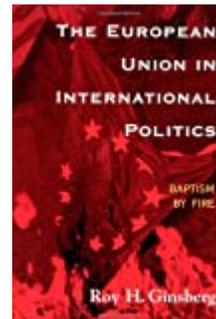




Roy H. Ginsberg. *The European Union in International Politics: Baptism by Fire.* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001. xxi + 305 pp. \$36.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-0023-5; \$105.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-0022-8.



Reviewed by Antoine Capet (Université de Rouen)

Published on H-Diplo (August, 2002)

On the Difficulty of Measuring the Impact of a Foreign Policy

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Many books are appearing on the European Union and European Integration in the English language, but most seem to reflect the internal Europhile/Europhobe British debate on joining the Euro, and a monograph by an American scholar with no *prima facie* axe to grind will therefore be welcome among the English-speaking reading public.

This is not an easy book to read: most pages are filled with acronyms—and even though a glossary is given before the first chapter, it is always a nuisance either to have to memorize them or to go back to the key every five minutes or so. Other pages have many dates or figures, and the combination can be daunting, as the following sentence will show: “In 1993, the EU shifted aid in OTs from NGOs to the P.A., following the Oslo Accords.” In the same paragraph, the reader has to juggle with Ecu and dollars: “For the period 1991 to 1995, the Palestinians received Ecu 258.7 per capita.... Approximately \$2 billion in EU aid was distributed to the Palestinians in assistance during the 1990s” (p. 143).

To the text proper must be added one figure trying to show the “Conceptual Model of European Foreign Policy Decision Making,” with a neologism like “actor-ness” (apparently derived from previous authors, who are clearly identified on p. 47) and foreign words like “acquis communautaire/acquis politique” (admittedly explained p. 10) and ten tables—the main ones purposely on the same pattern, to allow comparisons—attempting to measure the impact of European Union action on various nations or regions (former Yugoslavia; Israel; Palestine; United States) and in various circumstances (conflict in the Balkans; Middle East peace process). Here again, great intellectual concentration is required if the comparisons are to be meaningful to the reader. Undergraduates and laymen will no doubt be deterred by the effort required of them, but those who enjoy attempts at conceptualizing and quantifying theoretically impalpable notions such as the results of a foreign policy will follow Ginsberg’s reasoning with considerable interest. As Stuart E. Eizenstat, former U.S. Ambassador to the EU, puts it in his foreword, “the potential [economic] gains and losses to each country from being in a common market are quantifiable.... Foreign policy ... often involves matters such as interna-

tional prestige and national honor, on which it is hard to place a concrete value” (p. xiv).

To answer this challenge and tackle the problem, Ginsberg has chosen a series of case studies in three fields with widely different degrees of EU influence: “areas and issues of the world where EU political impact is generally expected (Mediterranean states and CEE[1]) and where generally it is unexpected (Israel and the P.A. [Palestinian Authority] in the contexts of the MEPP [Middle East peace process] and the Barcelona process) or largely discounted (the United States in the context of relations with the Iranians, Libyans, Cubans, Palestinians, and Israelis and with regard to ending the military conflict in Kosovo)” (p. 55).

The first difficulty, therefore, is that (as in a mathematical demonstration) everything rests on the validity of the postulates. If one posits that influence in region A was unexpected on the part of region B, and then one goes on to show that region B achieved great results in region A, then one will draw the conclusion that region B has considerably increased its impact in that area. What one measures, therefore, is the difference between final results and initial starting-point. Thus the evaluation of the starting-point acquires a decisive importance in the measurement of the final impact.

This does not mean that Ginsberg’s method is invalid, simply that he would have found different impacts if he had defined his starting-points differently. In other words, his demonstration is open to argument at both ends, and different readers will have different opinions for or against his findings, depending on their views on the validity of his starting-points. A substantial section of the book, covering the first fifty pages or so, is therefore devoted to a discussion of methodological problems, with Ginsberg examining the state of the literature and what his recent predecessors in the field can contribute in the way of analytical tools. Chapter 2 is devoted to the extremely arduous task of defining “a conceptual model of EFP [European foreign policy] decision making that rivets on the relationship between foreign policy inputs and outputs” (p. 21) and also discusses the existing literature. The complexity of the final one-sentence paragraph of conclusion will give an idea of the difficulty of arriving at a model which includes all variables and parameters:

“The chapter has also shown that students of EFP are beginning to bridge, indeed reconstruct with new materials, the old divide between liberal and realist theories, and they are linking levels of analysis that produce more interesting explanations by revising and applying

older concepts that still resonate (externalization, civilian power); coupling concepts that make for more finessed explanations (Europeanization and liberal intergovernmentalism); bridging domestic and international levels of analysis to gain more inclusive insights without sacrificing parsimony (multilevel diplomacy, two-tier bargaining); developing new concepts that offer alternative insights into what makes EFP “European” and what makes CFSP [Common foreign and security policy] “common” (constructivist thought, European interests); developing new or reworking older concepts that facilitate investigation into what kind of international actor the EU is (or is not) and how it is to be evaluated (presence and actor-ness); and placing EFP in the global environment (international systemic change) and in the European context (European identity).” (p. 43)

The next chapter deals with the techniques of measurement of “External Political Impact,” justifying the choice of tools that will be used in the case studies which form the core of the book, and indirectly answering Eizenstat’s doubts by asserting in conclusion that “documenting the external effects of EFP activity is difficult, but not impossible.” Ginsberg’s primary sources are of two kinds: oral interviews and written documents. For the book, he conducted ninety-five “extensive interviews of nonmember government officials and academic specialists” (p. 54), with full details given in Appendix B, in which the interviewees are listed according to geographical location: Washington, Brussels, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Ramallah, Prague, Berlin (by phone) and East Jerusalem (by electronic mail). The written documents “include trade, investment, development assistance, and other economic and financial data; government reports, documents, and press releases; speeches, articles, and autobiographies of decision-making principals; news reports; legislative actions; treaties; and diplomatic actions, positions and démarches” (p. 54).

Thus, if one may use a colloquial expression, Ginsberg leaves no stone unturned to try to attain his objective, the measurement of the EU’s impact on the world scene. One may first question the representativeness of the nations and issues which he chose to study, but the central interrogation remains that of the adequacy of all these subjective tools if the final aim is to obtain an objective picture. To put it otherwise, Ginsberg faces the all-too-familiar reproach which specialists of the “exact” sciences never fail to level at practitioners of the “human” sciences, viz. how can one quantify qualitative notions? Phenomena like goodwill and psychological influence cannot be measured with the precision and reliabil-

ity of chemical reactions—and if they cannot, what is the value of the results obtained?

To push the analogy further, the chemist can prove that if one drops so many cubic centimeters of Acid A onto so many cubic centimeters of Body B, then reaction X will always follow. The variables are also perfectly measurable and reproducible: height above sea level, atmospheric pressure, ambient temperature, etc. Any other skilled chemist on earth will arrive at the same results by reproducing the same conditions. But one may safely argue that any number of specialists of international relations, given the same material as Ginsberg, will arrive at so many different measurements of the EU's impact. This does not invalidate Ginsberg's undertaking—arguing that it does would make intellectual speculation on human relations pointless, which even the most hardened critic senses cannot be the case—but it relativizes the value of his hard-and-fast conclusions, especially his quantified results, which are summarized in a final table (Table 7.1, p. 278) which purports to classify the 219 case studies according to the degree of impact. Thus in seventeen cases, the EU had a “nil” impact, whereas it had a “marginal” one in thirty-nine cases, a “considerable” one in one hundred cases and a “significant” one in sixty-three cases.

Clearly, the imprecision of words (nobody would draw the same line between, say, “considerable” and “significant”) can only lead to highly debatable percentages, and even though it would probably be an exaggeration to say that such figures prove nothing, it is obvious that

the value of the exercise lies elsewhere. Arguably, the considerable interest of the monograph is to be found, not in its quantitative results, but in the intellectual process which has produced these results. To go one step further, one could say that, at bottom, disputing the final outcome of the process—the figures given—is too facile to be of interest to the scholar versed in the subject. The real intellectual stimulation comes from trying to follow Ginsberg's methodological efforts, with considered approval or constructive criticism of his approach at every stage in the reasoning—no easy task because the phrasing is so dense at times that one almost gives up, but a rewarding accomplishment for the reader with perseverance.

It would probably be a mistake to recommend *The European Union in International Politics* to young students new to the subject of international relations, as they might well be put off immediately. All university libraries, however, should stock it for postgraduates and doctoral students keen (as they should be) to reflect on the methodological tools of that discipline as expertly manipulated by a first-class practitioner, with a view to forging their own in due course.

Note

[1]. CEE standing, not for “la Communauté économique européenne,” as a French speaker immediately decodes the acronym in such a context, but (from the key to acronyms) for “Central and Eastern European/Europe.”

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Citation: Antoine Capet. Review of Ginsberg, Roy H., *The European Union in International Politics: Baptism by Fire*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. August, 2002.

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