

Course: GV251

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Week 1: The Political System of the European Union
Week 2: The Council

PART I) Institutional architecture of the European Union

a) Is the EU more like a federal state or more like an international organisation?

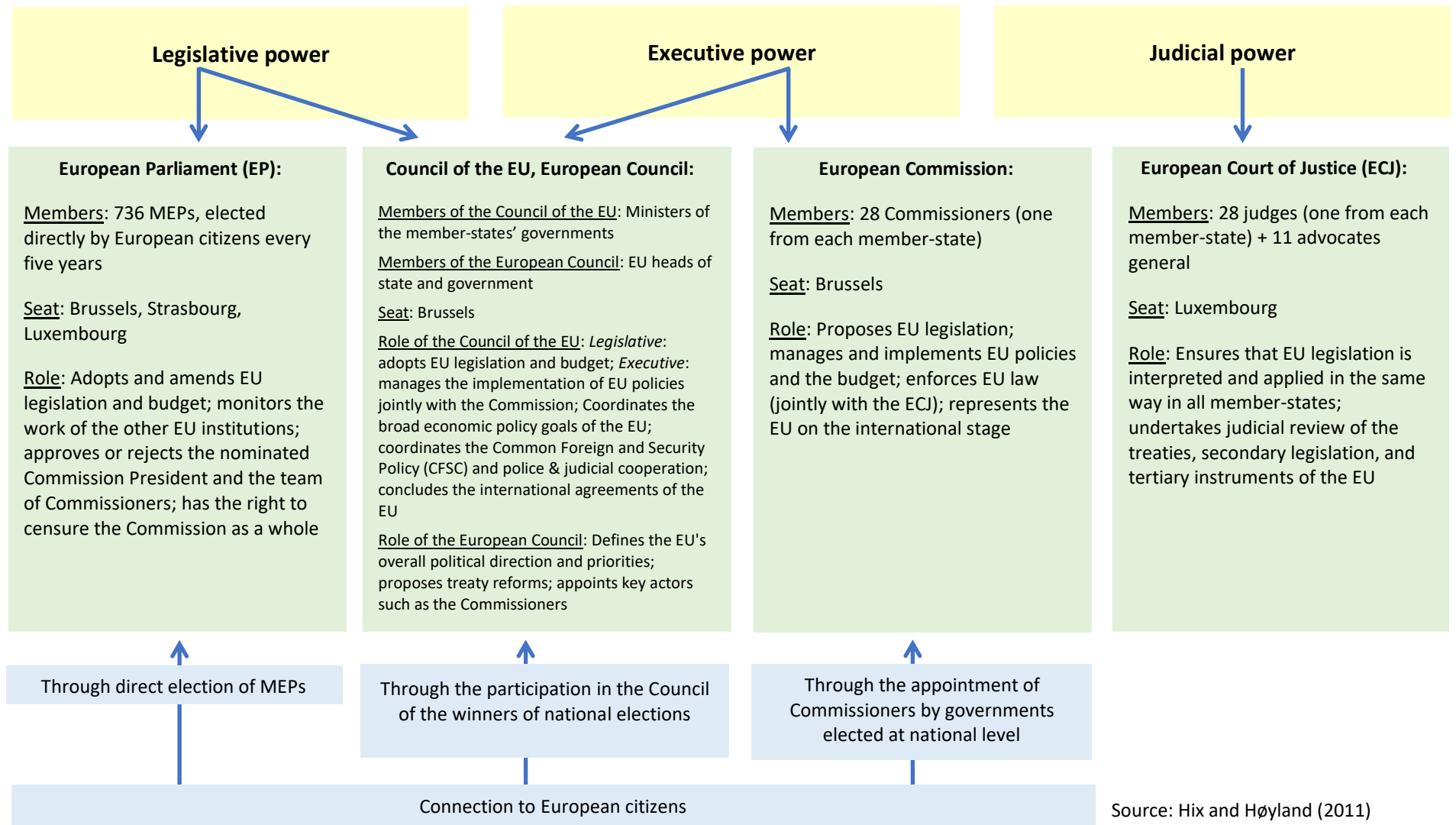
b) If the EU is something more than a simple international organisation, but something less than a full federal state, what does this imply for our ability to study the EU in a comparative way?

Simon Hix's approach: The EU can be studied as a **political system**, since it has four characteristics that Almond (1956) and Easton (1957) identified as characteristics of political systems:

1. It has a stable and clearly defined set of institutions for collective decision-making, and a set of rules governing relations between and within those institutions;
2. EU citizens at least in part seek to realize their political desires through the EU political system, either directly or through intermediary organisations such as political parties and interest groups;
3. Collective decisions at EU-level have a significant impact on the distribution of economic resources and the allocation of values in the EU;
4. There is a continuous interaction between these political outputs, new demands on the system, new decisions, and so on.

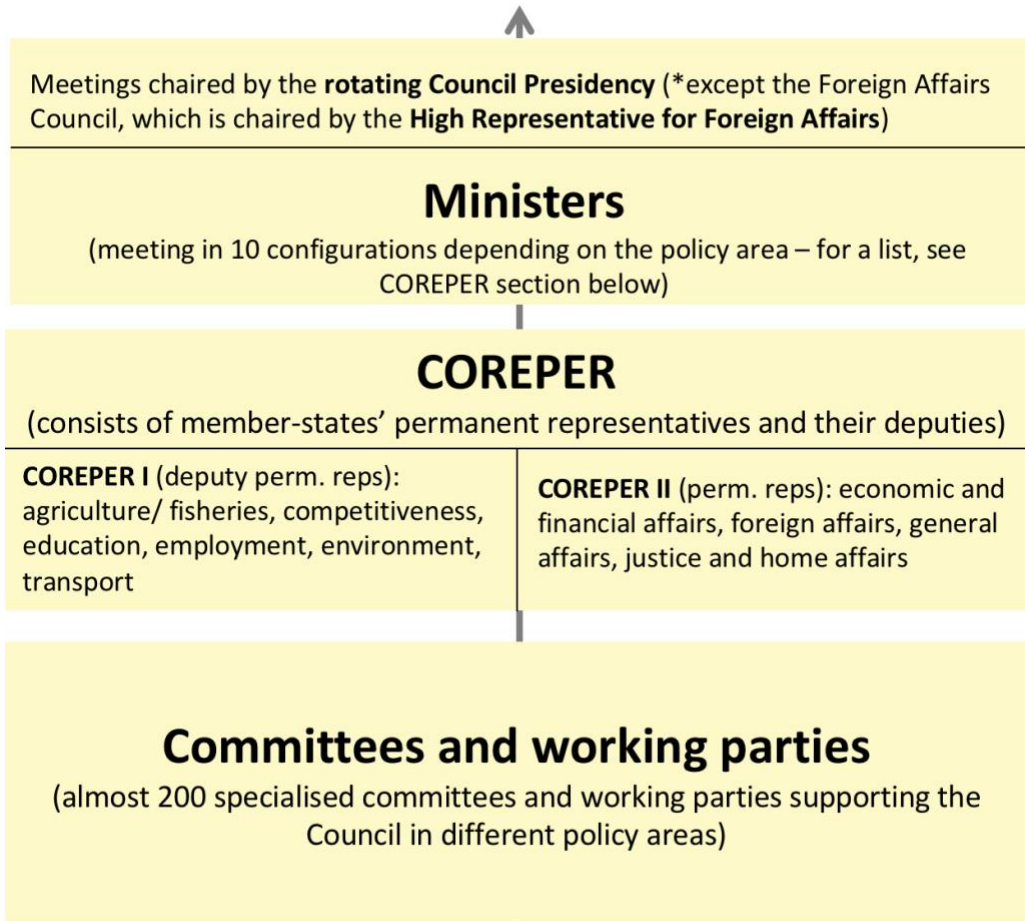
Implication: Thinking about the EU as a political system enables us **to study the EU in a comparative way** and to use the tools of mainstream political science to answer all sorts of interesting questions, such as: *Is the European Commission a runaway bureaucracy? What factors can explain the policy decisions that the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers take? Are EU politics characterised by a democratic deficit?*

c) The institutional structure of the EU political system: A simplified version



d) Hierarchical structure of the Council of the EU and the European Council

Council of the European Union



European Council



PART II) Theories of European integration

a) *Working in groups, please discuss:* How central is the role of the Council in shaping the process of European integration, from the perspective the theoretical approaches mentioned below?

i. Liberal intergovernmentalism: _____

ii. Supranational politics approaches: _____

iii. Constructivism: _____

b) *Working in groups, please discuss:* In your opinion, which theoretical approach to the process of European integration answers the above question about the centrality of the Council's role in the integration process most convincingly? Can you give a few empirical examples that support your view?

c) ***During your own time, please fill in the blanks with the names of major theories of European integration, important theoretical concepts, and the names of major texts in integration theory, making use of the word bank at p. 8.***

i) _____:

Main assumptions and propositions:

- (1) European integration tends to be self-perpetuating, as the initial decision by national governments to pool authority in a particular policy area often creates a functional need for integration in other related policy areas (this process is known as _____).
- (2) In pursuing their own institutional interests and agendas, supranational institutions have a large influence on the integration process and often steer it towards directions that national governments had not anticipated or did not desire (this process is known as _____).

An important text: _____

ii) _____:

Main assumptions and propositions:

- (1) EU politics are dominated by national governments, which usually have a clear understanding of the implications of the agreements they make at EU level. The influence of supranational institutions and spillover effects is at most secondary.
- (2) National governments choose to participate in the European integration process because it is in their interest to do so. National governments seek to cooperate at the EU level because in many policy areas they are _____, which means that the decisions and actions of some national governments have a major influence on others as well. Governments choose to delegate power to supranational institutions mainly as means of enabling them to _____ that over time, they will observe the terms of their mutual agreements.
- (3) Even though European integration is a win-win process, some national governments are able to exert a bigger influence on the shape of EU-level agreements, thereby reaping larger distributional gains. The distribution of gains from the integration process reflects the relative bargaining power of different national governments.

An important text: _____

iii) _____:

Main assumptions and propositions:

- (1) Policy outcomes at the EU level can sometimes differ from what national governments had originally anticipated or wished, as governments can sometimes not foresee with clarity the policy outcomes of the integration process. This can be due to time constraints, scarcity of information, issue complexity, uncertainty,

or institutional rules such as qualified/ double majority voting at the Council. In addition, due to the short-term horizon of elected governments, national government representatives may not devote much attention to the long-term consequences of the agreements they make at EU level. The cumulative result of all these factors is that policy decisions can have _____.

- (2) However, due to the _____, decisions about the process of European integration taken at one point in time may be hard to reverse later on, even if they prove to have undesirable effects.

An important text: _____

iv) _____:

Main assumptions and propositions:

European voters, the national governments that represent them, and supranational institutions don't always act to maximise some pre-defined objective economic interests. Instead, their ideas and identities have a profound influence on the course of action that they consider appropriate and on their approach towards European integration. In turn, actors' ideas and identities are shaped by their environment, including the process of European integration.

Word bank:

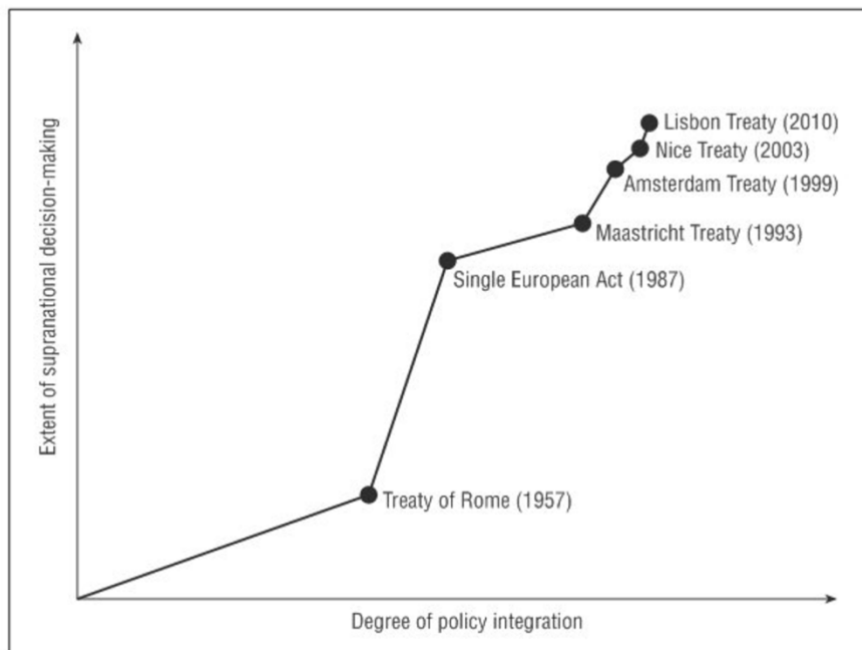
- 1) Terms: Constructivism; Historical institutionalism; Liberal intergovernmentalism; Neofunctionalism; credibly commit; sunk costs of past political decisions; functional spillover; interdependent; political spillover; unintended consequences
- 2) Texts:
 - a) Andrew Moravcsik (1998), *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press)
 - b) Ernst Haas (1958), *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces 1950-1957* (London: Stevens and Sons)
 - c) Paul Pierson (1996), 'The path to European integration: A historical institutionalist analysis', *Comparative Political Studies* 29: 123-163

Sources: Hix and Høyland (2011); Pollack (2005)

PART III) History of European integration

a) In the graph below, Hix and Høyland (2011) illustrate the extent to which different EU treaties advanced the integration project in terms of the number and significance of policy areas placed under EU competence (x-axis), and the proportion of EU policy competences governed by supranational decision-making procedures (y-axis). What concrete steps (if any) were taken with each Treaty to advance the integration process towards each of these directions? *During your own time, fill in the table below.*

Figure 1.1 *Progress towards equilibrium?*



	Advances in the degree of policy integration	Advances in the extent of supranational decision-making
Treaty of Rome (1957)		
Single European Act (1987)		
Maastricht Treaty (1993)		
Amsterdam Treaty (1999)		
Nice Treaty (2003)		
Lisbon Treaty (2010)		