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*The Study of European Union Politics in the  
UK and Ireland*

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This is a working paper version of a paper written for SENT – The Network of European Studies. One of SENT's core objectives is the mapping of European studies and the comprehensive review of the evolution of European studies over the last decades in the different disciplines and countries (<http://www.sent-net.uniroma2.it>). The final version will be published in an edited volume by F. Bindi & K. A. Eliassen on the Development of European Integration Studies in Political Science

# The Study of EU Politics in the UK and Ireland<sup>1</sup>

## Nick Sitter<sup>2</sup>

The study of European Union politics in the UK and Ireland exploded onto the academic scene in the mid-1990s. In 1990 even the best-stocked university bookshops featured little more than a single shelf of books on the European Community; by 2010 a full wall would no longer provide sufficient space. In 1990 the student of EC politics could easily gain a good overview of the relevant literature on politics, international relations and economics, and even law; two decades later it is difficult enough to keep up with developments in one of these fields. The present chapter provides an overview of the development of the British and Irish literature on the EU, from the early debates on European integration to the broad area that makes up European Union politics today. Because this is a large field, the chapter charts the development of this literature rather than provide in-depth assessment of individual contributions.

In 1990 Stephen George gave his book on Britain in the European Community the title *An Awkward Partner*. The title reflected the difficulties British politicians and civil servants experienced in adjusting to and coming to terms with membership of the EC, but the conclusion of the second edition (George 1994) suggested that this relationship was gradually becoming somewhat less awkward. Something similar can be said about the study of the European Union and its predecessors, both in the UK and in Ireland. The study of EC/EU politics has been more difficult, problematic and controversial than most area studies or cases in comparative politics. This is not simply a matter of how to deal with comparative analysis of a single case (the 'N = 1 problem'); or of the classical debates about the role of structure and agency; or about the balance between context and parsimonious simplification (Sartori 2009). The study of the politics of European integration has proven particularly challenging because the EU changes faster than most other polities, because the study of the EU requires knowledge of both international relations and comparative politics, and because the EU is more heterogeneous than most political units.

The study of European Union politics (this term will hereafter be used as a shorthand to denote EU, EEC and EC politics) has developed over the last half-century from a sub-discipline of international relations to a fully fledged subject in both international relations and comparative politics. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the beginnings of a turn to comparative politics and public policy in the EU politics literature, and the subject exploded onto the scene in the 1990s. To be sure, the debates over the very nature of the EU – whether it is best studied as an international organisation, a political system or something unique – still remain open. However, EU political system is increasingly used as a case study or an arena for testing and developing theory, much in the same way that national political systems have long been used. Studies of the European Court of Justice are comparable to those of the

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national constitutional courts; studies of the Commission's DG Competition to those of member state competition authorities; and studies of the European Parliament to any national parliament. The theories that inform academic studies of EU politics are increasingly taken from the broader comparative politics and public policy literature, as much as from the international relations literature.

This chapter charts the development of the study of EU politics in the UK and Ireland, from the early debates on European integration to the Lisbon Treaty. The first section elaborates on the 'awkwardness' of the subject and locates British and Irish research on EU politics in a broader international relations and comparative politics context. The next three sections each address one period. Section two focuses the initial debates on European integration and on UK and Irish membership, during which the literature was characterised by individual ad hoc contributions in politics, law and economics, and the main theoretical debate centred on international relations theories of regional integration and the nature of the EEC. Section three covers the period running from first enlargement of the EEC to the Single European Act, during which the debate between realists and neo-functionalists reached its zenith but the comparative politics debate on European politics also began to take form. The fourth section takes the story up to the present day. It includes the period between the SEA and the Lisbon Treaty when debates in international relations and comparative politics theory were projected onto debates about European integration, and many British and Irish research projects diverged along constructivist vs rationalist lines. By 2010 the field of 'EU studies' in the UK and Ireland could properly be said to be so broad as to no longer constitute a single field. Tellingly, books on the EU are increasingly (once again) dispersed across the appropriate disciplinary sections in university bookshops.

## 1. An Awkward Subject?

The study of the European Union – not just in Britain and Ireland, but elsewhere too – has proven awkward in the dictionary-definition sense that it is 'not easy to deal with' and 'requires cautious action'. The nature of the object – the EU – has been far more widely and aggressively debated than in the case of most other polities or political units. William Wallace's (1983) "less than a federation, more than a regime" formulation neatly captures both the two main units to which the EU has most often been compared – a federal state and an international organisation – and the idea that the EU does not quite fit into either category. An obvious solution is to argue that the EU is in fact a unique organisation, that it is *sui generis*, or born in and of itself, and that the study of EU politics warrants the development of an entirely new set of analytical tools. A prominent 1990s version of this debate in the UK saw Simon Hix (1994, 1996) advocate a comparative approach and Andrew Hurrell and Adnan Menon (1996) argue that the EU was not 'politics like any other' and that its study required a combination of comparative politics and international relations theory. The central point, however, is that comparative analysis of the EU is 'not easy' and 'requires cautious action' – the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of 'awkward'. The three principal sources of the awkwardness of EU politics as a subject – that it has been changing relatively fast, that EU politics is a very multi-theoretical field, and that the EU is remarkably heterogeneous – are addressed briefly in this section.

The first challenge that confronts the student of EU politics is that the organisation changes at a faster pace than almost any other large polity. To be sure, all polities change. The study of politics and public policy is therefore, to some extent, the study of reform and change. Students of British politics are no strangers to relatively fast and radical change, from Thatcherism to New Labour and beyond. However, as a *political system*, the EU has developed and changed much faster, and more continuously, than those of its member states. Moreover, this change has not only been comparatively fast; it has involved several dimensions of European integration (H. Wallace 1989). The EU has *deepened* in the sense that its member states have become more closely integrated over time and the EU's supranational characteristics have been strengthened: more majority voting in the Council of Ministers, a stronger role for the European Parliament and the European Commission, and an increasingly important role for EU law and the European Court of Justice (at least until the mid-1990s). The EU has *widened* in the sense that it has grown steadily from six to twenty-seven or thirty member states: the UK, Ireland and Denmark joining in 1973, the Mediterranean enlargements in the 1980s, five of the six remaining European Free Trade Area states joining the EU or the European Economic Area in the 1990s, and the ten former communist states plus Malta and Cyprus joining after the turn of the century. And the EU has increased its *scope* in the sense that it has expanded from the single market to include a number of other policy areas, including foreign policy cooperation, the common currency, policy and justice cooperation. Even the scope of the Single European Market has been gradually extended since the Single European Act, with the 'public turn' to utilities and cooperation in social policy, health and education since the early 1990s.

The 'moving target' problem has been exacerbated by the somewhat erratic pace of European integration. This, in turn, shaped the academic debate in the UK and Ireland (and indeed elsewhere). The first decade after the Treaty of Rome saw a number of radical developments, including establishing the direct effect of EEC law and the supremacy of the European Court of Justice. Neo-functional accounts of European integration driven by an inexorable logic of spillover from one policy area to the next and interest groups shifting their loyalties to the new political centre were triumphant. The 'empty chair' crisis in 1965-66 and Luxembourg compromise (to the effect that Qualified Majority Voting in the Council would not be used if a state argued that important national interest were at stake) hit the brakes on European integration, and coincided with Stanley Hoffmann's (1966) timely article asserting the obstinacy of the state. Others followed in Hoffmann's footsteps, but already by the end of the decade it became clear that, assured that they were now in control of the integration process, the member states governments were prepared to push integration further. The 1970s saw some success for intergovernmental initiatives as the role of the Council of Ministers and its Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) increased and member states explored intergovernmental cooperation in the fields of foreign policy, counter-terrorism and combating drugs and organised crime. However, the decade also saw considerable problems with the efforts to move toward a common currency. Paul Taylor captured the state of affairs nicely in *The Limits of European Integration*, published in 1983. Somewhat ironically, European integration blossomed again less than two years later. Renewed interest in neo-functionalism followed (George 1985; Tranholm-Mikkelsen 1991); as did another round in the debates between realist and liberals in international relations. The Single European Act and the increased role of the European Parliament prompted renewed interest

from scholars of comparative politics and public policy (Wallace, Wallace and Webb 1983; J. Lodge 1989; Andersen and Eliassen 1993; Bulmer 1993; Richardson 1996); best summed up in Simon Hix's (1994) call for comparative politics scholars to 'pick up their pens'. The steady pace of deepening, widening and scope extension in the 1990s and 2000s seems to have brought an end to the rollercoaster pattern of European integration – but history suggests that it would be rash to expect that this will last.

Perhaps the most challenging practical question that this history of the ups and down of both integration and integration theory raises is whether the EU is best studied as a process or a 'snap-shot'. The debate centres on whether EU politics is sufficiently stable to warrant 'normal' comparative politics analysis of for example lobbying or voting patterns in the European Parliament, or whether all decision making should be seen in a broader context of continuing European integration. Unsurprisingly, scholars who draw on the public choice literature (often inspired by studies of the federal US political system) and focus on the interplay between rational actors with fixed interest and clear unambiguous rules have tended towards greater assumptions of stability. Examples include studies of voting patterns in the Council of Ministers or the European Parliament, of which many can be found in the journal *European Union Politics*. Conversely, scholars from a more sociological tradition, who also include ideas and organisations among the drivers of political decision-making have tended to emphasise change. The *Journal of European Public Policy* offers numerous examples of studies that focus on changes over time in decision-making practices in the Council and the Commission. In practice most public policy scholars have opted to do both: to study decision making as if it were taking place under relatively fixed rules of the game, while bearing in mind that decision making in the 1990s and 2000s generally took place in the shadow of rapid 'constitutional' change as the EU treaties were revised and the scope of the Single Market extended to new sector even between treaty changes.

The second challenge that confronts the student of EU politics is practical: the need to acquire a solid grasp of a broad range of theories. Whereas the public choice theorist interested in legislative decisions at Westminster or the political sociologist interested in cleavages and voting patterns may with some justification limit their study to the literature in their chosen field, the study of EU politics requires a broader theoretical background. Mastering EU politics involves at least some study of international relations, comparative politics, political economy, political history and political sociology. Many of the scholars cited in the present chapter have been trained in both comparative politics and international relations; most of the rest have acquired solid command of the literature and research methods that range far beyond the methods they favour in their own work. This is not only because of the nature of the EU, but also because of the history of EU studies as an academic field.

The brief review of the history of EU studies in this chapter and elsewhere in the present volume provides ample illustration that the subject has been driven by scholars working in a number of different academic traditions. Patrick Dunleavy's observation (when studying a crisis in Thatcher's cabinet in the 1980s) that "political science is inherently a multi-theoretical discipline in which issues of interpretation are of central intellectual interest" (1990:58) is particularly pertinent to the study of EU politics. Although there is much common ground between comparative politics and

international relations, inasmuch as both raise similar questions about the nature of the world (ontology), what one can know about the world (epistemology) and the appropriate tools for acquiring particular knowledge (methodology), comparative politics and international relations still draw on quite different sets of literature in practice. Because both sets of literature have played such a central role in the study of EU politics, the student of EU politics faces a heavy burden in terms of mastery of *the literature*.

At the level of theory, the multi-theoretical nature of EU studies has raised several questions as to how different theories can be used or combined to study 'the nature of the beast'. Donald Puchala's (1972) metaphor for several blind men examining different parts of an elephant and drawing widely different conclusions about what kind of animal they were studying is probably the most widely cited example. Puchala's blind men offer one way out of this conundrum: acceptance that different theories focus on different aspects of European integration. Alternatively Robert Keohane and Stanley Hoffmann (1991) and John Peterson (1995) suggested that different theories explain different types of events: they saw neo-functionalism operating between inter-governmental bargains. Andrew Moravcsik (1991, 1993) used a similar argument to limit his liberal intergovernmental theory to explaining treaty change. In a similar vein, Jeremy Richardson (1996) drew on theories of the policy process to argue that different stages of the EU policy process warrant different theories. Finally, Paul Taylor (1991) offered another approach to combining theories: suggesting that neo-functionalism illustrated the pressure *for* integration while consociationalism explained the *countervailing* forces. In short, the multi-theoretical nature of the study of the European Union is beyond doubt, although the implications of this remain controversial.

The third challenge that confronts the student of EU politics derives from the indisputable fact that the European Union is a more heterogeneous political unit than most of its member states, and the controversies this has caused about whether convergence can be expected and documented. The enlargement from six to thirty-odd member and quasi-member states has driven the point home: no student of current EU politics can doubt that there are big and important differences in power, preferences, resources, institutions, policy traditions, values and ideas across the member states. However, the early UK literature on European integration shows this is a difference in degree rather than in kind from the early years of the EEC. For example, in 1968 John Pinder argued that the differences between Gaullism in France and neo-liberalism in German economic policy would make it very difficult for the EEC to progress beyond negative integration (agreement on the removal of barriers to trade) to positive integration (the development of common policies). This was in response to the neo-functionalists' suggestions that European integration would not only make the EEC more homogeneous, but that economic integration would spill over into increased political support for the project over time (Haas 1958). Since the 1960s this debate has continued in a modified form: scholars who focus on integration theory have tended to emphasise the tendency for the EU to grow ever more integrated and homogeneous; whereas public policy scholars who study patterns of 'Europeanisation' have presented a wealth of evidence of variation across sectors, countries and time (Bulmer 2007).

The debates about the significance of heterogeneity in the EU have taken two principal forms. First, a question of whether political or economic integration is the central driving force; and second, whether heterogeneity has become less politically important over time. The first debate has roots in the debates in the 1960s about the role of nationalism, and the relationship between what Paul Taylor (1968, drawing on Tönnies 1940) called transaction-based society (*Gesellschaft*) and value-based community (*Gemeinschaft*). Neo-functionalist scholars generally took the view that economic integration would drive political integration (*Gesellschaft* would spill over into a nascent *Gemeinschaft*); whereas federalist or realist scholars saw the absence of an EEC-level *Gemeinschaft* as an obstacle to further integration. This debate continues today in the shape of research on socialisation of national actors and the Europeanization of member state politics. It confronts the student of EU politics with a number of important questions for research design, particularly related to how far and to what extent researches can simplify and generalise in order to build parsimonious models of decision making in the EU without losing touch with reality. Much of the critique of neo-functionalism in the late 1960s from British and Irish scholars centred on its assumptions that interest groups were heterogeneous within states but that similar sets of interest groups could be found in each state.

The second dimension of heterogeneity concerns its importance. Perhaps the clearest example is the debate that centred on the effect of the enlargement of the EU to include formerly communist member states. Scholars who focus on preferences and rules tend to focus on how enlargement could be expected to lead to more blocking constellations in the Council of Ministers, whereas others have suggested that the EU (like other federal systems) develops its own mechanisms for overcoming deadlock (see Egan, Nugent and Paterson 2010 for several good reviews. Alternatively, patterns of EU decision-making are deemed to have changed over time. The change from consensual decision making in the Council in the 1960s and 1970s to more use of majority voting in the 1990s and 2000 is well documented, as is the change from the classical 'Community method' of consensual decision-making to other forms of governance such as regulation. Helen Wallace has written extensively on this, most accessibly in various editions of *Policy-Making in the European Union*, each of which also contain good reviews of the literature on integration theory (e.g. Wallace, and Pollack and Young 2010). Another version of this argument can be found in the literature on the regulatory state in Europe (Majone 1994, McGowan and Wallace 1996), in the shape of an argument that decision-making both in the EU and its member states took a turn toward regulatory governance in the early 1990s. Alternatively, the development of the EU political system may be compared processes of national state-building in Europe, using classical comparative politics literature such as Stein Rokkan's work on state-building and democratisation (1970) and Arend Lijphart's work on democracy in plural societies (1977). Hence Simon Hix's suggestion (2007) that as the EU regime matures, left-right political competition is replacing national divisions as the key dimension of political competition at the EU level.

Although the study of EU politics involves some challenges above and beyond those encountered by the student of comparative politics at the state-level, this should hardly be a cause for despair for the student of EU politics, whether he or she comes to the subject from a comparative politics, international relations, public policy, political economy, political sociology or indeed any other background in political

science. The study of EU politics may be an awkward subject in the sense that it requires careful consideration and raises questions about assumptions that can safely be made when studying politics and policy at the national level. Four broad questions have dominated the British and Irish literature: first, the question of what kind of political system or regime the EU is and how it is best understood; second, questions about the nature, preferences and strategies of the core actors (and indeed about what kind of actors can be considered core actors); third, questions about the European institutions and agencies in terms of their organisation and resources; and fourth, questions about the implementation of EU policy and of its effects. All four questions have prompted debates about the relative importance of actors, institutions and norms. The debates not only reflect contemporary debates in comparative politics and international relations; by the 1990s they were beginning to shape and drive the broader debates in political science and international relations. The next three sections turn to the historical development of the study of EU politics in Britain and Ireland; covering three periods separated by the UK's and Ireland's accession to the EEC in 1973 and implementation of the Single European Act in 1987.

## **2. Before Membership**

The study of the politics of European integration prior to the UK and Ireland (and Denmark) joining the EEC in 1973 was carried out largely as a sub-discipline of international relations. The academic debate centred on how to understand the EEC; and to a lesser extent on how European integration worked in specific policy areas. A handful of scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, mainly working the field of international relations (hereafter IR), shaped these early debates between state-oriented and pluralist scholars. The central question was whether international politics was primarily driven by states or by a wider set of non-state actors. Some of the British academics who were to publish top-level articles in five consecutive decades – such as Paul Taylor and Helen Wallace – began to publish on European integration at a time when the IR debate on the EEC was driven as much by North American IR academia as by its European counterparts. The literature that was developed by British and Irish scholars in the 1960s and early 1970s concentrated on two broad themes: contributions to the IR debates on theories of European integration and on the practical policy implications for the UK (and to a lesser extent Ireland) of participation and non-participation in European integration.

The central question in debates on theories of European integration in the 1950s and 1960s concerned hypotheses put forward by Ernest Haas (1958) and other American neo-functionalists on the one hand, and their more state-centred critics on the other. These debates reflected both the broader IR debate between pluralists and realists, and the practical debates about how to go about European integration in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). The central theoretical questions were whether European integration was driven by a self-reinforcing dynamic beyond the control of the six member states, and particularly whether integration was driven by (supranational) policy entrepreneurs; whether it entailed tasks that were inherently expansive (functional spillover would occur as solving one challenge gave rise to new and broader challenges); and whether the loyalties of firms, trade unions and voters would be redirected toward Brussels (political



spillover). The clearest elaboration of a realist critique came from Stanley Hoffmann (1966) at Harvard, in the shape of his suggestion that European integration would be limited to 'low politics' (practical policy issues and zero-sum games about redistribution) and that 'high politics' (relating to security, and to "maximization of the common good", Hoffmann 1982:29). The British debate at the time saw the elaboration of four broad lines of argument that contributed to shaping the IR debate on European integration.

First, European scholars in general and British scholars in particular paid more attention to the role of nationalism than did most of their US counterparts. For example, Paul Taylor (1968) argued not only that nationalism was limiting the scope for European integration, but also that scholarly attention to the role of nationalism might raise questions about the legitimacy of the European integration project. Like both state-centric scholars and classical functionalists, Taylor suggested that the political legitimacy of the project might be a precondition for successful integration. Consequently therefore integration was, and indeed should be, state-driven and based on political consensus. This picture stood in stark contrast to both the neo-functionalists' and federalists' assumption that successful integration would lead to increased legitimacy for the EEC project. It foreshadowed the focus on democracy and sovereignty that would be more fully developed in the British literature in the 1970s.

Second, several British scholars embarked on detailed empirical investigation of domestic politics and the role of interest groups in the European integration process. Helen Wallace (1971) found that far from generally supporting European integration, interest groups were divided within and across the EEC member states. Whereas neo-functionalists assumed a degree of homogeneity of interest groups across the member states (and realists paid only limited attention to interest group politics at all), the empirical evidence pointed to a far more diverse picture. Wallace and others documented considerable variation between the member states both in terms of the types of interest groups that existed and the role they played in the European integration process. Consequently they directed research toward the role that domestic politics played in European integration, with particular emphasis on the effects French and British interest group and party politics had on European integration and the prospect for UK membership

Third, the neo-functionalist dynamic of functional spillover was challenged by John Pinder's (1968, drawing on Tinbergen 1954) suggestion that integration in policy areas that only required the removal of barriers to trade (negative integration) was far easier than in policy sectors where new common standards were required (positive integration). This introduced a more elaborate qualification of the limits to European integration than Hoffmann's high/low distinction, building not so much on (the realists') preoccupation with power and sovereignty as with the practical and political obstacles to the development of common policies. The central argument would later be formulated more rigorously in game-theoretical terms by Fritz Scharpf (1999), but Pinder's work in the 1960s already argued that it had proven considerably easier to remove barriers to trade by prohibiting or removing protectionist measures than it was to establish new common rules among six states that features quite different economic, administrative and legal systems.

Fourth and finally, the IR debate drew some criticism on the grounds that it neglected the international context in which European integration took place, from for example John Pinder (1968), Michael Hodges (1972) and Reginald Harrison (1974). The establishment of the EEC took place very much in the context of the cold war, with considerable help from the USA both directly in terms of help and encouragement and indirectly in terms of the NATO security umbrella. Whereas the international context was relatively benign in the 1950s and 1960s, the combination of economic and political international crises in the 1970s would provide a very different context for European integration. With the US Dollar off the gold standard, soaring oil prices, an international economic downturn, and increasing debates about welfare state crises at home, the EC member states would operate in a more volatile political and economic context in the 1970s.

However, during the 1960s a second, more empirical and policy sector-oriented, dimension of the academic literature on the politics of European integration began to take form in Britain and Ireland that took this subject beyond the international relations literature. A growing number of academics publishing in the *Journal of Common Market Studies* (established in 1962) turned their attention from integration theory to analysis of the economic (and to a lesser extent political) consequences of the EEC for the member state states, particularly in terms of industry, agriculture and trade. An overview of the first ten years of *Journal of Common Market Studies* publications includes a series of articles on economic, social, legal and constitutional aspects of European integration, including studies of the European institutions, and a substantial number of articles that focus on the external relations of the EEC (particularly trade). These articles lay the foundations for a broad literature on EEC public policy, both in its own right and in terms of its impact on the member state. The core contribution of this policy literature was to position the EEC as an 'issue area' in national politics (H. Wallace 1971, 1973), and to focus attention on the role of different sets of national actors in different EEC issue areas and the role of the Commission and the European Court of Justice as policy entrepreneurs (Coombes 1968, 1970). Work on the role these institutions played drew attention to the strong regulatory role that the Commission was beginning to play in EEC politics and policy.

### **3. From Membership to the Single European Act**

The study of the politics of European integration between the 1973 enlargement and the Single European Act saw an increasing number of comparative politics scholars turn their attention to the European stage, and begin to analyse the politics, public policy and political economy of the EEC on its own merits rather than approaching it primarily as a case of advanced regional integration. This period also saw a decline of regional integration theory in the IR discipline in general, and somewhat of an academic backlash against neo-functional theories of European integration. By the early 1980s a series of new books and articles were being published in the UK and Ireland that either returned the state to the centre of integration theory or focused more explicitly on boarder political and economic constraints than the principal neo-functional authors had done. However, just as neo-functionalism reached its nadir and the state's role seemed at its strongest, European integration took off again after a period of 'Euro-sclerosis' in the 1970s. The agreement at the Fontainebleu summit in 1984 and the resolution of the UK budget rebate question set the scene for a

renewal of European integration. The role of the Commission in brokering the political agreement that led to the Single European Act and the ensuing debates on economic and monetary union prompted a revival of the realist – neo-functionalist debate in the early 1990s. However, by this stage the study of the politics of European integration has been broadened to such an extent that the realist – pluralist debate never regained the prominent position it had occupied in the 1960s. Much of the reason for this lies in the empirical and policy-oriented turn that British and Irish scholarship on European politics took in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The 1970s saw a decline in regional integration theory, both in the UK and Ireland as well as on the broader academic scene. Ernst Haas himself (1975) declared the death of regional integration theory, or at least its obsolescence. Integration theory was to be subsumed under the broader heading of interdependence. By the mid-1970s it was clear that much of promise that European integration had seemed to hold in the 1960s would remain unfulfilled in the short term. A combination of international developments and domestic politics limited the development of the EEC, as did the enlargement to the UK, Ireland and Denmark in 1973. The predominant response in terms of international relations theory was a turn either to broader theories of interdependence, or a return of the state to centre stage. However, a range of mixed models that saw the EC system as something almost unique in international relations were also developed in the 1970s. Perhaps most famously, William Wallace (1983) argued that the EC was ‘less than a federation’ and ‘more than a regime’; that it was neither a federation nor international organisation but an institutions that involved a compromise model of sovereignty. Likewise John Pinder (1985) saw the EC a complementary to member state sovereignty, rather than as a challenge to it; as a system that was developing alongside the state system. In short, the 1970s saw economic and social transformation in Western Europe that prompted British and Irish academics to begin to investigate the close and increasingly intense interdependence between the EEC member states, and the implications of these relationships. William Wallace would later (1999) suggest that these changes in Europe were of the kind that would later be labelled ‘globalisation’ when they took place on a wider stage in the 1990s.

The decline in academic interest in integration theory did not extend to interest in the European institutions themselves. With the strengthening of the Council of Minister’s role and machinery and institutionalisation of the European Council summits of heads of state and government, interest in the state-driven machinery of the EC grew. Prominent books on the Council of Ministers in this era included a volume by Geoffrey Edwards and Helen Wallace (1977), as well as several articles by Wallace (1976), and Paul Taylor’s work on intergovernmentalism (1982). A key point in this literature was the difference between formal rules and the actual workings of the Council of Ministers; a theme than was echoed in articles by practitioners (Bieber and Palmer 1975). The European Commission attracted somewhat less attention: although a number of articles explored the Commission’s role in policy sectors such as trade or competition policy, relatively few books and articles addressed the Commission as an international organisation. David Spence and Geoffrey Edwards’ (2006) edited volume on the European Commission contains practically no references to books or articles from this period, but a couple of dozen references to publications in the decade after Jacques Delors took office as Commission President in 1985. However, academic work on the European Parliament took off in the second

half of the 1970s (see below): a review by Simon Hix, Tapio Raunio and Roger Scully (2003) found that the publication of books and articles on this topic peaked in the years after the introduction of direct elections in 1979 and only began to recover again in the late 1990s.

This period also saw increasingly systematic focus on the relationship between domestic politics and European integration, and particularly how domestic politics could act as a break on integration. Labour's calling a referendum on EEC membership in 1975 was the clearest case in point (Sarlvik, Crewe, Alt and Fox 1976); in the Irish case the economic incentives were clearer and more one-sided (Burns and Salmon 1976). This drew attention to the possible breakdown of what Lindberg and Schenigold (1970) had called the 'permissive consensus', as a state's participation in European integration became contested by political parties in the member states. All the new member states had gone through domestic debates on membership in the early 1960s, and the year before the 1973 enlargement Norway had become the first state to reject membership in a referendum. In 1978 Groom (1978) warned of 'spillback': the possibility of successful economic integration provoking political controversy at the member state level. In the same decade academic work in the UK and Ireland began to address questions of democracy and legitimacy, the operation of the European Parliament and whether direct elections to the European parliament could resolve the Europe's 'democratic deficit' (J. Lodge & Herman 1978; Marquand 1978, 1979; J. Lodge 1984, Kirchner 1984). Michael Palmer (1977, 1981) added analysis from a practitioner's perspective. Simon Bulmer's (1983) article on domestic politics and EC policy making and Stephen George's (1985) discussion of the role of domestic politics in shaping European integration started off a series of articles and books examining the relationship between domestic (particularly British and German) politics and European integration and policy-making (Bulmer and Paterson 1989; Bulmer, George and Scott 1992; Bulmer and Lequesne 2005).

At the same time the EC saw quiet progress in a number of policy areas, from the mechanisms for European Political Cooperation and the establishment of the European Monetary System in 1979, to cooperation outside the formal EEC framework in terms of counterterrorism, efforts to combat illegal drugs and cooperation in defence. A range of mid-level policy studies that focused on individual or comparative studies of policy sectors were published in books and journals, and theories of policy making were applied to the EC. A notable example of the latter was Jordan Grant and Jeremy Richardson's (1983) application of their work on policy communities to the EC, which Richardson followed up with a series of studies of EC lobbying and policy-making (Mazey and Richardson 1993; Richardson 1996; Coen and Richardson 2009). The *Journal of Common Market Studies* attracted a wider range of empirically oriented articles, as scholars specialising in a range of policy fields turned to examine the EC as another case study of policy-making or international policy cooperation. A review of individual policy articles is beyond the scope of the present chapter, but a handful of books and edited volumes merit particular mention because they provide a particularly good overview of the state of the art at the time. The volume on *Policy-making in the European Communities* edited by Helen Wallace, William Wallace and Carole Webb, which covered both policy making and a range of sector cases studies, made its first appearance in 1977 and was followed by a second edition in 1983 (by 2010 it was in its sixth edition,

edited by Helen Wallace, Mark Pollack and Alasdair Young). Stephen Geroge's *Politics and Policy in the European Community* (1985) combined analysis of EC policy making with several sector-specific chapters; and Hugh Arbuthnott and Geoffrey Edwards' *Common Man's Guide to the Common Market* (1979; second edition 1989) provided an accessible overview of EC policy in a range of sectors.

Taken together, the studies of the politics of European integration, of European institutions, of policy-making in the EC and of a range of policy sectors provided a mapping of the EC as a complex and heterogeneous institution. During the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s academic attention to some extent followed the fortunes of the institutions: relatively more about the Commission and Court in the 1960s, then a stronger focus on the Council and the role of domestic politics in the 1970s, with increasing focus on the European Parliament in connection with the introduction of direct elections in 1979, and a return to attention to the Commission after Delors took over and the Single European Act was negotiated. In the period after the first enlargement the study of European Community politics became thoroughly multi-disciplinary, as a series of comparative and sector-specific policy studies were published both in the form of books and journal articles. The heterogeneity of the European Community became a more pressing challenge after the 1973 enlargement, and by the time of the Single European Act the debate as to whether a larger number of member states made the Community more unmanageable (prone to gridlock) or institutions like the Council were adapting through the use of informal norms and procedures was well underway. With the enlargements, institutional reforms and extension of the policies covered by the EU in the 1990s and 2000s this question was set return and prompt ever more academic debate.

#### **4. From the Single European Act to the Constitution**

The Single European Act proved a watershed not only for European integration, but also for the study of EU politics in Britain and Ireland. The run-up to the 1992 'deadline' for the Single European Market saw a large increase in book-length studies and journal articles on European integration, and this turned out to be the beginning of a sustainable boom in EU studies. The story of research on EU politics in the UK and Ireland in the 1990s and 2000s is a story of rapid expansion, but also a story of 'normalisation' of EU studies in the sense that the subject began to attract the attention of a wide range of comparativist scholars. EU politics became a more 'mainstream' field of research, and the EU, its organisations and its policy sectors were used increasingly as case studies in comparative politics and public policy. Whereas the EU remained somewhat unique as a subject of international relations, not least because of the deep and intense degree of inter-state cooperation, it came to be seen by many scholars almost as just another case of political competition or policy making. Across the disciplines, the distinction between the EU as a system or regime and its member states as a separate level of analysis became increasingly blurred. By the end of the 1990s, IR scholars working on the EU had contributed considerably to the blurring of the boundaries between the state and international politics in mainstream IR analysis. Likewise, public policy scholars working on the EU contributed considerably to shaping the field of comparative public policy in the UK and Ireland. By 2010, even if the EU was not quite 'just another case study', the EU

had become somewhat of a 'normal subject' for IR, comparative politics, political economy and public policy scholars.

The first decade after the Single European Act saw the publication of a raft of textbooks and studies of the individual EC institutions that soon became that standard references for academic work on the EC/EU, whether in the shape of undergraduate reading lists or citations in research articles. Two early textbooks warrant mention: Stephen George's (1985) *Politics and Policy in the European Community* and Neill Nugent's (1989) *The Government and Politics of the European Community* joined the Wallace, Wallace and Webb (1977) policy volume and El-Agraa's (1980) EC economics textbook as classics that would reappear a number of editions (most recently: El-Agraa 2007; Nugent 2010; Wallace, Pollack and Young 2010; George, Bache and Bulmer 2011). Others that appeared in one or two editions but captured the state of the art at the time well include Juliet Lodge's (1989, 1993) edited volume on the EC's challenges, William Wallace's (1990) *The Dynamics of European Integration* and John Pinder's history of the EC/EU (1991, 1998). These have since been joined by a series of single-author textbooks and edited volumes, notably by Mike Artis and Norman Lee (1994), Jeremy Richardson (1996), Simon Hix (1999), John Peterson and Michael Shackleton (2002), and Michelle Cini (2003), all of which have since appeared in new editions and sometimes with new co-authors or co-editors. Nugent's 1989 volume was part of Macmillan's comparative politics series; a few years later he was among the series editors for that publisher's dedicated European Union series.

The number of books on the European institutions likewise increased, and many prompted repeat editions (only the first and most recent editions are cited here). The Palgrave Macmillan series now includes David Judge and David Earnshaw (2003, 2008) on the European Parliament, Fiona Hayes-Renshaw and Helen Wallace (1997, 2006) on the Council of Ministers, and Nugent (1997, 2001) on the Commission, as well as a series by Juliet Lodge on each set of European Parliament elections (J. Lodge and Herman 1982; J. Lodge 2009); Simon Hix and Christopher Lord (1997) on political parties and Justin Greenwood (1997, 2007) on organised interests. Other notable volumes on institutions include Simon Bulmer and Wolfgang Wessels (1987) and Emil Kirchner (1992) on the Council; David Spence and Geoffrey Edwards (1994, 2006) and Michelle Cini (1996) on the Commission; and Francis Jacobs and Richard Corbett (1990; Jacobs Corbett and Shackleton 2007) on the Parliament. Two volumes focussing specifically on the Delors commission also merit attention: George Ross (1995) *Jacques Delors: The House that Jacques Built* and Charles Grant *Jacques Delors and European Integration* (1994).

The present chapter is not the place to replicate or compete with some of the excellent article-length analytical reviews of EU studies in the first decade or two after the Single European Act, let alone the book-length surveys and assessments of the English-language literature on European integration. At this point it is better to refer the reader to Simon Hix's review of international relations and comparative politics research on the EU (1994) published in *West European Politics* just as that journal began to focus on EU issues; to the debate on institutionalism and new governance carried out in the shape of critical literature reviews by Simon Bulmer (1998) and Hix (1998) in the then newly established *Journal of European Public Policy* (see also Pollack 1996); and to Helen Wallace's (2000) critical review of the history of

European Union studies as part of the *One Europe or Several* research programme. A good recent review by an American author can be found in Mark Pollack's (2010) chapter in the *Policy-Making in the European Union* volume. For book-length reviews of the history of European integration theory that focus primarily on the English-language literature, see Paul Taylor's (1996) discussion of the relationship between developments in European integration and integration theory, Ben Rosamond's (2000) thematic review of the theories of European integration, Michelle Cini and Angela Bourne's (2006) edited volume on EU studies, and the edited volume on research agendas in EU studies by Michelle Egan, Neill Nugent and William Paterson (2010). Moreover, the *Journal of European Public Policy* has dedicated a series of special issues to constructivism (1999), Europeanization (2001), historical institutionalism (2002), political economy (2003), neo-functionalism (2005) etc. The following paragraphs therefore do little more than to point some broad trends in EU studies that characterised research in Britain and Ireland in the last two decades, each of which would warrant at article-length surveys in themselves.

Given the close relationship between IR and comparative politics in the UK and Ireland, it was no surprise that the central debates in the two disciplines developed in parallel in the 1990s, closely mirroring one another. For scholars concerned with the EU in both disciplines, the central questions concerned the nature of the EU as an object of comparative study, and the analytical tools and research methods most appropriate to study it. The debate as to whether the SEA was better understood in terms of cooperation between states with clearly articulated preferences or the Commission's entrepreneurial role was fought out on both sides of the Atlantic. Robert Putnam's work on two-level games (1988) and Andrew Moravcsik's (1991, 1993) liberal intergovernmentalist position in the USA were close to the position elaborated by Paul Taylor (1991) from the IR perspective and Stephen George (1985) from the comparative politics angle. Wanyne Sandholtz and John Zysman's (1989) work on the Commission's leadership role found parallels the research by IR theorists, comparative politics scholars, and even sociologists and anthropologists collected in Neill Nugent's (1997) edited volume on the Commission. William Wallace's (1990) edited volume on *The Dynamics of European Integration* represented an effort at dialogue not only across the Atlantic, but also between IR and comparative politics. By 2000, Helen Wallace (2000:100) could confidently assert that "contemporary Europe is approached increasingly through the regular conceptual lenses and with the regular methodological toolkits of political science and international relations." In both cases, this meant bringing new theories and research tools to bear on the study of European politics; to the study of integration and treaty debates as well as day-to-day politics and the study of individual legislative proposals or policy sectors.

One broad question lay at the centre of the debates in EU studies in the 1990s and 2000s: do institutions matter? Or more specifically: why and how do institutions matter? The classical approach to EU institutions, focussing on their functions, competencies and relationships with each other and the member states, was been supplemented by studies of their organisation, the formal and informal rules observed by actors, and whether participation in European integration changed or shaped preferences, norms and values. Studies of the Commission went beyond examination of its executive, legislative and administrative roles, to explore its internal cohesion, leadership and dynamics (Page and Wouters 1994; Cram 1994, 1997; Laffan 1997).

Work on the European Parliament went beyond the study of its formal power, to explore the dynamics of decision making and patterns of party competition (Hix and Lord 1997). Game theory-inspired work on the European institutions was pioneered in the USA by George Tsebelis (1994), but challenged by arguments to the effect increased power to the parliament could also reinforce the Council's focus on collegiality (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace 1997). Three broad sets of answers to the question of how and when institutions matter shaped the research agenda on EU politics in Britain and Ireland.

First, drawing on the rational choice (or public choice) tradition of comparative politics, and closely linked to the realist school in IR, a number of scholars approached EU studies with the assumption that institutions play a role that is largely limited to providing the rules of the game. Institutions provide one of the constraints – or in rational choice institutionalism the key constraint – under which individuals attempt to maximise their expected utility. Institutions may provide a degree of stability inasmuch as they may be difficult to change, they may limit the range of policy options, and they may the member states of complete control of policy making or effective supervision of supranational organisations. However, they are seen as intervening rather than independent variables. Although the most influential early research in this field came from academics in the USA (Tsebelis 1994; Pollack 1996, 1997), a number of British and Irish scholars working in this tradition applied their theoretical approach to the EU, notably Patrick Dunleavy (2000) and Michael Laver (2000). However, as the institutional affiliations of the contributors to the journal *European Union Politics* reveal, this is hardly an Anglo-Irish-dominated research agenda. Tellingly Mark Pollack's (2006) review of the rational choice work on EU politics includes relatively few references to work by British scholars, compared to the large number of Americans and continental Europeans working in this tradition. The notable exception is Simon Hix's work on voting in the European Parliament (e.g. 2001). Hix's textbook on EU politics (1999) is broadly in this tradition, although his work (e.g. 2008) also addresses a broader research agenda. Criticism of these approaches generally centre on their heavy reliance of formal rules and distance from the real world of politics, including the gap between theory and practice (Corbett 2000).

Second, new institutionalism differs from rational choice institutionalism in its broader focus, which includes informal institutions, sometimes described as 'thick' institutionalism (Bulmer 1993, 1998). Institutions do not necessarily evolve from a historically efficient process or reflect the interests of the principals that created agents to operate in their interests. Institutions may develop beyond the intention of the member states, and thus cause gaps between the states' preferences and the actual operation of institutions. States' short term preferences may be subject to change, and their actions are likely to have unanticipated consequences. Institutions are more autonomous than in rational choice models, and may drift away from original intentions. Many institutionalists also emphasise the role of ideas and norms, i.e. the 'embedded values' written into the institutional set-up, in addition to the formal rules of the game, and the extent to which these shape actors' preferences or values (the literature on Europeanization). This tradition has deep roots in the empirical orientation of the comparative politics work on Britain (and Germany) and the EC (Bulmer 1983, 1993, 1998; Bulmer and Paterson 1987; Armstrong and Bulmer 1998). The *One Europe or Several* research programme (Wallace 2001) was carried out



within this broad tradition, as is much of the work published in the *Journal of Common Market Studies* and the *Journal of European Public Policy*. Policy studies and textbooks that fall within this broad strand of research include books and edited volumes by Michelle Cini (1996), Laura Cram (1997) and Elizabeth Bomberg and John Peterson (1999; Bomberg, Peterson and Stubb 2008). For a positive review, see Helen Wallace's assessment to the effect that this research tradition offers "thoughtful thick description [that] has to be contrasted with much of the American literature, where the objectives are often more theoretical than empirical" (2000:103). However, Wallace also notes that a large part of the theory-development in this field came from German and Scandinavian scholars, and that the institutionalist research tradition in the UK and Ireland draws on a broad set of European scholars, many of whom spent some (or much) time in the UK.

Third, in its 'thicker' form, new institutionalism crosses into the territory of social constructivism, as ideas and interpretation of reality assume more importance than objective reality itself. This entailed an application of constructivist IR theories to the EU (see Rosamond 2000), with the core assumption that the structures of international politics are the products of social interaction extended to the EU system. In the 1990s this kind of analysis was often applied together with arguments to the effect that the Union is a unique or *sui generis* system due to its specific ideas and institutions, and that this has implications for the nature of both decision making and models of democracy. A notable breakthrough came with a special issue of the then relatively young *Journal of European Public Policy* in 1999 edited by Thomas Christiansen, Knud Erik Jørgensen, Antje Wiener and published as an edited volume in 2001. Again this was a thoroughly international research team, the three editors working respectively in Aberystwyth, Aarhus and Belfast, constructivism being associated with the "Copenhagen School", and the critical review with which the special issue concluded being the US-based Andrew Moravcsik's "Is something rotten in the state of Denmark? Constructivism and European integration" (1999). By the 2000s constructivist analysis of the EU has become part of the mainstream, and a series of special journal issues and edited volumes were dedicated to bridging the gap between rational choice and constructivist scholarship, to the extent that Pollack's (2006, 2010) reviews of EU theorising assess the outcomes of these debates as increasingly pragmatic and problem-driven approaches to the study of EU politics rather than 'dialogue-of-the-deaf' meta-theoretical debates.

Finally, EU studies in the 1990s and 2000s also saw a broad series of comparative politics and public policy-oriented research agendas that were only loosely connected to these three strands (though many fell closer to the new institutionalist middle ground than to rational choice or constructivism). For example, the debate on the extent to which the EU constitutes a regulatory state was kicked off by Giandomenico Majone (1994) (at the multi-national European University Institute) and Francis McGowan and Helen Wallace (1996) and generated considerable debate in both EU studies and comparative public policy (see Martin Lodge's review, 2008). Because it was amongst the first truly supranational policy areas in which the Commission exercised considerably power alone, competition policy drew particular attention (McGowan and Wilks 1995; Wilks 1996; Gerber 1998). A second noteworthy example is Paul Taggart's (1998) work on how and why political parties on the flanks of European party systems oppose European integration, which likewise generated a broad debate among both EU scholars and comparative party politics scholars (Mair

2000; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008). These developments saw EU studies become far more closely integrated into broader comparative research agendas than had been the case in the period before Single European Act.

## **5. The Study of EU Politics in Britain and Ireland – no longer an awkward subject?**

Over the past half-century or so the study of European Union politics in British and Irish academia have developed from a somewhat awkward subject dominated by US-led IR debates to a broad and well-integrated part of political science. With this development the subject has lost much of its awkwardness, although it remains so in the dictionary definition sense that it is 'not easy' and 'requires cautious action'. The political system of European Union still changes faster than the Irish or UK political system; the student of EU politics still needs to acquire a solid grasp of several theoretical approaches to the subject, and the EU is, if anything, more heterogeneous than the EEC ever was. Yet the fast-changing nature of the EU is well-understood, how to handle this has been subject to considerable debate, and theoretical and practical tools have been developed to deal with this. The study of the EU is still multi-theoretical, but over the last two decades similar questions have been asked by comparative politics and IR scholars, and the dialogue across disciplines and approaches improved dramatically. The multi-faceted nature of the EU is well-understood, and easily accommodated in integration theory. At the same time much of the uniqueness of Anglo-Irish scholarship on European integration has disappeared. The influence from US academia was strong even in the 1950s and 1960s, and this has been supplemented by close integration of the European academic community. Research training and work in more than one country is common, particularly among scholars writing on EU politics. Consequently it is increasingly difficult to classify scholars as "British or Irish". In short, the study of the EU in the UK and Ireland is very much a 'normal subject' in the sense that it is less unique than it has at some periods in the past, in terms of both disciplinary focus and research agendas. The combination of labour mobility, disciplinary cross-fertilisation, the internationalisation of journals and editorial boards, and the very fact that English has become the language of choice (if not first choice, then second) for many EU-oriented academics means that even in the UK and Ireland the subject has been well and truly Europeanised.

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