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## Chapter 18

### Policy Processes

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This chapter examines the nature of the EU's policy processes. It shows that the processes are numerous and highly complex in nature, that a number of factors combine to determine what processes apply in what policy circumstances, that there are four broad frameworks of policy processes, that a number of characteristics regularly feature in most policy processes, and that the processes are by no means as inefficient as they are often portrayed as being.

Broad themes that run through the chapter are the multifaceted nature of the policy processes and the host of differing sorts of policy actors that interact with one another on the basis of an array of different policy-making rules and procedures. These themes are further examined in the following chapters of this part of the book.

### Variations in EU Processes

There cannot be said to be a 'standard' or 'typical' EU policy-making or decision-making process. A multiplicity of actors interrelate with one another via a myriad of channels.

#### The actors

There are three main sets of EU policy actors: those associated with the EU institutions, those with the governments of the member states, and those with Euro-level and national-level non-institutional and non-governmental interests. As has been shown in previous chapters, each of these sets of actors has an array of responsibilities to fulfil and roles to perform. But so variable and fluid are EU policy processes that the nature of the responsibilities and roles can differ considerably according to circumstances. For instance, in one set of circumstances an actor may be anxious to play an active role and may have the power – legal and/or political – to do so. In a second set of circumstances it may not wish to be actively involved, perhaps because it has no particular interests at stake or because prominence may be politically damaging. And in a third set of circumstances it may wish for a leading part but not be able to attain it because of a lack of appropriate power resources.

## Box 18.1

## EMU policy actors

- **The Ecofin Council of Ministers.** Composed of national Ministers of Finance from all EU member states, the Ecofin Council is responsible for the broad outlines of EU macroeconomic policy. The Ecofin Council also has a number of specific EMU-related responsibilities, including deciding upon whether to take action against eurozone states with excessive government deficits and deciding on a range of issues in connection with external monetary and foreign exchange matters. Under amendments made by the Treaty of Lisbon, only eurozone members can vote when the Ecofin Council takes decisions on matters that just affect the eurozone.
- **The Eurogroup.** The Eurogroup was created in 1998 as an informal and unofficial gathering of Ministers of Finance from eurozone member states. It quickly established itself as an important and permanent forum, and was given legal status – in the form of a protocol – by the Lisbon Treaty. The Eurogroup normally convenes monthly, immediately before Ecofin meetings, to discuss matters of shared interest concerning the eurozone. As the euro crisis intensified from 2010, the Eurogroup became the main crisis management institution.
- **The European Council.** The Heads of Government and State are obliged to discuss, under Article 121 TFEU, ‘a conclusion of the broad guidelines of the economic policies of the Member States and of the Union’, and in practice consider anything else they wish. During the economic and financial crisis, the European Council was an increasingly active policy player and the taker – often at specially convened meetings – of many key EMU-related decisions.
- **The Euro Summit.** Following a first ever meeting of eurozone leaders in November 2008 – that was held to discuss a coordinated eurozone response to the international financial crisis – eurozone leaders began to occasionally meet. In 2012 they put their meetings on a formal basis by establishing Euro Summits. These Summits are supposed to be held at least twice a year, but in practice have been convened as and when they have been necessary: so, only one was held in each of 2013 and 2014, but – in response to the Greek crisis – three were held in 2015.
- **The European Central Bank (ECB).** The ECB was established to manage eurozone monetary policy, but from the very beginning of the economic and monetary crisis it became involved in broader policy deliberations and decision-making that strayed into the territory of fiscal policy. It was a key formulator of the European Banking System that was created in response to the crisis and is now the principal overseer of that system.
- **The European Commission.** The Commission regularly produces policy reports and recommendations on a wide range of economic policy matters, including EMU. It was, for example, the principal drafter of the 2015 Five Presidents’ Report on the future of EMU. It also has economic surveillance responsibilities and powers in respect of national economic, and especially budgetary, performances, which were strengthened by measures adopted in response to the euro crisis.
- **The Economic and Financial Committee** of the Council. The Committee’s remit includes all aspects of economic and monetary policies – from the operation of the euro, through macroeconomic policy coordination, to international monetary relations.
- **The European Parliament.** The EP has few powers in relation to EMU, but does have a range of consultation and information-receiving rights.

Take, for example, the Latvian government. It has a strong direct interest and is actively engaged in EU deliberations in respect of, for instance, issues related

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and monetary policies, especially in the global financial crisis which have strongly affected the Latvian economy, but in this policy area its smallness and its marginal economic position has meant that its role has been more one of recipient than policy shaper. By contrast, it is affected by, and does not involve itself much in, policy negotiations and decision-making related to the EU's Mediterranean strategy.

Box 18.1 further illustrates the range and variety of actor involvement by showing the unique cast of actors in each of the EU's most important policy areas: EMU. Each policy area has its own cast.

## The channels

The channels vary in four principal respects:

- 1 *In their complexity and exhaustiveness.* Some types of policy decision are made fairly quickly by a relatively small number of people using procedures that are easy to operate. In contrast, other decisions are subject to complex and exhaustive processes in which many different sorts of actor attempt to determine and shape outcomes.
- 2 *In the relative importance of EU, member state, and subnational processes and in the links between the three levels.* One of the EU's major structural difficulties is that it is multilayered, with differing degrees and sorts of power and influence being exercised in different ways at different levels. Moreover, there are often no clear lines of authority or hierarchy between the different levels.
- 3 *In their levels of seniority.* EU policy processes are conducted at many different levels of seniority, as illustrated by the numerous forums in which representatives of the governments of the member states meet: Heads of Government in the European Council; Ministers in the Council of Ministers; Permanent Representatives and their deputies in COREPER; and officials and experts in committees and working parties.
- 4 *In their degree of formality and structure.* By their very nature, the fixed and set-piece occasions of EU policy processes – such as meetings of the Council, plenary sessions of the EP, and Council/EP delegation meetings called to resolve legislative and budgetary differences – tend to be formal and structured. Partly because of this, they are

often not very well equipped to produce the horse trading, concessions, and compromises that are so necessary to build majorities, create agreements and further progress. As a result, they have come to be supported by a vast network of informal and unstructured channels between EU actors, ranging from the after-dinner discussions that are sometimes held at European Council gatherings to the continuous soundings, telephone calls, e-mails, working lunches, and meetings and pre-meetings that are such a part of EU life in Brussels, Strasbourg, Luxembourg, and national capitals.

## Factors Determining EU Policy Processes

A number of factors can be identified as being especially important in determining the particular mix of actors and channels that are to be found in any particular context.

### The treaty base

One of the most important things the treaties do is to lay down different decision-making procedures and to specify the circumstances in which they are to be used. As a result, the treaties are of fundamental importance in shaping the nature of the EU's policy processes and determining the powers exercised by institutions and actors within these processes. Box 18.2 illustrates this point by giving examples of just some of the many and varied policy-making and decision-making procedures provided for in the TEU and the TFEU. (These procedures are all explained at length elsewhere in the book.)

### The proposed status of the matter under consideration

As a general rule, procedures tend to be more fixed when EU law is envisaged than when it is not. They are fixed most obviously by the treaties, but also by Court of Justice interpretations (for example, the obligation specified in the famous 1980 isoglucose case ruling that the Council must wait upon EP opinions before

**Box 18.2****Illustrations of different policy- and decision-making procedures laid down in the treaties**

- There are three procedures for non-administrative legislation: the 'ordinary' ('co-decision', pre-Lisbon Treaty), 'consultation', and 'consent' ('assent', pre-Lisbon Treaty) procedures. Key points of difference between these procedures include: (1) the EP can exercise veto powers under the ordinary and consent procedures but cannot do so under the consultation procedure; and (2) there are single readings in the Council and the EP under the consultation and consent procedures, but potentially three readings – or, perhaps more accurately, two readings and a conciliation stage – under the ordinary procedure.
- External trade agreements negotiated under Article 207 TFEU (formerly 133 TEC) have their own special procedure, under which the Commission conducts negotiations under a mandate from the Council and the Council makes final decisions – either by QMV or unanimity depending on the type of decision – subject usually to obtaining the consent of the EP.
- The annual budget also has its own arrangements, under which the Council and the EP are joint budgetary authorities.
- Under the 'flexibility' provisions added to the TEU and the TEC by the Amsterdam Treaty and made easier to apply by the Nice and Lisbon Treaties, it is possible for a group of nine or more member states to establish 'enhanced cooperation' between themselves and to make use of EU institutions, procedures and mechanisms. With the exceptions of those policy areas where the EU has exclusive policy competence and also the CFSP, a decision to so act can be taken by qualified majority in the Council (though with safeguards built in for member states which object to such a decision being taken) and with the consent of the EP. In the CFSP field, there must be unanimity in the Council and the EP only has a right to be informed.
- The CFSP is based on an intergovernmental decision-making framework. Most policy decisions require unanimity in the Council and consultation with the EP, whilst operational and procedural decisions are usually taken by QMV if the Council so decides and without consulting with the EP. Whether or not the EP is consulted, the Council must keep it regularly informed of policy developments.

giving Commission proposals under the consultation procedure legislative status) and by conventions (for example, the understanding in the Council that when a member state has genuine difficulties the matter will not normally be rushed and an effort will be made to reach a compromise even when QMV is permissible).

When Council and EP and Council legislation is being made, it is subject to a full legislative procedure. As such it becomes the subject of representations and pressures from many interests, is assessed by the EP and often also by the EESC and the CoR, and is scrutinised in detail in national capitals and in Council forums in Brussels. By contrast, Commission legislation is subject to much less review and discussion. The reason for this is that Commission legislation is normally of an administrative kind – more

technical than political. Indeed, much of it consists of updates, applications or amendments to existing legislation, often in the spheres of external trade or the CAP. As a result, Commission legislation, prior to being introduced, is often only discussed by appropriate officials in the Commission and is then subject normally to much less review by national officials and EP representatives in the manner described in Chapter 9.

Where policy activity does not involve law-making, considerable discretion is sometimes available to decision-makers, especially governments, in which policy processes is used and who is permitted to participate. A common procedure when states want the EU to do something but do not necessarily want new law to be made (which may be because there

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ment on what the law should be or because, as in foreign policy pronouncements, law is inappropriate. It is to issue Council resolutions, declarations, recommendations or conclusions. These can be as vague or as precise as the Council wishes them to be. Often, resolutions and the like can have a very useful policy effect, even if it is just to keep dialogue going, but because they are not legal instruments they are not normally as subject to examination and challenge by the EU institutions and actors.

### The degree of generality or specificity of the policy issue

At the generality end of the scale, EU policy-making may consist of little more than exchanges of ideas between interested parties to see whether there is common ground for policy coordination, the setting of priorities, or possible legislation. Such exchanges and discussions take place at many different levels on an almost continuous basis, but the most important, in the sense that their initiatives are the ones most likely to be followed up, are those that involve very senior officials and politicians – especially if the outcome of deliberations find their way into European Council conclusions.

Far removed from *grands tours d'horizon* by senior officials and politicians is the daily grind of preparing and drafting the mass of highly detailed and technical 'administrative legislation' – most commonly in the form of regulations – that make up the great bulk of the EU's legislative output. Senior EU figures, especially ministers, are not normally directly involved in the processes that lead to such legislation. There may be a requirement that they give the legislation their formal approval, but it is Commission officials, aided in appropriate cases by national officials, who do the basic work.

### The newness, importance, controversiality, or political sensitivity of the issue in question

The more these characteristics apply, and the perception of the extent to which they do may vary – what may be a technical question for one may be politically charged for another – the more complex policy

processes are likely to be. If, for example, it seems likely that a proposal for an EP and Council directive on some aspect of animal welfare will cause significant difficulties for farmers, it is probable that the accompanying policy-making process will display all or most of the following features: particularly intensive pre-proposal consultations by the Commission; vigorous attempts by many sectional and promotional interest groups to make an input; very careful examination of the proposal by the EP and the EESC; long and exhaustive negotiations in the Council; considerable activity and manoeuvring on the fringes of formal meetings and between meetings; and, overall, much delay and many alterations *en route* to the (possible) eventual adoption of the proposal.

### The balance of policy responsibilities between the EU and national levels

Where there has been a significant transfer of responsibilities to the EU – as, for example, with agricultural, external trade, and competition policies – EU-level processes are naturally very important. In such policy spheres, EU institutions, particularly the Commission, have many tasks to perform: monitoring developments, making adjustments, ensuring existing policies and programmes are replaced when necessary, and so on. On the other hand, where the EU's policy role is at best supplementary to that of the member states – as with education and health policies – most significant policy-making activity continues to be channelled through the customary national procedures, and policy activity at the EU level is limited in scope.

### Circumstances and the perceptions of circumstances

This is seemingly rather vague, but it refers to the crucially important fact that policy development and policy-making processes in the EU are closely related to prevailing political and economic circumstances, to the perceptions by key actors – especially national governments – of their needs in the circumstances, and to perceptions of the potential of the EU to act as a problem-solving organisation in regard to the circumstances. Do the advantages of acting at EU level,

as opposed to national level, and of acting in the EU in a particular way as opposed to another way, outweigh the disadvantages?

The area of freedom, security and justice (AFSJ) policy area provides an example of how changing circumstances can bring about related changes in policy processes. The policy area began to be initially developed at EU level from the mid-1980s, largely as a result of spillover from the internal market project and the opening-up of borders. However, the development was very tentative and was conducted on a strictly intergovernmental basis. Two sets of changing circumstances have, however, resulted in national governments giving AFSJ issues a much greater priority in recent years and being willing to see intergovernmental policy processes giving way to supranational processes in many AFSJ areas. One of these changing circumstances has been EU enlargement, which has intensified already existing concerns about border controls and related issues such as illegal inward movements of people (from non-EU states to the EU), cross-border crime, and drug trafficking. The other changing circumstance has been the increased threat to 'the West' from international terrorism, which was first dramatically demonstrated by the 9/11 attacks in the USA and has since been brought closer to home by many terrorist incidents in Europe – notably in Madrid in 2004, London in 2005, Paris in 2015, and Brussels in 2016. These changing circumstances have been instrumental in promoting the more *communitarised* approach to AFSJ that has been evident since the late 1990s and which saw the Lisbon Treaty 'transfer' what remained of the separate AFSJ pillar three from the TEU to the TFEU, albeit with the retention of unanimity in the Council for some especially sensitive JHA issues.

## The Four Frameworks of EU Policy Processes

As has been stressed above, there are many EU policy processes. Indeed, the Convention that drew up the Constitutional Treaty identified no less than 28 distinct policy-making procedures on the basis of the decision-making rules in the Council, the nature of the EP's involvement, and the consultative status of the EESC and the CoR.

However, notwithstanding this numeracy of policy processes, it is possible to identify broad policy-making patterns. Paul Magnette (2005) suggests that three criteria are especially helpful in enabling such patterns to be discerned. These criteria are: the degree of involvement of institutions that are independent of government; the decision-making rules in the Council; and the legal character of many decisions and outcomes.

Using these criteria, four main policy-making frameworks can be identified. Within these frameworks there are variations in the specifics of policy processes, but the fundamental features are shared. The frameworks will now each be examined.

### The Community method

When the Community was established in the 1950s, a single and relatively simple policy-making system was provided for in the treaties. In the words of what for many years was a much-used maxim, the essence of the system was that 'the Commission proposes, the Parliament advises [on a restricted range of matters], the Council disposes [that is, decides – almost invariably by unanimity], and [where laws are made] the Court adjudicates'. This system, which came to be known as the Community method, was designed on the one hand to try and avoid what was seen to be the paralysing effects of the intergovernmental decision-making arrangements of organisations such as the Council of Europe and the OEEC, whilst on the other hand ensuring that national governments had the ultimate control of final decision-taking.

Over the years the Community method has evolved in response to changing needs, demands and circumstances. Two changes have been especially significant. First, the powers of the EP have been greatly extended in the rounds of treaty reform that have regularly occurred since the mid-1980s. From initially having only consultative powers, it is now normally a co-decision-maker with the Council when the Community method is used – and it is used in some 70 per cent of the cases where EU laws are being made. This change has had the effect of transforming the Community method from a system that was previously based on a Commission–Council tandem to one that is now based on a Commission–Council–EP tandem. Second, the ability of the Council to take decisions by qualified majority voting (QMV) has been greatly extended – to such an extent

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**Community method:**

**Features**

- The Commission takes the policy lead and has monopolistic power over the drafting and adoption of legislative proposals.
- The Council is always a final decision-maker, either by itself or with the EP. QMV is normally, but not always, available for the adoption of Council decisions.
- The EP normally has co-decision-making powers with the Council under the 'ordinary legislative procedure'. Where this power is not available, the EP must be consulted before any final decision can be taken.
- The EU's courts have final jurisdiction over all EU legislation.

is available (though, as was shown in Chapter 10, it is not always used) for most areas of legislative decision-making. Box 18.3 provides an outline of the key features of the Community method in its current form. These features are further considered in Chapter 19, where the EU's legislative procedures are discussed.

because the Community method is the only method that can be used for making EU legislation where a full legislative procedure is required, it is still naturally an extremely important policy-making framework. But, other frameworks have also come to be used. A key reason for this use of other frameworks is that policy areas and issues have come onto the EU's agenda which the law making has been deemed to be unsuitable for. This has been unacceptable to some member states. It has long been the case with foreign policy, but it has become so also with such policy areas as employment, social, and macroeconomic, where member states have recognised the need for policy coordination but have not wished to make binding laws and have not wished to be subject to the supranational institutions which the Community method – to varying degrees – involves. Another reason for the relative decline of the Council to take decisions is enlargement, which by making the EU not only much larger but also much more heterogeneous

has meant that more flexible policy processes than the Community method are sometimes appropriate. And, in the opinion of Giandomenico Majone, a third reason has been growing suspicions by member states that the supranational institutions, especially the Commission, have over-used the method because the method works so much to their institutional advantage: 'there is clear evidence that the Commission, and arguably also the Court of Justice, on many occasions have used the Community method well beyond the limits envisaged by the drafters of the Treaty of Rome, and that the member states have reacted to this lack of self-restraint by limiting the scope of delegation to the supranational institutions' (Majone, 2006a: 616).

**Intensive transgovernmentalism**

Intergovernmental cooperation is a form of policy-making in which national governments are the key actors, decisions require unanimous approval by participating governments, and many decisional outcomes do not involve the making of laws. In the EU context, intergovernmental cooperation may thus be said to exist when: the European Council and/or the Council of Ministers are the sole decision-makers and the Commission and the EP are, at best, to the margins; QMV is not available and all member states can veto a proposed decision to which they object; and decisions that are taken are political rather than legal decisions and are not enforceable through the EU's courts. Box 18.4 summarises the key features of intensive transgovernmentalism.

This form of decision-making was first used in the early 1970s when the EC began to take steps in the field of foreign policy cooperation. The member states became concerned that whilst the EC was establishing itself as an increasingly important international economic actor, and more especially trade actor, its political voice and influence were largely absent. Accordingly, they began to seek to work more closely with one another on foreign policy issues. But, because of the sensitivities involved in respect of foreign policy – not least the fact that it is a policy area where sovereignty sensitivities run high – the Community method was seen as being unsuitable and unacceptable. The member states wanted to see how far they could cooperate, not integrate. They wanted

**BOX 18.4****Intensive transgovernmentalism: key features**

- The right of policy initiation is not exclusive to the Commission but is held also by the governments of the member states.
- The EP is in a generally weak consultative position, with few formal powers other than the power of consent on some types of international agreements.
- Much policy activity is focused on fostering cooperation between governments rather than on law-making.
- Governments interact with one another on an intensive basis, both at many levels and in many policy areas.
- All key decisions are made by either the European Council or by the Council of Ministers acting by unanimity.

also to be firmly in charge of developments rather than being dependent in any way on the Commission, the European Parliament, or the Court of Justice.

Since the taking of the initial steps in the early 1970s, foreign policy cooperation has developed into a major area of EU policy activity, as is shown in Chapter 22. It is still essentially based on the principles of intergovernmental cooperation on which it was founded, but the policy processes have inevitably become much more intensive in form as the range of foreign policy interests, activities and instruments have grown. Indeed, so intensive have the processes become that it is clear that the term 'intergovernmental cooperation' now no longer fully captures the nature of foreign policy-making processes and that Wallace and Reh's term 'intensive transgovernmentalism' is much more accurate (Wallace and Reh, 2010: 109–11). Intensive transgovernmentalism captures the constantly ongoing interactions between representatives of the governments of the member states as they work with one another on a day-to-day basis to make EU foreign policy, and increasingly also the linked area of defence policy, meaningful and effective. These interactions take many different forms, ranging from

preliminary and relatively informal discussions on policy matters between middle-ranking officials from member state Foreign Ministries to formal decisions on policy issues made by Foreign Ministers in the Council of Ministers or by Heads of Government in the European Council.

Until recently, the other major policy area where intensive transgovernmentalism featured prominently in EU policy processes was AFSJ. Like foreign policy, AFSJ was initially developed on a very cautious and tentative basis – in its case from the mid-1980s – and also like foreign policy the sovereignty sensitivities associated with the policy area meant the Community method could not initially be used. However, though in its initial treaty appearance – as pillar three of the TEU which was created as part of the Maastricht Treaty – it was based on firmly intergovernmental principles, pressures quickly built to make AFSJ more subject to the Community method. This then occurred, with several AFSJ policy areas – including immigration, visa, and asylum – brought into the EU's first pillar by the Amsterdam Treaty, and then with what remained of the third pillar brought into the TFEU by the Lisbon Treaty. Remnants of intergovernmentalism still remain in the AFSJ area – with, for example, the Commission not having sole legislative proposing rights in some spheres (the only policy area where this is so) and with unanimity still required for the Council for some types of decision (though, of course, it is not unique in this) – but, for the most part, AFSJ has been 'communitarised'.

Beyond 'regular' policy areas, there is one other type of policy process that is based primarily on intergovernmental principles: the process that led to 'history-making' decisions. These are decisions that in some way mark very significant stages or turning points in the integration process. Examples of such decisions include those on the content of treaties, on the contents of the multiannual financial frameworks, on enlargements, and on major and policy initiatives. Decisions of this type have quasi-supranational features associated with them: they are, for example, often at least partly prepared by the Commission and final adoption of decisions require the consent of the EP. Furthermore, though history-making decisions do not have the same status as being law-making decisions, they are decisions that national governments are required to abide by and in most cases they are duly transmitted into

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**BOX 18.5****The open method of coordination: key features**

- Broad policy goals and guidelines are set at EU level by the Council, acting by unanimity. The specificity of the goals and guidelines varies considerably between and within policy areas.
- The policy goals and guidelines are not given legal status, but are essentially voluntary in nature.
- Member states draw up national action plans setting out how they will seek to achieve the goals and be in conformity with the guidelines. In drawing up the plans, member states are granted considerable discretion regarding the policy instruments and mechanisms they are to use.
- Member states submit (to the Commission and the relevant configurations of the Council) regular reports on their progress in achieving the goals and meeting the guidelines. Reporting obligations can be burdensome, especially for small member states.
- The Commission exercises an important role in assisting with and monitoring OMC activities. As part of its activities it produces reports that, in addition to disseminating information, are often intended to encourage/pressurise member states that fall behind to improve their performances and so achieve targets. These reports are publically available and often involve (though the Commission customarily denies it) an element of the so-called 'name and shame' approach to policy implementation.

appropriate procedures. But, notwithstanding intergovernmental and Community method features, the process that leads to history-making decisions is essentially intergovernmental in character in that national governmental representatives are invariably heavily involved in the preparing of decisions – especially the case in respect of treaty making. Above all, the key decision-makers are very often members of government, usually the Heads of Government, acting by unanimity.

### Open coordination

In the second half of the 1990s the EU began to become involved in a number of policy areas where governments of the member states felt there was a need to have a policy approach that would fall somewhere between intergovernmental cooperation and the Community method. The former was thought to be too weak for some emerging policy areas whilst the latter was thought to infringe too much on national sovereignty and independence.

The new policy approach that was gradually developed is known variously as open coordination, the open method or, to use its full and official name, the open method of coordination (OMC). Open coordination was initially applied to macroeconomic policy coordination, with a system being developed in the late 1990s, known as the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPGs), designed to strengthen the coordination of the broad economic policies of all member states, whether they were to be EMU members or not. At about the same time, OMC began also to be applied to aspects of employment policy, where the member states were charged by the Amsterdam Treaty with a responsibility for developing a coordinated strategy in particular for promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce. The March 2000 Lisbon European Council meeting then gave OMC a major boost by identifying it as a key policy procedure to be followed in giving effect to the Lisbon Strategy that was launched at the summit. The Strategy had as its central purpose making the EU economy much more competitive, dynamic, and knowledge-based, and doing so within a framework in which employment and social cohesion are advanced (see Chapter 20 for a fuller account of the nature of the Lisbon Strategy, and its successor which is known as *Europe 2020*).

What then is the nature of OMC as a policy framework? The broad features are outlined in Box 18.5, but within those features OMC takes a number of forms, with some forms being tighter and more hierarchical than others. Essentially, however, OMC involves the governments of the member states, operating normally, but by no means always, on the bases of ideas and proposals advanced by the Commission, agreeing

(by unanimity) on policy goals – such as reaching target levels for investment in research or launching information technology training programmes for young people – and then seeking to achieve the goals not via legal compulsion but via voluntary action. The nature of the action to be taken is set out in national action plans, which often vary considerably in both ambition and detail. Pressures of various sorts, orchestrated and managed usually by the Commission, are put on the member states to ‘fall in line’, but national governments are given considerable latitude as to the policy instruments they use and there is no question of legal action being taken against them for failing to meet policy targets. Amongst the preferred methods of achieving policy aims and targets are the submission to the Commission and the relevant formation of the Council of annual national reports, peer pressure, benchmarking, and the adoption of best practices.

The main disadvantage of the OMC approach is that it is ultimately voluntary in nature. So, governments are not legally bound by agreements and may not feel very committed to implementing them. Where national implementation is poor, there are no ‘punishments’ that can be invoked against national authorities, other than them being publicly shown to have ‘fallen behind’. Advantages of OMC are that policy remains primarily a national responsibility, national diversities are respected, and governments may agree to commit to orientations and actions they would not accept if stricter and more mandatory policy instruments were being proposed. (Useful introductions to OMC include: Borrás and Jacobsson, 2004; Schäfer, 2004; Heidenreich and Bischoff, 2008.)

## Centralised decision-making

There are two very important policy areas where EU supranational institutions have been given extremely strong and relatively independent decision-making powers. The institutions have been given these powers because the policy areas concerned have been deemed as needing to be ‘de-politicised’ in the sense that the decision-makers have been seen as requiring to be shielded from political pressures. In both cases the powers that have been assigned to the supranational institutions could be seen as constituting a rather special form of policy implementation responsibilities, but such is the extent and impact of

the implementation that the decisions taken by the supranational institutions regularly have great policy significance.

One of these policy areas is competition, where, as was shown in Chapter 9, the Commission has considerable discretion and powers in relation to a wide range of matters, including abuse of dominant trading positions, proposed company mergers, the existence of cartels, and state aid to public and private companies. The Commission is always lobbied when dealing with competition issues, not least by member state governments when decisions to be taken are seen as having potentially significant consequences for national economies. But though the Commission normally seeks to be sensitive to particular national concerns, final decisions fall to it alone: dissatisfied governments may appeal Commission decisions to the CJEU on points of law, but they cannot ask the Council to overturn decisions on political grounds.

The other policy area is eurozone monetary policy, where, as was described in Chapters 1 and 14, the ECB has very important sole decision-making responsibilities. Like the Commission in respect of competition policy, the Bank is subjected to pressures from member state governments – unsurprisingly given the often divergent policy needs of eurozone national economies – but it alone takes key interest and exchange rate decisions. As a result of the economic and financial crisis, it has also become involved in the making of decisions with important fiscal implications.

## Recurring Characteristics of EU Policy Processes

A number of general features are characteristic of the way in which EU policy processes run through EU policy processes. They include: considerable institutional roles and powers, complex inter-institutional linkages, inter-institutional cooperation, difficulties in effecting radical change, tactical manoeuvring, and different speeds.

### Variable institutional roles and powers

The roles and powers of the EU’s institutions and of the political actors associated with them

## Compromises and linkages

The diversity of competing interests across the member states, coupled with the nature of the EU's decision-making systems, means that successful policy development is frequently heavily dependent on key policy actors, especially governments, being prepared to compromise. If actors are not prepared to take a consensual approach effective decision-making can be very difficult although, at the same time, taking such an approach usually results in actors not being completely content with decisional outcomes.

As part of the process wherein compromises provide the basis for agreements, deals are frequently formulated in which different and sometimes seemingly unrelated policy issues are linked. Linking issues together in 'package deals' can open the door to agreements by ensuring that there are prizes for everybody and not, as might be the case when only a specific issue is taken, for just a few.

The European Council has been instrumental in contracting some of the EU's grander compromises and linked deals. It has, for example, been key to agreements being reached on the EU's multiannual financial frameworks, which involve bringing together many different and usually strongly contested matters. So, for instance, after extensive pre-preparations, agreement on the contents of the 2014–20 financial framework was eventually reached at the February 2013 European Council meeting (see Chapter 23). Matters that had been causing difficulties included the overall size of the framework, the ceilings to be imposed on types of expenditure, national net contributions to and receipts from the budget, and the continuance and size of the UK's rebate.

One of the reasons the European Council has become involved in the construction of overarching deals of the kind just described is that other EU institutions and actors, and EU processes as a whole, are ill-adapted to the linking of different policy areas and the construction of complex package deals. The General Affairs and Ecofin Councils have some potential in this regard, especially the former since its coordinating potential was enhanced by the Lisbon Treaty. However, in practice, these Councils do not have the authority to 'impose' comprehensive solutions on sectoral Councils. As for the sectoral Councils, they do not normally become involved in discussions beyond their immediate policy concern, and they certainly do

ably between policy processes and policy. This point was suggested above in the examination of the four policy frameworks, and indeed it may be regarded as a theme of this book so often made – either implicitly or explicitly – in other chapters. Attention here will, therefore, be confined to a few core observations.

When legislation is being made, decision-making processes are based on an institutional triangle within which the Commission, the Council, and the EP all exercise power and influence and are constantly interacting. But, the precise powers and influence of each of these institutions can vary considerably according to just what is being proposed and what procedure applies. The Commission, for example, has very considerable control over administrative legislation, but has much less control over the contents of tabled directives which are subject to the ordinary legislative procedure. It is argued by some observers that once such directives have been tabled, the Commission, though remaining to be a policy participant, is sometimes in the position of doing little more than servicing Council deliberations and negotiations.

Beyond the making of legislation, there is an additional array of varying institutional roles and powers. Thus, for example, a 'soft' policy approach is taken, the EP is normally disadvantaged and policy processes resemble more a Commission–Council tandem, as is the case with those parts of the Europe 2020 Strategy which are based on the OMC. In respect of EMU, the EP has more on the margins, much of the Council's work is undertaken in practice by the Eurogroup of ministers, and key monetary decisions are taken by the ECB. And in the CFSP and CSDP spheres institutional positions are different again, with the Council dominating. This is because of the inter-governmental nature of these policy areas, which means not only that the unanimity principle prevails in the Council but also that the Commission does not have exclusive proposing rights and the EP is largely restricted to being consulted and being able to tender advice. In addition to the Council, the European Council sometimes also exercises a significant role in respect of CFSP/CSDP (as indeed it does in some other policy areas, including economic policy). Another important CFSP/CSDP institutional actor is the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who, post the Lisbon Treaty, has a base in both the Council and Commission camps.

not have the means of linking difficulties in their own areas with difficulties being experienced by ministers elsewhere.

Much EU policy-making and decision-making thus tends to be rather compartmentalised, and it is within rather than across policy compartments that the trading, bargaining, linkaging, and compromising that are so characteristic of EU processes are mainly to be found. At Council working party level, trading may consist of little more than an official conceding a point on line eight of a proposed legal instrument in exchange for support received on line three. At ministerial level, it may result in what amounts to an exchange of resources as, for example, can happen in the Agriculture Council in respect of decisions on product and income support systems.

## Inter-institutional cooperation

Three types of cooperation are of crucial importance to the effective day-to-day operation of the EU. These are *intra*-institutional cooperation, *inter*-institutional cooperation, and *inter-level* cooperation between EU and member state actors (Vanhoonaeker and Neuhold, 2015). All three types are examined throughout this book, but as *intra*-institutional and *inter-level* cooperation were considered at some length in Part II of the book, there will be a particular examination of inter-institutional cooperation here.

Disagreements and disputes between the EU institutions mostly concern policy matters, but they can also concern institutional matters – especially if an institution is seen to abuse its powers in some way. But the extent of inter-institutional disagreements and disputes should not be exaggerated, for EU policy processes are also characterised by close, even intense, inter-institutional cooperation of many different kinds. Indeed, not only are policy processes characterised by such cooperation but they are highly dependent on it. If cooperation was not to be generally forthcoming, policy processes would be much more difficult, protracted and halting than they are. For example, processes would always be highly conflictual if the Commission and Council were seen by MEPs to be over-dismissive of EP amendments to legislative proposals, whilst they would be extremely inefficient if the Commission, the Council, and the EP did not cooperate with each other on legislative planning and timetabling.

Inter-institutional cooperation has grown over the years as the range of policy activities in which the EU is involved has spread, and more especially as policy processes have become more numerous and more complex. The growth has taken many different forms. So, for example, there has been a mushrooming of informal contacts between officials of the Commission, the Council, and the EP, and it is now commonplace for these officials to liaise closely with their counterparts on policy dossiers. At a rather more formal level, there are tripartite meetings – that is, meetings between representatives of the three institutions – of various kinds. For instance, there is a monthly meeting to monitor the progress of proposals identified in the Commission's annual work programme. There is also a monthly meeting of the Presidents of the three institutions, held during the EP Strasbourg plenary, to consider relevant issues. At an even more formal level, several inter-institutional agreements have been signed to regularise, clarify, and generally facilitate inter-institutional relations.

The ordinary legislative procedure illustrates in specific way the growth in inter-institutional cooperation. Amongst its consequences it has: (1) encouraged the institutions to devise/accept a compromise at an early legislative stage; (2) increased the need for the Council to be sensitive to the EP's views; (3) made tripartite meetings between representatives of the Commission, the Council, and the EP a feature of much EU law-making; and (4) promoted (the already extensive) informal exchanges between representatives of the institutions to sound out options, discover what may be possible, and identify areas where progress may be made. In short, the procedure has given a powerful stimulus to a cultural change in the relations between the Commission, the Council, and the EP that has been underway since the creation of the cooperation procedure by the Single Act. At the heart of this cultural change is the notion that the three institutions must work closely with one another and when legislation is being made they must cooperate on the basis of a genuinely triangular relationship.

Figures on the proportions of final legislation that are 'attributable' to each of the Commission, the Council, and EP must always be treated with care. They do not fully measure the dynamics of inter-institutional dynamics and bargaining and the relative 'success' of institutions in championing their policy preferences. There are problems, for example, in evaluating

importance of Council and EP amendments, are also in assessing precisely what has happened when drafts are re-worked to accommodate not all, of Council and EP amendments. However, that under the ordinary legislative procedure all three institutions must judge a draft at least acceptable for it to be approved by the second reading, the fact that over 95 per cent of legislation is so approved is testimony to the 'give-and-take' that is characteristic of legislative processes.

### Obstacles in effecting radical change

There has been a consequence of the prevalence of compromise in EU policy-making and decision-making – a deep gradualism and incrementalism. It is not possible for the Commission, the Council, a national government, or anyone else, to articulate a clear and comprehensive policy programme incorporating bold new plans and significant departures from the *status quo*, and expect it to be adopted without being modified significantly – which usually means being watered down. Ambitious proposals, such as the much-discussed Services Directive which is aimed at opening up competition in services industries and which was the subject of long inter-institutional negotiations between 2004 and 2006 – customarily find themselves being smothered by modifications, escape clauses, and long transitional periods before full implementation.

The obstacles to innovation and radical change are plentiful, and stem from a range of different national, institutional and ideological positions and perspectives. Moreover, some of the obstacles have increased in force over the years. One reason for this is that the way forward is not as clear as it was in the 1960s, when specific treaty obligations were being honoured and 'negative integration' (that is, the dismantling of barriers and the encouragement of trade liberalisation) was generally accepted as the main policy priority. Another reason is that the EU has become more politically and ideologically heterogeneous. This is partly because of enlargement and partly because the old Keynesian consensus on social and economic policy that existed in most Western European countries until the mid-1970s no longer exists. Although there has been a measure of consensus on the benefits

of moving towards a more liberal model of integration, there have been significant differences between the governments of the member states on the extent to which and the ways in which economic life should be directed and managed. A third reason why some obstacles to change have increased in force is that policy development has inevitably created and attracted interests that have a stake in the *status quo*. This is the case, for example, with agriculture, where Commission proposals for reform invariably produce protests from powerful sectional groups and electorally sensitive governments.

All this is not to suggest that change and reform are not possible. On the contrary, since the mid-1980s there clearly have been major changes and reforms of both an institutional and a policy kind. Additions and amendments to the treaties, the (continuing) internal market programme, the creation and increasing centralisation of EMU, the enlargement process, the Lisbon/Europe 2020 Strategy, and the movement of the CAP away from price support towards income support are but amongst many examples of ongoing changes and reforms. These changes and reforms have been driven by a range of external and internal factors, and have been guided and shaped by complex interactions between EU and national political forces. The existence of obstacles to change does not, therefore, preclude it occurring, but what it does do is to ensure that since just about any policy innovation is likely to meet with at least some resistance from some quarter(s), bold initiatives are always likely to be weakened/checked/delayed.

### Tactical manoeuvring

Tactical manoeuvring and jockeying for position are universal characteristics of policy processes. However, they are especially apparent in the EU as a result of its multiplicity of actors and channels and the diversity of its interests.

It is not possible to present here a comprehensive catalogue of the tactical options that are available to policy actors. However, a sample of the questions that often have to be considered by just one category of key EU actors – national representatives in the Council – will give a flavour of the intricacies and potential importance of tactical considerations, as can be seen in Box 18.6.

**BOX 18.6****Tactical options to be considered by national representatives in the Council**

- Can a coalition be built to create a positive majority or a negative minority? If so, should it be done via bilateral pre-meetings or in an EU forum?
- Is it necessary, for domestic political purposes, to formally note dissent on a proposal to which the government is opposed? (Although most Council business is conducted behind closed doors, much of what goes on in ministerial meetings enters the public domain. Moreover, since the Lisbon Treaty 'the Council shall meet in public when it deliberates and votes on a draft legislative act' (Article 16, TEU).)
- Is it possible to disguise opposition to a proposal by 'hiding' behind another state?
- Should concessions be made in a working party or in COREPER to ensure progress, or should they be held back until the ministers meet in the hope that this will be seen as conciliatory and helpful, with the consequence that it might reap dividends on another occasion?
- Where is the balance to be struck between being seen to be tough in defence of the national interest and being seen to be European-minded and ready to compromise? (Often, on a particular issue, some states have a vested interest in an agreement being reached, whilst the interests of others are best served by the absence of any agreement and, as a result, the absence of EU obligations.)

**Different speeds**

EU processes are often criticised for being cumbersome and slow. Unquestionably they can be so, but this is far from always being the case. Procedures exist that allow certain types of decision to be made as and when necessary. So, for example, annual budgetary decisions are made according to a predetermined timetable, Commission legislation can be

issued almost immediately, and Council regulations and decisions can be pushed through via urgent procedures if the circumstances require it.

As for 'standard' EU legislation, decision-making processes have speeded up over the years, despite the movement from the one reading consultation procedure to the potentially three reading ordinary procedure. Whereas the average time between the transmission and adoption of a directive was around 36 months in the mid-1980s, it is now about 19 months (European Parliament, 2014: 10). There are three main factors determining the speed at which particular proposals are adopted. First, whether or not they command initial general support in the Council and the EP. Second, whether or not Council and EP negotiators are sufficiently flexible to permit an agreement at first reading (proposals that go to second readings and conciliations average about 30 months before they are adopted). Third, whether QMV rules apply in the Council. If QMV is available, ministers are not normally prepared to wait – as they must if unanimity is required – for everyone to agree to all aspects of a proposal. Rather it is customary to give government that objects strongly to a proposal time to adjust to the majority view – perhaps with encouragement via compromises and derogations – and then proceed, either on the basis of an implicit vote by officials or an explicit vote by ministers.

Voting is used most frequently in established policy areas such as trade, agriculture and the internal market. As Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace (2006: 298) put it 'it seems to be the case that routinized explicit voting at ministerial level or implicit voting at official level occurs more readily in those policy fields where there is a settled rhythm to EU decision-making; where the default position is that an existing agreement continues rather than that there is no agreement; where national positions are quite clear; and where the benefits of doing business together are fairly well established.'

Decision-making is likely to be at its slowest when a proposal is in a policy area still under construction, when it is highly contested, when it creates difficulties of principle for members of the Council and when it is not subject to the dictates of a timetable when QMV cannot be used. In such circumstances the EU's decision-making capacity can be relatively weak and it can be very difficult for progress to be made. There may not even be much of a concerted effort to force progress if it is felt in the Council that

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**The Efficiency of EU Processes**

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## The Efficiency of EU Policy Processes

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 shown, many obstacles to coherent and properly  
 ed policy development. For example, resistance

by states to what they regard as an excessive transfer of  
 powers to the EU has resulted in many policy spheres  
 being less integrated and comprehensive in their  
 approach than is, from a policy efficiency perspective,  
 ideally desirable. Regional policy, industrial policy,  
 and environmental policy are examples of policy areas  
 where policy responsibilities are shared between the  
 EU and the states, where frequently the activities of the  
 two levels (three if subnational authorities are added)  
 are not always properly coordinated, and sometimes  
 where they are not even mutually complementary.

EU policy thus tends not to be wholly the outcome  
 of a rational model of decision-making. That is to say,  
 policy is not normally completely made via a proced-  
 ure in which problems are identified, objectives are  
 set, all possible alternatives for achieving the objectives  
 are carefully evaluated, and the best alternatives are  
 then adopted and proceeded with. Rather, policy tends  
 to evolve in a somewhat messy way, which means that  
 models of policy and decision-making other than the  
 rational model are often also, or even more, useful for  
 highlighting key features of EU processes. Box 18.7  
 identifies some of these models.

\* \* \*

But, having identified weaknesses in the quality of EU  
 policy processes, some re-balancing is now in order  
 lest the impression be given of a system that is wholly  
 and uniquely disordered and undemocratic. There are  
 three main points to be made.

The first point is that, in many respects, EU policy  
 processes are not so different from national processes.  
 This is not, of course, to say that important differences  
 do not exist. The international nature of the EU, for  
 example, makes for more diverse and more powerful  
 opposition to its policy initiatives than customarily  
 exists within states. It is also the case that EU decision-  
 makers are less directly accountable than national deci-  
 sion-makers to those who are subject to their decisions.  
 Another difference is that the EU’s policy structures  
 are more complex, and in some respects collectively  
 weaker, than their national counterparts. But recogni-  
 tion of these and other differences should not obscure  
 similarities of type – if not perhaps intensity – between  
 EU and national processes: political interest, policy  
 networks, political elite, institutional, and other models  
 of decision-making can, after all, throw light on fea-  
 tures of the latter as well as the former. For example,  
 in all member states, especially those with coalition

**Box 18.7****Examples of policy- and decision-making models that can assist in the analysis of EU policy- and decision-making processes\***

- *Political interest* models can be useful in drawing attention to the interaction of competing interests in the EU, to the variable power exercised by these interests in different policy- and decision-making situations, and to the ways in which decisional outcomes are frequently a consequence of bargaining and compromise between interests.
- *Policy network* models are useful in focusing on the ways in which in some policy spheres EU decision-makers and outside interests come together on an at least semi-regular basis for such purposes as information sharing, reconciling differences, and making decisions. Policy networks can vary considerably in character, with some being tight in structure and making provision for frequent intra-network communications whilst others are relatively loose and provide for only occasional communications.
- *Political elite* models highlight the considerable concentrations of power, at official and political levels, that exist across the EU's policy- and decision-making processes. As at national levels, concentration is especially marked in sensitive policy areas such as monetary policy and foreign policy, where processes are more secret and closed than they are in regional or agriculture policy for example. Political elite models also draw attention to the paucity of mechanisms available to EU citizens to ensure direct accountability on the part of EU decision-makers. The fact is that decision-making in the EU is not tied to or restricted by elections and electoral outcomes as is decision-making at the national level.
- *Institutional* models emphasise how the rules and understandings via which EU decisions are made do much to shape the nature of the decisions themselves. That is, the institutional structures and processes are not neutral. So, for example, when a wide range of national, regional, and sectional interests are entitled to be consulted before policy can be developed and decisions can only be made by unanimity in the Council, progress is frequently slow and the outcome is often little more than the lowest common denominator. When, on the other hand, the process is more streamlined – and permits, for example, QMV in the Council or the Commission to disburse funds directly – then policy and decision-making are likely to be more decisive and decisions themselves more adventurous and coherent.

\* On models and conceptualisations of EU policy processes, see also Chapters 24 and 25.

governments (which is the norm in most EU states), political accommodation is an everyday occurrence and policy trimming is common. Furthermore, in countries like Germany and Belgium where there is a considerable geographical decentralisation of power, tensions between levels of government over who does what and who pays for what are by no means unusual. In short, many of the EU's policy-making 'problems' – such as the prevalence of incrementalism and of policy slippages – are by no means absent in national political systems.

The second point is that not all EU policy processes consist of cobbling together deals that can satisfy the current complexion of political forces. This certainly is a crucially important feature, but it does not amount to the complete picture. In recent years, greater efforts

have been made to initiate rather than just react to change. This means that the Commission now tends to look to the medium-term rather than just the short-term, and to pull at least some of the pieces together into coordinated programmes.

At the level of overarching policy coordination, progress towards more forward-looking and coordinated policy planning has, it must be said, been only modest, but it is developing. For example, as is shown in Chapter 23, the financial framework that have framed budgetary policy since 1999 have been based on Commission documents that have sought to deal with at least some central issues on a multiannual basis. Moreover, since 2004, when Prodi became Commission President in 2004, the incoming Commissions have further sought to

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system planning by issuing at the beginning  
 of office documents setting out policy  
 guidelines. Designed to provide guidelines for their  
 terms, the documents have been followed  
 in the issuing of annual work programmes setting  
 out political and policy priorities for the following  
 year. These annual programmes are presented to and  
 discussed with the Council and EP in the autumn  
 of the year before which they are to apply.

Of course, effective EU planning requires that  
 the Commission plans and priorities be tied in with those  
 of other main institutions. This has been some-  
 times a problem, with both the Council and the  
 Commission protective of their right to determine their  
 own priorities – as witnessed, for example, by both  
 the Council and the individual Council Presidencies set-  
 ting out the goals for their time in office, and both the  
 Council and the EP specifying their political objectives  
 at the beginning of the annual budgetary process.  
 Nevertheless, collaboration on planning between the  
 institutions is improving, with a variety of consulta-  
 tive and information-exchange mechanisms now in  
 place designed to try and ensure that the three institu-  
 tions work in the same policy direction.

Coordinated forward thinking and planning has  
 improved over the years in particular policy sec-  
 tors with the existence of medium- to long-term  
 objectives and multiannual programmes. These  
 are drawn up by the Commission, usually in consulta-  
 tion with appropriate consultative committees and  
 committees of experts, and have to be approved by  
 the Council to be given effect. They appear in various  
 forms, including Commission Green Papers, com-  
 munications, and framework programmes and are  
 designed for purposes such as getting new policy objec-  
 tives off the ground, setting medium-term modernisa-  
 tion objectives, and initiating action programmes.

It is worth saying a little about action programmes  
 which illustrate how, within specified fields of activ-  
 ity, a measure of coordinated development over a  
 defined medium-term period is possible. Action  
 programmes vary in nature, from the broad and  
 general to the highly specific. Broad and general pro-  
 grammes typically include measures to improve the  
 monitoring and supervision of existing legislation,  
 to prepare for new legislation, running a pilot scheme, and  
 to fund training programmes. Amongst the fields of activ-  
 ity where such action programmes exist are equal  
 opportunities, public health, and access to educational

training programmes. In contrast, specific action  
 programmes are more specialised in their areas of  
 concern and tighter in their provisions. Examples are  
 social research programmes on such matters as safety  
 in coalmines and industrial hygiene, which are given  
 appropriations for a given period and provide up to  
 about 60 per cent of the cost of approved research  
 projects.

The third and final 're-balancing' point to be made  
 about EU policy processes is that critical judgements  
 of them ought to be placed in the context of the very  
 considerable degree of policy cooperation and integra-  
 tion that has been achieved at the EU level. There is no  
 comparable international development where states  
 have voluntarily transferred so many policy responsibili-  
 ties to a collective organisation of states, and in so doing  
 have surrendered so much of their national sovereignty.  
 It is hardly surprising, given the enormity of the exercise,  
 that pressures and desires for cooperation and integra-  
 tion should so often be challenged, and held in check, by  
 caution, uncertainty, conflict, and competition.

## Concluding Remarks

The EU thus has a wide, varied, and in many respects  
 highly complex set of policy processes. Of course, this  
 is to some extent also true of the member states, but  
 not like anything to the same degree. A number of  
 reasons account for the EU's distinctiveness in this  
 respect, of which the varying preferences of the mem-  
 ber states regarding which policies they wish to see  
 developed and in what ways are especially important.

The overall policy process picture embraces a num-  
 ber of operating principles that feature to different  
 degrees within particular processes. This is seen most  
 evidently in the varying nature of the intergovernmen-  
 tal/supranational balance.

The chapter has, however, sought to emphasise  
 that notwithstanding the seemingly bewildering over-  
 all nature of EU policy processes, some order can be  
 brought to them by recognising that they can be seen  
 as falling within four broad frameworks. They are  
 frameworks, moreover, within which a number of  
 recurring features can be detected.

A particularly important dimension of policy pro-  
 cesses is, of course, legislative processes. These are  
 examined in the next chapter.