Preface

For many decades State aid law and policy were neglected aspects of the EU integration project. With the start of the new millennium and the ensuing dramatic enlargement of the EU, State aid law has become a central focus of attention. Along with procurement policy, State aid was seen as one of the remaining difficulties in creating an integrated single market. This invited greater attention from the Commission in formulating long-term policy alongside its day-to-day State aid enforcement role. At the same time, issues arising from State aid became increasingly contested by non-State parties, mainly competitors, in the national courts. This invited participation in the State aid discourse by a wider group of actors as well as confronting the Commission with the need to ensure the good administration of State aid notifications and complaints and a careful analysis of the effects of State aid.

Attempts to modernise State aid became central to the Lisbon process which started in 2000, whereby the aim was to encourage ‘intelligent’ State aid by reducing aid to specific sectors and by making better use of aid for horizontal projects which were central to EU integration concerns. In 2005 the Commission presented the ambitiously titled State Aid Action Plan Less and Better Targeted State Aid: A Roadmap for State Aid Reform 2005–2009. This policy framework has underpinned the new approach to State aid policy in the EU in recent years and informs many of the chapters in this book.

At the same time, new and unforeseen issues confronted the EU. For example, the effects of liberalisation, the consequences of enlargement, the growth of regionalism, the need to tackle climate change with sustainable energy policies, and questions concerning the role of public services in liberalised and competitive markets arose as policy concerns. Moreover the economic and financial crisis at the end of the last decade propelled State aid to the centre stage of competition policy, thereby moving it from a concern solely for a discrete group of specialists and with the term ‘State aid’ thereby entering popular discourse and public debate. After 2007 State aid has become a central issue in the future of the whole EU integration process.

Thus, when asked to edit this book, I wanted to provide a modern snapshot of the way in which State aid has become a central aspect of EU integration and a major concern of national economic policy. Several excellent
practitioner handbooks exist, providing detailed coverage of the soft and hard law, European Court and Commission Decisions. These texts have allowed scope for this research handbook to widen the discussion towards a critical and inter-disciplinary analysis of the way in which State aid law and policy has accommodated the new demands of integration and the role expected from regulation of State intervention in competitive markets.

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Erika Szyszczak, University of Leicester and Littleton Chambers, Temple, London.
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