Foreword

Having been closely involved in the development and design of the European Social Survey (ESS) from the start, I am delighted by the convincing evidence in this book that our painstaking work is yielding such important findings.

When the ESS started its life in 2001, a great deal was expected of it. Learning from the experience of other pioneering cross-national studies, such as the Eurobarometers, the European Value Surveys and the International Social Survey Programme, it was designed to produce high quality evidence about how citizens of over 20 nations in Europe see themselves, one another and their collective world. To pursue that goal effectively, however, we had to devise a bulletproof means of achieving the same or closely equivalent data within every participating country. In the absence of such close equivalence, comparisons between countries would be spurious. So the defining characteristic of the ESS is conformity to a meticulous common specification that applies both to its methods and to its content. The outcome, we believe, is a cross-national dataset of unusual quality and reliability.

The findings in this book are based on the first two rounds of the ESS (2001/2002 and 2003/2004). Twenty-two countries participated in Round 1 and 26 in Round 2, and it is good to see that this book makes use of data from virtually all those countries. Also impressive is the multidisciplinary nature of the book, including contributions from authors with backgrounds in political science, sociology and social policy.

The Nordic countries are particularly interesting in a cross-national context. Not only are their survey standards among the highest in Europe, but they historically embody a unique model of social democracy that may at once cause and be caused by certain attitudes and values. They are also perhaps the closest approximation in Europe to a group of countries that might be expected to share broadly similar characteristics and cultures. The analyses in this book reveal whether these images are justified. Or do the Nordic countries actually differ as much from one another as from other European countries? Or do within-country differences effectively outweigh between-country differences?

Several books and articles based on ESS data have already appeared. Some focus on particular topics. Others examine European attitudes and

values from the perspective of a single country. This book is the first to cover such a wide range of topics and be produced by authors from a cluster of neighbouring countries. It is an especially welcome and interesting work of scholarship.

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