

### Review: Swen Hutter, Edgar Grande and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *Politicising Europe: Integration and Mass Politics*

Tatar, Marius Ioan

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**Swen Hutter, Edgar Grande and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *Politicising Europe: Integration and Mass Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, ISBN 978-1-107-12941-2 (hbk), 340 pages**

*Review by Marius Ioan TĂȚAR*

While the European Union has recently celebrated 60 years since its founding treaty was signed in Rome on March 25 1957, the European project seems to have entered a critical stage. Brexit is only the most recent development in a series of political controversies that reflect the challenges and problems the European integration process has faced since the mid 2000s when the Constitutional Treaty was rejected in two national referendums in France and the Netherlands. Political conflict over European integration became even more evident in the aftermath of the economic crisis. The rise of EU contestation is indicated by increasing levels of Euroscepticism among citizens, relatively favorable outcomes of Eurosceptic parties in national and European elections, public controversies on political strategies designed to cope with the euro crisis and more recently to deal with the refugees' crisis. All these developments seem to suggest an increasing split between citizens and the elites that have led the European integration process since the beginning (Tătar, 2010).

Against this background, the book edited by Swen Hutter, Edgar Grande and Hanspeter Kriesi assumes that a focus on the "politicization of Europe, both as an analytical concept and a political strategy is key to an understanding of the acute problems that the European integration project faces today" (p. xvi). The book is the result of a long-term collaborative research project that focuses on the development of political conflict over European integration in six west European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK). The study follows every important step of European integration for more than four decades, from the early 1970s to the euro crisis in 2012. Politicization is defined as an expansion of the scope of conflict in the political system (p. 7). The study focuses

on three main dimensions of politicization: issue saliency (visibility), actor expansion (range), and actor polarization (intensity and direction) (see Chapter 1 by Grande and Hutter, p. 8). Thus, politicization is viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon which includes an increasingly salient and polarized public debate among expanding range of actors (p. 10). The concept of politicization used in this book emphasizes political conflict particularly over the constitutive aspects of the emerging European polity, such as conflicts over national sovereignty, identity conflicts and problems of solidarity. All these emerged from the problems that confronted the European integration project from the very beginning: the scope of cooperation between member states, the problem of membership and enlargement, and the problems of institutional design and authority (p. 12). The authors formulate a set of hypotheses related to the levels, causes and consequences of politicization and test them with an impressive new dataset.

The book is structured into four parts. The first part (chapters 1 and 2) is dedicated to theoretical and methodological aspects. In terms of research design, the study traces politicization in three different types of occasion (i.e. national elections, Europeanized political protest and public debates on major integration steps). The research team has used original content analysis of quality newspapers as the main data collection method (see Chapter 2 by Martin Dolezal, Edgar Grande and Swen Hutter).

The second part (chapters 3-5) maps the levels and types of politicization of European integration. In chapter 3, Grande and Hutter point out that treaty reforms which entailed a further authority transfer from national states to the EU show higher levels of politicization than debates on the accession of new member states. Enlargement debates mainly had a politicization potential in the accession countries themselves. The authors mention two exceptions from this pattern: the northern enlargement in the early 1970s (which mobilized substantial politicization in France in debates on Britain's EC membership); and Turkey's application to EU which provoked anti-Islamic sentiments and raised concerns about European identity (p. 88). In chapter 4, Grande and Hutter analyze politicization in the electoral arena where European issues compete with other important domestic issues. The authors note some striking differences in the timing and course of politicization across various countries and this suggests that domestic political actor constellations and strategies play an important role in politicization processes (p. 111). These results emphasize the importance of political parties and other social

actors in mobilizing electoral support as well as various forms of citizen participation (Tătar, 2011; Tătar 2015). The findings in chapter five reveal that European integration left its mark in the protest arena too, but the impact is limited and it did not increase from the mid 1990s to late 2000s (p. 133). In this chapter, Martin Dolezal, Swen Hutter and Regina Becker conclude that while in the electoral arena conflict over Europe is mainly about membership and transfer of national sovereignty, by contrast, in the protest arena it is more often about specific socio-economic and issues (p.134).

The third part of the book deals with the driving forces and consequences of politicization. Chapter 6 by Swen Hutter, Daniela Braun and Alena Kerscher focuses on the substantive content of European integration conflicts and debates. The authors conclude that constitutive issues that relate to the basic dimensions of the EU polity ('deepening' or competencies and 'widening' or membership) trigger higher levels of politicization than do conflicts over specific policy issues. In chapter 7, Martin Dolezal and Johan Hellstrom analyze the factors that influence political parties' decisions to use strategically European issues. The authors find out that mainstream parties stress constitutive issues to about the same extent as challenger parties from the far left and right (p. 179). However, the parties of the radical left and right do stand out as the main promoters of skeptical positions on European issues in electoral campaigns (p. 180). In Chapter 8, Grande, Hutter, Kerscher and Becker examine how political actors strategically frame European issues in order to shift the logic of political conflicts. While cultural-identitarian frames have been gaining importance, utilitarian arguments still dominate political discourses over European integration (p. 205). Moreover, nationalist-identitarian discourses are not only used by radical right parties in the electoral arena, but also by mainstream parties (p. 206). In chapter 9, Simon Maag and Hanspeter Kriesi change the direction of causal explanation by focusing on how politicization structures political contestation over European integration. The authors distinguish between scope and sovereignty dimensions of Europe-wide debates. Further, in chapter 10, Kriesi and Grande argue that the euro crisis has accentuated the issue of solidarity between member states reinforcing the importance of re-distributive conflicts.

The last part of the book includes a discussion of the main findings and their implications for theories of European integration. Grande and Kriesi conclude that politicization of European integration could be best interpreted as a punctuated process characterized by significant variations over time, across countries and



political arenas. Overall, the study is clearly structured and it develops interesting hypotheses testing them with impressive sets of data. Certainly, this book provides a very useful tool for scholars studying European integration. It also offers new insights for all those interested in understanding the current political issues in Europe.

## References

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