Preface

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Ongoing specialisation in the social sciences has made the study of rapid social and political developments in modern societies more challenging. Even broad and wide-ranging processes such as globalisation, individualisation or modernisation do not normally draw together scholars from different (sub-)disciplines. Europeanisation and the rise of a multi-level system of governance in Europe are two further examples of apparently closely linked processes that are studied separately by many scholars. In 2005 – through the CONNEX network (see below) – we had the opportunity to bring together a number of social scientists with different backgrounds, research interests and perspectives on political and social developments in Europe. At a conference in Bled (Slovenia) we discussed the various ways decisions in Europe were made and the success or otherwise of attempts to improve the engagement of citizens, voluntary associations, lobbyists, national ‘gatekeepers’ and interest groups within the complex European system of growing sub-national, national and supra-national interdependencies.

The participants at the Bled conference all shared their ideas about how to approach the study of decision making in Europe from a variety of angles and perspectives. Furthermore, all shared the goal of basing conclusions on empirical analyses and not simply theory (or speculation) alone. The considerable differences between the results of the various empirical analyses presented appeared to have more in common than we initially thought. Systematic comparisons turned out to be highly fruitful by distinguishing between ‘bottom-up’ (that is, focusing on the consequences of Europeanisation for civil society at the local level) and ‘top-down’ approaches (that is, focusing on the consequences for civil society of the process of European integration and democracy in the European Union). At our second meeting in Mannheim (Germany) in autumn 2005 colleagues refined and expanded their papers and after lengthy discussions about the distinctive and shared aspects we decided to publish this volume.

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under the 6th Framework Programme. This network is dedicated to the analysis of efficient and democratic multi-level governance in Europe (see <http://www.connex-network.org>). We are very grateful to Beate Kohler-Koch (Network Coordinator) and Fabrice Larat (Network Manager) for their enthusiastic support during all stages of our work on this project.

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