

IEUSS REVIEW OF BOOKS

Bulmer, S and Lequesne, C. [*The Member States of the European Union*](#), 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 2020

The above is a comprehensive book on the European Union, ambitiously taking on integration theory as well as a discussion about how the EU affects and is affected by its member states.

In fact, the title may be a misnomer. It is clear that the editors requested their contributors to focus on specific themes, in this case, Europeanisation, the economy, and the migration crisis. Whilst this is understandable, it may appear that the contributors followed their brief a little too well to the extent that the title even seems to be a misnomer – might it not be better called: 'Europeanisation and the EU' or something like that, which might have encompassed the book's contents more precisely? Many of the chapters are headed by the term 'Europeanisation', which does indicate that the notion was central in the minds of both editors and contributors. The state of the EU's members' economies and migration, whilst they are both significant subjects within the EU, are not *equally* significant, and not for the same reasons, to all the member states of the EU. Has each member state experienced a refugee crisis (p 3) – or, in fact, has any of them, given that the EU still takes in only a small fraction of refugees worldwide?

I found it something of a weakness, although this may be arguable, that the book contains chapters on some of the member states only. It includes the UK, which is no longer a member of the EU, of course, but excludes, for example, Ireland, Portugal, Hungary and so on. The omitted states receive a mention, if at all, within chapters devoted to other member states with which they have proximity or affinity. It is understandable, of course, given that to devote a chapter to each state would mean that the book would start out with 27/28 chapters, which might well be too many to allow proper coverage of the book's range. After all, there is much interesting and

significant material relating to the member states which is not directly linked to all of them. Nevertheless, the states might have been grouped in some way for the chapters so that they all (in accordance with EU principles) would have been treated as equals by the editors.

That said, the book does a good job of introducing, analysing and describing many of the EU's processes and procedures and how they affect and are affected by its member states. I particularly appreciated the chapters on interest groups/social movements and on subnational authorities, although slightly surprised that neither chapter mentioned the EU's main Committees (European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions) which might both be said to have some impact on non-state/sub-state levels of the EU's member states.

The chapters on the member states themselves were well constructed and informative – painting a picture of each state and the part played by it vis-à-vis the EU – the sense that France sees the EU as a means towards its former *gloire* (pp 76-77); that Germany sees itself as 'an honest broker' (p 105); that Greece's financial troubles and the EU's response to them have 'for the first time' led both its major parties towards a consensus (p 134). I was a little disappointed that the EU's impact on Spain's autonomous regions was rather underplayed, but impressed at the portrait presented of Sweden's adaptability and flexibility to EU norms and processes. The description of Poland, whose citizens are richer, better governed and much more secure, which they appreciate although perhaps with less enthusiasm than might have been hoped (p 211), seems to encapsulate the kind of reluctant Europeanism expressed in most of the Visegrad states. The chapter on Bulgaria too demonstrates how Europeanisation may be only skin deep. This finding will not come as a particular surprise to public policy analysts, but it is often downplayed by commentators who regard changes within institutions and the law as sufficient whilst ignoring the requirement for the embedding of those changes within the norms and principles of both citizens and public policy actors. And then to the UK – a harbinger of what is to come or just a rotten apple in the barrel? Menon and Scazzieri conclude

that it is neither. They do not expect other states to follow the UK's example, but they do believe that 'differentiated integration' will continue to portray the reality of the EU's relationship with its member states.

The best part, though, for me was the masterly introductory chapter on EU integration, which was refreshingly clear, detailed and successful in forecasting the possible futures for, as well as describing the present and past of, the EU and its member states. I was also impressed by Kassim and Buth's chapter 'Europeanisation and Member State Institutions' in which they note that there is a two way interaction between and amongst the EU and its member states, and that 'top down' is an insufficient way of describing those interactions (p 302).

The book as a whole, in fact, demonstrates the reality that the EU and its member states are reactants (a term in chemistry that describes substances that affect each other and lead to an outcome different from them both). In this case, the EU reacts with its member states; the member states react with the EU and the processes change both to produce...? The problem is that the product of these particular reactants, unlike that which results when hydrogen is combined with oxygen (and produces water), is still to be determined, although Bulmer and Lequesne and their contributors can hardly be blamed for not being able to establish what it will be.

Finally, the book ends on an optimistic note, noting that the UK's less than glorious exit from the EU has had the effect of discouraging Eurosceptic parties in other states from clamouring to leave. It appears, to Bulmer and Lequesne that far from encouraging an exodus, the UK's experience appears to have demonstrated even to Eurosceptics that leaving is really not a good idea!

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March 3, 2021