



Which Policy for Europe? Power and Conflict inside the European Commission

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To cite this article: Sebastiaan Princen (2015): Which Policy for Europe? Power and Conflict inside the European Commission, West European Politics, DOI: [10.1080/01402382.2015.1114301](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1114301)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1114301>



Published online: 18 Nov 2015.



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Book Review

Which Policy for Europe? Power and Conflict inside the European Commission

By Miriam Hartlapp, Julia Metz, and Christian Rauh

Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, 368 pp., \$55.00, ISBN 978-0-19-968803-6 (hbk)

Which Policy for Europe? is the result of a joint project by the authors to study position formation within the European Commission. Its main argument is that to understand the policies proposed by the European Commission (and hence EU policies themselves), one needs to look at the internal processes that lead to a Commission proposal. In the book, this process is divided into two separate stages: the formation of positions by individual DGs, and the way in which these various positions are aggregated into a single Commission proposal.

Empirically, the book analyses position formation around 48 legislative proposals in the period 1999–2009, in three policy areas: social policy, research and innovation policy, and consumer policy. The authors discern three ideal-typical position formation processes, which are based on technocratic, competence-seeking and policy-seeking logics, respectively. They show that each of these logics is present in Commission position formation, albeit to different degrees and sometimes within one and the same case.

This book fits into the longstanding literature on the European Commission, which has seen several notable contributions over the past years. Whereas most studies focus on internal characteristics of the Commission (such as its organisational structure, socialisation processes or attitudes of individual officials), *Which Policy for Europe?* uses these internal characteristics to explain policy outputs.

Theoretically, this places the book in the developing literature that studies the role of organisational factors in the functioning of the EU. As the title of the book indicates, the underlying claim of *Which Policy for Europe?* is that the content of EU policies and legislation can only be explained by looking at the process through which the Commission arrives at its proposals. This argument is set against competing approaches, which accord a central place to member states or to the dynamics of interinstitutional bargaining in explaining EU policy-making, treating the European Commission as a unitary actor that responds to these outside forces.

The book does not directly test these rival explanations, although it does take into account the impact of the (anticipated) positions of the Council, individual member states, interest groups and the EP on the Commission's internal position formation process. As it turns out, such 'external' considerations are most important in explaining the positions of individual DGs, while the aggregation of DG positions into a single Commission proposal is driven more by factors and resources internal to the Commission. Overall, the book does not show exactly to what extent external pressures and internal dynamics determine the content of Commission proposals. However, by making a strong theoretical and empirical argument for looking at internal position formation processes, the book sets a firm baseline for further studies in this direction.

In terms of readership, the book is compulsory reading for scholars working on the European Commission and those studying EU policy-making. For the former group, the book's focus on position formation provides a valuable addition to existing studies,

while for the latter it offers important new insights into the formation of the EU's legislative agenda. Moreover, by establishing a link between them, the book brings together two literatures that have so far developed in isolation from each other.

In addition, the book may be of interest to experts on EU social, research and innovation and consumer policy, which will find a systematic and fine-grained analysis of the internal processes that led up to major legislative proposals in these areas. Finally, parts of the book are relevant to specific debates in the literature, including the composition and role of expert groups, the role of party politics in the Commission, and the impact of public opinion on Commission proposals.

In teaching, the book could be used in graduate courses on the European Commission and/or EU policy-making. Its clear and systematic approach makes it suitable and instructive reading material for students at that level. It is probably too specific for undergraduate courses, although it could be used as supplementary material in advanced and more focused courses.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2015.1114301>