

*The State of Power and Democracy in Europe:  
Comparative Perspectives*

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*Abstracts:*

**The ‘who is who’ of modern politics and the challenge of minorities: the North in the European context**

*Peter A. Kraus, University of Helsinki*

In general terms, the political salience which cultural diversity has in contemporary societies stems from the unequal recognition different groups receive according to a logic based on hegemonic categorization. To varying degrees, and at different levels, this categorization privileges ‘majority’ citizens vis-à-vis the members of ‘old’ and ‘new’ minorities. In the context of democratic politics, the mobilization of minorities frequently implies that the paradox of sovereignty has to be addressed in a straightforward way, as demands for self-determination are raised whose ‘self’ questions the hegemonic use of categories. This entails two major challenges: The first challenge refers to the threat minority demands may represent for holding together nation-states as the key units for collective decision-making in the modern world. The second challenge concerns the way minorities represent and articulate themselves. The paper discusses these issues in the context of Northern Europe, bringing into focus potential tensions between the institutional framing of social cohesion and a politics committed to recognizing diversity.

## **The State of the EU: Power to the Parliament and no Democracy without Parties**

*Dr. Steven Van Hecke, University of Antwerp*

One of the main trends that has characterised the EU in recent years is the shift in the internal balance of power of which the European Parliament has been the main beneficiary. This is not to say that we have entered the era of parliamentary democracy at EU level, on the contrary. Still a lot of problems related to power and democracy continue to exist. The direction in which these problems are being solved, however, is clear: the growing politicisation of EU politics and its institutions. Here, political parties play a crucial role, or should play that role, both at the national and the European level. This observation is recently illustrated or even strengthened by the making of Barroso II and the appointments of the Chairman of the European Council and the so-called EU Foreign Minister.

## **Gender and Power: Matching Concepts and Sparring Partners?**

*Petra Meier, Universiteit Antwerpen, ([petra.meier@ua.ac.be](mailto:petra.meier@ua.ac.be))*

Gender as a concept is intrinsically related to questions of power. At the basis it is meant to be tool to look into the societal relations between/of men and women. It looks into the structural dimension of these positions, lifting issues of inequality out of the individual('s) sphere (and partly responsibility). It allows for analysing how the societal relations between/of men and women relate to and influence each other, how they are created, reinforced, maintained and changed. Given its relational focus, i.e. gender does not only focus on women or on men but on both social groups and the interrelating dynamics between them, it allows for putting the societal positions of men and women in perspective. In everyday life, however, gender is often reduced to a synonym of sex, the demographic variable of being of the male or feminine sex, thereby undoing it from any connotation to power. However, it is the relation to questions of power that make the concept so valuable. This contribution looks into the relation between gender and power in gender equality policies, more specifically those meant to balance the power relations and the exercise of power by both men and women. It analyses the use and understanding of both concepts in a selection of policy documents from these fields, and reflects on their consequences for the furthering of gender equality.

## **Language, the Peasantry and Class Alliances as 19<sup>th</sup>- Century Factors in Finnish Women's Achievement of Political Rights**

*Laura Stark, University of Jyväskylä*

In 1906, Finnish women were the first women in Europe to receive not only the right to vote but also the right to stand for Parliamentary office. What makes this political watershed interesting is that while Finland was at that moment in the grip of dramatic social and political events, no real public debate preceded women's achievement of these rights, and even the views expressed by men in the Finnish legislative assembly were quite neutral when compared to the arguments used for and against women's suffrage elsewhere in Europe. The first Estate in the legislative assembly to officially decide to give women the right to vote and stand for Parliamentary office was the Landed Peasant Estate. Historians have explained Finland's unique gender relations by claiming that the older agrarian Finnish culture was relatively egalitarian. In a harsh climate, farming husbands and wives had to work hard together and depended on each others' labor. Yet the agrarian culture was also highly patriarchal and characterized by strong inequalities. This paper argues that the attitudes towards women held by the rural inhabitants who made up 90% of the Finnish population cannot be explained through an analysis of gender relations alone, but that other factors played an equally important role in how gender relations were interpreted by contemporaries. These included the struggle to make Finnish a fully official language alongside Swedish, the formation of hegemonic class alliances in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the modernization of different facets of the countryside at different paces. I also suggest that the reason why women's rights and proper role in society were *not* a hotly debated issue at the turn of the century is because they had been publicly discussed already in the 1860s in connection with other issues such as inheritance and farm work, as well as a covert practice carried out by farm women known as "home thievery. In short, decision-makers weighing the pros and cons of women's political participation in the turbulent years of 1897 – 1906 did not invent their justifications *de novo*, but were relying on older concepts emerging from earlier public discussions regarding women's rights.

## **Executive Politics and Constitutional Bricolage in France and Finland**

*Niilo Kauppi, CNRS/Institut d'études politiques, Strasbourg*

In this paper I will explore the political interests and strategies that led to constitutional reforms in Finland and France in the 2000s. The fact that these reforms are taking place at the same time in these two EU member-states is not an accident. Both countries have traditionally been considered as forming semi-presidential political systems with relatively strong presidencies. Since the 1990s, European integration and globalization have significantly shifted political action from the nation state to a constellation of shared sovereignty between member states and various supranational institutions, mostly the European Union. Simultaneously, powerful executive networks have formed at the level of the EU and globally. In the minds of some politicians, these external transformations called for more fundamental political reform in the political status of the presidency, government

and Parliament or the Senate and the National Assembly. In both EU member states, arguments of efficiency and transparency of decision-making were central to legitimize the constitutional reforms and the de facto reinforcement of the executive. But the reforms led to seemingly different outcomes. The French presidency has been reinforced while the Finnish presidency has been weakened. Why is this? In France, the president, his “presidential majority” and his collaborative circles acted as the initiators of the quite popular reforms, whereas in post-Kekkonen Finland an elite consensus saw reinforcing parliamentarism as the only alternative, despite the popular support for a politically influential presidency. Although different, the results of the constitutional reforms were, paradoxically, in the end very similar. In both France and Finland, political decision-making has been “rationalized”. This means it has been concentrated in Finland into the hands of government and the administration (especially the Ministry of Finance) at the expense of Parliament – a development structurally similar to the one in France where the presidency has been reinforced. In both cases, the losers are the directly elected national representatives and parliamentary democracy.

### **Realignment in Western Europe. A New Cultural Cleavage?**

*Wouter van der Brug, University of Amsterdam*

In their 2008 book *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*, Hanspeter Kriesi and his team announced the birth of a new political cleavage in contemporary Western Europe, one dividing the winners and losers of globalisation. In his presentation, Wouter van der Brug challenges the main conclusion of Kriesi et al. by demonstrating – on the basis of expert surveys from a large number of countries and voter surveys from the Netherlands – that party positions are mainly structured by one dimension. Opinions of citizens are, however, structured by the two dimensions that Kriesi et al. describe. A consequence of these findings is that large groups of citizens, in particular those who are left-wing on socio-economic issues and right-wing on cultural issues, are not represented by any party. The implication of these findings is that realignments of West European party systems can be expected to occur.

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