

Supranationalism:

The existence of a supranational body that is higher than the nation-state and capable of imposing its will on it.

Euroscepticism:

Opposition to the process of European integration, based on a defence of national sovereignty and national identity; Eurosceptics are not necessarily anti-European.

Subsidiarity: The principle that, within a federal-type system, decisions should be made at the lowest possible level.

the fact that EU law is binding on all member states and that the power of certain EU bodies has expanded at the expense of national governments. The EU, therefore, hovers somewhere between intergovernmentalism and **supranationalism** (see *How the EU works*, p. 343). The EU may not yet have created a federal Europe, but because of the superiority of European law over the national law of member states, it is perhaps accurate to talk of a 'federalizing' Europe.

WEBLINK: www.europa.eu.int/index_en.htm

Use the EU official website to find links to EU bodies such as the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the European Commission.



As an economic, monetary and, to a significant extent, political union brought about through voluntary cooperation amongst states, the EU is a unique political body. The transition from Community to Union, achieved via the TEU, not only extended intergovernmental cooperation into areas such as foreign and security policy, home affairs and justice, and immigration and policing, but also established the notion of EU citizenship (members of the EU states can live, work and be politically active in any other member state). In the UK in particular, such developments have been highly controversial. Often dubbed Europe's 'awkward partner', the UK has struggled to come to terms with its European identity. '**Euroscepticism**' has remained strong, especially in the Conservative Party, fuelled by the fear of a European 'superstate' that would threaten both national sovereignty and national identity.

Nevertheless, although the EU has done much to realize the Treaty of Rome's goal of establishing 'an ever closer union', it stops far short of realizing the early federalists' dream of establishing a 'United States of Europe'. This has been ensured partly by respect for the principle of **subsidiarity**, which, in the TEU, expresses the idea that EU bodies should only act when matters cannot sufficiently be achieved by member states. Decision-making within the New Europe is increasingly made on the basis of multilevel governance, involving subnational, national, intergovernmental and supranational levels, with the balance between them shifting in relation to different issues and policy areas. This image of complex policy-making is more helpful than the sometimes sterile notion of a battle between national sovereignty and EU domination.

THE IMPACT OF THE EU ON THE UK

It is often said that the UK is in Europe but not of Europe. Although the UK's relationship with the EU may be characterized by continuing

Focus on ... HOW THE EUROPEAN UNION WORKS

- **European Commission.** This is the executive-bureaucratic arm of the EU. It is headed by 28 commissioners (one from each of the member states) and a president (since 2014, Jean-Claude Juncker). It proposes legislation, is a watchdog that ensures that EU treaties are respected, and is broadly responsible for policy implementation.
- **The Council.** Formerly called the Council of Ministers, this is the decision-making branch of the EU and comprises ministers from the 28 states who are accountable to their own assemblies and governments. The presidency of the Council rotates amongst member states every six months. Important decisions are made by unanimous agreement, and others are reached through qualified majority voting or a simple majority.
- **The European Council.** Informally called the European Summit, this is a senior forum in which heads of government, accompanied by foreign ministers and two commissioners, discuss the overall direction of the Union's work. A President of the European Council was appointed in 2009 (Herman Van Rompuy).
- **European Parliament.** The EP is composed of 751 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) (73 from the UK), who are directly elected every five years. The European Parliament is more a scrutinizing assembly than a full legislature. Its major powers (to reject the EU's budget and dismiss the European Commission) are too far-reaching to be exercised on a regular basis.
- **European Court of Justice.** The ECJ interprets, and adjudicates on, European Union law. There are 28 judges, one from each member state, and eight advocates general, who advise the Court. As EU law has primacy over the national law of member states, the court can 'disapply' domestic laws. A Court of First Instance handles certain cases brought by individuals and companies.


'awkwardness', it has not been able to escape a process of 'Europeanization'. How, and to what extent, has EU membership affected UK politics? The implications of EU membership for the constitution and parliamentary sovereignty have been examined in Chapter 6. Other important areas affected by EU membership include:

- ▶ Public policy
- ▶ Political parties
- ▶ Pressure groups
- ▶ Public opinion.

PUBLIC POLICY

This is an area of considerable debate. Every year the EU issues more than 12,000 regulations, directives, decisions and recommendations which have an impact on the UK and other member states. This has led some to highlight a growing 'democratic deficit' as decision-making authority is transferred from

Focus on ... THE EU'S 'DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT'



The idea of a 'democratic deficit' has been used to explain how EU membership has undermined democracy in the UK. The idea of a 'democratic deficit' is based on the following logic:

- More and more policies are being made at EU level rather than by elected UK governments
- EU bodies are not properly democratic: the only directly elected EU body, the European Parliament, is weak and has little influence over policy
- European integration therefore runs hand-in-hand with the erosion of democracy and public accountability.

On the other hand, pro-Europeans often argue that fears about the 'democratic deficit' are exaggerated. They point out that:

- Major EU decisions are made either in the Council of Ministers or the European Council by national leaders who are directly accountable to their electorates
- Member states are responsible for ratifying key EU treaties (usually done by a parliamentary vote or a referendum)
- The European Parliament is gradually becoming more powerful, and this trend is likely to continue. The Lisbon Treaty gave the European Parliament important new powers.

Parliament to non-elected EU bodies. However, the EU's policy influence is very different in different areas. For example, health, education, social security and social services have been little affected by membership of the EU. The UK's opt-out on the single currency also helps to preserve the UK's economic sovereignty, although it has no choice about conforming to rules about the free movement of goods, services and capital throughout the EU. Similarly, the UK's decision not to participate in the Schengen Agreement (which provides for the free movement of people within the EU) has allowed the UK to retain border and immigration controls. On the other hand, agriculture and fisheries policies are now dominated by the EU through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Common Fisheries Policy. While British farmers have benefited substantially from the CAP, the country as a whole pays more than it gets back because of the UK's relatively small agricultural sector.

Regional aid has been an important area of EU policy-making. This is provided through grants from the European Regional Development Fund, which helps small businesses and supports economic regeneration, particularly in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the north of England. The EU is also closely involved in setting and monitoring standards in environmental policy and consumer affairs. This ranges from regulating the quality of bathing beaches and the effectiveness of pollution controls to the ways in which products such as ice cream, sausages and beer can be sold. The impact of the EU on social policy in the UK was restricted by the opt-out, negotiated in 1991, from the Social Chapter of the TEU. The incoming Labour government in 1997, however, relinquished the

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opt-out. The UK therefore became subject to a wide range of regulations about matters such as working hours and the rights of part-time workers. Progress towards establishing common foreign and defence policies within the EU, while still limited, has developed considerably in recent years with the intergovernmental Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). However, while the EU has taken an increasingly larger role in representing member states on bodies such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund, national governments, not least the UK, have been less willing to limit their independence in relation to military matters.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Membership of the EU has affected UK parties in two main ways. In the first place, Europe has been a cross-cutting issue that has tended to divide both the Labour and Conservative parties. Divisions within the Labour Party, for instance, led Wilson to renegotiate EC membership in 1974 and to call the 1975 referendum on continued membership. During 1981–87, Labour supported withdrawal from the EU. Euroscepticism grew within the Conservative Party from the late 1980s onwards, leading to divisions that threatened the survival of the Major government and contributed to its landslide defeat in 1997. Second, the European issue has given rise to new political parties. The single-issue Referendum Party contested the 1997 general election, while the UK Independence Party (UKIP) won 12 seats in the European Parliament elections of 2004 and 13 seats in 2009, equalling Labour's tally. In 2014, UKIP gained 27 seats and became the largest UK party in the European Parliament.

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PRESSURE GROUPS

The process of European integration has had a major impact on patterns of pressure group activity in the UK. This has occurred as pressure groups have responded to the transfer of policy-making responsibilities from national governments to EU bodies. Most of this lobbying focuses on the European Commission, the main source of EU regulations and directives. Many major pressure groups have therefore set up offices in Brussels as well as in London. The growing influence of the European Parliament has also led to more intensive lobbying at Strasbourg. One of the most prominent consequences of this process has been the growing number of European-wide pressure groups, which help national groups to pool their resources and to achieve

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a higher public profile. Over 700 such groups have come into existence, mainly representing business interests. Examples of such European-wide groups include the Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations (COPA), which provides a European voice for the National Farmers' Union and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), through which the Trades Union Congress (TUC) operates.

PUBLIC OPINION

How has EU membership affected public attitudes within the UK? The evidence here is that relatively little has changed. The UK's failure to adopt a more clearly European identity, and to participate more fully in EU initiatives, is underpinned by continuing public scepticism about the benefits of EU membership. Before the 1975 referendum, roughly two-thirds of people polled claimed to oppose continued EC membership. Although this was turned into an almost two-thirds victory for the 'yes campaign', Euroscepticism soon reasserted itself. Opinion surveys across the EU have consistently demonstrated that knowledge of, interest in and support for the 'European project' is lower in the UK than in many other member states. For example, in a 2014 Eurobarometer opinion poll, conducted by the European Commission, only 44 per cent of UK citizens were optimistic about the future of the EU, the lowest level in any member state except Greece.

Some have explained these trends in terms of the continued impact of the historical and cultural factors that encouraged the UK to refuse the invitation to join the EEC in 1957. Others, however, point to the increasingly strident anti-Europeanism of the UK press since the early 1980s, especially those owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. An additional factor is that, since the Heath government 1970–74, no UK government (Labour or Conservative) has made the case for a positive engagement with 'Europe' by clearly emphasizing the benefits of EC/EU membership. Why should the British people show enthusiasm for the 'European project' when its governments have been consistently so lukewarm about it? This trend accelerated during the 2010–15 Parliament, by the end of which the Conservative Party was committed to holding an 'in/out' referendum on EU membership if it won the 2015 election.