

The institutional politics of the European Union : an analysis of administrative governance and constitutional reform in the EU

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THE INSTITUTIONAL POLITICS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

An Analysis of Administrative Governance and Constitutional Reform in the EU

Thesis by Thomas Christiansen

Propositions

1. Policy-making, constitutional reform and macro-social transformation are inter-related processes constituting different layers of change in the formation of a European polity.
2. The European polity being established through these processes constitutes a *sui generis* form of political organisation – it is neither an association of states nor a nascent state itself; the analysis of the institutional politics of the EU therefore requires analytical approaches that go beyond those traditionally applied in comparative politics or international relations.
3. Rather than focussing either on the role of political actors (as political science traditionally does) or on elements of structure (as lawyers tend to do), the comprehensive study of processes of change (and continuity) requires an analysis of the interaction between both agency and structure.
4. Political agency is determined not only by material interests, resources and strategies as implied by rationalist approaches, but is also shaped by the legal, institutional, social and ideational structures which a social constructivist perspective includes.
5. European governance is subject to inherent tensions between supranational and intergovernmental logics, and between open-ended political bargaining and reliance on formal legal procedures; such tensions are reflected in the organisational structures and internal decision-making processes of the EU institutions.
6. Administrative interaction between the European institutions, and between national and European levels of governance, is characterised by cooperation rather than antagonism.
7. EU treaty reform, which has traditionally been studied as a series of discrete events, needs to be understood as a continuous process that is part of a wider process of constitutionalising the European Union.
8. The ‘failure’ of the Constitutional Treaty did not mark the end of the EU’s constitutional project, as has been argued, but instead implied the return to a long-standing practice of implicit and informal constitutionalisation.
9. When normatively evaluating (the lack of) the EU’s democratic credentials, it is crucial to include not only the aspirations, but also the limits, of the liberal democratic model in such an assessment.
10. The widely-held belief that the study of the EU’s system of implementing committees known as ‘comitology’ is boring is not necessarily always true.

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