There is also an emerging consensus that cooperation in a variety of other areas makes better sense than independent action, which can lead to unnecessary competition and duplication of effort. It is still too early to talk about a federal relationship among the member states, and between them and the EU institutions, but the trend is undoubtedly in that direction. Several levels of government are being created, all with independent powers. How far European cooperation will go depends on how we choose to define subsidiarity, but while this is moving higher up the agenda of EU negotiations, the definition of which issues are best dealt with at the level of the member state and which at the level of Europe remains fluid.

The member states still have a large measure of control over domestic policy, in a wide variety of important areas, from foreign policy to defence policy, tax policy, education, criminal justice, and health care. Compared, for example, to the American case, where the states now have only residual responsibilities in a modest selection of areas, and whose independence from national government in Washington DC is largely symbolic, the member states of the EU are still powerful, independent actors. This is unlikely to last indefinitely, however. Internal political and economic pressures have meant a gradual surrender of powers by the member states, a steady accumulation of responsibilities by the EU institutions, and – increasingly – the sense that Europe is governed both from Brussels and from 27 national capitals.

External pressures are also bound to continue to tighten the definition of Europe. Most of the rest of the world has not yet woken up to the implications of European integration, and to the idea that the 27 member states of the EU can and should be seen as a political and economic unit, that is exerting its global influence ever more effectively. Non-Europeans still treat Europeans mainly as citizens of individual member states, but this is slowly changing. As it does, it will give Europeans themselves a greater sense that they can be both European *and* British or Italian or Greek or Czech or Lithuanian. This in turn will give a tighter definition to the concept of Europe.

Chapter 6

The EU and its Citizens

The Maastricht treaty famously claimed that the goal of European integration was to create 'an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen'. But even the most enthusiastic supporters of the EU concede that it has been less a popular movement for change than a process begun and sustained by elites. The argument that the average European has few opportunities directly to influence the work of the EU has become serious enough to earn its own label: the democratic deficit.

'What about us?' the European public might reasonably ask. 'Does anyone in Brussels or our national capitals care what we think?' It sometimes seems as though the work of the EU goes on despite public opinion, which is often confused, sometimes doubtful, and in some cases actively hostile towards integration. Many of the key decisions on Europe are taken as a result of negotiations among national political leaders, who often refuse to put those decisions to a democratic test through a national referendum. Popular control over the European Commission and the European Court of Justice is only indirect, and although voter interests are directly represented in the European Parliament, it is one of the weaker European institutions.

To make matters worse, most Europeans are puzzled by the European Union. Its character and personality are hard to pin down, it is engaged on a journey to an unknown destination, the media often misrepresent the way it works, the Commission has done a mixed job of explaining what the EU does, and most academic writing on the EU makes the European project sound dull and legalistic. The result is confusion and apathy – as reflected, for example, in the poor turnout at European elections. The European Council decided as long ago as 1984 to promote 'a people's Europe' aimed at making Europe more 'real' to its people, and changes to the treaties have made the EU institutions more 'transparent' (more open to scrutiny), but the argument that popular enthusiasm can be generated by public policy is fundamentally flawed.

But there is a counter-argument to all this: the interests of citizens are represented by their national governments in the meeting rooms of the European Council and the Council of Ministers, and the powers and influence of the European Parliament are growing. The European Commission is no less transparent or responsive than national bureaucracies, and is so short-staffed that it actually makes more use of input from ordinary citizens,

interest groups and corporations than do most of its national counterparts. And in many respects the democratic deficit in the EU is no bigger than the deficit in the member states, where citizens often complain that they are insufficiently consulted.

This chapter asks what integration has meant for Europeans, and for the nature of democracy in the European Union. It begins with an assessment of public attitudes towards integration, examining the relationship between public opinion and the decisions taken by national leaders, and discussing the problem of the democratic deficit. It then looks at the channels through which Europeans can express their opinions on EU policy – including elections, referendums, and interest groups – and asks how effective they have been, and what kinds of changes need to be made to bring Europe closer to its citizens.

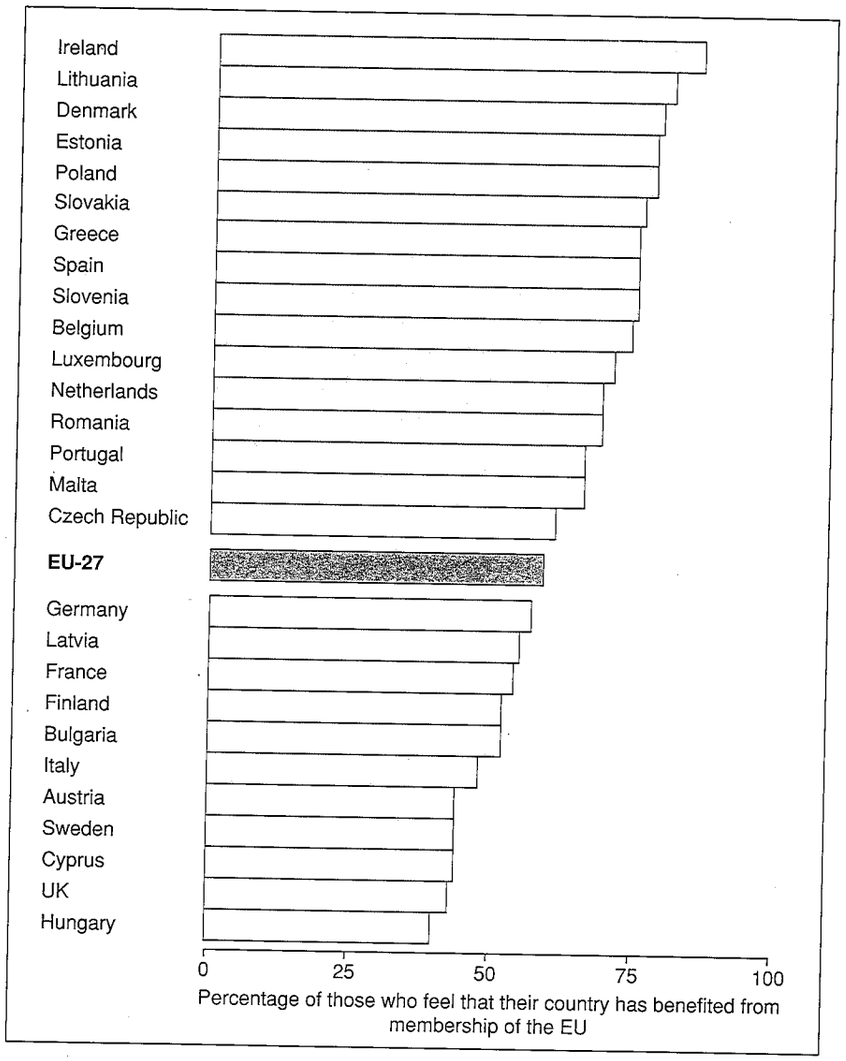
Public opinion and Europe

The EU has a survey research programme known as Eurobarometer, which measures public opinion on a wide variety of issues relating to European integration, ranging from views on the general process to those on specific policies. Surveys over the last 30 years have found a waxing and waning of enthusiasm for the EU: support grew from 50 per cent in 1980 to a peak of 71 per cent in 1990, but fell in Germany after reunification, and then more widely throughout the EU in the wake of the controversy over Maastricht. By 2000–04, only 48–50 per cent of Europeans thought that membership was a 'good thing', although the number had recovered by 2007 to nearly 60 per cent (Eurobarometer polls 54 (2001), 61 (2004), and 67 (2007)).

There has also been first a decline and then a recovery in the number of people who believe that their country has benefited from membership, from 58 per cent in 1990 to 47 per cent in 2004 to 59 per cent in 2007. Among those most convinced of the benefits are the majority of Eastern European member states (Bulgaria and Hungary excepted) and older member states that have most clearly seen the economic benefits of membership, such as Ireland, Greece, and Spain. Eurosceptical Denmark is surprisingly enthusiastic (with four out of five Danes seeing benefits), stalwarts Germany and France are surprisingly lukewarm (just over half of respondents feel there have been benefits), and Britain predictably helps bring up the rear (see Figure 6.1).

Clearly, opinion about the EU is mixed, and there are several probable explanations for this. First, integration is still a relatively new issue for the average European. True, the Treaty of Rome was signed back in 1957, and work was under way on the construction of the common market in the 1960s and 1970s, but it has only been since the early 1990s that the effects of integration have really begun to have much of a direct impact on the lives of Europeans, who have been slow to appreciate its implications, and have

Figure 6.1 *Public opinion on EU membership*



Source: Eurobarometer 67, June 2007.

only recently begun to think in much depth about the costs and benefits of integration, or to learn more about how the EU works.

Second, the actions of national and EU leaders are often at odds with the balance of public opinion. Take the issue of enlargement, for example: only 44 per cent of EU citizens supported the idea in 2000 while 35 per cent were opposed, and only 26 per cent saw it as a priority for the EU while 62 per cent

did not. Undeterred, the Commission continued to negotiate with aspirant members, and 12 of them joined in 2004–07. In a similar vein, support for the euro strengthened in the lead-up to the final switch in 2002, but it was still lukewarm, with only 55 per cent in favour, 37 per cent against, and 8 per cent undecided. Equally undeterred, the leaders of 12 member states gave up their national currencies and switched to the euro, in every case failing to put the issue to a public referendum.

Although public opinion is occasionally overlooked, there is reason to question the extent to which it is well informed, and thus can be relied upon. The average European admits to knowing little about how the EU functions or what it does (see Box 6.1), which raises questions about the credibility of the views of many of those surveyed by Eurobarometer or other polls. And there have been several cases where polls have found initial majority opposition to an initiative, only to find it later replaced by majority support. Take, for example, the debate over the euro. Two years after its adoption, Europeans still had mixed views (47 per cent support and 44 per cent opposition). However, by 2006 there had been a switch to 60 per cent support, and nowhere was the change of heart more clear than in Germany: polls in the mid-1990s found that more than 60 per cent of Germans were opposed to the euro and unwilling to surrender the Deutschmark, but by 2006 two-thirds of Germans supported the euro (Eurobarometer, Flash EB 153, November 2003; Eurobarometer 66, December 2006). On some issues at least, the EU's political leaders can reasonably claim to be ahead of public opinion.

The third problem is that national leaders, European institutions, the media and academic experts have done a less than perfect job of explaining the implications, costs, and benefits of integration. To be fair, integration is a complex process that is constantly changing, and the implications of the changes have not always been fully understood even by policy makers – every new step has produced unanticipated effects (the single market programme being a prime example) and the switch to the euro was a leap into the unknown. But there has been no constitution to which citizens can refer for clarification, the treaties confuse as much as they illuminate, academics seem to be much more interested in what is wrong with the EU than what is right with it, and coverage in the Eurosceptical media misleads by emphasizing the negative at the expense of the positive.

Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, there is the issue of the democratic deficit. This has been defined as 'the gap between the powers transferred to the Community level and the control of the elected Parliament over them' (Williams, 1991, p. 162), and as 'the shift in decision-making powers from the national to the EU level, without accompanying strengthening of parliamentary control of executive bodies' (Archer, 2000, p. 58). These definitions imply that the democratic deficit could be narrowed by giving the European Parliament greater powers, or by giving national legislatures greater control over EU institutions, but the problem is much broader, and a better definition of the democratic deficit might be the gap between the powers of European institutions and the ability of European citizens to influence their work and decisions.

Box 6.1 The knowledge deficit

No matter how much the European Commission tries to make Europe seem more real to its citizens, and no matter how often the European Council talks about the importance of transparency, one critical reality remains: the average European knows little about how the EU works. This has been made clear by the results of Eurobarometer surveys, in which respondents are asked how much they know about the EU, its policies, and its institutions, and to give themselves a score out of 10, with 10 meaning they know a great deal and 1 meaning they know little. In 2002, no less than 71 per cent of respondents gave themselves (failing) scores of 5 or less, and the average for the sample worked out at 4.48. Just 2 per cent gave themselves scores of 9 or higher (Eurobarometer 58, Autumn 2002). The results were even worse in 2006, when 76 per cent gave themselves scores of 5 or less, and the average worked out at 4.10 (Eurobarometer 66, December 2006).

Those who feel they know the most include managers, university graduates, Europeans who use the media regularly, and those in the age range of 25–54. Those with the lowest levels of knowledge include manual workers, retirees, and people with a high school education or lower. In descending order, Luxembourgers, Danes, the Dutch, Austrians, Slovakians and Swedes felt they knew the most in 2006 (all above 4.7), while those who scored themselves lowest were Italians, Belgians, Bulgarians, French, Spaniards, Hungarians, and Britons (all 4.0 or below). It is interesting to note that Eurosceptic Danes scored themselves so high, while the French admitted to knowing so little.

When tested on the specifics in 2004, 55 per cent of respondents incorrectly thought that the EU was created just after the First World War, 50 per cent did not know that Members of the European Parliament were directly elected by voters, and 48 per cent incorrectly thought that the president of the European Commission was elected to that position. Meanwhile, nearly one in three Europeans had never even *heard* of the Council of Ministers, and about one in five had never heard of the European Commission, the Court of Justice, or the European Central Bank. Meanwhile, reflecting popular prejudices, one in four Europeans thought that the biggest item on the EU budget was the cost for officials, meetings, and buildings. (As we saw in Chapter 5, administration actually accounts for just over 5 per cent of EU spending, while cohesion and agriculture account for 70 per cent.) (All results from Eurobarometer 61, Spring 2004.)

These are not encouraging figures. It will be difficult for Europeans to develop a sense of belonging to the European Union if they continue to know so little about it, and as long as they know so little, they will continue to misunderstand its work, raising questions about the extent to which polling on the EU can be relied upon, and perpetuating the elitist qualities of EU decision making. Ironically, the lack of public knowledge persists despite attempts by the Commission to make its work more accessible through printed and audiovisual media and the internet.

The deficit takes several forms:

- The leaders of the member states, meeting as the European Council, reach decisions on important policy matters without always referring to their electorates. Less than half the EU-15 member states asked their citizens whether they wanted to join the European Community or the European Union, for example (in contrast to the newest eastern and Mediterranean members, where referendums were held in nine of the 12 countries). The Maastricht treaty was negotiated largely behind closed doors, poorly explained to the European public and – despite the important changes it made to the structure and goals of the EU – was put to the test of a referendum in only three member states (Denmark, France, and Ireland), one of which (Denmark) said no, and another of which (France) said yes only by a narrow margin. Amsterdam and Nice were equally poorly explained, and equally poorly tested.
- Despite its powers over proposing and developing new European laws, the Commission is subject to little direct or even indirect public accountability. Appointments to the College of Commissioners must be approved by Parliament, but otherwise they are made without reference to voters. The president of the Commission is appointed as a result of a game of musical chairs run by the leaders of the member states, represents the views of the EU in several international forums without a mandate from the people, and has tenure that is subject to the whims of national leaders rather than the opinions of European citizens. Furthermore, there is little opportunity for citizens to take part in or contribute to the deliberations of the Commission, and only limited (albeit improving) opportunity for the European Parliament to hold it accountable for its initiatives and decisions.
- Most meetings of the Council of Ministers and the permanent representatives in Brussels are closed to the public, despite the fact that many important decisions on the content of new laws and policies, and on their acceptance or rejection, are taken there. Ministers and representatives take the kinds of decisions that – at the national level – are taken by members of elected assemblies, who are held accountable for their actions at elections, by the media, and in the court of public opinion.
- The European Parliament – the only democratically elected institution in the EU system – lacks several of the powers of a true legislature: it cannot raise revenues or introduce new laws, and it has only a limited ability to hold the Commission accountable for its decisions. It has worked hard to win new powers for itself, but most of the important decisions on EU law and policy are still taken elsewhere.
- The Court of Justice is the institution that best champions the cause of individual Europeans, being the final court of appeal for anyone who feels they have been hurt by European law, by its non-appliance, or by contradictions between European and national law. However, Europeans have no direct say in appointments to the Court, nor will they until the kind of legislative confirmation that is used for courts in many member states is adopted by the EU, and nominees to the Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance are investigated and confirmed by the European Parliament.
- The formal rights of Europeans relative to the EU institutions are modest: they have the right to vote in European elections, to petition Parliament or the European ombudsman (see below) if they feel their rights or interests have been violated, to access the documents of EU institutions (within certain limits), and to diplomatic representation outside the EU by any member state, provided their own country has no local representation.

The democratic deficit has contributed to a psychological barrier between Europeans and the EU, undermining the development of the ties that must exist between leaders and citizens in order for a system of government to work. True, most national systems of government also suffer from their own forms of democratic deficit, but the perception (at least) is that the problem is significantly worse in the EU, and that it has helped create a troubling distance between Europeans and the EU institutions. It is hardly surprising that the anti-European media are able to generate public distrust and resentment towards these institutions, which often appear distant and mysterious. This is most obvious in the case of the Commission. Although it is a small and productive institution with a small budget, and can only propose and oversee the implementation of new laws, it is often misrepresented by Eurosceptics as powerful, overpaid, unaccountable, and secretive. It is helped little by the fact that most of its staff occupy a series of anonymous buildings spread around the suburbs of Brussels, and that access to those buildings by ordinary Europeans is restricted.

The European Commission is well aware of the problems, and made some candid admissions in a White Paper published in 2001 on the issue of governance:

> Europeans ... increasingly distrust institutions and politics or are simply not interested in them. The problem ... is particularly acute at the level of the European Union. Many people are losing confidence in a poorly understood and complex system to deliver the policies that they want. The Union is often seen as remote and at the same time too intrusive ... [The EU] must start adapting its institutions and establishing more coherence in its policies so that it is easier to see what it does and what it stands for. A more coherent Union will be stronger at home and a better leader in the world ... Reform must be started now.

The paper also defended the work of EU institutions, noting that there is a perception that the EU cannot act effectively where a clear case exists (such as on unemployment, food safety scares, and security concerns on EU borders), that even where the EU acts effectively it does not get fair credit for its actions, that people do not see that improvements in their quality of life often come from European rather than national initiatives, that '"Brussels" is too easily blamed by Member States for difficult decisions that they themselves have agreed or even requested', and that many Europeans 'do not know the difference between the [EU institutions, and do not] understand who takes the decisions that effect them and do not feel the Institutions act as an effective channel for their views and concerns' (Commission of the European Communities, 2001a, pp. 3, 7). Unfortunately, rather than making specific suggestions for change, the paper made the usual mistake of talking in generalities and employing bureaucratic notions of better involvement, more openness, greater flexibility, 'partnership arrangements', 'a more systematic dialogue', and 'policy coherence' – whatever these mean.

The democratic deficit has been the topic of a scholarly debate dating back many years (see, for example, Andersen and Eliassen, 1995; Chryssochoou, 2000), but opinion is divided on whether or not it is the problem it seems. Franklin (1996, p. 197) once described the lack of proper democratic accountability in the EU as 'a crisis of legitimacy', and this is a view still widely held. But Jolly (2007) argues that the suggestion that increasing the powers of the European Parliament can help remedy the deficit is based on the flawed assumption that the citizenry of Europe can be compared to the citizenries of individual member states, and that there is a European demos – or people – that cares about such matters. Much also depends upon how the EU is understood. If it is a federation, or has aspirations to become one, then the necessary links between citizens and EU institutions are indeed weak. But if it is a confederation, then the links are unusually strong. In a confederal system the links are expected to be no more than indirect: national governments answer to their citizens, and in turn represent them in the meeting chambers of the central authority. If this is accepted as a description of how the EU works, then the extent of the problem of the democratic deficit must be called into question.

The people's Europe

It took more than thirty years for political leaders to begin paying much attention to the question of how Europeans related to the process of integration. A report was drawn up in 1975 at the request of the European Council by Leo Tindemans, prime minister of Belgium, looking into the steps that might be taken to achieve a more integrated Europe that was 'closer' to its citizens. But nothing more was done until June 1984, when the EEC heads of government, meeting in Fontainebleau and spending most of their time agreeing reforms to the Community budget, briefly turned their attention to the idea of a 'people's Europe'. Pietro Adonnino, a former Italian MEP, was hired to chair a committee to put forward suggestions on how the EEC might be brought more closely in touch with its citizens.

The committee endorsed arrangements that had already been made for a European passport: national passports were phased out after 1986 and replaced by a standardized burgundy-coloured European passport bearing the words 'European Community' (later 'European Union') in the appropriate national language, and the name and coat of arms of the holder's home state. It also endorsed arrangements for a European flag, adopting the banner used since 1955 by the Council of Europe, the design of which – a circle of 12 gold stars on a blue background – is credited to Paul Levy, director of information for the Council (Bainbridge and Teasdale, 1995, pp. 188–9). The flag has since become a potent symbol of Europe – it can be seen flying on public buildings, shops and hotels throughout the EU, and is omnipresent at meetings of EU leaders. (It was popularly thought until the early 1990s that the 12 stars represented the 12 member states but the number was coincidental and the design has not been changed as membership of the EU has grown.) Meanwhile the European Commission created an annual 'Europe Day' (9 May, the anniversary of the Schuman Declaration), and adopted as the official European anthem the 'Ode to Joy' by Friedrich von Schiller, sung to the final movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

The Single European Act incorporated more of the Adonnino recommendations, the most important of which was the easing of restrictions on the free movement of people. At the time of the Treaty of Rome it was understood that an open labour market would be an essential part of a single market, but while all Community citizens were given the right to 'move and reside freely' within all the member states, this was subject to 'limitations justified on grounds of public policy, public security or public health'. Since integration in the early days was economically driven, priority was given to making it easier for people who were economically active to move from one state to another. Limits were placed on migration, initially because governments wanted to protect themselves against the possibility of a shortage of skilled workers, and then because of the lack of opportunities in the target states (Barnes and Barnes, 1995, p. 108).

Changes under the SEA allowed residents of the EU-15 to move and live anywhere in the EU, provided they were covered by health insurance and had enough income to avoid being a 'burden' on the welfare system of the country to which they moved (see Chapter 7 for more discussion). The removal of restrictions on movement has since helped make Europeans more mobile, and the number of non-nationals living in member states has risen. There were 5

Box 6.2 Euroscepticism

Public and political opinion on both the process of European integration and on the work of the European institutions is divided, but this is no surprise: all political endeavours in democratic systems will have their supporters and their opponents. Although the majority of Europeans support the process and feel that Europe has benefited from the work of the EU, there are many who disagree, and who advocate opinions ranging from wholesale reform of the process to its abandonment. Known variously as Eurorealists or Eurosceptics, critics of the EU believe that it is a harmful development, and regret the shift of sovereignty away from the member states to the EU institutions. Although the scale of criticism has not increased much in recent years, the Eurosceptic debate has become more visible thanks in part to its growing prominence in media debates about Europe, and it has played a greater role both in domestic politics – with the rise of minor parties opposed to European integration, and splits within mainstream parties between Europeans and anti-Europeans – and in the broader debate about integration, where it has had a critical role in opposition to treaty reforms, enlargement, and new policy initiatives.

The arguments put forward by Eurosceptics vary from country to country, and by issue and time, but they have included some or all of the following: that the European institutions have become too powerful and lack adequate transparency or democratic accountability; that integration is leading to the creation of a European superstate that is out of touch with citizens; that the EU is promoting unpopular policies (for the political left, for example, this means too much of an emphasis on free markets, and for the political right it means too much power in the hands of workers); that too many decisions are taken by European leaders without sufficient reference to citizens; that national sovereignty and identity are threatened by integration; that the demands of Europe are unsustainable for more fragile economies; that the EU institutions are elitist, and even – in more extreme cases – that there is a conspiracy among European leaders to move ahead without reference to citizens (for an example of Eurosceptic thinking, see Booker and North, 2005).

Euroscepticism is not a well-defined ideology so much as a set of related positions based on opposition to European integration. Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004) distinguish between hard and soft forms. The former is based on principled objections to the transfer of power to European institutions, it is relatively easy to see, and is most obvious in the case of those who argue for the withdrawal of their countries from the EU, and in the case of political parties whose platform is opposition to the EU, such as the People's Movement in Denmark and the UK Independence Party in Britain. Soft Euroscepticism is based on opposition to the direction being taken by the EU and a further expansion of its powers, and is both harder to see and more widespread than hard Euroscepticism.

million immigrants in 1950, 10 million in 1970, and there are probably more than twice that number today, although tracking has become more difficult as restrictions have been lifted. The flow of immigration was initially from south to north, and most of those moving were workers from Mediterranean

states looking for higher-paying jobs, and then sending for their families to join them. Immigration flows today are more complex because there has been an increase in the movement of students, professionals, managers, and retirees. Where Europeans once moved involuntarily for economic reasons (and they still do, as shown by the number of Eastern Europeans moving west since 2004 in search of better-paid jobs), more are now moving voluntarily and for a variety of different reasons – they may be looking for a different cultural environment in which to live, looking to be educated in a different country, retiring to warmer parts of the EU, being posted by their employer, or looking for a new start in a new country.

Tourism has played an important role in making Europeans more mobile. Most Europeans could once afford to travel only within their own countries, but the advent of cheap mass tourism since the late 1960s has led to a marked increase in the numbers of people taking holidays in other member states. Day trips, weekend breaks, stays of one or two weeks, timeshares, package holidays, the purchase of holiday homes and extended visits for those who can afford the time have all combined to increase the ease and comfort with which Europeans travel around the continent. Language differences still pose a psychological barrier, but the easing of restrictions on movement has combined with the introduction of the euro to make other member states seem less 'foreign' to Europeans.

All these demographic shifts have been helped by another element of the Adonnino report that was formalized by the SEA: arrangements for the mutual recognition of professional qualifications. The Commission at first tried to work on each profession in turn, to reach agreement on the requirements, and then propose a new law. But this was time-consuming, and in 1991 a general systems directive was adopted by which the member states agreed to trust the adequacy of qualifications that required at least three years of professional training in other member states. The list of mutually recognized professions has since grown, and now includes accountants, librarians, architects, engineers, and lawyers. The Commission has meanwhile published a comparative guide to national qualifications for more than 200 occupations, helping employers work out equivalencies across the member states.

An important element in worker mobility is education and youth training, where the EU has been active in encouraging educational exchanges and addressing the critical issue of language training. The EU Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), which replaces an earlier programme called Socrates, helps promote cross-border education through sub-programmes called Comenius (primary and secondary school partnerships), Erasmus (higher education) and Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig (vocational education). Since 1999 the Bologna process has improved the portability of qualifications with the goal of creating a European higher education area within which university education is compatible, comparable and transferable, and of making European higher

education more attractive and internationally competitive. Bologna includes a European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) under which study at any university in the EU is translated into a common credit system, thus helping open up the educational options available to students in Europe. Almost every European country, along with Turkey and Russia, has signed on to the process.

The inability to speak other languages poses a practical barrier to the free movement of workers, and also stands as a potent reminder of the differences among Europeans. In addition to the 23 official languages of the EU – Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish, and Swedish – Europeans must also deal with many local languages and dialects, and languages spoken within the EU by large numbers of nationals from non-EU states (notably Turks and Arabs). Almost all secondary school pupils in the EU learn at least one foreign language, although some have a better record than others. The rise of English as the lingua franca of Europe has been notable and inexorable, helped by its use in international commerce, entertainment, and sport; an estimated 85 per cent of secondary school pupils in the EU-25 were learning English as a second language in 2004, the most active English learners being in Austria, Denmark, Finland France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden (where more than 95 per cent of students take English classes). Meanwhile, only 23 per cent of Germans are learning French, and only 18 per cent of French students are learning German (Eurostat, 2007, p. 91).

While tourism, the removal of technical barriers to movement and the promotion of language training all contribute to free movement, integration will never be able to do much about the social and psychological barriers posed by differences in the routine of daily existence. Americans can readily travel from one state to another in search of jobs or to improve the quality of their lives, and will find their daily routine changing little; they will find the same shops, the same banking system, the same money, the same programmes on television, and so on. By contrast, Europeans not only face different languages, but must also deal with a host of new norms and rules, including everything from different social customs to different sets of road signs and traffic regulations, different procedures for renting or buying a home, taking out car insurance or opening a bank account, and a new array of products on the shelves of local supermarkets. It is psychologically difficult enough for an American family to uproot itself and move hundreds of miles away, but the challenge of acculturation in the EU is much greater. An Italian moving to Denmark or a Swede moving to Hungary may eventually learn how things are done locally, but there is a limit to how much new EU laws and policies can help.

Another of the changes introduced by Maastricht was the promotion of European citizenship, although this is not what it seems. 'Citizenship' in democracies is usually defined as full and responsible membership of a state, and has been described by some social scientists as including the right to equality before the law, the right to own property, the right to freedom of speech, and the right to a minimum standard of economic and social welfare. But these are all rights that legal non-citizens of democracies also enjoy. What usually makes a citizen different from a non-citizen in practical terms is that a citizen can vote and run for elective office in his or her home state, can serve on a jury in that state, is eligible to serve in the armed forces of that state (although some countries allow non-citizens to serve), cannot be forcibly removed from that state to another, has the right to receive protection from the state when outside its borders, is recognized as a subject of that state by other governments, and must usually obtain the permission of other governments to travel through or live in their territory. More intangibly, citizens feel a sense of 'belonging' to their home state.

According to Maastricht 'every person holding the nationality of a member state shall be a citizen of the Union', but this is less substantial than it sounds. A step in the direction of real citizenship was taken with the agreement that citizens of a member state finding themselves in need in a non-EU country where their home state had no diplomatic representation could receive protection from the diplomatic and consular authorities of any EU state that had a local office. Another step was taken with the easing of restrictions on voting and running for elective office: citizens of one member state living in another can vote and stand for municipal and European Parliament elections (but not for national elections).

Another change introduced by Maastricht under the 'People's Europe' initiative was the creation of a European ombudsman. If a legal resident of the EU feels that any of the EU institutions (other than the Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance) is guilty of 'maladministration', and can make a compelling case, the European Parliament must ask the ombudsman to review the complaint, and if necessary carry out an investigation. Appointed for a five-year term that runs concurrently with the term of Parliament, the ombudsman is expected to be both impartial and independent of any government. Since the first ombudsman was appointed in 1995, the Commission has been the target of most of the complaints, which have included charges that it has failed to carry out its responsibilities as guardian of the treaties, that it lacks sufficient transparency, and that it has abused its power. The number of complaints has grown over the years, which is probably less a sign that things are getting worse than a sign that more people are becoming aware of the work of the ombudsman.

Participation and representation

Making Europe more 'real' to Europeans poses one set of challenges, but giving them a meaningful say in how it makes its decisions poses quite another. The realization by the citizens of the member states that they belong to a larger joint enterprise in which it is in their interest to participate must come from them. They need to understand the implications of integration, they must see and directly experience its benefits, and they must feel that they can have a real impact on the way it evolves. Of course, if the EU is a confederation then direct links between EU institutions and Europeans are unnecessary: the people hold their national governments accountable, which in turn represent their interests at the European level. But this is no more than an ideal, because not only do Europe's national leaders often pursue narrow political interests, but they often reach agreements on European policy in the face of public opposition.

As 'Europe' becomes a more important issue in national politics, as more Europeans take advantage of the removal of internal borders and travel restrictions, and as voters figure policies on Europe into their calculations about choosing among competing national political parties and leaders, so Europeans will have more influence on policies and positions adopted in the meeting rooms and hallways of the Commission, the Council of Ministers, and the European Council. Until this happens, there are three other channels through which they can influence the outcome of European policy decisions: voting in European elections and referendums, and supporting the work of interest groups.

European elections

Held every five years since 1979, elections to the European Parliament (EP) give Europeans the opportunity to decide the make-up of the EP, which has an increasingly effective role in making European law. Voters must be 18 years of age and must be citizens of one of the EU member states. Since Maastricht, they have been allowed to vote in whichever country they have residence, and even to run for the EP wherever they live, regardless of citizenship. To vote they must make a declaration to the local electoral authority and meet local qualifications; to run for office they must meet qualifications in their home state. The minimum age for candidates varies from 18 to 25 years, depending on the country of residence, and there are also different rules on how candidates qualify; some member states do not allow independent candidates, some require candidates to pay deposits, others require them to collect signatures, and so on.

Every member state uses multi-member districts and variations on the theme of proportional representation (PR), either treating their entire territory as

a single electoral district (Germany, Spain, Poland and most of the smaller EU states) or dividing it up into several Euro-constituencies (Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, and Ireland). Seats are then divided among parties according to their share of the vote. PR has the advantage of reflecting more accurately the proportion of the vote given to different parties, but it also results in many small parties being elected to Parliament. Also, PR leads to voters being represented by a group of MEPs of different parties, and constituents may never get to know or develop ties with a particular MEP.

Once elected, MEPs sit not in national blocks but in cross-national ideological groups with roughly similar goals and values. By the rules of the EP, a group must have at least 20 members, who must be elected from at least one-fifth of member states. No one party group has ever had enough seats to form a majority, so groups must work together in order to achieve a majority. The balance of power and the order of business is also affected by frequent changes in the number and make-up of party groups. Three groups have developed a particular consistency over time – the Socialists on the left, the Liberals on the centre-right, and the European People's Party on the right – but they have always had to share power with a cluster of smaller parties with a variety of values and opinions (see Box 6.3).

Unfortunately, turnout at EP elections is low, compromising the credibility and political influence of Parliament. From a modest peak of 63 per cent in 1979, figures fell to just under 57 per cent in 1994, then took a relatively sharp fall to just over 49 per cent in 1999, tailing off to just under 46 per cent in 2004. Belgium and Luxembourg usually have the highest turnout (85–92 per cent), but in most member states fewer than half of all voters now cast ballots. Several countries started out on a high note upon joining the EU, only to see their voters lose enthusiasm: thus Portugal fell from 72 to 39 per cent, Austria from nearly 70 to 42 per cent, and Finland from 60 to 40 per cent. Optimists expected that the figures in 2004 for new members in their first flush of membership would be high, but they turned out to be among the worst ever: less than 42 per cent turned out in most countries, and just one in five in Poland and Slovakia (see Figure 6.2).

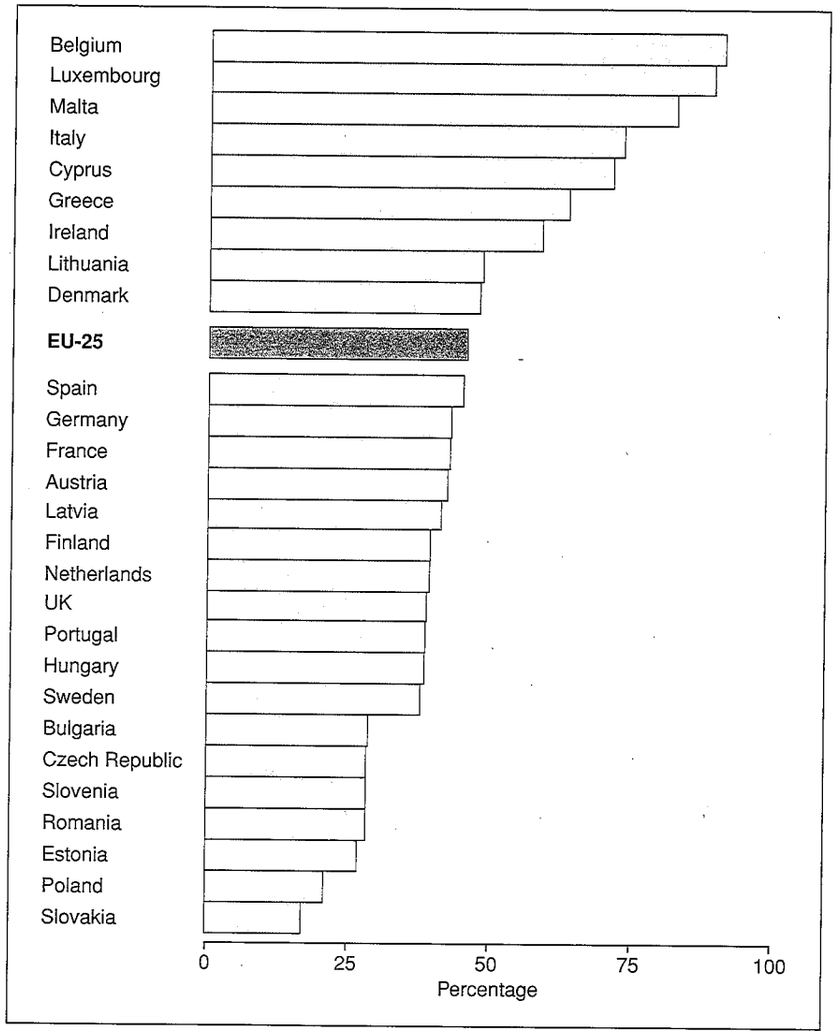
There are several explanations for this state of affairs, the most compelling of which is the relative significance of 'first-order' and 'second-order' elections (Reiff and Schmitt, 1980; Hix, 2005, pp. 180–4). Voters give priority to national elections, because they determine who controls the national executive and legislatures, which in turn make the decisions that are most immediate and relevant in the lives of citizens. National elections are also hard-fought and attract the most media attention. By contrast, European elections are seen as second-order elections because there is less at stake; there is no potential change of government involved, they draw much less media attention, and most Europeans either know very little about what Parliament does, or are confused or badly informed about European issues.

Box 6.3 Parties in the European Parliament

The 2004 European elections brought 160 different parties to the EP, many of which consisted of as few as one or two members. Since there is little that these parties can achieve alone, it is in their interests to build alliances with other parties, and thus they have formed cross-European party groups. Some of these have been marriages of convenience, but most have built more consistency and focus with time (for details, see Bardi, 2002; Corbett *et al.*, 2005, Chapter 5). Moving from left to right on the ideological spectrum, the party groups in 2007 were as follows:

- *European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL)*. One of the least consistent of the party groups, it is made up mainly of German, Italian, and Czech leftists.
- *Socialist Group (PSE)*. This is the main left-wing group in Parliament, and currently the second largest, with a few ex-communists on the left but dominated by more moderate social democrats. It has members from all but two EU states, with France, Spain, and Germany sending the biggest contingents.
- *Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)*. Consistently the third largest group in the EP, the ALDE contains members from all but five member states. Difficult to pinpoint in ideological terms, most of its members sit in or around the centre, and its biggest national blocs are from Britain, Italy, France and Romania.
- *Greens-European Free Alliance (Greens-EFA)*. Has seen substantial growth in recent years, with new additions to its numbers after the 2004 elections making it the fifth biggest party group in the EP. Pursues a variety of issues related to social justice.
- *European People's Party and European Democrats (EPP-ED)*. The major right-wing group in Parliament, the EPP overtook the socialists in 1999 to become the biggest party group, with MEPs from every EU member state. The delegations from Germany, the UK, Spain, and Italy are the largest.
- *Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN)*. A small group of centre-right MEPs driven by opposition to Maastricht and federalism, and who have so far refused to link up with their most natural ally, the EPP. Most of its members come from Poland and Italy.
- *Independence/Democracy Group (ID)*. Created after the 2004 elections, this consists of self-described 'EU critics, eurosceptics, and eurorealists'. It opposes a European superstate and political centralization.
- *Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty Group (ITS)*. The most conservative and nationalist party group, ITS was formed in 2007 when the accession of Bulgaria and Romania gave it enough MEPs to apply for group status.

Figure 6.2 *Turnout at European Parliament elections, 2004*



Source: European Parliament website, http://www.europarl.europa.eu. Bulgarian elections were held in May 2007 and Romanian elections in November 2007, and their turnout figures are not included in the EU average.

Among the other explanations for low turnout:

- EU voters have developed relatively few psychological ties to the European Parliament, which may be the best known of all the EU institutions, but still seems anonymous and distant to most.
- MEPs do not become well-known political figures, so there is little of the personality politics at the European level that often sparks voter interest and turnout in national elections.
- Low turnout mirrors a general downward trend in national elections in many EU member states. Where turnout at EP elections fell by 13 per cent between 1979 and 1999, it fell by 10–14 per cent over roughly the same period in (for example) France, Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands (Corbett, 2001).
- Turnout is often a reflection of how voters view their home governments and national political issues, and many will use their vote to send a message to national politicians. This is exacerbated by the way most political parties run as national parties, rather than as members of genuine Europe-wide party groups. So if voters are not interested by national politics, they are less likely to turn out at European elections.

One of the suggestions made by the Adonnino committee that has not yet been implemented was for the establishment of a uniform electoral procedure for European elections. The idea was first outlined in the Treaty of Paris, repeated in the Treaty of Rome and raised again on several subsequent occasions, but little has been achieved in practical terms. Even the definition of the word 'uniform' in this context is debatable, and while a decision was taken at the 1974 Paris summit that the goal would be met if European elections were secret, direct, based on universal suffrage and held on the same day, this has not been the end of the story.

Referendums

National referendums allow European voters to express their opinions on narrow (but usually important) topics. Not every country uses them, and they have only been used for selected issues, but they have come to play an increasingly important role in the process of European integration, and there has been increased moral and political pressure for their use. Some have been little more than tools for political manipulation, as when Britain held a referendum in 1975 that was ostensibly about whether or not Britain should stay in the Community following renegotiation of the terms, but was actually designed to settle a division of opinion about Europe within the government (Nugent, 2006, p. 483). Others have had a significant impact on the course of European integration, as when the terms of Maastricht and Nice were amended following their rejection in referendums in, respectively, Denmark and Ireland. Voters are so rarely given the opportunity to express their views on EU matters that referendums are often used to express opinions on the EU and European integration more generally, rather than just the issue at hand.

Most referendums have fallen into one of two major categories:

- *Whether or not to join the EU.* These have been held only by newer members of the EU, beginning with the votes held in Denmark, Ireland, and Norway in 1972. A majority of Danes and Irish approved, but a majority of Norwegians disapproved, and said no in a second referendum in 1994. The Swiss also said no to EU membership in a referendum in 2001. All three countries that joined the EU in 1995 held referendums, as did nine of the ten countries that joined in 2004 (the exception was Cyprus). The results were all positive for membership, but levels of enthusiasm varied: the Slovaks, Lithuanians, and Slovenians were the most supportive, with 90–92 per cent majorities in favour, while in Finland, Sweden, and Malta, bare majorities of just over 50 per cent said yes. The only example of a territory leaving the EU came in 1982, when the 53,000 voters of Greenland – which had joined in 1973 as part of Denmark – opted to leave.
- *Whether or not to accept a new treaty.* This has only been a recent phenomenon, and only in a select few countries. Denmark held a vote on the Single European Act in 1986, mainly because the government wanted to outmanoeuvre parliament, which had voted against ratification. Most Danes (56.2 per cent) said yes on that occasion, but a bare majority of 50.7 per cent turned down Maastricht in 1992, and 54 per cent of Irish voters turned down the Treaty of Nice in 2001. The negative votes gave Europeans pause for thought, and resulted in changes to the treaties. New referendums in both countries subsequently went in favour of the treaties. The Danish vote on Maastricht also drew attention to the elitist nature of EU decision making, and obliged European leaders to think more about public opinion. Referendums were also held in 1998 in Denmark and Ireland on the terms of the Amsterdam treaty, and both were positive. Undoubtedly the most politically significant referendums to date were those in the Netherlands and France in 2005 on the constitutional treaty, when – respectively – 61 per cent and 55 per cent voted no. The French vote was particularly newsworthy, given that France has been a staple of European integration from the beginning.

Just as important as the result of some of these votes has been the symbolism often attached to the *absence* of referendums. The issue of adopting the euro was particularly controversial, and was put to a vote in just two countries, Denmark and Sweden, where the outcomes were both negative. Meanwhile, none of the 15 governments that adopted the euro have held a referendum, often for fear of a similar result. The Blair administration in Britain promised

a referendum when the time was right, but never did, again mainly for fear of a negative vote; the Eurobarometer 61 poll (2004) found 61 per cent of Britons opposed to adopting the euro. Soon after coming to office, Gordon Brown found himself in trouble over the issue of the Lisbon treaty, claiming that it was significantly different from the constitutional treaty and thus did not merit a referendum, but failing to convince his critics.

Interest groups

While national leaders promote national agendas, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – or interest groups – have cut across national frontiers to promote the shared sectional interests of groups of people in multiple member states. In addition to the EU bodies that represent these interests, such as the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (see Box 4.3), the last 20–25 years have seen the growth of hundreds of NGOs that represent the views of a large number of groups of people with a stake in EU policy and law. Many are an outgrowth of pre-existing national groups, others have been set up specifically to respond to European issues, and many have opened offices in Brussels in order to be close to the Commission and the Council of Ministers. Studies in the 1990s indicated that there were nearly 700 groups working to influence decisions taken at the European level, and that about two-thirds of them had existed since 1980 or earlier. Just over 60 per cent were business groups, 21 per cent dealt with public interest issues and 16 per cent were professional organizations (Aspinwall and Greenwood, 1998).

The growth in interest group activity at the European level has paralleled the growth in the power and influence of the EU institutions, or the 'European-ization' of policy areas that were once the preserve of national governments (Mazey and Richardson, 1996, p. 200). The groups have not always simply followed the evolution of the EU, going wherever new opportunities for influence have presented themselves, but have often been actively involved in pushing the EU in new directions. Business leaders, for example, were champions of the single market, arguing that competition among European corporations was a handicap to their ability to take on the Americans and the Japanese. At the same time, the European Commission has encouraged interest group activity; it uses groups as a source of expert knowledge and to test the viability of new laws, and also uses them to monitor the compliance records of member states: most groups are only too happy to blow the whistle on their home governments if they are not implementing EU law.

Historically, business and labour groups have been the most active, mainly because the process of integration was for so long driven by economic issues (Greenwood, 2003). As the EU won new powers over competition policy, mergers, and the movement of workers, so business and labour groups made

greater efforts to influence the Commission and the Council of Ministers. Not only are individual corporations represented either directly or through lobbying firms in Brussels, but several cross-sectoral federations have been created to represent the interests of a broader membership. These include BusinessEurope (formerly the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE)), which represents 39 national business federations from 33 countries, the European Round Table of Industrialists (which brings together the chief executives of major European corporations such as British Airways, Renault, Bayer, Fiat, Philips, Volvo, and Nokia), and the EU Committee of the American Chamber of Commerce (which represents American firms active in Europe).

Labour is also represented in Brussels, notably through groups such as the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), whose membership consists of more than 80 European-level industry federations and national labour federations from 36 countries, including Britain's TUC, France's CGT, and Germany's DGB. Professional interests are represented by groups such as the Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff (EUROCADRES), and by associations representing everything from architects to dentists, journalists, opticians and vets. Several Brussels-based interest groups include member organizations from outside the EU, a reflection of how much the EU has come to matter to business and labour throughout Europe.

Groups representing public interests, such as consumer issues and the environment, have also become more active as the EU has become more involved in matters about which they care. Until the 1970s, environmental groups focused their attentions on national governments, because they had different priorities, and because most environmental policy in Western Europe was still made at the national level. As the Community became more active on the environment in the mid-1980s, it became a more profitable target for interest group pressure. The new emphasis given to EU-level activities was reflected in the opening of offices in Brussels by such groups as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and the World Wide Fund for Nature, while many other groups employed full-time lobbyists. As environmental groups became more active, so did groups representing the industrial perspective on environmental issues, such as the European Chemical Industry Council (Cefic), Eurelectric (representing national electricity supply associations), and the European Crop Protection Association.

Increased access to EU policy makers led in turn to a more systematic approach among environmental groups to lobbying at the European level, and a clear trend towards approaching domestic environmental problems as EU-wide problems. The complexity of those problems encouraged domestic groups to work more closely together and to form transnational coalitions, the best known of which is the European Environmental Bureau (EEB). Founded in 1974 with the encouragement of the Commission, the EEB is an umbrella

body for national interest groups in the EU, and acts as a conduit for the representation of those groups in the EU institutions, particularly the Commission. The Bureau now claims to represent more than 140 national environmental groups with a combined membership of 25 million (for more information, see McCormick, 2001, pp. 116–22).

The methods that European-level groups use are similar to those used by groups at any level: promoting public awareness in support of their cause, building membership numbers in order to increase their influence and credibility, representing the views of their members, forming networks with other interest groups, providing information to the EU institutions, meeting with EU lawmakers in an attempt to influence the content of law, and monitoring the implementation of EU law at the national level.

Aspinwall and Greenwood (1998) argue that the representation of interests at the European level has become more diversified and specialized, and that European groups are becoming protagonists: they now try to influence policy rather than simply to monitor events, using increasingly sophisticated means to attract allegiance. A symbiotic relationship has developed between the Commission and interest groups, with the former actively supporting the work of many groups and giving them access to its advisory committee meetings, and the latter doing what they can to influence the content and development of policy and legislative proposals as they work their way through the Commission.

The activities of interest groups have helped offset the problem of the democratic deficit by offering Europeans channels outside the formal structure of EU institutions through which they can influence EU policy. They have also helped focus the attention of the members of interest groups on how the EU influences the policies that affect their lives, have helped draw them more actively into the process by which the EU makes its decisions, and have encouraged them to bypass their national governments and to focus their attention on European responses to shared and common problems.

Conclusions

The European Union has helped redefine the relationship among Europeans. Where they have long identified themselves in national terms, and have been tied economically, legally and culturally to one nation state or another, the reduction of the barriers to trade and to the movement of individuals over the past decade has encouraged Europeans to think of themselves as part of a larger entity with broader interests. Common policies have resulted in key powers over the lives of individual Europeans shifting to Brussels, so that an increasing number of Europeans feel the effect of decisions made at the EU level. Personal mobility has increased and, cultural barriers aside,

Europeans have taken more interest in neighbours who have long been considered as 'foreign' rivals and occasionally a direct threat to their own national interests.

However, while this horizontal integration has been taking place, the vertical ability of Europeans directly to influence the European Union has lagged. Integration has been driven by the priorities and the values of the leaders of the member states, who have made most of their decisions with limited reference to their citizens. The result has been the creation of a European governing structure that is only indirectly accountable to the views of the people who live within it. European law is proposed and implemented by a European Commission whose leadership is not accountable to European voters. Key decisions on the adoption of new laws and policies are taken by national representatives meeting in closed session as the Council of Ministers. The only institution that directly represents European citizens – the European Parliament – is denied the power to propose new laws, and must share the power to adopt new laws with the Council of Ministers.

Europeans are divided about the wisdom of integration, with only half of them agreeing that membership has been a 'good thing' for their country, and most of them admitting that they do not understand how the EU works. As European institutions struggle to sell the concept of integration to the citizens of the member states, they are handicapped by the absence of effective channels of accountability, and by the perpetuation of the democratic deficit. Changes made under the people's Europe programme and as a result of new treaties have made Europe more real to its citizens, but uniform passports, a European flag, and student exchange programmes fall far short of the kinds of changes needed to make Europeans feel as though they are truly connected to the EU. The democratic deficit can only be addressed by a wholesale reform of the EU institutions aimed at making them accountable to the citizens of Europe instead of to the leaders of the member states. But this is something that few national leaders would willingly contemplate even if their citizens were more enthusiastic than they appear to date.