

## **Susan Senior Nello: The European Union: Economics, Policies and History**

(The McGraw Hill Companies, Berkshire, 2005)

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The level of scientific interest in matters of the European Union is now such that the study of the EU may well be identified as a distinct field of study in its own right. In other words, the EU, in its totality, represents a meaningful unit. As far as practicality is concerned, “Europe” (officially defined as a confederation of independent states, each “carrying with itself”, as it were, its own limits), and the European Union are, in principle, open to indefinite expansion without pre-established limits. This fact explains the author's sense of caution in relation to a constantly evolving EU. The member-states are subjecting themselves voluntarily to some supra-national authorities, while maintaining completely heterogeneous attitudes with respect to certain traditional “aspects” of sovereignty (monetary policy, military integration and alliances, border control, etc.). The apparent displacement of focus from politics to the economy by structural coupling in the EU, however, has given a constitutionally privileged place to the market and its laws. From the perspective of constitutional theory, it is assured that the European treaties from Rome to Nice represent a constitution for the Union, and in accordance with this we could treat the law-based integration in EU as the economic constitution. As in other areas of EU studies, scholarship on the political power of the EU is beginning to move fruitfully beyond the constricting strait-jacket of the intergovernmentalist/supranationalist debate.

Susan Senior Nello belongs to the school of research that thinks we should be optimistic about the EU's future. Far from demonstrating the failure and fragility of European integration, the collapse of the constitutional project in France and the Netherlands exhibits the EU's stability and success. Contemporary Europe rests upon a pragmatically effective, normatively attractive and politically stable “European constitutional settlement,” embodied in the revised Treaties of Rome. This settlement is both popular and broadly consistent with the majority of European citizens' expectations for the EU.

In this book we are provided with admirable, and possibly complementary, examples of how scholarly research might proceed to clarify the political contexts in which principles of EU (the European “project”) are formulated and

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put into practice. It is organised as a text-book and serves to contextualize the focus of the EU's frame of analysis within a broader account of the socio-economic production of and the different ways in which the institutions of EU are organised in response to this. It then outlines some mechanisms – pertaining to its internal and external linkage structures – that have enabled the EU to perform successfully in a geopolitical context where most of the main actors are states. A number of proposals that have come up in policy discussions over the last couple of years are reviewed. In fact, Susan Senior Nello has written an inspiring book on the economics, politics and history of the European Union. She provides an account that focuses on the different aspects of the story. It is an extremely well-informed study, which is rich in detail and lengthy (462 pages and 20 chapters with scrupulously-written index). The book's narrative is without doubt extremely well-informed and authoritative account of the EU, its institutional infrastructure that lies behind it, that has been written to date. A great part of the book is devoted to describing the formal appearance and socio-economic implications of this project of Europeanisation of rational action as it is brought to bear upon a range of juridical and contractual settings. Its attractive narrative writing makes it an easy read. Its mixture of theory and empirical material gives the book a potential to be influential far beyond a narrow readership of those solely interested in the EU process. The book addresses mainly students of economics, European studies, business and international relations, but to some extent will appeal to all in post-communist countries.

This book does not provide a theory and look for cases to sustain it. No theory seems all encompassing enough to capture the many aspects of the processes with which the book is concerned. This approach suggests that we are to be open-minded about questions and theories. Senior Nello's attempt to explain the complex historical processes of EU, from agenda-setting outcomes via the negotiating process, leads us to use a variety of conceptual reference points. These alert us to different questions, helping us to avoid a one-dimensional account and to see the inter-connectedness of the EU. Thus, this book does not represent an all-inclusive theory of treaty negotiations etc.; it is rather theory-informed than theory-driven.

This book addresses different topics and makes assumptions regarding the practical application and specific explanatory power of its frame. In fact, all chapters display sensitivity and attention to most of these problems and offer solutions that merit further discussion. The various contributions of this book share in the understanding that European states are in the process of redefining notions of welfare provision, according to more austere benchmarks of economic efficiency. All of these concerns have, fortunately, begun to cross-fertilize and to engender better concepts, sharper analyses, bolder visions, and greater theoretical and methodological stringency. The book (written mainly from the perspective of economic theory) under review here illustrate this claim, trying as they do to make empirical sense of cross-national variations in policy-making, political

attitudes and socio-economic structures by paying close attention to differences of history, cultural assumptions and institutional frameworks – but also to the transnational flow of ideas, values and the mutual inspiration between them. On this level of in-depth, probing analysis of a special policy arena in a specified time frame, it is a convincingly conducted and illuminating expose´ that combines close attention to historical detail with a specific sense of framing that helps us to better understand national variations between countries which in other ways represent similar experiences. It is uncertain whether transnational challenges will undermine current institutional diversities and lead to downward convergence, or on the contrary, different types of market economies will be capable of maintaining their specific comparative advantage in increasingly competitive global market.

This is a logical consequence of a number of new theoretical, methodological and empirical concerns in (and across) different social-science disciplines over the past years. Differences of empirical research topic notwithstanding, these works--which represent a variety of public attitudes to European integration--all highlight the significance of national frames for differences which are otherwise hard to fathom. This will require more dialectical and theoretical analysis which theorizes the novelties and potentialities of European culture for promoting progressive social change, as well as critique how it reproduces existing inequalities and oppression. It is the merit of Senior Nello's book to put reality directly into the agenda of current economic theory, and it is our challenge to take it further in theoretical conceptualisation and practical application. The study identifies a number of real or potential systemic weaknesses which pose new challenges to policy-makers.

The discussions in this book could usefully be linked to wider topical debates about EU. This book, nonetheless, provides a useful perspective and a clear impetus for further exploration of significant processes. Senior Nello is providing the reader with a broad framework, which she uses to identify the logic of various key events and tendencies. The last chapter of the book deals with the EU enlargement that is tremendously useful for members of post-communist states. It includes, among other components, a brief chronology of the enlargement process (treating of the cooperation agreements) and analysis of topics such as EU policy towards South-Eastern Europe. A distinctive mechanism through which the EU achieves adherence to the *Acquis* is its project of eastern enlargement, whereby the legal authority of the EU is inserted into states located on the EU's immediate eastern and southeastern perimeter. A crucial precondition for application for full membership, and one key criterion according to which the applicant states have repeatedly been evaluated, is the transposition and implementation of the EU's *Acquis*. The final chapter reviews several existing developmental instruments for eastern countries: official development assistance, debt relief, trade measures, and promotion of foreign direct investment, of which draw many conclusions.

This chapter has been written so that it can stand independently; the intention is to afford a text that can be consulted by researchers or policy-makers. As we know, most commentators treat enlargement as a radical rupture in the history of the EU. At the same time, many criticize the EU for the lengthy enlargement process and burdensome conditions imposed on the candidates. This didactic framework underlies not only the traditional transitologist account, but also the new visions of regional cooperation. We should take into account that the emerging critiques of transitology stress the pivotal importance of existing institutions and social relationships in framing and enabling societal transformations in East-Central Europe. These accounts rightly emphasize that post-socialist transformations involve not a wholesale adoption of Western norms by the accession countries, but also a highly selective and strategic appropriation of some parts of Western ideas. In its actuality, the EU enlargement is to be described as a learning process, and it seems to me that this suggestion could be pointed out as an important lesson of this book.