Notre Europe

ETUDES & RECHERCHES

Is Politicisation good or bad for the Union?

Initial Synthesis of the Debates and Lines of Research

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Introduction

There are some debates whose degree of maturity is inversely proportional to their importance for the future of European integration. The debate on the "politicisation" of the Union is one of these. Concerned by the expanding gulf between citizens and elites in relation to the integration project, some maintain that the functioning of EU institutions must necessarily become politicised; they advocate a gradual opening of European political debates to partisan competition along traditional left-right lines and the application of the majority principle in the decision-making process. On the other hand, many see this approach as a hasty transposition of the nation-state model of democratic functioning, which does not take sufficient account of the specificities of the EU's political system and could bring with it a number of dangers whose consequences might well undermine any intended democratic effects.

To date, these opposing points of view have surfaced primarily in the academic sphere, without really being taken up by those with a practical engagement in the issues. Notre Europe has therefore sought to contribute to the debate by linking scientific study with practice. Starting with an open exchange between two well-known academics, Simon Hix and Stefano Bartolini, we then asked others with either an academic or a practical involvement to respond to what these two had to say. All the contributors came together for a seminar on 4 May 2006, held in partnership with the Institute of European Studies at the Free University, Brussels. The ideas generated by the resulting exchanges greatly exceeded our hopes. Underlying what might appear as a debate on institutional practices lurk fundamental issues relating to the nature of the European Union and the future of its political integration.

Is politicisation good or bad for the EU? The article below attempts to start answering this question by providing an initial synthesis of the debates as they took shape through direct exchanges (initially written, then spoken during the seminar of 4 May) between Hix and Bartolini, enriched with remarks (again written and spoken) from Professors Paul Magnette and Jean-Louis Quermonne, Philippe de Schoutheete, former Belgian Ambassador to the European Union, and French MEP Jean-Louis Bourlanges. This synthesis is not neutral; its preliminary conclusions draw on the more general line of thought pursued by Notre Europe on the EU's political future. However many points are worth developing at greater length and the aim of this synthesis is also to identify lines of research that merit further work.

I. A broad consensus on the diagnosis

POLITICAL DEBATE TO REDUCE THE GULF BETWEEN ELITES AND CITIZENS

No one seems to challenge the disturbing observation with which Hix opened both his written contribution and his presentation at the seminar of 4 May. The past decade has been marked by a growing disaffection with the European project among Europe's populations. Results from Eurobarometer suggest that support for membership of the EU, falling since the early 1990s, has now stagnated around 50%. The "no" votes in the French and Dutch referendums on the Constitutional Treaty provide tangible signs of a latent malaise. The EU can no longer be content with what has been called the "permissive consensus" of its peoples if it is to make the qualitative leap towards integration that it now needs more than ever in a globalised world. Citizens must feel they have a stake in the European project and the continuing perception of a democratic deficit in the EU's functioning must not be allowed to continue.

Many agree with Hix in his advocacy of a mechanism that would involve European citizens, enabling them to determine political options and to participate in a debate. According to Hix such a mechanism must also enable them to accept defeat, in the hope of finding themselves on the winning side in the near future. Indeed, as he notes, as long as one section of society feels it is stuck on the losing side, the members of that group will not only oppose the current government but will also criticize the political system as a whole. This phenomenon was observable in France at the time of the referendum of 29 May 2005. Most supporters of the "no" camp felt that the European Constitution would determine the Union's political orientations for a long time to come and chose instead to reject the entire document, although in so doing they were also choosing to halt the movement towards integration, which, paradoxically, many claimed to support.

For Hix, the mechanism for generating a more active engagement among citizens primarily involves the gradual increase of political debate within the EU, which should lead to a greater degree of accountability and legitimacy. The competitive, adversarial system proper to the political process would force the protagonists to reveal their positions and to respond to their opponents in the media and perhaps outside the traditional political sphere. This more transparent struggle for control of the political process would help citizens to identify the major players and to understand the possible consequences to which they would be exposed should one side or the other succeed in implementing its agenda. The rival camps would be obliged to develop coherent sets of political measures in the form of manifestos, and the winners would be granted a mandate, without which any political change is regarded as shadowy and thus illegitimate.

The introduction of more overt political debate within the European institutions would certainly help to inform citizens about the terms and agents of the decision-making process. And, as Bartolini notes, Hix's work has the merit of changing the nature of the debate on the EU's democratic deficit by placing the accent on its political dimension ("mass politics") rather than institutional reform. Magnette adds that this approach has the great advantage of reminding us that the EU's legitimacy does not depend solely on the policies it produces, but also on the manner in which it produces them. For de Schoutheete the idea that ideological debate can bridge the gulf between the (generally pro-European) elites and (more eurosceptic) public opinion is worthy of closer attention, since the question raised is of fundamental importance. Our contributors differ, however, on the manner, and indeed in some cases the appropriateness, of organising such political debate.

WITHOUT IDEALISING OR DIRECTING POLITICAL DISCUSSION

Of course political debate should not be regarded as the solution to every problem. As Magnette notes, it is important to avoid drifting into a rather lofty vision of political discussion in which honest elected representatives are contrasted with nasty corporatist interests. De Schoutheete adds that it is important to relativise the power of ideologies and their capacity to reinvigorate European political debate at a time when these ideologies are in decline at the national level. To this can be added all the other difficulties hindering the establishment of the best conditions for political discussion at the supranational level, such as multilingualism, differences in political traditions including the relationship to elected representatives, geographical distance or poorer access to relayed information.

Bartolini goes so far as to assert that politicisation might expand rather than reduce the gulf between elites and electorate, due to the problem of the degree to which political parties are representative. Across Europe the parties are increasingly seen as more favourable than the electorate towards integration. Moreover, he adds, studies have shown that the attitudes of voters towards European integration seem not to coincide with the philosophies of left or right, but to crystallize instead around a "perception of new possibilities and increased mobility versus the perception of what these will cost."

When envisaging the introduction of a greater degree of political confrontation it is also important to aim for truly open political debate. Bartolini's warning in this regard is particularly apposite. As he notes, it is not unusual for top European civil servants and supporters of integration accompanied by democratisation to be of the firm belief that if people only knew more, were more competent, better informed and more engaged, they would realise that the EU is a good thing and in their interests. Hix himself somewhat undermines his own argument by asserting that if there were a more open political debate on the Services Directive voters would understand that liberalisation of the services sector is more likely to create jobs than to destroy them. The outcome of a debate cannot be prejudged. The process of politicisation will be of value only if its supporters are prepared to accept the risk that the process will transform initial indifference or support into informed, considered opposition.

II. Divergences on the evolution of the issues at stake and the state of politicisation

EMERGENCE OF THE DEBATE BETWEEN RIGHT AND LEFT AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

It must be recognised that, as Hix acknowledges, the content of European political debates has evolved. As integration continues, alongside the traditional debates about "more or less Europe", "more or less depth", we are seeing the appearance of issues such as "more or less regulation of the market" or "more or less of a link between economic and social aspects" in which the analysis relates to "left-right" divisions familiar from national politics. The evolution of political debate within the European institutions was brought into sharp focus by the discussions around the "services directive", also known as the "Bolkestein directive". Beyond the usual conflicts associated with national differences and consensual decision-making, these discussions highlighted the complexity of the European political arena and, to some extent, the increasing politicisation of European institutions in which a classic debate between left and right became apparent.[1]

These developments lead us, as Hix proposes, to challenge theories of the EU as a "regulatory state", of which Giandomenico Majone is the main proponent. Majone contrasts the EU's so-called "regulatory" policies, which are intended to correct market deficiencies and which benefit society as a whole, with "redistributive" policies intended to transfer resources from one group to another and which therefore create winners and losers. According to Majone, regulatory policies must be drawn up by independent institutions, since institutions controlled by majorities, such as parliaments and elected governments, would be tempted to use them to benefit their own supporters. There is good reason to question whether this dichotomy is still meaningful as a description of EU functioning. As Hix says, in practice most European regulatory policies have significant redistributive consequences and besides, the challenges now facing the EU are very different from those it faced at the time of its foundation. With a single market in place and an established institutional structure (though one that remains deficient, as we shall see below), questions of political orientation are surfacing more clearly. Hix lists the issues he regards as most salient: should the European single market be more liberal or more highly regulated? Should monetary and macro-economic policies be more orthodox or more Keynesian? Should the EU adopt a more liberal or a more restrictive immigration policy? This set of political choices will, he adds, very probably create clearly identifiable winners and losers, at least in the short term.

[1] For a more detailed analysis of this case study, see Francesco Marchi's Policy Brief published by *Notre Europe*.

THE NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH INTO THE CURRENT STATE OF POLITICISATION

Much of Hix's thesis rests on an analysis of the current state of politicisation in the European institutions. He asserts that the EU is ready for a greater degree of politicisation, since this process is already and increasingly under way in the current functioning of the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the Commission, notably as a result of certain institutional reforms.

In Hix's view the procedure for nominating the Commission (modified by the Treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and particularly Nice, which introduced qualified majority voting in the Council) made it possible to strengthen political debate for the vital task of developing the agenda within the European system. He believes way is now open to a situation in which majorities of the same political colour in the Council and the EP could elect the President of the Commission. In this way the political contest for the post of President could create a mandate for the successful candidate and team. The extension of the codecision procedure and qualified majority voting, and the presence of a single Commissioner from each Member State will also foster the evolution towards greater politicisation.

Hix presents a certain amount of data showing that ideological disagreements have arisen in the three European institutions. In his view the European Parliament is currently witnessing the emergence of a truly party-political regime. A study of all roll call votes between 1979 and 2004 shows that MEPs are increasingly voting according to left-right party divisions rather than nationality. The data also show that coalitions in the EP are increasingly being formed along the left-right axis and less along pro- or anti-European lines. Analyses of votes in the Council since the 1990s also reveal, according to Hix, a greater degree of politicisation. He explains, for example, that in the period 1995–2000 the UK and Germany were the two countries that voted against legislation or abstained most frequently, on divergent grounds and mainly on social questions. A study by Miko Mattila has also shown that the main factor determining whether a country was a winner or loser in the late 90s was its position on a left-right axis. At that time 13 out of the 15 governments were of the left and tended to be among the winners. In Hix's view the Commission has become notably more politicised since the introduction of the new procedure for appointing the President and the establishment of one commissioner per member state. A classification of commissioners according to the position of the party they belong to shows that the centre of gravity of the Barroso Commission has shifted significantly to the right of the two preceding Commissions.

For other participants, such as Bartolini, although it is clear that the left-right split exists and is expressed within the European Parliament, the emergence of left-right structuring in the Council and the Commission remains unproven. De Schoutheete is similarly unconvinced that such an evolution is already perceptible in these two institutions. As he observes, analysis of negative votes and abstentions in the Council do not permit any conclusions to be drawn, since

it involves a tiny minority of decisions, most of which were obtained through consensus. Moreover there is no voting on the Coreper – the body that prepares agendas for the Council of Ministers and takes decisions (submitted to the Council under "Point A", in other words not requiring further discussion). Lastly it may be that a negative vote or an abstention expresses something other than disagreement with the content of a proposal. Countries such as Germany and Belgium, in particular, may abstain or adopt a minority position because their federal structure has not allowed them to reach internal agreement. De Schoutheete also doubts that commissioners act according to their political convictions. His personal experience leads him to dispute the classification set out by political scientists and presented by Hix, both in principle (individual ideological positions cannot be plotted on a scale in the same way as temperature or body weight) and in its practical application. In particular he notes that Karel Van Miert and Mario Monti are poles apart in the classification, but have pursued quite similar competition policies.

So there is clearly very little unanimity concerning the analysis of the current state of politicisation and research into the Council and Commission is undoubtedly in need of refinement and greater depth. However it is undeniable that the EU's institutional landscape has evolved through many stages. The system of governance envisaged by the founding fathers of European integration was to be preserved from the ideological conflict they regarded as responsible for a war-torn past that they were determined to leave behind. The idea of a High Authority (today's Commission) composed of independent, high-ranking civil servants responsible for identifying the general European interest and making decisions through consensus was integral to that logic. Furthermore the establishment of the first treaties required action of a primarily diplomatic order. Today the situation is very different. The European Parliament, directly elected by the people, has seen its powers considerably strengthened. The extension of the codecision procedure and qualified majority voting has meant that the Council of Ministers is consolidating its role as the "Chamber of States", rendering the need to define the executive function within the EU ever more pressing. A synergy between the executive tasks performed by the Council and Commission was already emerging in the draft Constitutional Treaty, which provided for the fusion of tasks relating to external relations through the creation of a Minister for Foreign Affairs. It seems reasonable to suppose that the increasing complexity of subjects dealt with by the EU and the gradual federalisation of the decision-making process are gradually producing political divisions to add to territorial differences.

A COMPLEMENT RATHER THAN AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE QUESTION OF DEEPENING INTEGRATION

As we shall see below, the idea of linking greater politicisation to the gradual federalisation of the EU is perhaps the key to a compromise between the different contributors. For the greatest ambiguity in the thesis of politicisation is undoubtedly its link to the question of deeper integration. According to Hix, the growth of political debate within the EU does not require institutional reform. Since a quasi-constitutional architecture and single market are already in

place, the question now is how best to use them. Quermonne warns against the resurgence of a Thatcherite vision of Europe, interested only in the management of regulatory and deregulatory policies and going no further down the path of integration.

For Quermonne the dominant political division is still between states seeking to maintain the status quo and those wishing to pursue and develop the process of integration. This is a matter of high politics, but not of a left-right debate. In elaborating this idea he considers the relationship between France and Germany, which is at its most successful when the two countries are moving in different political directions. Professor Quermonne's reaction has the merit of reminding us that "constitutive" questions (linked to membership of the EU, its frontiers, competences and the decision-making process), to use Bartolini's expression, are still far from exhausted within the Union. The division over "more or less European integration" remains pertinent, particularly as we are now seeing the emergence of theses such as that set out by Gordon Brown, who argues that the European model is losing its justification in a world dominated by the effects of globalisation.

The immaturity of the constitutional debate within the EU leads Bartolini to a concern that the politicisation being advocated touches on these fundamental questions as much as it affects "isomorphic" issues (having the same form and substance as corresponding issues at the national level, such as levels and types of market regulation, citizenship rights and immigration policy). Bartolini also believes that until now national parties and electorates have been divided more often over European constitutional matters than over isomorphic questions. He deduces from this that the politicisation of constitutive issues would be a disaster; more solid assurances are needed concerning the identities of the major players and bodies responsible for introducing this new political approach and the power they could wield. This leads him to raise the issue of European parties discussed below.

In practice the line between constitutive and isomorphic issues is porous and it is also with this in mind that Bartolini doubts the possibility of developing true political "mandates" – arising out of public discussion and debate through different programmes and platforms – within the European system, as advocated by Hix. For Bartolini a candidate for the post of President of the Commission, for example, would soon find his room for manoeuvre restricted by aims already established in the European treaties, such as the autonomy of the ECB. The jurisprudence of the European Court and vetoes in the Council would similarly hinder the development of certain policies. In Bartolini's view those arguing for politicisation must clarify their proposals by stating that mandates will be confined to minor adjustments within the narrow limits of the aims already established by the EU.

Although others, such as Magnette, are more accepting of the idea that constitutional debates could also be politicised (in particular he mentions the case of Belgium), it becomes clear from these exchanges that, if it is to happen, politicisation cannot be an alternative so much as a complement to a debate – perhaps more necessary now than ever before – on the appropriateness of the process of integration itself. Whereas politicisation may help to facilitate the decision-making process and make it more transparent for citizens, deepening integration through the extension of qualified majority voting and the codecision procedure remains a vital tool in attaining these goals. The formation of cross-party coalitions in the three European institutions and the definition of a mandate may make it possible to avoid legislative gridlocks. But, as de Schoutheete notes, it would probably be more effective to prevent gridlocks by means of institutional change, including an increase in qualified majority voting in the Council.

III. Dangers of politicisation unsuited to the particularity of the EU system

A NECESSARY PRECONDITION: THE DEBATE ON THE POLITICAL NATURE OF THE UNION

If politicisation is to go hand in hand with deepening of EU integration, it is indispensable to consider the EU's political system as it has taken shape over the last fifty years, as it is likely to develop and as it would be desirable to develop it. From this perspective a "veneer" of politicisation which took no account of either the complexity or the particularity of this system would be counter-productive. Instead the first priority must be to reject any transposition of national or even international models on to the EU. As Magnette notes, much closer attention must be paid to the unwanted effects of isomorphism and any structural similarities and differences between the EU and comparable systems must be identified with greater rigour. Quermonne also supports this view, identifying a marked trend towards imitation involving the transposition to the European level of an approach that may be well adapted to the Nation State but takes no account of the singularity of the EU. Both authors criticise Hix for drawing primarily on the bipartisan and highly majoritarian model of Westminster, which is undoubtedly not best suited to the EU.

In this context Magnette cites the exemplary work of Yannis Papadopoulos, notably a study he carried out for Notre Europe in which, through a subtle analysis, he reveals strong structural similarities between the EU and Switzerland (including a system involving multi-level clivages , a cross-party executive, a bicameral parliament, multilingualism, consociative decision-making) and concludes that the EU is a democracy of the consociative type.[2] Generally speaking, federal political systems are more useful sources to draw on when envisaging the politicisation of the EU because they involve the articulation of unity with diversity and of politics with territorial (or constitutive) concerns. The practice of coalition rather than majoritarian governments is also undoubtedly more illuminating for thinking about the politicisation of the EU.

[2] Arend Lijphart's work on consociative democracies is a useful reference for understanding the EU. It examines the ways in which segmented societies manage to establish democratic modes of functioning through power sharing.

Moreover Hix himself acknowledges that political systems are located on a continuum between the classic majoritarian model (centralisation of the power to set the agenda and to exercise a veto, government based on a single party and a weak second chamber) and consensual systems (many veto holders, proportional representation, coalition government etcetera). He also recognises, referring to Lijphart, that in political regimes that are geographically, culturally or socially pluralist, such as the EU, a concept based on consensus is preferable to a majoritarian approach. However, in Hix's view, EU functioning is exaggeratedly consensual, enabling minority interests to block reforms and prevent the implementation of policies once they have been adopted, and creating a lack of leadership. His aim is thus to instil a little more majoritarianism into the European mechanism. But in order to decide where to place the cursor on the continuum between majority and consensus, it is vital to pay attention, as Papadopoulos does, to both the description of EU's political nature and to its desired evolution. This must be done through a deeper understanding of European federalism in its current and perhaps also its future form.

THE PROCESS OF POLITICISATION MUST BE MORE COMPLEX THAN SIMPLE BIPOLARISATION

These preliminary remarks on the political nature of the EU inevitably introduce a second reservation in relation to the politicisation advocated by Hix. Does politicisation necessarily mean bipolarisation? Quermonne sees this as a regrettable confusion which reduces politicisation to a split between left and right, when in fact it is much more complex.

Bourlanges believes political divisions do exist, but that they are not bipolar and it would make no sense to apply bipolarisation to the EU. There are many divisions in Europe. The right-left split is present in relation to economics, but others are equally important, such as the divisions between traditionalists and cultural liberals (cf. conflicts over the Buttiglione affair), those for and against integration of a federal nature or Labourists and naturalists. For Bourlanges the rise of the EPP and the PSE has been accompanied by ideological impoverishment and renationalisation, resulting in the departure of parties such as his own (UDF) from the EPP. It is also because of this that President Barroso has had to review the legislative programme he initially proposed and accept a compromise.

The notion of compromise is interesting because, as Magnette notes, it proves that the absence of head-on confrontation is compatible with politicisation. In his view a proportional civic culture is a workable proposition.

POLITICISATION IN STEP WITH THE NATURE AND REALITY OF EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

As we have seen, the data on the emergence of a debate between left and right within the Council and the Commission is open to question. But whatever the real degree to which these institutions are politicised, it is also important to establish whether the reinforcement of this division is either desirable or realistic. For de Schoutheete its desirability is doubtful to say the

least. The aim of the Council is to defend the interests of member states and that of the Commission to promote the common European interest. In his view these things are not essentially defined by ideology.

For Hix a greater degree of politicisation would raise the stakes and oblige leaders to join forces with others of a similar outlook to create alliances across institutions. More open competition would prevent a political leader from going back on an agreement made by a trans-national party. The effect of this would be to overcome any possible institutional congestion and increase the EU's capacity to undertake political reform.

This assertion by Hix leads some contributors to question whether such politicisation is realistic. Bartolini mentions the problem of continual changes to the composition and political orientation of the Council resulting from national elections and, to a lesser extent, the choice of commissioners by national governments. From this he deduces that the possibility of having a Commission, Parliament and Council all of the same political colour for any length of time is pure fantasy. Similarly Magnette notes that it seems highly unlikely that the majorities in the Parliament and Council would converge, since the political colour of the Council varies according to national elections which are little affected by European issues. In his view the Commission will always be a cross-party coalition rather than a homogeneous majority and to politicise the selection of the President of the Commission would be to risk generating expectations that would necessarily be disappointed.

IV. Consequences for the choice of tools to encourage politicisation

POLITICS WITHOUT FORGETTING NECESSARY INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

As we discussed above, in Hix's view the politicisation of the EU is already under way and any institutional changes necessary to activate it fully are of a marginal nature. He advocates a gradual reform of the institutions that would not require revision of the Treaty. He proposes:

to make the EP function in a slightly more "majoritarian" way, modifying the system of appointments for the committees and rapporteurs, which is currently entirely proportional, to create a system in which the largest party in the EP or a majority coalition of parties would be granted greater powers to control the legislative agenda.

to hold a presidential election for the EP every five years, ending the need for compromise over this appointment between the two main groupings and encouraging the formation of majority coalitions to win the position.

to make the legislative deliberations of the Council more transparent, so that amendments proposed by the President and other governments are subject to public scrutiny before the deliberations of the COREPER while giving the public and media access to the deliberations of the Council when it makes pronouncements on legislative matters.

that all votes in the Council should be recorded, even when a proposal is not passed unanimously or by a qualified majority, and not only when a necessary majority is achieved.

to establish more open competition for the Commission Presidency, not requiring a major election of the Commission by the people, nor even by the EP, but requiring (1) the rival candidates to set out their ideas for their mandate in a manifesto, (2) a public debate between the main candidates (for example before the EP and the press) and (3) open declarations of support for one candidate or the other by all the prime ministers and party leaders of the EP.

that once the Commission has been appointed it should establish a programme of work spanning several years based not only on the electoral promises of the President but also on a coalition agreement within the political majority of the new Commission.

From the synthesis provided thus far it is easy to identify the measures that would prove most controversial, although these were not specifically debated either in the papers or during the seminar. Moreover they are not of the same nature. The Council has much to do in terms of transparency to catch up with the Commission and the European parliament. Opening up the debates in the Council and a more systematic recording of its votes represent a step which

does indeed seem indispensable. Although the "Chamber of states" will undoubtedly retain a mode of functioning focused more strongly on negotiation, there is no reason why its legislative practice should always remain so different from that of the European parliament. The transparency of deliberations in the Council was moreover a provision of the draft Constitutional Treaty and its foundation stone was laid at the European Council of June.

Where the Commission is concerned, for several years Notre Europe has proposed that the appointment of the Commission President should be linked to the results of European elections. De Schoutheete and Bourlanges remind us that they agree with this proposal made by Jacques Delors. The establishment of more open competition for the Commission presidency seems to be a move in the same direction. The question of the Commission's mandate is more delicate and open to discussion. We have noted Bartolini's reservations regarding the real room for manoeuvre available to a Commission President in the framework of the existing treaties. The *acquis communautaire* must also be preserved. But the question runs deeper than that and is linked to the difficulty of conceiving of this executive function while the question of a "European government" remains unresolved. As mentioned above, an important issue for future institutional reforms is a clearer definition of the executive tasks of the EU, currently split between the Council and the Commission. Here we come back to the remarks developed above on the need not to lose sight of the deepening of integration or the political nature of the EU.

Similarly reforms to the functioning of the European parliament seem to draw directly on a classic majoritarian system which almost certainly takes insufficient account of either the wealth of its divisions or the virtues of a culture of compromise.

EUROPEAN PARTIES: THE CHICKEN AND EGG OF POLITICISATION

Hix's construction relies heavily on the capacity of the European parties to create internal discipline, to organise as truly European entities and to maintain cross-party coalitions across institutions. Bartolini does not believe in the capacity of the European parties to play this role. In his view their institutional environment is not conducive to consolidation; there is a lack of ideological cohesion and an absence of demands and pressure from the base for downward representation and the institutionalisation of European parties, which European funding transforms into institutions supporting the EU. According to him the European parties readily join forces and form alliances because they are not constrained by partisan, ideological politics. This being so, Bartolini notes, rather than strengthening the European parties, politicisation could make things much harder for them.

De Schoutheete also regards the two main parties in the EP (the EPP and PSE) not as true ideological groupings (he sees many Christian Democrats in the EPP as more left-wing than some New Labour MEPs) but as coalitions formed to secure a major share of appointments,

power and patronage within the EP. Therefore, like Bartolini, he believes that the introduction of ideological debate could well fragment them. He would not be sorry to see this happen, since it would clarify the positions of the parties, notably on the question of their commitment or lack of it to a greater federalisation of the EU; but this, he adds, would not favour the kind of bipartisan, adversarial politics dear to Hix. However de Schoutheete does believe that the European parties have an important role to play, that they should be open to individual memberships and should evolve into authentic European parties (rather than conglomerates of existing national parties), which, in the long term, could select their candidates from different countries and open up a truly European debate.

Magnette is more positive about the potential of the European parties. In his view they are managing to establish discipline and cohesion despite being unable to impose sanctions or retribution on their members. He regards this as a European particularity which should be taken seriously rather than returning to the archetype of the Nation State.

But whatever the analysis of the current capacity of the European parties to be agents of the politicisation of the EU, it is hard not to acknowledge that they must play a central role. The debate around the European parties and politicisation recalls the question of the chicken and the egg. Hix believes that injecting a debate between right and left and a more majoritarian model of decision-making into the European institutions would force the protagonists of these debates, and notably the European parties, to organise. Meanwhile Bartolini fears that politicisation would be damaging as long as the European parties are insufficiently prepared to manage and contain it. Both are undoubtedly right and the shock therapy advocated in Hix's vision could indeed, as de Schoutheete notes, have the positive effect of clarifying the debate and the positions of the players. However, prudence demands more detailed research into the European parties and the best way to pursue their true "Europeanisation", without this having a detrimental effect on the maintenance of community dynamics.

V. Some conclusions and directions for research

In initiating this open debate on the politicisation of the EU, Notre Europe was seeking to advance thinking on this theme by demonstrating both its importance and its immaturity. The aim of increasing the readability of political debate within the EU, rendering it more transparent and familiar to European citizens, is both praiseworthy and crucial to the future of the European project. Citizens need to feel that they can influence not just the pace of integration, but also its content, and that they can do this through a recognisable democratic process. Hix is right to stress that without this there is a risk that they will reject the system as a whole. But to try to reach this goal by applying a model of politicisation that is unsuited to the specifics of the EU's institutional architecture and the nature of its current and future political project would be counter-productive.

We have seen that the data on the state of politicisation of the three European institutions are subject to controversy. It is therefore indispensable to carry out further research. The actors at the core of this politicisation must also be subject to more detailed analysis. In the first instance this means the European parties, but other intermediaries, such as the media, the national parliaments and methods of direct participation by citizens will have an essential role to play. This synthesis has also suggested that it would be better to draw on federal systems and "consociative" models of democracy in considering ways in which the EU could become politicised. To apply the principles of a classic majoritarian, bipartisan system could damage the current institutional balance. It is therefore more important than ever to explore the particularity of the federal model as applied to the EU and its potential evolution. The division between left and right cannot be simply juxtaposed to the "constitutive" division over "more or less Europe"; the two are inextricably linked, since the nature and shape of the former will be moulded by the latter.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS PUBLISHED ON THIS SUBJECT

Available on Notre Europe Website

- Politics: the Right or the Wrong Sort of Medicine for the EU?

  Two policy papers by Simon Hix and Stefano Bartolini – Available in French and English (April 2006).

- Sould the EU be "politicised" along a Left-Right axis?

  Reaction of Philippe de Schoutheete – Available in French and English (6 April 2006).

- Sould the EU be "politicised" along a Left-Right axis?

  Reaction of Paul Magnette – Available in French and English (10 April 2006).

- Sould the EU be "politicised" along a Left-Right axis?

  Reaction of Jean-Louis Quermonne – Available in French and English (13 April 2006).

Study available in French and English on the Website http://www.notre-europe.asso.fr



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