

The Constitutional Project and Politicization in the EU

Loukas Tsoukalis

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Moravcsik is absolutely right in observing that the European constitutional project failed to mobilize citizens across our member countries and generate support for further integration. And how could it? The term constitution is clearly a misnomer, changes in Council voting procedures and rotating presidencies may be a step in the direction of better delivery but hardly the stuff that excites most people, while the policy part of the old treaty remained virtually the same. Practical changes were presented as a major political project, and they backfired – at best, they met with indifference.

Does this mean that politicization of European integration is a dead duck? Moravcsik argues that the greatest tactical advantage of the EU is that it is *so boring*, and it should continue being so.

European integration has been the product of an elitist conspiracy with good intentions and pretty remarkable results. So far so good. It is, however, unlikely to continue in the same way for a number of reasons. The continuous expansion in terms of membership and policy functions of the EU has increased internal diversity, while multiplying the effects of decisions taken by European institutions on the everyday life of citizens. In times of big economic restructuring at the world level, the number of losers within member countries tends to grow. Real, potential or even imaginary losers constitute a significant section of our populations in a period characterized by big and rapid change. Many of them view European integration as a vehicle of the dreaded globalization, and they turn against it. The problem lies *within* countries and not so much *between* countries; and it is much bigger and more intractable than in earlier periods.

Moravcsik argues that politicization of European integration is impossible because the most salient issues, as seen by European citizens, are still in the hands of national governments. Trade, regulation and exercises in soft power are not the kind of issues that can provoke active interest on behalf of ordinary citizens. Put in those terms, he is probably right. He

misses an important point, however. Economic regulation is not distribution free. Different mixes of monetary and fiscal policy are not economically neutral either. In other words, what kind of Europe we have impacts significantly on the domestic political and social contract. We are witnessing a growing mismatch between the predominantly intergovernmental nature of EU negotiations and economic reality, which is increasingly European and global.

One day, hopefully in the not too distant future, politicians will begin to discuss seriously ways and means of Europe collectively trying to manage and shape globalization. They will begin to debate trade-offs between growth and equity, as well as the link between such trade-offs and the division of powers between European and national institutions in different areas of economic policy, including taxation or social policy. Some have already begun to discuss more openly the pros and cons of further enlargement, or Europe's role as a global actor. It should not be beyond the capacity of politicians to translate the above into simple language and present in the form of basic political choices understood by ordinary citizens. Choices do exist, but most politicians have so far failed to articulate them as choices that have both a European and a national dimension. Perhaps, because there is still no elected office at the European level attractive enough to bring forward the best available talent from the left and right of the political spectrum, new or old.

The indirect election of the President of the European Commission by the newly elected members of the Parliament could be a good way of further politicizing the EU. It would not be without risks. It would surely make the EU less boring, and elections to the European Parliament as well. Such a development would also change the balance between institutions, and hence bound to generate strong opposition. Shall we be ready for this political battle before 2009?