

**Tömmel, Ingeborg, and Amy Verdun, eds. 2019.**  
***Political Leadership in the European Union.***  
**Routledge, 155 pp. £9.99 (Paperback)**

A persisting question in European Union (EU) studies has been Henry Kissinger’s iconic quote: “Who do I call if I want to speak to Europe?” This quote highlights a fundamental issue concerning the EU’s political leadership structures and whether such leadership is existent or even necessary within the organization. Nevertheless, understanding leadership in the EU is crucial, due to the organisation’s multi-faceted role as a political entity, a unique case of regional integration, and an important actorness on the international scene. In the pursuit of shedding light on this critical problem, Tömmel and Verdun published their compelling edited volume *Political Leadership in the European Union* in 2017, by compiling academic articles first published in the *Journal of European Integration*, Volume 39, Issue 2. Their work delves into the intricacies of leadership within the EU’s various institutions and aims to answer the central question posed by Kissinger: who leads EU institutions, and how they do it. By compiling these chapters together, editors aim to demonstrate that political leadership in the EU is not only plentiful, but also essential in times of crisis.

The lack of theoretical frameworks of leadership of the EU, a *sui generis* institution, serves as the driving force behind this volume. The aim is to bring together articles that employ the theoretical frameworks of political leadership such as Burns’ (1978) ‘transactional’ and ‘transformative’ leadership theories (chapters 5 to 8), while other five chapters make use of their own typologies of political leadership, such as for ‘agenda setting leadership’ (chapter 3) or ‘policy leadership’ (chapter 4). These multiple theoretical perspectives, as well as diverse actors, institutions, and time periods analysed, allow this volume to address the theoretical gap of understanding leadership in the EU. Methodologically, all articles make use of qualitative, single or comparative, case studies. The data collection methods vary throughout the volume, from datasets of presidential speeches (chapter 3 and 8) and interviews with the EU officials (chapters 4 and 8) to original survey questionnaires (chapter 10). Nevertheless, each author relies on profound knowledge about the relevant actors, resulting in meticulously detailed accounts of demonstrated leadership.

From here, I provide a brief review of the chapters clustered in five sections, based on the topics of the papers. First, I discuss the introductory chapter authored by the editors, followed by an examination of chapters covering European Commission presidents (chapters 2 and 3). Then, I delve into the European Council presidency of Herman Van Rompuy analysed in chapters 5 and 6. Moving on, I explore academic assessments of

EU's leadership during the European financial and debt crises<sup>1</sup> (chapters 8 and 9). Lastly, I address the three chapters focusing on the institutional-level leadership in the EU (chapters 4, 7 and 10).

The first chapter co-authored by Tömmel and Verdun presents an in-depth introduction of firstly, various theoretical frameworks of political leadership utilised in the book; secondly, numerous leaders and leaderships that have been analysed before; and thirdly, the contribution of this book to the literature on the EU's leadership. The four theoretical frameworks discussed in the first chapter are, however, unevenly applied throughout the book. Additionally, this book posits that explanatory approaches and research findings made at the national level cannot simply be transposed to the analysis of leadership in the EU. Yet, most of these four theories were applied on national governments and international organisations first, and are now applied to the EU in this book. Despite the usefulness of this chapter as an overview of the literature on political leadership, the article misses the opportunity to present one single theoretical framework unique to the EU.

In chapters 2 and 3, the European Commission presidents are set to be the actors presenting greater capacity for leadership through the Commission's exclusive right of initiative. The chapters provide an analysis of the ways in which Commission presidents can project leadership: starting with a precise description of Jacques Delors' (1985-95) career and leadership style, then comparing it to that of two other Commission presidents, Walter Hallstein (1958-67) and José Barroso (2004-14) in the following chapter. Ross and Jenson focus on Delors' presidency, analysing his political career, rise to presidency, and the eventual end of his incumbency. Much emphasis is put on his leadership style known as *engrenage*, consisting of a step-by-step policy proposal strategy, where each step of the way forward is designed to contain the seeds of the following one. Müller analyses the agenda-setting capabilities of Commission presidents Hallstein, Delors, and Barroso through their speeches. Both articles reach similar conclusions about Delors' unmatched leadership, an established argument within the EU scholarship, with which they concur. Nevertheless, from a methodological standpoint, one problem arises. This study utilises executive speeches to analyse the agenda-setting abilities of the three Commission presidents. Müller compares which specific topics and general issues have been addressed in speeches during their terms to gain insight into their strategies as presidents. However, when a presidential speech repeatedly emphasises one topic while only briefly mentioning another, both are categorized as "1" in this analysis. Hence, the authors may have treated less relevant topics as equally important as the major topics. In other words, equal attention is given to unequally important arguments, which may have altered the findings.

In chapters 5 and 6, attention shifts to Herman Van Rompuy, the first president of the European Council. Both articles agree on the president's transactional rather than transformative role, but the first article provides evidence for this assertion, while the second contends that the president strengthened the intergovernmental dimension of the

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<sup>1</sup> In the article referred as the euro crisis.

EU. Precisely, both adhere to Burns' (1978) theory of transactional and transformative leadership from different perspectives whilst getting similar results. In fact, here is where both theories are best employed and their conclusions suggest that a transactional form of leadership is often considered as intergovernmental, whereas a transformative one presents more supranational characteristics. The authors find that Van Rompuy effectively fast-tracked decision-making, forged strong relationships with other EU member states' (MS) leaders, and presented a composed image of the EU during the times of crisis. Nevertheless, they conclude that despite his success at brokering negotiations, he was a transactional leader, and ultimately favoured powerful MS in a display of elitist intergovernmentalism.

In chapters 8 and 9, the authors analyse the role of leaders that proved to be indispensable during and in the aftermath of the euro crisis. Verdun (chapter 8) analyses the European Central Bank's (ECB) presidents, Jean-Claude Trichet (2003-11) and Mario Draghi (2011-19) during the euro crisis. The authors conclude that both presidents displayed responsibility and determination in stabilizing the markets. However, Trichet was more pioneering in his initiatives, while Draghi built upon the actions of his predecessor. That said, the authors struggle to distinguish whether the ECB's presidents are the driving force behind the initiatives or merely representing the ECB's stance, functioning as spokespersons. Van Esch (chapter 9) focuses on former German and Greek prime ministers, Angela Merkel and Alexis Tsipras in dealing with the consequences of the euro crisis. She argues that Merkel was a non-ideological, but influential leader nationally, who was expected to lead the EU during the euro crisis. Tsipras, on the other hand, was more of an ideological leader that cultivated great loyalty in his national electorate but had to navigate a traumatic chapter during the euro crisis. The author frames national leadership within the EU as paradoxical: legitimate to govern over the electorate but illegitimate to decide the fates of other MS on the EU level. Despite clear differences in the leadership styles of Merkel and Tsipras, they shared a similar paradoxical struggle. Both articles provide a comprehensive account of the leadership taking in the European national and supranational responses to the euro crisis.

Spread throughout the book are institutional-level analyses presented in chapters 4, 7 and 10, adding great diversity, as they move away from the individual-level analyses. They range from discussing specific institutions such as the European Commission (chapter 4) and the European Parliament (chapter 7), to more general topics like the leadership of the EU in the climate transition (chapter 10). Overall, they frame the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the EU as leaders in regulation, democratisation, and fight against climate change, respectively. On a more theoretical level, their contributions are relevant to the gap of the book, as they provide analytical frameworks for explicit contexts: institutional policy-leadership, inter-institutional leadership within the EU, and EU leadership on the global stage.

Ultimately, this book holds significant relevance in the field of regional security, as it focuses on the EU, a unique case of regional integration in the world. This book helps

readers comprehend leadership in the EU, which is especially imperative considering the unprecedented nature of the EU's response to the regional security crisis posed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Bosse, 2022; Miadzvetskaya and Challet, 2022; Maurer et al., 2023).

Finally, *Political Leadership in the European Union* is a valuable resource for students, scholars, and practitioners interested in the relevant theories, actors, and practices of political leadership in the EU. The analysis highlights that the EU is not devoid of leadership, while also providing nuanced insights into the varying degrees of leadership among different presidents of EU institutions and MS. These vary from the leadership taken by individuals to condition the EU's general course of action, to institutional leadership in EU policy-making, and institutional leadership on the international stage.

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