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Book review of 'The European Parliament' by Richard Corbett, Francis Jacobs, and Michael Shackleton, London: John Harper, 2011

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Richard Corbett, Francis Jacobs, and Michael Shackleton. *The European Parliament. 8th Edition.* London: John Harper, 2011.

Now in its eighth edition, this seminal work on the organisation, working methods, and powers of the European Parliament (EP) is fully revised to take into account the changes resulting from the 2009 European elections and the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty. Similar to earlier editions, the book is divided into three parts.



Part 1 provides 'The Framework', describing the main features of the EP in comparison to other legislatures and how Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are being elected. It also discusses issues arising from the EP's commitment to multilingualism and the distribution of its work between Strasbourg, Luxembourg, and Brussels. Part 2 deals with 'The Actors and Working Structures', starting with the background, role, and motivations of individual MEPs. Subsequent chapters deal with the composition, organisation, and operation of political groups, the EP leadership, committees, inter-parliamentary delegations, the plenary, intergroups, and the secretariat, respectively. Finally, Part 3 covers 'The Powers of the Parliament'. This part includes chapters on the role and prerogatives of the EP in the legislative process, in the adoption of the budget, in the appointment and dismissal of the Commission and the leadership of other EU organisations and agencies, and in scrutinizing delegated and implementing acts of the Commission. Other chapters outline Parliaments connections and communication channels to other European Union (EU) institutions and its openness towards interest groups, media, and ordinary citizens, as well as the role of national parliaments in EU law-making and their relations to the EP before and after the Lisbon treaty. Finally, the book concludes with a discussion of how the EP affected constitutional change over the years through its influence on successive treaty reforms.

As the outline of the book's content indicates, it probably provides the most comprehensive and currently up-to-date description of the European Parliament. Given the breadth of material covered, ranging from rather minute administrative details to politically salient powers, readers with different backgrounds will inevitably find some topics more interesting or relevant than others. From a political science perspective, I found the discussion of issues involving the selection of a uniform electoral system, the evolution of the political group system, the composition and roles of intergroups, the advantages and disadvantages of informal trilogues under the ordinary legislative procedure, the operation of the new budgetary procedure, and the varying appointment powers regarding different EU agencies most stimulating, often suggesting interesting questions for further research.

A big strength of this book is that it presents a wealth of factual information that is useful for teaching and research. Amongst other things, it provides tables on the electoral systems in use in different member states, the national voter turnout in EP elections, the gender balance in Parliament, the current national party membership in political groups, previous political experience of MEPs and their subsequent uptake of positions in the Commission or national governments, the details of current and often also past occupants of leadership positions in party groups, committees, inter-parliamentary delega-

tions, and the EP as a whole, and the applicability of legislative procedures in different policy areas - including a reference to the relevant treaty article and an indication of which areas have been newly included in the scope of the ordinary legislative procedure by the Lisbon treaty. The book also includes lists of cases in which the EP used its right to formally request a Commission proposal and in which it tabled a motion of censure of the Commission. Finally, the appendix provides tables of all European elections results for member states since the first direct election in 1979. The value of the book as a source of statistics and qualitative information would have been even greater if it had provided direct references to primary sources. The appendix includes a general pointer to the EP's website and a bibliography of selected academic work on different aspects of the Parliament. However, to check the accuracy and possibly extend the information provided in the book, direct pointers to the relevant source material would have been useful.

In terms of substance, the book provides largely descriptive information and generally balanced discussions of the pros and cons of different features of the EP. Most of its claims are not controversial. The exception in that respect is Chapter 18 on the EP's influence on constitutional change in the European Union. After a description of the involvement and the positions taken by the EP with respect to treaty changes, the chapter concludes that the 'successive treaty revisions since Parliament became directly elected were all strongly influenced by the European Parliament'. This conclusion stands in stark contrast to most other academic work on the topic, which stresses the role of member states and possibly that of the Commission. Although the chapter succeeds in demonstrating that most constitutional changes successively agreed by member states in intergovernmental treaties were often also sought by the European Parliament, it provides little evidence for the claim that Parliament was able to convince 'at least some national governments to press its case'. Alternative theories of constitutional change and the possibility that the EP was just lucky rather than powerful - by holding the same position as the truly powerful actors - are not ruled out by the analysis.

However, these minor weaknesses cannot do away from the overall contribution of the book. As the current European Council President Herman van Rompuy puts it in his foreword, this is 'the authoritative guide to the European Parliament'. It is probably not a book to be read from cover to cover, but it is definitely a must-have reference work for anybody interested in the workings of the European Parliament and the political system of the EU in general.

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