Preface

This encyclopedia takes a fresh look at European Union (EU) public policy. In so doing, it builds on a very well-developed literature that has proven to be capable of responding to new opportunities and challenges. Most observers may first think of the challenges for EU public policy, and of these there are several, both long-standing and more recent. Since the EU and its predecessors have begun to formulate EU law, several accounts have underlined that Member States do not comply in part or in full with their respective stipulations. This tradition of EU implementation research is as relevant as ever. In response to non-compliance with certain EU laws, the European Commission has taken some unorthodox steps. For example, since 2015 the Member States have been able to opt out from the scope of the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms into the environment. Effectively, this means that the Member States can restrict or ban the cultivation of such plants on their territory even though it is authorized at the EU level. More generally, differentiation seems to have become a more accepted strategy, which, however, also bears certain risks. Certainly, the greatest challenge not only for EU public policy but for the EU as a whole is the questioning of the EU’s legitimacy by the governments (or parts of them) of the Member States.

Turning to the opportunities, EU public policy has shown itself to be willing and capable of addressing grand societal challenges. A case in point is the European Green Deal, which represents an ambitious reform agenda to ensure economic growth but to also achieve a transformation to a low-carbon society. The high political priority given to the implementation of the European Green Deal is reflected in the fact that the vice president of the European Commission himself, Frans Timmermans, is responsible for its delivery. Another opportunity is the cumulative experience with crises, which have facilitated the creation of new institutions but also a chance for more integration and the adoption of policies demonstrating that the Member States are connected to each other in solidarity. All these empirical developments suggest that taking a fresh look at EU public policy is worthwhile.

In addition to the empirical reasons given, there are conceptual reasons for editing this collection. Many concepts that have been used to study EU public policy have developed further, or new concepts have been added to the analytical toolbox. For example, the shift away from studying single policy instruments to policy instrument bundles in public policy has also become an emerging research perspective in EU public policy. The same applies to new theoretical perspectives, such as the Narrative Policy Framework, which are more frequently being used in EU public policy.

In this encyclopedia, we approach EU public policy from three perspectives. The first perspective refers to policy decisions taken at the EU level. This is complemented, second, by contributions that look at the features of institutions that are essential for implementing EU public policy in the Member States. The third perspective outlines more generic concepts that can be found in EU public policy but also in public policy more generally.

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