

## **IEUSS REVIEW OF BOOKS**

**Nugent, Neill. [The Government and Politics of the European Union](#), 8<sup>th</sup> ed., Macmillan Higher Education/Red Globe Press, 2017.**

In the Fall of 2009, I taught my course on the European Union to a class of more than 20 students. Late in the term the headlines were all about the Greek financial crisis, the threat to the Euro and the beginning of the end of the EU. In 2012 I taught the same class to six students, who saw this in part as a political history class, since the EU seemed to be on its way out. This experience increases my respect for Neill Nugent, who daringly opens his book, [The Government and Politics of the European Union](#) (8<sup>th</sup> edition, 2017), with a list of "crises and challenges" that can easily be taken as reasons to study something else!

This opening, however, is also a reflection of the dramatic, real-time nature of EU studies. Nugent's first chapter shows a dynamic, flexible, sometimes messy phenomenon, adjusting to a changing context but also shaping it. Since the 1950s, its leaders have cultivated and shaped the EU as they have tried to figure out what it can do and how to help it adapt most effectively. Scholars have been right behind them, trying to describe and classify it. How do we introduce students to this unfamiliar and increasingly complex political entity? Nugent's book is a wonderful resource for navigating the many aspects of the EU.

The book's structure combines shorter chapters into larger sections on the EU's history, treaty framework, institutions and policy processes. The last section steps out of the EU itself and looks back at it using conceptual and theoretical tools.

Nugent gives us permission to pick and choose the order in which we work through the book with our students. Some might want to start at the end, with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that prepare us for going back to the actual historical narrative earlier in the book. Others instructors will use that first chapter of the book to start raising interesting questions about our assumptions regarding what it means for a country or an entity like this to succeed or fail, or about declaring a political project complete.

The section on the treaties also allows flexibility. Its first two chapters describe the background to, and contents of each of the treaties (Rome, SEA, Nice, Lisbon, etc.). But if students might find it too tedious to go into the

chronological history and details of each specific treaty, one can jump to Chapter 8, "Treaties and the Integration Process," which has a conceptual approach to the documents and their practical consequences.

Students might be put off by the scope of the book, so it's up to us to keep them engaged until they get their stride. To help navigate the complexity of the topic, the text cross-references itself repeatedly, taking us to different sections that appear earlier or later, so that we can keep all of the strands untangled. In that sense, the book is like an encyclopedia in which one can jump from section to section as needed.

Nugent helps with a text that is confidently organized. The text moves along quickly and sometimes even has a conversational feel. As he writes, Nugent very often follows a description of a treaty or institution or event with a concise commentary on the background or context: "There were four principal reasons for this decision." This is a scholar's interpretation but also a dialogue with the reader, and a constant invitation for the rest of us to determine whether he has omitted or forgotten something. (I'm still looking.) Nevertheless, it is not personal. Don't bother looking to find editorial comments from a British author writing skeptically about the EU. Even the book's conclusion, where one might expect the author to relax, is scrupulously non-judgmental, except as measured by the specific goals or general aspirations of the EU itself.

Nugent ties many of the EU's structures and policy areas to the treaties, providing many text boxes and document excerpts as illustrations. For people who already know about the treaty history, about the changes in the names (such as the compilation of previous documents into the Consolidated Treaty, or the difference between TEU and TFEU), and what and how they each cover (such as the Maastricht pillars), the text is as clear as anyone can be, with frequent reminders of where a particular item might be found in a previous treaty. It would be helpful to provide a box with a graphic depiction of treaty development either in the text or on the publisher's website.

The core of the text is made up of the third and fourth sections: III. The Institutions and Political Actors of the European Union, and IV. Policies and Processes of the European Union. Nugent does a wonderful job of helping us navigate what can easily become tedious, especially for newcomers. Almost every chapter and sub-section begins with an overview, continues with details and description, and then gives some kind of example or illustration that refers to a specific leader or historical event.

Nugent does not presume to know our interests or perspectives, and does not provide his own list of questions for us to raise in class. Instead, he has a Concluding Remarks to nearly all chapters that briefly summarize different

aspects of the topic, such as the pros and cons of the EU Policy process (p. 274), on-going problems in implementation of legislation (p. 344), or the tentative nature of the EU's place in the international arena (p. 416). We are then free to start our discussions in any way that serves our educational goals.

The resources at the publishing site are helpful but need some updating. The basic outlines of the material in the text can be used by instructors to review content and then raise questions about specific items. This would be a good place to add timelines, images or video clips to complement the text. Some of the current material will benefit from being updated. For example, a sample COREPER Agenda dates from 2005. One suggestion is that Council agendas be added that refer to topics that address different kinds of student interests: digital privacy, freedom of movement, civil rights, environment, etc. Another possibility would be to take one issue and use it to illustrate action by the different Councils, the two COREPER and or working groups, so that students can see actual examples of the level of detail covered by each decision-making level on a specific issue.

Work is now underway to prepare the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of this book on the EU. The first and second editions actually pre-date the EU as such, and its longevity is not accidental: this is a solid, robust text that is much more than an introduction to the EU. It is a reference work that teachers and students can usefully keep and draw on for many years.

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