editorial

It has been quite a challenge to produce the first issue of the *EPS*'s annual review of books since the idea was originally proposed a couple of years ago. Long enough time, you might have thought, to put together a few reviews of European political science books and pack them off to the publishers. But then, as events of this year demonstrate, matters European are rarely straightforward and, for a start, we were without three of the essential ingredients for publishing a review of books: reviewers, books and a publisher.

The problem of the lack of a publisher was only a temporary one: at the time, the ECPR was moving *EPS* from in-house production and distribution to commercial publication and after extensive examination of tenders from various sources, Palgrave Macmillan was chosen to do the job which included the publication of the annual reviews issue. So now all we needed were books and reviewers.

Approaching the next hurdle, books, involved a surprising amount of hard thinking by members of the ECPR executive committee (especially Martin Bull as chairman of the Publications sub-committee and Richard Bellamy as Academic Director), by the current editors of the 'regular' issues of *EPS*, James Newell and Martin Rhodes and myself as the new Reviews issue editor. What, we asked ourselves, are we going to review? Again the answer was not as straightforward as you might first think. 'European political science' as a set of operating criteria does not exactly conjure up notions of stringent exclusivity so it was clear that my job was going to be different from, for example, that of the reviews editor of *Balkan Studies* whom I imagined sitting happily in his or her office sorting efficiently through a pile of delivered books representing the current quarter's output of Balkanalia and dispatching them knowledgeably to well-chosen reviewers particularly expert in those aspects of the field. But 'European political science' – sounds good but couldn't you be a little more precise?

First, what did we mean by 'European?' Published in Europe? Written by Europeans? Focused on Europe? Dealing with undetached European parts? What about all those important books on Europe published by Americans? Or important books on American politics written by Europeans? Or just important books on political science. What, for that matter did we mean by 'political science?' If you care to look at the list of the ECPR's standing groups, you will quickly realise what a broad church the ECPR is: tolerated sects include Organised Crime, Green Politics, Third World Politics, Politics and the Arts, and Political Geography. About the only sub-discipline that seems to be excluded, possibly because it doesn't yet exist, is Political Scientology, instead of which there is Rational Action Theory. Were its adherents to be considered *économistes manqués*, but still political scientists, or *économistes impérialistes* to be fought on the ramparts of history, meaning and value?

And all in one issue a year. Palgrave Macmillan put at our disposal extra pages for the Reviews issue but in the face of the collective output of thousands of European political scientists, along with anything that they might find interesting, important or relevant, we clearly had

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some selecting to do. One idea was to trawl the reviews pages of the national political science journals, choosing the very best and re-publishing it in *European Political Science*. However, even if such a task were conscientiously carried out by a team of linguistically competent and academically objective sub-editors, long journal lead times would inevitably make the material look a bit dated by the time it appeared in the *EPS* December issue and would probably be already familiar to those interested in the topic. Eventually, we gave up on the idea of covering a lot of ground thinly and decided to focus on review essays by knowledgeable reviewers who would be charged with choosing the books themselves. So the hurdle of books seemed to be jumped (for the moment) and the hurdle of reviewers loomed ahead.

It is tactless, to say the least, for any editor to describe his contributors as obstacles, so let me quickly put on record my gratitude to all those people whose names appear on the contents pages (and especially Peter Mair for his advice as well as his contribution). To reverse the perspective for a moment, they were like thoroughbred horses galloping down a challenging but enjoyable field of research trips, book projects, article deadlines and conference performances, looking forward to streaking early across the finishing line only to be confronted by an importuning reviews editor suggesting insistently that the major contribution to social scientific knowledge be set aside for a bit in order to write a long book review.

Reviewers' generosity with their time was by any standard extraordinary. Perhaps one academic spoke a little more frankly than she intended when she ranked the activity of book reviewing as 'up there with writing letters of reference' but possibly she also spoke more truly than she was aware of. Writing letters of reference, like reviewing books, is an indispensable service that academics provide free to each other. Without them neither people nor books can make their careers to positions of authority and influence. Of course, one hopes that in the end quality will win out despite the routine letter of recommendation or the perfunctory book review but in a world of so much low-quality information, what is more useful than the well-judged reference or the insightful book review?

Not everyone had the time to give – how could they? – so it was probably a little over-optimistic to shoot off a slightly sycophantic letter to the great and the good of European political science requesting that they carry out an in-depth review of five to six books whose titles they should communicate to the editor without too much delay and could they please make sure that their contributions could be read with interest by a broad audience of Europe's political scientists. The trouble with this strategy is that e-mails are both too easy to send and too easy to reply to: the brief and not ungenerous 'thanks, but no thanks' does not have to be bulked out with more flowery excuses, and then blotted, stamped and posted. At a certain point it was clear that in this age of seamless global communications, one of the most effective means of getting results still remained face-to-face arm-twisting (which only highlights the great generosity of those who did accede to the e-mail request).

If the ECPR is the broad church of European political science, then the European University Institute is its open house. The number of political scientists who have passed through its doors since they opened in 1976, whether as researchers, fellows, faculty members, project participants, exchange students, sabbatical visitors, workshop and conference invitees, or thesis defence jury members is probably by now beyond calculation. Having been here for too many of its thirty years meant that I had a wide range of names to approach so no

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apologies are offered for the fact that nearly all of the contributors in this first issue have had at some point in their careers a more or less sustained link with the EUI.

One final hurdle remained: we seemed to have solved the question of books – in principle, at least; but there still remained the practical question of getting them from the publishers to the reviewers. Once again the mirage of instant transcontinental communication and customs-free transport shimmered in front of the ever-optimistic editor. Surely a simple e-mail informing the publisher that acres of European publicity awaited one of their products, upon shipment to Professor X in Oslo, would quickly do the trick? If only.

One problem is that we were asking for review copies at the wrong moment in the distribution chain: publishers seem to like sending out review copies at the moment the production run is handed over to the distributors to do their job. Asking them to supply copies after this point created a lot of work and some publishers needed a fair amount of e-mail prodding. Others, of course, behaved in an exemplary fashion and I would like to thank in particular the staff of the Oxford and Cambridge University presses for their diligence and alacrity. Another difficulty is that non-English language publishers tend to concentrate on their own immediate markets and while not immediately responsive, normally delivered the goods after some reminding. However, after over a year of doing this, it has been difficult not to reach the conclusion that the only good French publisher is a deaf French publisher; or at least, the only rational explanation a sane person could come to is that extreme obtuseness constitutes a binding norm among them, assiduously observed and rendering them impervious to every form of communication from outside the Hexagon. Perhaps they do these things differently in France.

Finally, the prestigious and well-funded New York research foundation, which took six weeks to answer and finally accede to multiple e-mail and fax requests for one book and then shipped it across the Atlantic by surface mail so that it arrived too late for inclusion by the reviewer, will remain nameless as I write this in the early autumn of 2005 when the leaves begin to rustle and the sage no longer flowers.

Peter Kennealy

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The website allows you to register as a potential *EPS* reviewer and to view books for review organised by theme; or you can always contact the editor directly: peter.kennealy@iue.it
Review copies should be sent to: Peter Kennealy, *EPS* Review, European University Institute, Badia Fiesolana, San Domenico di Fiesole, 50016 Firenze, Italy.

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