

SUMMARIES

Interest representation and public policies in the European Union

by Gerda Falkner

Authors have forwarded seemingly contradictory hypotheses on how European integration might impact on national interest intermediation. This paper advocates including the meso level in the analysis, i.e. looking systematically at the policy- and sector-specific characteristics in European governance. From that perspective, it seems that the impact of Euro-politics could be much more diverse (in the sense of differentiated between policy areas) than hitherto expected. In addition, we should pay attention to the existence (and limits) of different types of impact potentials of Euro-level patterns on the national systems. Although no uniform systems of interest politics can be expected, even in the longer run, persisting or even growing intra-system diversity of forms of public-private interaction might increasingly be accompanied by a trend of inter-system convergence of policy-specific networks due to Europeanisation.

Timing and the development of social care services in Europe

by Valeria Fargion

In this article, the author identifies *timing* as the most crucial factor in explaining why local governments in Continental Europe were unable to adopt the Scandinavian model of social service provision. In these countries, greater local-level fiscal autonomy and service provision responsibilities occurred within a context of increasing social needs and strong economic constraints. Moreover, local governments lacked well-institutionalised social service systems at the time of these growing demands. Given these competing pressures, local govern-

ments were incapable of developing adequate policy responses. Trends towards greater fiscal austerity coupled with an expected increase in social needs render more expansive provision unlikely.

The political knowledge of the Italian public: a cognitive map

by Donatella Campus

By analysing the comments about old and new Italian parties made by a sample of citizens after the 1996 election, the author explores how Italian voters organise their beliefs about parties and, in general, about politics. The paper claims that there have been some recent changes in the way voters develop their political attitudes. The first issue concerns the greater attention that citizens seem to pay now to the leaders of major parties: all interviewees gave special emphasis to their personal traits and characteristics. A second more general finding is that respondents showed to have little familiarity with the new parties' programs and policy stances. Even if the electoral campaign actually focused on many policy issues, the impact of campaigning on the voters' knowledge of issues has been quite limited. This suggests that the process of learning which started after the radical changes of the early 1990s has not yet been completed and citizens need more time to fully understand the new political proposal.

Economic explanations of political cycles: limits and possible developments

by Stefano Palombarini

The article investigates public choice models for the analysis of political cycles as efforts in re-founding a genuine political economy. It classifies political cycles models according to two criteria: the «ends of government» and the rationality and information structure of voters. A closed review of the hypotheses guiding rational models reveals the heuristic limits of the approach. A genuine political economy should consider the consequences of processes governed by a political logic, which is intrinsically different from that of economic accumulation or utility maximisation. Rather than a re-foundation of political economy, in the case of public choice analysis one should speak of a widening of the realm of economics.