ACCESS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION
ACCESS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Law, Economics, Policies

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FOREWORD

The Flemish master Pieter Bruegel the elder has well illustrated the lack of interest of people for a historic event that takes place under their very eyes. In a painting of 1564, entitled “The Procession to Calvary”, he has depicted the Messiah as a small figure sinking down under the cross on his way up the Golgotha. No one in the crowd of Roman soldiers and ordinary people around Him pays any attention to His Martyrdom. They are all looking at a couple of peasants quarrelling with three soldiers in the forefront of the picture. This everyday brawl is the centre of attention of the crowd and not the event that has changed the course of history. One can hardly blame these people who, at the time of the Crucifixion, were going about their everyday affairs and were attracted by a thrilling albeit ordinary happening. As demonstrated by Bruegel, they had not the perception – that we now have – of the importance of the event that they were witnessing.

Likewise, the majority of contemporary Europeans have no notion that they are witnessing an experience that will most probably change again the history of mankind. This history is marked by wars and all kinds of bloody fights between ethnic, religious and other groups, fights for power, for land, for ideals (real or supposed) or just for the survival of a nation or a group attacked by other nations or groups. The extraordinary event that takes place under our eyes is the sixty-year old experience of peaceful and voluntary unification of different and formerly conflicting nations. The European experience is unique by virtue of its objective of establishing the basis for an increasingly closer union between formerly hostile nations. It is also unique because of its institutions, which have no equal in other international organisations. Lastly, it is unique on account of its achievements: never in human history have different nations cooperated so closely with one another, implemented so many common policies or, in such a short space of time, harmonised ways of life and economic situations which differed so greatly at the outset.

Yet this unique experiment is hardly exciting. It is hidden behind tedious negotiations by complicated institutions using a peculiar jargon incomprehensible to ordinary citizens. Curiously enough it is not the lack but the abundance of information that clouds the European horizon. Information about the work of European institutions is abundant and freely available to citizens for the asking, particularly in electronic form. The problem is that the great majority of citizens do not and never will go asking for information about
an experiment that they consider as extremely complex and distant from their everyday problems and interests. On their part, many European mass media report on a daily basis new European policies, laws, programmes and internal and external disputes. Yet, these media accounts are for most citizens like the leaves of a tree, which hide the forest that is stretching out behind. Leaves, like the daily news are ephemeral and unexciting, not worthy of particular attention. On the other hand, the dense forest of European institutions, policies and laws, which produces the political and economic oxygen necessary for the blossoming of small and medium European nations, is obscure and terrifying, if there is no roadmap showing the way through it.

Access to European Union attempts to provide the reader with an overall view and the perspective necessary for understanding the complex organisation, which is the European Community/Union (EC/EU). Indeed, it is virtually impossible to understand the functioning of a particular mechanism or of a specific measure of the Union without having a comprehensive view of the organisation and some knowledge of its development over time. The emphasis of the book is placed on the common policies developed by the EC/EU. Indeed, an approach to multinational integration is advanced, based on the setting up and development of common policies by the participating states. This approach is based on the empirical evidence of the European Union, but may also be applied mutatis mutandis to other multinational integration schemes elsewhere in the world.

This book aspires to being a textbook for any student of European integration, whether academic student of the European integration process, lawyer interested in European law, which is ceaselessly growing and modified, economist wishing to acquire the latest information on European economic policies, historian wanting to understand the recent history of the continent or businessman seeking to understand the mechanisms of the large market in which he operates. In fact, European integration cannot be properly approached with the particular methods and tools of political science, international relations, economics or law. Access to European Union follows, therefore, an interdisciplinary, pragmatic approach, which is somewhat distinct from the precise precepts of the disciplines that compose it.

This approach, however, is neither dogmatic nor purely theoretical. The empirical or pragmatic approach endeavours to present objectively what European policies and legislative acts are meant to achieve, with a minimum of value judgments as to their performance to date. In fact, European policies, as all public policies, have both positive and negative aspects and can therefore be approached either in a positive or a negative way according to the viewpoint of the writer. Moreover, European policies are in a state of perpetual evolution, as they are constantly modified and adjusted to ever-changing technical, economic and political conditions. In this book we follow an empirical approach of
European policies as they are in a particular year: what they try to achieve; what they have achieved so far; which are their main shortcomings; and, finally, which are their short-term prospects.

To help the reader find easily the details of any policy or measure he or she is interested in and/or deduce in an unprejudiced way whether a certain policy is good or bad or whether it has achieved the objectives assigned to it, facts and references are presented in a precise, almost scholastic, manner. All statements about past, present and future developments of common policies as well as all references to European law are based on the official texts of European acts, published in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJ) or in Commission publications. In addition to their documentary purpose, the references to the OJ are also meant to help researchers find the official texts of their particular interest, as published in the collections of the OJ or in the electronic database EUR-Lex in the Europa server of the Commission.
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