

EDITOR'S NOTE

In this issue we bring you yet another set of exciting and diverse essays on Europe, including a broad selection of early field research reports from the Council's promising young pre-dissertation research fellows.

The issue begins with a mini-forum on the evolution of higher education in the UK. In the first essay, Sukhdev Johal, Michael Moran and Karel Williams succinctly describe the systemic change of the UK higher education system over the last few decades. Prior to 1986, the UK had a public university system with nearly 100% state funding yet with a high degree of administrative autonomy. While the cost to students was minimal, it was an elite higher education system with only 5-6% of a given age cohort attending university. A series of reforms beginning in 1986 have radically changed this system, ultimately leading to a greatly expanded higher education sector but one divided between a handful of elite universities that garner disproportionate resources and a larger group of universities that educate the bulk of students with declining resources. In the second essay of the mini-forum, Luke Martell focuses on the consequences of the draconian cuts in higher education spending pushed through under the current government. Martell argues that PM Cameron is taking up where Thatcher left off in terms of eroding the boundary between public and private spheres, ultimately using the recent economic and fiscal crisis as a pretext for radically restructuring the state. He sees the high fees imposed on students will lead them to focus on economically more attractive courses of study while eschewing other socially valuable ones. They will also exacerbate already rising social and economic inequalities.

In the next essay, Mark Ingram explores the evolution and impact of state cultural policy in France during the 5th Republic. Based on his own ethnographic research on theatre artists in southern France, he argues that state cultural policy has helped generate a national political discourse emphasizing inclusive models of citizenship and facilitated the adaptation of republican values to changing social and political conditions.

Katharina Holzinger and Thomas Sommerer, summarizing results from a larger study, find no clear 'race to the bottom' in environmental standards resulting from increased competition among countries to lure global investment capital. In fact, they find global economic competition is generally associated with stricter, not weaker, environmental standards in the 24 countries covered in their study. This outcome is explained primarily by EU harmonization at higher standards and the entry of countries into global environmental regulatory regimes.

In the next essay, Simona Piattoni explores the meaning of increased multi-level governance in the European Union, with actors ranging from the local to the European level often involved in the same – often lengthy – policymaking process. She illustrates this with a brief review of European regional development policy. She argues that multi-level governance is more than a descriptive concept of how

EU governance evolved, but is rather seen as a theoretical explanation for this process.

And in our final essay, Jozsef Böröcz also focuses on the EU in his essay employing a 'longue durée' perspective: He sees the EU as the latest mechanism – following the failure of colonialism and Nazi efforts to unite Europe by force – with which Europe confronts the structural disadvantages of being relatively small states in a global system of competitive and often hostile states. Because the EU's economic and therefore geo-political weight has only grown through expansion of membership, slow economic growth and diminishing expansion opportunities mean that Europe's long-term downward trend in global significance appears likely to continue in coming decades.

In conclusion, I wish to note that this is my final issue as editor of Perspectives on Europe. I would like to thank Siovahn Walker and her predecessor, Stephanie Grupp-Clasby, for their fantastic work toward realizing this publication over the last two years. With Siovahn's steady hand and guidance from new editorial board members – Mary Lewis, Julia Lynch, Jeffrey Cole, and Virag Molnar – I have no doubt that the next editor will exploit even better this publication's potential to reach new and old audiences with ever more exciting material.

Richard Deeg
Editor