Contents

Introduction

Theoretical and conceptual accounts of European integration abound. It is rare these days for an academic publication on European integration not to be anchored in a conceptual framework of one kind or another, while claiming to deepen, test, enlarge or reinterpret a theoretical account.

At a time of increased strains and contestation for the European Union (EU), it is more important than ever to understand the range of theoretical perspectives that have helped explain its evolution and present state and provide the resources for addressing new developments and challenges. This book is designed to provide an introduction to and critical assessment of the wide range of theories that currently prevail in the study of European integration. It does so both in terms of an analysis of their substantive contributions to the field but also in terms of their historical context and origins (including what they were developed to explain and the impact of real-world events on their fortunes) and their philosophical underpinnings. While the first theorists specifically focused on explaining European integration, i.e. why states have agreed to abandon all or parts of their national sovereignty and what results this integration process has produced, since then others have sought to apply more 'mainstream' approaches from comparative politics, public policy and beyond to explain the day-to-day politics of European integration.

The book will argue, however, that neither of these two perspectives is sufficient to understand contemporary European integration. This means, more precisely, that the EU cannot be analysed merely as an inter-governmental entity in which member states make central decisions, nor that it is a political system similar to that of a (nation)-state – an interpretation introduced by general comparative politics approaches. This book argues that only a combination of both international relations and comparative politics approaches will allow us to answer crucial empirical contemporary European studies questions both on its internal and broader external – or international – aspects. In other words, this book aims at 'mainstreaming' theoretical accounts of European integration. What do we mean by that?

Mainstreaming European integration theory

Theoretical 'mainstreaming' means drawing out the relationships between key concepts and frameworks in EU studies with broader theorizing in political and social science both today and historically.

While this attempt was undertaken as early as in the 1980s (Bulmer 1983), and has became even more systematic since the 1990s (Hix 1994, 1998; Pollack 1996; Caporaso 1999; Gabel, Hix and Schneider 2002), this book aims to give it another twist.

Mainstreaming European integration theory means, to the understanding of these authors, not only looking at the construction of new institutions at a supranational level. European integration is also about the transformation of domestic structures, policies and politics. Thus, instead of developing theories and frameworks solely designed to study European integration, conceptual tools broadly used to study the state should be applied to European integration.

This particular understanding of mainstreaming European studies is reflected in the development of contemporary European integration frameworks such as institutionalisms (Chapter 5), governance (Chapter 6), Europeanization (Chapter 7), sociological approaches (Chapter 8) or political theory (Chapter 9). I refer to this understanding as 'bottom-up mainstreaming' because its origins can be found in the study of the state.

However, this particular movement has a serious flaw: it neglects the international and intergovernmental aspect of the integration process (Hurrell and Menon 1996, 2003). Bargaining among member states inside the EU, negotiations between the EU and other states, bilaterally or multilaterally in international organizations such as the EU, takes place in an intergovernmental arena where contemporary conceptual international relations frameworks provide precious tools for analysis. These interactions are shaped by sovereignty-based considerations such as 'national interests' or 'power'. Theoretical tools developed by 'bottom-up mainstreamers' do not systematically take these sovereignty considerations into account, as they consider the EU as similar to a nation-state. Yet the intergovernmental aspect of European integration remains crucial. This, of course, concerns the external aspect of European integration (all areas of external relations – trade, defence or diplomacy, as well as internal policies that have an external impact, such as Justice and Home Affairs (JHA)). Sovereignty and power, however, also concern the internal aspect of European integration, i.e. the bargaining that takes place among the EU member states (Chapter 10).

Furthermore, the EU is not the *only* regional integration project, neither in time nor in space: NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Association), MERCOSUR (the Southern Cone Common Market) and ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), to mention just three, are other cases with which comparisons might be extremely beneficial. These comparisons would allow for a better understanding, not only of regional integration processes, but also of the consequences of regional integration for states and society more generally (Chapter 11). It is in all these areas that new international relations approaches offer promising avenues for research because, in one way or another, they

recognize an actor's role as being influenced by sovereignty and 'national interest' considerations. This research attitude is what this book calls 'top-down mainstreaming'.

This book differs from earlier calls for academic mainstreaming in a number of respects, most importantly by looking to a broader range of disciplines, including both international relations and comparative politics, alongside sociology. Linking the concepts of 'bottom-up' and 'top-down mainstreaming' in this book is not necessarily about developing one single homogenous conceptual or methodological approach to European studies. Here it means insisting on the fact that only the combination of theoretical concepts originating in comparative politics, public policy *and* international relations will allow for any nuanced understanding of the different aspects of European integration.

Introducing the reader to the richness of theoretical accounts in EU studies and guiding them through the complexity of these concepts, however, also requires putting these theoretical approaches into their political and historical context.

Contextualizing theories and concepts

Contextualizing theories and approaches in general is central for our understanding of where the origins of theories lie, and what the underlying scientific and methodological paradigms are. The analysis of processes, institutions or real-world phenomena more generally is always influenced by the particular social context within which the observer evolved (i.e. was trained to analyse and observe) and operates today (some academic institutions are renowned for their particular approach or 'school of thought'). The development of theoretical and conceptual approaches in EU studies is no exception: approaches and frameworks are influenced by the prominent academic but also political paradigm of their time, i.e. by trends. Thus, presenting the historical origins of theoretical approaches to European integration helps us explain the structures of thought generally implicit in these tools for analysis.

Let us take three moments in European integration in order to illustrate the importance of the social, political or academic context in developing theoretical frameworks. First, the theoretical accounts introduced in the 1940s and 1950s were developed to explain the origins of European integration. Three theories competed in explaining European integration in the 1950s, all of them influenced by the traumatic events of the Second World War: neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism and federalism. As will be shown in Chapter 1, federalism argued in favour of supranational integration, developing ideas on how to best structure regional integration in order to hinder the outbreak of a new armed conflict on the European continent. On the contrary, neofunctionalism

(Chapter 2) and intergovernmentalism (Chapter 3) emerged during a period of change in scientific paradigms: behaviourists introduced scientific methods stemming from hard sciences into social sciences. Influenced by this debate, these approaches developed hypotheses that sought to identify what had pushed sovereign states to abandon their room for manoeuvre and adhere to a new form of international organization. Their ideological standpoints were discarded: neither neofunctionalism nor intergovernmentalism believed that member states accepted to create the European Community (EC) mainly because of their wish to secure peace on the European continent. While neofunctionalists argued that European integration was due to the perceived benefits of this integration: positive results in one integrated policy area would lead to pressure for increased integration in another policy area, intergovernmentalists specifically emphasized the role of state interests driving the integration process forward.

While the latter interpretation remained largely valid for 20 years, the mid-1980s saw the emergence of new frameworks explaining European integration providing the second example of the importance of theories and conceptual frameworks in interpreting 'real-world events'. Contrary to the dominant intergovernmentalist thinking of the time, which emphasized the minimal interest of the major member states in European integration and, as a result, the relative apathy of the EC, the rise of institutionalist accounts brought change to the theoretical mainstream. More precisely, it allowed for an alternative interpretation of this 20-year period, but with hindsight. When adopting an institutionalist viewpoint (Chapter 5), we observe that, under the calm surface, a large number of changes and reforms were afoot. These include the introduction of the European Monetary System (EMS), the first elections to the European Parliament, the implementation of intergovernmental cooperation on foreign policy and integration through European law via the European Court of Justice (ECJ). Thus, far from being dependent on state interests alone, 'institutions mattered'. The existing institutions, as well as those established during the 1960s and 1970s, helped further European integration. Such an observation would have been impossible had the theoretical framework been based purely on a single variable – namely, state interests being for or against increased European integration.

The analysis of the negotiations for the Single European Act (SEA) in 1986, a document that 'relaunched' the European integration process by creating a single European market, is a third example that illustrates how the same events can be read very differently depending on the theoretical lens one chooses to look through. Thus, we may understand the SEA as an instance of purely intergovernmental negotiation between member states, and more precisely Germany, France and the UK (Chapter 3) or, on the contrary, as having been largely influenced by non-state actors and, more precisely, economic interest groups such as the European

Round Table of Industrialists. From this perspective, the preparation of the SEA becomes a phenomenon better explained using the conceptual approach of network governance (Chapter 5), according to which a broad and pluralistic number of actors – both public and private – negotiate in order to define and implement a policy.

What we observe here are cyclical or dialectical patterns of challenges to, and the reinforcing of, existing theoretical perspectives (Paterson 2010). Sets of real-world events, crisis and caesuras provide challenges, but also opportunities to reformulate theories and conceptual frameworks. The academic and sociohistorical context largely structures the emergence and subsequent importance of these theoretical approaches.

European integration studies have also been influenced by conceptual debates going on in other fields of political science and international relations. At the same time, European studies have exerted their own influence, contributing to the emergence of a number of considerable controversies in the social sciences more generally (Wiener and Diez 2004, 2009; see also Bache and George 2006; Rosamond 1995, 2000; Kelstrup and Williams 2000). For instance, governance approaches (Chapter 5), developed at the beginning of the 1990s in EU studies, opened up new possibilities to conceptualize the integration of the state into a supranational entity, by cutting the state into small constituent elements – public and private actors. This also led to normative questions about the democratic character of the EU in general, dealt with by political theory approaches (Chapter 9).

The relevance of theories

In short, this book is based on the basic and perhaps obvious assumption that theories matter. But why do they matter? Is it not enough to study the history or detailed workings of the EU as historians and lawyers do? Albeit important, this approach is not entirely satisfactory. Theories and conceptual frameworks matter precisely because they allow us to understand how a specific hypothesis can influence the interpretation of a given research question. To put it bluntly, if no effort is made to structure our observations, no proper understanding is possible (Marsh and Stoker 1995).

The origin of the notion of theory comes from the Greek verb *theorein,* meaning 'observing, identifying and understanding'. It refers more precisely to the idea of bringing order and meaning to phenomena observed. In a restricted sense, 'theory' is defined as an argument of correlation or determining variables of universal, historical and nomothetic validity which can be tested by a set of refutable hypotheses (Przeworski and Teune, 1982; King, Keohane and Verba 1994). This book, however, deals not only with theories, but also presents key

concepts and frameworks. Contrary to theories that attempt to develop an argument about causality, concepts and frameworks offer ideas for interpreting social facts. In the case of concepts and approaches, social phenomena are part of a specific context and must be interpreted rather than explained – i.e. any explanation is first and foremost (merely) an interpretation.

The link between concepts and theories can be understood as a continuum. On this continuum, multiple positions are possible. On the one hand, not all authors presented in this book who advocate an explanatory theoretical approach necessarily defend conceptualizations based on unidirectional links between causes and effects. On the other hand, adepts of the interpretive, conceptual approach do not all reject the use of language based on hypotheses and variables, be they dependent, independent or intervening – in fact, the majority of scholars take a position somewhere in the middle of this continuum.

This book will use the notion of *theories* or *theoretical approaches* when these frameworks allow us to develop a system of hypotheses. The notion of *conceptual framework* is used in a wider sense, referring to what Gerry Stoker called 'frame[s] of references in which reality can be examined … [by] providing interpretations of relationships between variables' (Stoker 1995: 18).

The theories and conceptual frameworks analysed in this book can be distinguished according to two functions: their explanatory function, on the one hand, and their critical and normative function, on the other.

Although *explanatory theories* differ very broadly in their epistemological underpinnings and, therefore, in the methods used by scholars when employing such theories, these theories do share a common objective: to explain why and how events take place. Their added value lies in systematic research aimed at uncovering the reasons for, and determinants of, the policy processes observed. Critical or normative theories, on the contrary, do not take European integration as a given. They aim to

Table 0.1   *Functions of theories and conceptual frameworks*

Functions	*Theories and conceptual frameworks*
Explanatory	Federalism, transactionalism, neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, institutionalism, governance, Europeanization, constructivism, sociology, political theory, international relations, comparative regional integration
Critical and normative	Federalism, functionalism, constructivism (postpositivist variant), normative power Europe (NPE), political theory

Table 0.2 *Four dimensions of EU research*

Dimension	Main question
Ontology	Does the world exist independently from actors' perception?
Epistemology	What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge?
Sub-disciplines	Should we study different areas of integration with different disciplinary tools?
Scope of theoretical approach	Can we explain the EU's political system in its entirety or only parts of it?

provide avenues allowing for developing alternatives to political and economic processes at the EU level. Political theory, for instance, led to reflections on what the EU should be or become.

However, distinguishing between the explanatory and normative functions of theories and conceptual approaches does not allow us to fully understand all the fundamental differences between the approaches presented in this book. Joseph Jupille's (2006) differentiation between four metatheoretical dimensions seems better suited to explain the architecture and cleavages present in scientific research on European integration (see also Wiener and Diez 2004, 2009).

The first dimension concerns ontology: 'What is the world made of?', 'What is a cause of the social world, and what is an effect?' Ontology deals with the question whether the world exists independently of the perception or experience of actors (and therefore, objectively), or if it only exists via the perception of individuals or the individual (subjectively). Are actors moulded by their environment and where they are situated in it, or are their preferences formed independently from external influences? This debate is best known as 'structure versus agency 'debate. It can be understood as an issue of socialization against autonomy of an individual: does the individual act as a free agent or in a manner dictated by social structure?

The second key dimension is epistemological: 'What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge?' More precisely, we distinguish between the question of 'how the social world functions' (understanding) and the question 'what makes the world function?' (explaining). Understanding refers to the scholar's attempt to make us grasp what events mean. In order to understand an event, we must interpret it, put it into perspective, generally in starting the explanation from an actor's view. Explaining, on the other hand, refers to the attempt to explain the laws of nature: 'The crucial move is to insist that every individual works basically in the same law-like way, with individual varieties depending

on systematic differences in, for instance preferences and information' (Hollis and Smith 1991: 4). A theory of knowledge thus tries to determine whether we can build up sufficient knowledge of the world (for example, via empirical observation) that will ever enable us to validate our hypotheses objectively. Or, conversely, is any observation based on a, at least partially, erroneous theory, as this theory will implicitly determine the responses that we hope to find in the empirical field? Both of these concerns are specifically discussed in the chapters on constructivism (Chapter 7) and sociological approaches to European integration (Chapter 8). Another way to frame the dimension of epistemology is to distinguish between positivist and post-positivist perspectives: A positivist theory of knowledge argues that causalities, i.e. relations between cause and effect (explaining), are out there just waiting to be found, whereas post-positivists refer to a value-laden social reality, only coming to light through individual interpretation (understanding).

A third dimension concerns the explanatory functions of subdivisions in the social sciences more generally. This book primarily concentrates on political science and sociological approaches and, thus, offers a rather homogenous view as compared to theories developed in legal studies, history or economics. At the same time, the different sub-disciplines of political science such as political theory, public policy, comparative politics or international relations raise also different questions, which in turn lead to different answers in European study research. Thus, international relations approaches until the 1970s were mainly concerned with identifying those factors that encouraged states to pool their sovereignty at the European level, whereas more general comparative politics approaches questioned the consequences of European integration for policies as well as for the citizens of European member states.

The fourth and last dimension concerns the scope of the theoretical approach. Can we explain a political or social system in general, in time and in space, and thus develop a so-called grand theory, or should researchers strive to explain a particular context, an attitude that can be found in so-called mid-range theories? Thus, theoretical approaches vary not only in terms of objectives, but also in terms of scope. Analysing EU energy policy, for example, requires different tools, based on mid-range theories than those used to assess the EU as a political regime in its own right where we can find attempts to develop grand theories.

The structure of the book

The book is divided into three main parts: Part I groups together theories which attempt to explain the reasons behind regional and, more specifically, European integration and the direction this process took. Part II presents frameworks that explain the way the EU functions, an aim that

has led to a gradual 'mainstreaming' of conceptual frameworks for studying the EU by using those designed to analyse the state ('bottom-up mainstreaming). Part III presents international relations approaches developed to analyse the variety of intergovernmental bargaining. A variety of these approaches, however, are not based on state-centred views, but deconstruct terms such as 'sovereignty', 'national interests' or 'power' ('top-down mainstreaming').

The consideration of the factors accounting for European integration, developed in the first part of the book, begins with what is widely called original debates on regional integration, such as functionalism, transactionalism and federalism (Chapter 1). As we will see in Chapter 1, federalism, in particular, will be presented as an evolutionary theory – from its origins to more contemporary conceptualizations. Originating as a largely normative approach in EU studies, federalism analyses cooperation between states, where cooperation leads, or is meant to lead, to the establishment of a new task-oriented body. Federalism gathered momentum again in the periods of evolutionary treaty negotiations, such as after the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 or the Constitutional, and then Lisbon Treaty, respectively, in 2004 and 2007. Thus, while empirically challenged at the EU level from the 1950s to the 1980s, it was reinforced again through a new set of empirical developments at the beginning of the 1990s and 2000s, to be challenged again after the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty. For nearly thirty years, until the beginning of the 1990s, neofunctionalist (Chapter 2) and intergovernmentalist approaches (Chapter 3) replaced federalist approaches. The critical analysis of these approaches is the subject of the first part of this book. The central question these theories try to explain is why states agree to join a regional bloc, and how this supranational organization developed or stagnated.

The second part of this book critically analyses conceptual frameworks in EU studies that stem from more general political science and comparative politics approaches. This new research did emerge at the beginning of the 1990s, with a call to mainstream European studies and a plea in favour of abandoning the project of conceptualizing the EU as a single case or as being *sui generis*. As developed above, this has meant the emergence of analytical frameworks proposing a greater use of comparative politics, public policy, political sociology or political theory in the study of European integration, mainly concentrating on policy areas linked to former pillar 1 policies. In this second part, the book will thus look in turn at different forms of institutionalism (Chapter 4) and governance approaches (Chapter 5), Europeanization and policy transfer studies (Chapter 6), constructivism (Chapter 7), sociological approaches to European integration (Chapter 8) and political theory (Chapter 9). The main objective of these academic concepts (and accompanying sets of literature) is not to develop frameworks for explaining *why* states join

regional integration schemes in the first place (motives, rationale, costs/benefits), but to contribute to our understanding of *how* the European political system actually works in practice today, and how the EU has influenced and transformed domestic politics in the various member states.

In the third and final part, the book seeks to analyse how the EU can be interpreted by using international relations approaches: on the one hand, to examine how general international relations theories can be applied to European integration when coupled with more sociological interpretations of international relations (Chapter 10). This chapter will allow us to present conceptual frameworks for measuring the influence of sovereignty and national interests on the bargaining behaviour of member states, as well as the EU's role in the world, i.e. whether it can be seen as a normative power, a coherent international actor or whether its internal structure prevents it from influencing international relations.

On the other hand, comparative regional integration approaches turn, at least partially, back to initial questions such as why states agree to form regional integration schemes and how these regional integration schemes function, in studying forms beyond the European continent (Chapter 11). These conceptual approaches thus attempt to conceptualize international integration processes more generally, rather than concentrating solely on those concerning European integration.

The proliferation of theoretical and conceptual approaches for studying the EU allows us, on the one hand, to engage in a more detailed and nuanced analysis of the EU and its historical development. At the same time, however, they have also revealed signs of increasing fragmentation (Paterson, Nugent and Egan 2010). While most of the approaches and theoretical frameworks have avoided becoming too specialized, there is nevertheless a certain danger that, instead of bringing the whole picture of European integration back in, they increasingly concentrate on micro-subjects or issue areas. In other words, we currently observe the consolidation of a multitude of middle-range theories that do not set out to *explain* the reasons for integration, but, instead, enable us to *structure* our research in a coherent manner. That is not to say that these many different approaches are operating in complete isolation from each other. What we hope for, of course, is that the borders between these different approaches are broken down or become more permeable, to give way to more open debates on the advantages and disadvantages of each approach and their level of application (Manners 2009).

However, it does seem that we are at a point where contemporary theoretical frameworks should consider how they might be more ambitious, in an attempt to explain the structure and functioning of the wider system as a whole. This is essential if we want to avoid wallowing in a multitude of very detailed examinations of specific, yet isolated, policy studies. Further studies focusing on European society (Fligstein 2008)

Index