

## Notes and Comments

### **Revisiting the Nature of the Beast – Politicization, European Identity, and Postfunctionalism: A Comment on Hooghe and Marks**

TANJA A. BÖRZEL AND THOMAS RISSE\*

We agree with Hooghe and Marks that the politicization of European integration, which started with the Maastricht Treaties but has gathered speed ever since, is here to stay.<sup>1</sup> It has changed both the content and the process of policy making. This is a significant insight which challenges the conventional wisdom about the European Union (EU). The contemporary debate about politicization is still framed in more or less normative terms. The discussion is largely about whether or not politicization is a good thing and whether or not one should promote it.<sup>2</sup> In sharp contrast, Hooghe and Marks argue forcefully and convincingly that the genie is out of the bottle and that politicization cannot be reversed. Their claim has significant implications for both the theory and the politics of European integration.

With regard to theory, politicization poses a double challenge to the two major approaches to European integration.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, both liberal intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism conceive of European integration as a process driven by the quest for effectively solving socio-economic problems.<sup>4</sup> According to liberal intergovernmentalism, national governments pool their national sovereignty rights to achieve more efficient policy outcomes that satisfy their domestic (mostly economic) constituencies.<sup>5</sup> According to neofunctionalism, strategic coalitions between transnational and supranational actors push and pull national governments into transferring sovereignty rights to the European level in order maintain and enhance economic benefits achieved

\* Freie Universität, Berlin (email: risse@zedat.fu-berlin.de and boerzel@zedat.fu-berlin.de).

<sup>1</sup> See Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, 'A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus', *British Journal of Political Science*, published online by Cambridge University Press, 2008, doi: 10.1017/S0007123408000409; see also Philippe Schmitter, 'On the Way to a Post-Functionalist Theory of European Integration', *British Journal of Political Science*, published online by Cambridge University Press, 2008, doi: 10.1017/S0007123408000483; and Hanspeter Kriesi, 'Rejoinder to Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "A Postfunctional Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus"', *British Journal of Political Science*, published online by Cambridge University Press, 2008, doi: 10.1017/S0007123408000471; also all in *British Journal of Political Science*, 39 (2009).

<sup>2</sup> For opposing views see Andrew Moravcsik, Anne Faber and Wolfgang Wessels, 'Strategien und institutionelle Perspektiven nach der Verfassungskrise: "Funktionalistische" und "institutionalistische" Wege zu einem neuen europäischen Verhandlungspaket', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 47 (2006), 252–63; Andreas Follesdal and Simon Hix, 'Why There Is a "Democratic Deficit" in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44 (2006), 533–62; Michael Zürn, 'Zur Politisierung der Europäischen Union', *Vierteljahresschrift*, 47 (2006), 242–51.

<sup>3</sup> While the field of theories of European integration has multiplied and diversified, Liberal intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism in their rationalist and constructivist varieties still dominate.

<sup>4</sup> See Hooghe and Marks, 'A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration'.

<sup>5</sup> Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

by transborder co-operation.<sup>6</sup> Yet, effective socio-economic problem-solving has always been only one of the driving forces of European integration. From the early days of the European Community of Coal and Steel onwards, European integration has always included a move towards building a supra-national polity. Since those days, the European Union has hugely expanded the scope of its policies – from environmental regulation to border control to post-conflict peace-building. While liberal intergovernmentalism has simply ignored this huge expansion of community competences, neofunctionalism at least provided a theoretical explanation for the emergence of a polity ('upgrading the common interest').

On the other hand, both theories assume European integration to be an elite-driven process and largely neglect the role of the public.<sup>7</sup> From a liberal intergovernmentalist perspective, member state preferences for European integration are aggregated in institutions of interest intermediation at the domestic level, such as parties and interest groups, and subsequently represented at the European level by national governments. For neofunctionalism, demands for European integration are articulated by socio-economic interests organized in transnational associations and pressure groups. Neither of the two theories attributes an active role to the public. Rather, they rely on the existence of a permissive consensus that is to hold as long as European integration produces effective policies that help to solve problems the nation state is no longer capable of tackling on its own. To be fair, neofunctionalism does expect political contestation with increasing integration. However, politicization was supposed to result in further integration rather than stagnation or re-nationalization.<sup>8</sup> As to liberal intergovernmentalism, the two-level game logic on which it is built<sup>9</sup> can actually accommodate increasing politicization in principle. Accordingly, politicization would result in smaller winsets as a result of which bargains at the European level are harder to achieve. While this insight is probably correct, leading proponents of liberal intergovernmentalism continue to be wedded to the elite-centred version of the theory.

In short, politicization constitutes a qualitative change in European integration that challenges core assumptions of major theories in the field. The postfunctionalist theory developed by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks seeks to tackle this challenge focusing on the role of identity. In the remainder of this Comment we will discuss the extent to which their theory-impregnated multi-level governance approach allows us to come to terms with the politicization of European integration, both in theoretical and practical terms. How can we explain the increasing politicization? And how shall we deal with it politically?

In a nutshell, the arguments by Hooghe and Marks can be summarized as follows: politicization results from three independent trends that have connected during the 1990s at the latest. First, the ongoing process of European integration with regard to both level (who decides at what level of the multi-level polity?) and scope (what issues are being transferred to the European Union?)<sup>10</sup> has raised the salience of European policy questions in the domestic polities of most member states. In other words, EU membership and institutionalization matter the more their effects hit home. Europeanization then serves as a necessary condition for politicization.

Secondly, public opinion on European integration is not superficial and fickle, but rather well structured along two dimensions.<sup>11</sup> The first dimension concerns the well-known left–right cleavage

<sup>6</sup> Ernst B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economic Forces 1950–1957* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958); Leon N. Lindberg and Stuart A. Scheingold, *Europe's Would-Be Polity: Patterns of Change in the European Community* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> See Hooghe and Marks, 'A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration'.

<sup>8</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*; Leon N. Lindberg, *The Political Dynamics of European Economic Integration* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1963).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Putnam, 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games', *International Organization*, 42 (1988), 427–60.

<sup>10</sup> See Tanja A. Börzel, 'Mind the Gap! European Integration Between Level and Scope', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 12 (2005), 217–36.

<sup>11</sup> It has taken quite a time for Europeanists to realize that the 'rational public' is not confined to American public opinion, but includes Europeans, too. See Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro,

which largely structures the party systems in most EU member states. The second dimension concerns identity issues and refers to the degree to which people see their national identity as exclusive or inclusive of other territorial identities (for instance, Europe). Public opinion research has shown – Hooghe and Marks among them<sup>12</sup> – that territorial identification in either exclusive or inclusive terms has a huge impact on attitudes towards European integration and is more important than economic interests or utility calculations.

Thirdly, policy entrepreneurs have picked up on and connected these two trends, i.e. increasing Europeanization, on the one hand, and identity concerns in public opinion, on the other. As Hooghe, Marks and others show, the conflict in public opinion between exclusive nationalism and national identities that include allegiance to Europe has been used primarily by parties which map onto the second salient cleavage in European party systems, namely the one between ‘old politics’ (what Hooghe and Marks call *tan* = traditionalism/authoritarianism/nationalism) and ‘new politics’ (*gal* = green/alternative/libertarian). The result is politicization then entails a shift from elite-driven interest-group politics to mass politics. The more national party systems are structured along the *gal/tan* rather than the left/right cleavage, the more we would expect a politicization of European integration in national politics. In some cases (such as France), the European issue has actually led to a re-arrangement of the party system by shaking up both the traditional left and the traditional right. In Germany, the European issue constitutes a ‘sleeping giant’ waiting to be discovered by the new – *tan* – party of the left.<sup>13</sup>

We essentially agree with the explanation for politicization provided by Hooghe and Marks. However, we would like to add one point: Hooghe and Marks appear to suggest that European issues solely map onto the *gal/tan* cleavage in the party systems. We concur to the extent that constitutional issues are concerned. The more the *finalité politique* of European integration becomes politicized in domestic arenas, the more we would expect populist parties on the fringes of either the left or the right to pick up the anti-European *tan* vote which is primarily motivated by identity concerns of the exclusive variety. We have seen this process in action during the referendum campaigns in France and the Netherlands. The traditional mass integration parties of the centre-left and the centre-right cannot politicize the *gal/tan* cleavage for electoral purposes without antagonizing parts of their own core constituencies. As a result, they will shy away from politicizing European integration, leaving this issue to the populists.

Yet, not everything is lost for the traditional left/right cleavage in European party systems when it comes to Europe and the European Union. It is one question to politicize European integration and constitutionalization as such. It is quite another matter to start public debates on particular European policies. What about ‘social Europe’ vs. neoliberal policies? What about environmental concerns vs. nuclear energy? What about ‘fortress Europe’ v. a Europe open to migration? These are policy issues rather than constitutional ones. And these policy issues are salient along the left/right dimension rather than the *gal/tan* cleavage. As a result, European mass integration parties of the centre-left and centre-right could actually profit from politicization, the more Europeans stop fighting over the European *finalité politique* and start debating what kind of European policies they would prefer.

(*Fnote continued*)

*The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, ‘Calculation, Community, and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration’, *European Union Politics*, 6 (2005), 419–43; Jack Citrin and John Sides, ‘More than Nationals: How Identity Choice Matters in the New Europe’, in Richard K. Herrmann, Thomas Risse and Marilyn Brewer, eds, *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 161–85.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Franklin and Cees van der Eijk, ‘The Sleeping Giant: Potential for Political Mobilization of Disaffection in Europe’, in Wouter van der Brug and Cees van der Eijk, eds, *European Elections and Domestic Politics: Lessons from the Past and Scenarios for the Future* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), pp. 189–208.

The political implications of these considerations are obvious. First, politicization is not necessarily a bad thing! Even if it slows down the process of European integration for a while, it inevitably increases the democratic legitimacy of the European Union which is desperately needed. Secondly, if politicization of European integration is here to stay, the current efforts by European elites to put the genie back into the bottle will fail. In all likelihood, these efforts will result in even more 'sleeping giants' waking up in the various member states.<sup>14</sup> In other words, populist parties of the *tan* variety (on either the right or the left fringes of the political spectrum) will exploit European integration for political purposes. Thirdly, if the mass integration parties in Europe want to regain lost ground in the battle over European integration, they have to live up to the facts of politicization. The way to do this *and* to gain ground in electoral battles would be to politicize Europe along the left/right cleavage. As a result, European issues ought to be framed in terms of the direction of European *policies* rather than with regard to European integration. The 2009 elections to the European Parliament will be the test case.

<sup>14</sup> Franklin and van der Eijk, 'The Sleeping Giant'.