
Foreword

No one, following the events of early 2016, can be in any doubt of the need for a book that explains important aspects of European Union policy. The United Kingdom engaged in a debate on its relationship with Europe that revealed a profound degree of ignorance of all things European. One might have thought that those senior politicians who had been attending European meetings for years might have acquired at least some basic understanding of the institutions with which they were engaging. Sadly not. Indeed, the lack of understanding of Brussels was so profound that one wondered if there might still be some British politicians wandering through the streets of Brussels, having given up in their search for the Berlaymont years previously and now simply desperate to find the Gare de Midi and a train to take them home.

Nor were the British people served well by the media. Their newspapers continued to pour out hatred aimed at anyone foreign, oblivious to the fact that most were owned by fantastically rich individuals whose commitment to the UK did not extend to living there or paying taxes in it. It was difficult to ascertain whether their stories reflected ignorance or dishonesty, although their reluctance to correct the most blatant lies suggests the latter. The BBC was little better, showing that it was possible for journalists to ascend to the highest levels of political reporting without any clear comprehension of how the EU worked. When one said that “facts [about the EU] are elusive” it was clear that the creation of Wikipedia had passed him by. Their commitment to “impartiality” meant that every reasoned argument by people who actually did understand the EU was countered by someone else who simply denied it.

Inevitably, there were a few people in the public eye who did understand the EU, although they tended to be dismissed as an elite out of touch with the people, encouraged by a cabinet minister who, with echoes of Pol Pot, argued that the British people had had enough of experts. A few others sought to conceal their understanding in pursuit of personal ambition. Boris Johnson, in an earlier existence a Brussels-based journalist famous for making up stories, saw the EU as an opportunity. He would campaign for a British departure from the EU, lose the referendum and then present himself as a knight in shining armour who had campaigned valiantly against overwhelming odds, an image that would, in due course, take him to Downing Street. Alas, like many of his cunning schemes, that was not

to be and, confronted with the realisation of the chaos he had created, he tried to flee the scene. With poetic justice, the new Prime Minister thwarted his attempt, bringing him into government as Foreign Secretary, a role in which he would have to meet the many international leaders he had previously insulted.

It would, however, be a mistake to view the British decision as entirely negative. In its aftermath polls across the rest of Europe have shown support for the EU soar, now that people have been made aware of the consequences of voting to leave. The weekend after the result tens of thousands of people took to the streets of London to voice their support for the EU. In this respect, the voters of the UK can be thanked for the enormous sacrifice they have made in the cause of European unity.

So, having set the scene, let me return to this important book. The editors have done us a service in several different ways. First, they have provided a lucid explanation of how the EU works, both in general, and specifically in the area of health. Given the profound ignorance revealed above, this can only be a good thing. One can only hope that the orders from Whitehall are already pouring in. Second, it reminds us of just how entwined our lives, as European citizens, are with the structures and processes of the EU. Again, the debate in the UK shows the depth of misunderstanding. In the aftermath of the referendum there were many calls for those citizens of other EU member states already living in the UK to be granted the right to remain. Almost at once, those politicians that had been most vocal in their calls to leave, using arguments based on not very well concealed attacks on immigrants, sought to offer this reassurance. Yet a right to remain is no more than that. The people who are affected enjoy many other rights by virtue of being EU citizens. The right to work, the right to travel freely within the EU, obtaining health care when needed, the right to move their money and pensions freely between states, the right to have their qualifications recognised on an equal basis, and much else. These rights are constantly evolving, set out in successive acts of European legislation, proposed by the Commission and decided by the Council and Parliament. When problems arise they are interpreted by the European Court of Justice. Yet those who support leaving the EU reject all of these institutions.

These are the people who feel that it will be possible to exit the EU almost at once. The VoteLeave campaign published a list of actions that it would take that would rapidly remove the UK from the EU. For them, this book will be extremely unwelcome. It serves as a reminder of the complexity of EU law, reaching into many areas of everyday life. It will take at least a decade to disentangle the mess that these people have created. And as we have already seen, they are leaving it to others to do so. So, we

can see that this book has another audience. Ordinary people, civil society organisations, professional bodies and others must hold politicians to account, ensuring that the damage they do is placed firmly in the public domain.

I am conscious that my reflections so far have been extremely UK-centric. Yet this book should also attract great interest throughout Europe and beyond. Its importance within Europe is obvious, not just for academics but also for those working on policy in areas such as health care, research and pharmaceuticals. However, across the world countries are signing new trade agreements, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or deepening existing ones, such as Mercosur. The trade links that bind EU member states are unusual in having a strong social element, with protections for health and wellbeing. Moreover, again unusually, these aspects are upheld by a court, based on the treaties and EU law, in public. This is very different from the investor state dispute settlement processes that are used in other trade agreements. This has major consequences. When Mr Kohll and Mr Decker sought the right to obtain health care in another member state, the European Court of Justice was clear that its ruling should protect the territorial integrity of health systems. In contrast, secretive trade tribunals are unlikely to show such concerns.

This book will undoubtedly be read by those who understand the importance of the EU's contribution to health policy. Crucially, it will help them to spread the message more widely. But the scale of the challenge must not be underestimated.

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