

## Book Review

Mark Rhinard (2010)

### *Framing Europe: The Policy Shaping Strategies of the European Commission*

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The increasing role of the European Union (EU) in governing European societies has attracted widespread attention from scholars interested in explaining policy-making at the supranational level. After the enlargement of the EU and the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the institutional architecture and policy processes of the EU have become more complicated than ever, so improving our understanding of the key drivers of this process is needed more than ever.

One such driver is the European Commission. The Commission's unique role in the EU political system has long been a subject of scrutiny, not least because of the central position it plays as a promoter and motivator of supranational policies. While many previous studies have been conducted on the Commission's 'formal' powers, its 'informal' powers are still relatively unknown. Moreover, even fewer studies have attempted to combine these two. The book *Framing Europe: The Policy Shaping Strategies of the European Commission* by Mark Rhinard attempts to fill this gap by setting out a framework of analysis for explaining how the Commission relies on a mixture of both formal resources and informal strategies to "strategically frame" policy choices.

The author argues that the Commission constructs frames to help member state governments "make sense" of policy questions, but it does so in a way that tends to privilege Commission preferences. The construction of a frame is rhetorical, but also material, in the sense that networks of supporters and policy instruments that reflect a preferred frame are put in place by the Commission as part of its "strategic framing" process. This process is led by policy entrepreneurs who then mobilise their preferred frames within their respective policy domains by manipulating ideas, institutions and interests in ways that bias outcomes. Thus, Rhinard's strategic framing argument combines both social constructivist and rational approaches to understanding the EU policy process, bringing together actor-based, institution-based and ideas-based literature.

The book contains an easily accessible chapter describing the analytical framework in a way that should be useful for both postgraduate students and established scholars. The chapter first defines the policy frame concept, discussing the actors involved in the framing process, and then turns to the means these actors can exploit in this regard (e.g. networks, institutional rules, and policy). The case study chapters cover two periods of biotechnology policymaking and two periods of agricultural reform. The former represents

an “easy case” and the latter a “hard case”, hence making a compelling claim that strategic framing is indeed common throughout the entire EU policy system.

At the same time, it would have been useful if the book had also included a more inter-governmental policy, such as CFSP or JHA before the Amsterdam Treaty. Greater attention to the effects of enlargement on this strategy and the effects of the Lisbon Treaty would also have been interesting; although maybe this is too much to ask considering the fact that the case studies were completed in 2009. The strategic framing concept has its limitations, too. As the author acknowledges, it is just one of several possible explanations for EU policy change, and it offers no guarantee for success for Commission frame entrepreneurs. On the contrary, strategic framing might just as well end up hurting the Commission if different Directorate Generals (and units within these DGs) employ different frames for the same policy domain.

Despite these shortcomings, one clear advantage with the book is that regardless of the policy area one is interested in, the analytical framework should be helpful in understanding EU level change more generally. In fact, one open question that the author only briefly addresses is whether the framework could even be applicable to other prominent supranational bodies, such as the UN Secretariat. Students of EU policymaking can build on the findings made by this book in two major ways. First of all, the explanatory potential of strategic framing as a concept for explaining the EU policy-making process could be strengthened through further case studies, especially by expanding the scope to also include cases from the formerly second and third pillar policy domains. Furthermore, future studies should do a better job at incorporating the strategic framing concept into the EU agenda setting literature so as to further uncover the entire policy-making chain in the EU.

In summary, the book *Framing Europe* makes an important contribution to the field of EU policy-making. It speaks directly to the debate between intergovernmentalists and those scholars who have a more favourable view of supranational policy-making by demonstrating a strategy used by the European Commission to directly influence policy outcomes. This strategy – labelled “strategic framing” – possesses much potential and deserves to be further assessed by future studies.

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