Foreword

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The tortuous path followed by the Treaty of Lisbon is open to a multiplicity of interpretations. Its negotiation and ratification have no parallel. It is true that the Maastricht Treaty was viewed at the time as exhibiting a surprising amount of contentiousness on the part of the public, and that the later Treaty of Nice also led to a focus on Irish referenda. However, the Constitutional Treaty and the subsequent Treaty of Lisbon occupy a special place in the pantheon of contested steps towards European integration.

The conflictual nature of both the negotiation and ratification processes can be viewed in two ways. One focuses on the specific characteristics of the Constitutional and Lisbon Treaties. From that vantage point, the issues of institutional representation of concern to governmental elites are especially salient. The struggles for more power by the ‘big’ countries along with the attempts by the ‘medium’ countries (especially Poland) to negotiate rules which would help them wield power in a future EU are especially salient. In a similar vein, the issues surrounding European integration have become politicized. That is, public attitudes towards the goal of further integration (*finalité politique*), the ‘left–right’ cleavage which at the national level has structured politics for many decades, and issues of identity have all emerged as factors which have encouraged the politicization of European integration. In the scholarly literature, a lively debate has erupted as to whether these three dimensions are in fact as important as their proponents claim (Hooge and Marks 2009; Kriesi *et al.* 2008; Franklin and van der Eijk, 2007).

A second longer-term view would argue that the contentiousness associated with both treaties forms part of a longer historical process which should not come as a surprise to political scientists. New types of political organization involve political conflict – both internal and external. Whether we think of the competition for international dominance which took place between city states, city leagues and the sovereign state (Spruyt, 1994), the creation and development of the American republic with its devastating civil war, or the gradual but fraught democratization of nation states, political conflicts have been a constant feature. The surprise which

the politicization of European integration has caused political science indicates the lack of a historical perspective on the creation of new forms of polities. The emergence of a regional polity is a radical break with the past – such breaks are not going to proceed without a great deal of resistance and conflict.

The EU is pioneering regional governance in a democratic age in which international politics is state rather than regionally centred. In fact, the rise of powerful new states in the international system – China and India in particular – strengthen the state-centredness of the international system as a whole. Outside the world of states, it is civil society rather than regional organizations which demand to participate in issues involving global governance. Thus the EU must address the “triple trinity” of balancing institutional strength, democratic governance, and international flexibility in a world in which regional governance is restricted to the European Union (Sbragia, 2010).

The Treaty of Lisbon can be viewed as taking an important first step along that path. The EU would be strengthened as would regional democratic governance. By giving the European Parliament significant new decision-making powers, including in trade policy, the treaty strengthens a regional legislature. The treaty also strengthens the ability of the EU to act internationally. Thus, it begins to grant the EU the international flexibility required in a geo-economic and geopolitical age in which a rising Asia cannot be ignored. Yet domestic politics within the Member States, the focus of this volume, intervened to cause major difficulties.

Trying to institutionalize regional governance based on national democratic states is not for the faint of heart. It is actually quite radical. Outside the EU, the Treaty of Lisbon would be an inconceivable project. Regional governance on that scale is simply unknown. Only Brussels-oriented elites could view such an agreement matter-of-factly as simply the ‘next step’. The process of European integration from here on will undoubtedly – and inevitably – be a conflictual process unlike the comparatively placid earlier years of integration. As the EU becomes a more institutionalized polity with foreign policy aspirations, the conflicts inherent in the development of regional governance in a world of national governance will become ever more visible.

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