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Which Europe?
The Politics of Differentiated Integration

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The model of unitary integration has dominated thinking about post-1945 European integration. Its power as a persuasive narrative derives from its combination of normative and causal beliefs that support and give coherence to the European project of ‘ever closer union’. In normative terms the unitary principle rests on the political ideal of European solidarity through ensuring the equality of Member States in sharing common rights and obligations. The corollary is a unitary legal order embracing all states and their peoples. The unitary principle also reflects the economic values of efficiency and growth through exploiting large, continent-wide market scale. The corollary is that customs union, common external trade policy and, above all, the single market, with a ‘level playing field’ ensured by competition policy, become core to unitary integration. In this perspective differentiation is a temporary and highly constrained phenomenon, essentially an epiphenomenon.

In practice, this model has only ever applied with major reservations. Most basically, the Community-building process began with only six Member States, a mini-Europe. Even as the Community expanded in membership, the Cold War set boundaries to the process. There were ‘multiple Europes’ before the geo-strategic parameters shifted decisively in 1989–90. Not least, ‘economic’ Europe and ‘defence’ Europe assumed different institutional forms (notably the European Economic Community and NATO) with non-identical memberships. ‘Multiple Europes’ survived the end of the Cold War. However, once its barriers were removed, more and more of European space became enclosed within the European Union. By 2007 it had grown to 27 members. In consequence, the unitary principle was territorially extended across Europe. Nevertheless, successive enlargements, before and after the end of the Cold War, acted as catalysts for renewed debates about the principle of differentiated integration. Greater diversity in membership, not least in levels of economic development and in institutional capacity, raised questions about the unitary principle. At the same time, extension of the scope of EU policies, along with ‘deepening’ of the integration process through institutional and procedural reforms, also posed challenges to the unitary principle. The combination of enlargement, increasing scope of policies and institutional deepening served to give a new saliency to the model (or rather models) of differentiated integration. Correspondingly, territory, function and temporality seemed of increasing relevance for understanding the complex and evolving balance between the unitary and differentiation principles.

This volume seeks to catalogue differentiated integration in Europe and to offer a set of partly complementary and partly competing explanations for this complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Though its central disciplinary basis remains political science and international relations, the perspectives offered reach across disciplines into economics, geography, history and sociology. The volume does not seek to advocate a single unifying theory of differentiated
integration. Its objective is to get readers to think theoretically about the phenomenon by providing a range of tools for this purpose. Its other objective is empirical: to provide an inventory. The resulting picture is by no means complete. The very fact that such a wide ranging set of chapters contains gaps – for instance, territorially, the three Benelux states and, functionally, aspects of the single market – is testament to its sheer scale. In making necessary decisions about exclusion, we have sought to capture the ‘wider’ Europe beyond the conventional ‘old’ EEC. We have also taken account of what the authors of the ‘function’ chapters – as subject experts – chose to select.

The idea for this volume was conceived by the editors during one of the research activities of the EU Consent Network of Excellence, coordinated by Professor Wolfgang Wessels of the University of Cologne, and was significantly shaped by the debates that took place within the network. This volume has benefited inestimably from the British Academy Small Research Grant that made possible the organization of a three-day workshop at Cardiff University in September 2008. At this workshop the first drafts of the chapters were presented, with contributors acting as discussants for each other’s papers. The resulting debates enabled the editors to provide detailed guidance to authors. We are enormously grateful to authors for the good-natured way in which they dealt with the comments of discussants and editors. It must be stressed that the editors sought to organize a learning process amongst authors, not to advocate a single best approach. The main unifying theme was the political nature of differentiated integration.

The project also benefited from the earlier smaller workshop of the ‘theory chapter’ authors, held at the European University Institute in Florence in May 2008. We are very grateful to Professor Michael Keating for making the necessary arrangements. Last, but not least, we would like to thank two members of staff in the School of European Studies at Cardiff University: Dr Katja Seidel for organizing the workshop; and Mary Raschella for handling the financial matters. Both Katja and Mary lightened our loads enormously.

In the final analysis, though, the quality of this volume owes so much to the authors of the theory, policy and territory chapters. It has been a pleasure as well as a source of intellectual profit to work with them.

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July 2009
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