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Editor's introduction

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In introducing the first number of the annual review issue of this journal three years ago, the then editor highlighted the tension between two contrasting legacies in European political science that had, in fact, been responsible for the birth of this initiative. One was the steady pace of institutional development within national political science communities that had found expression in an expansion in political science writing at national level, and that had as its consequence an accentuation of the appearance, at least, of linguistic diversity. The second was the rapid development, largely sponsored by the ECPR, of a genuine community of European political scientists, within which specialists in particular areas of comparative research comfortably transcended national boundaries.

The tension between these two patterns of development is at least as obvious today as it was three years ago; hence, the need to provide a linkage between them remains as strong as ever. It is precisely with the intention of bridging this gap that the annual review was launched, and this continues to be its primary purpose. The contributions in this issue illustrate the extent to which cross-fertilisation has taken place between national political science traditions and the broader (and largely American-dominated) world of comparative politics. This is especially clear in two contributions that draw extensively, but by no means exclusively, on the German tradition in exploring respectively the adequacy of the nation-state as a unit of comparative analysis in western Europe (Jan van Deth) and the implications of the study of the process of democracy as it functions at state level for the construction of new political institutions (Michael Greven).

It is not surprising that the concerns of European political scientists have been shifting from the levels of domestic or national politics, on the one hand, and of comparative politics, on the other, to examine political processes within the new set of political structures that increasingly define their external environment – the European Union. The wide-ranging literature that focuses on one of the more distinctive forms of political activity at EU level, lobbying, is the subject of a review by Svein Andersen and Kjell Eliassen.

The enormous political changes that have been taking place in central and eastern Europe are still too recent to have given birth to a substantial body of literature that could be called a 'tradition'. As political science is reorganised there (or, perhaps, even reborn), it will be a particularly impor-

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tant concern of this annual review to survey the development of political science in this largely neglected part of the continent. Part of this challenge is met by Stephen White in the current issue, in which he looks at the development of political science in post-communist Russia, focussing especially on the infant art of public opinion polling.

The three remaining items in this issue may be seen as significant developments of its original mandate. The first represents an effort to broaden the geographical coverage of the continent by extending this to its English-speaking area. John Dearlove's article about writing on the British constitution, which he sets in the context of the broader literature on political institutions, fills a gap in an important area of European academic endeavour. While the inclusion of an article of this kind is not intended to suggest any dilution in the annual review's ambition to act as a window on those political science communities that have been shielded by linguistic barriers from the gaze of the outside public, it is intended to signal the fact that this concern is not exclusive.

To emphasise this point, a second innovation seeks consciously to highlight the diversity of Europe's political science traditions. The present issue contains a listing of the main contents of the journals associated with the national political science associations of western Europe, preceded by a commentary on these. It is intended to make this a regular feature of the annual review, and to extend its coverage to the newer journals that are now appearing in central and eastern Europe.

Finally, one of the most significant developments in the European political science infrastructure in recent years has been the electronic revolution. Practically all European political scientists now use electronic media for text preparation, or will do so shortly. A large number communicate with each other by means of electronic mail. A much smaller number are in a position to exploit this technological revolution more fully by making use of electronic conferencing and electronic access to remote databases. In an effort to assist in the expansion of the size of this last group, the present issue contains an article by Nadia Spang Bovey that provides an overview of the kinds of resources that are currently available, and some guidance on how to take initial steps in exploiting them. It is hoped that future issues will revisit and update this dynamic new area of academic activity.

The annual review remains, then, committed to bridging the gap identified by its first editor, but it must also face additional challenges. The more conventional of these is likely to arise as academics catch up with the radical political developments that have been transforming both western Europe (with the growth of the EU) and the eastern part of the continent (in the context of the pursuit of new answers to old political problems). The more radical challenge is posed by the information technology revolution; there is a danger that a two-speed approach to exploitation of the possibilities of this new technology may produce a two-tiered community, with the boundary between the two tiers defined by inequalities in terms of access. In many

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ways, indeed, the boundary between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in the world of electronic communication is more formidable than its counterpart in the world of natural languages.

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