the European Union began, not coincidentally, with events in the real world, including the braking of supranational integration post-de Gaulle and the end of the postwar economic miracle in the major European economies. Caporaso and Keeler (1995) refer to this as the “doldrums” period for the EU and political science research into it. Haas (1975) announced the obsolescence of his own neofunctionalism, while Puchala (1972) claimed that regional integration theorists had been like blind men inspecting an elephant, each finding a different part and none agreeing on the others’ characterizations. The *zeitgeist* involved a substantial abandonment of “grand theory” and a retreat into narrower, less ambitious work that eschewed generalization beyond the European case. Work of this time was predominantly descriptive, rather than explanatory or theoretical. Keeler (2005, 555-556) brings several indicators to bear along these lines, the most relevant of which is the retrenchment of work on the EU into specialized journals such as the *Journal of Common Market Studies* (JCMS) and *Journal of European Integration*. In one view “integration theory [was] run into the ground, probably because...this new and complex phenomenon could not be studied by our conventional tools of analysis” (Tsoukalis, quoted in Rosamond 2006, 12).

Third Wave: Generalizability Returns, late 1980s-1990s

The European integration process was relaunched in the mid-1980s, most notably with the 1985 adoption of a “single market program” calling for the abolition of all internal barriers to economic exchange by the end of 1992. This “1992 program,” embodied in the 1987 SEA, not only reinvigorated the EU, but also catalyzed a rediscovery of integration theory among political scientists. Two main contenders, both rooted in general international relations (IR) political science scholarship, emerged

relatively quickly. The first, signaled by Sandholtz and Zysman's (1992) analysis of the Single Market program, characterized the *relance* of the Community as a series of elite bargains (involving especially the European Commission, industrial elites, and national politicians) responding to changes in the international economic structure (relative US decline and the rise of Japanese economic power). Subsequent work emphasized similar features in explaining smaller-scale parts of EU integration, and continued to insist on a foundation in IR, rather than integration, theory.

The re-emergence of accounts that were at least consistent with, if not explicitly derived from, neofunctionalism generated a new intergovernmentalist response that emphasized the primacy of state interests in driving and delimiting the European integration process. Moravcsik downplayed the entrepreneurial success of the European Commission, denied any inherent institutional logic toward deeper integration, and minimized the role of transnational elites. Viewing European integration as "conventional statecraft," he emphasized that states' preferences and power defined both the demand for and supply of supranational integration (Moravcsik 1991). This IR-inspired "liberal intergovernmental" approach eventually provided a powerful synthesis combining a theory of institutional choice with rigorous accounts of state preference formation and interstate bargaining (Moravcsik 1998).

In contrast to liberal intergovernmentalism, the rediscovery of supranational institutions and transnational societal actors found expression in a further body of "third wave" literature dealing not with the broad tectonics of European integration (i.e., it was not a "grand theory"), but with the activities of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) and the ongoing process of "legal integration" (for the opening salvo, see Burley and Mattli 1993). A related vein of research on the "constitutionalization" of the EU's founding treaties—whereby it was transformed from traditional international law into a hierarchically integrated legal system granting rights directly to citizens—melded neofunctionalist insights about transnational elites with Deutschian concern for international transactions to provide a

powerful political theory of EU legal integration (Stone Sweet and Caporaso 1998). This discovery of the law by political scientists working on the EU remains a key feature of the literature.

Two last third wave developments bear mentioning here. First, there were at least two additional attempts at developing grand political science theories of European integration to rival the revived neofunctionalist and intergovernmentalist work. Gary Marks (1993) proposed a theory of “multilevel governance” that sought to account for the general upward and downward diffusion of political authority in the EU and beyond. Stone Sweet’s work on legal integration supplied the opening for a grand theoretical statement of the EU’s development along transactionalist-neofunctionalist lines (Sandholtz and Stone Sweet 1998). Second, the 1990s amplified and extended the third wave’s emphasis on the importation of theories, models and methods from across political science. Hix’s (1994) call for more comparative politics work on the European Union inspired countless studies. The 1990s also saw increasing attention to the American politics literature, with imports including spatial models, principal-agent models of delegation, and numerous others.

Fourth Wave: The Normal Political Science of the EU, present day

The current phase of political science research into the European Union represents a continuation of trends begun in the third wave. The “grand theories” of European integration have not gone away. References to neofunctionalism (a.k.a. “supranationalism”) and intergovernmentalism remain *de rigueur* in the literature. Yet the bulk of research occupies itself with lower-order problems tackled through middle-range theories, most often drawing on (or at least consonant with) broader political science literatures. Debates seem increasingly pragmatic rather than paradigmatic.

Thus, the “normalization” of the EU in political science is perhaps the most striking feature of the present-day literature. Recent work from both sides of the Atlantic both draws on and informs non-EU work across the subfields and methodological traditions of the discipline. The pages of four journals mainly devoted to the EU—*Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Integration*, *Journal*

of European Public Policy, and *European Union Politics*—speak equally to EU specialists and to political science generalists working in a wide range of subfields. The amount of EU-related work appearing in general journals is also on the rise. The degree of transatlantic and interdisciplinary cross-fertilization stands at unparalleled levels. Thus, we view as rejected longstanding questions about subfield (especially comparative and IR) incompatibilities, about an alleged transatlantic scholarly cleavage, and about the appropriateness of applying general political science to the *sui generis* EU, matching its descriptive specificity with theoretical tailoring (*cf.* Rosamond 2006).

CONCLUSION

The analysis above documents a history of the main approaches to the study of the European Union along two complementary dimensions: the scope of their theoretical aims (general or particular) and the direction of theoretical application (inside-out or outside-in). While not necessarily exclusive to any one period, the categories produced by this division allow us to succinctly capture the many ways in which EU scholarship has evolved and progressed over the years. The first period attempted to develop grand, generalizable theories of integration, both from the inside-out and from the outside-in. Scholarship eventually succumbed to a second, more *sui generis* period concerned with EU-specific affairs when real-world integration decelerated. The third period witnessed the resurgence of prior integration theories, the development of entirely new exportable theoretical explanations, and the application of imported explanatory frameworks to EU data. Over the long haul, and in the present fourth wave, all of these trends have come to coexist. While the EU is still undeniably unique, political scientists view it as a means for acquiring both general *and* specific knowledge.

Having briefly summarized the main trends in EU-related political science, we here conclude with some final thoughts on its future. As the most advanced regional integration project worldwide, we expect the European Union to remain an important fixture of political science research for three reasons. First, the EU continues to evolve, providing a living laboratory within which a great many

political phenomena can be rigorously studied. Second, related, this evolution inspires political scientists insofar as it reveals both an EU specificity *and* suspected similarities to political-economic, institutional and behavioral processes operative elsewhere. Third, new regional integration efforts underway around the world may look to emulate the EU's model of supranational governance and economic union, giving rise to an already-bourgeoning field of 'comparative regionalism.' Precisely *because* it is so distinctive and seductive, the European Union provides scholars with endless options for engaging in both inside-out and outside-in theoretical work, either of which satisfies the aspirations of general political science.

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