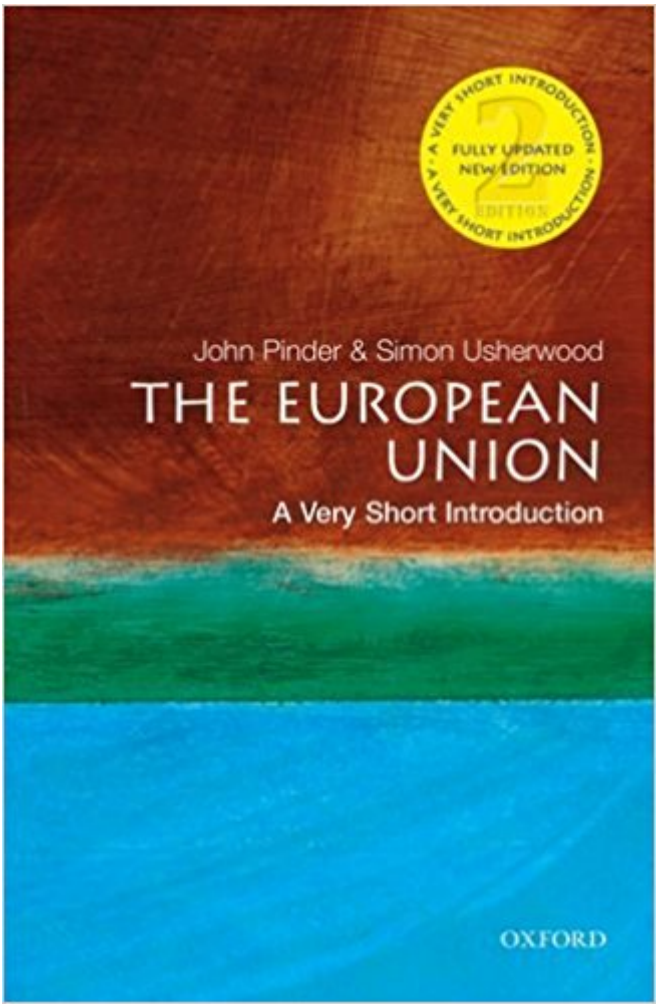
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The European Union: A Very Short Introduction



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Synopsis

The European Union is the largest economic entity in the world and one of the largest political entities, with 493 million people in 2006. Fully updated for 2007 to include controversial and current topics such as the Union's enlargement and its role in ongoing world affairs, this accessible Very Short Introduction shows how and why the Union has developed, how its institutions work, and what it does--from the single market to the Euro, and from agriculture to peace-keeping and the environment. Pinder and Usherwood cover the entire history of the Union, examine the momentous changes that have taken place within the Union since 2000, and highlight the benefits, controversies, and lessons learned from programs such as its expansion into central and eastern Europe, and the circulation of the Euro. The book also examines the role of the European Union as a peace-keeper in Europe and beyond, sheds light on how it functions in world politics, looks at its role in supporting the rise of environmental politics, and considers the challenges and choices that lie ahead in the 21st century.

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Customer Reviews

`Even a quick flick through to look at the pictures is illuminating' Independent Weekend Review,26/05/01 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

John Pinder, OBE, is an Honorary Professor at the College of Europe, Bruges and Natolin, and

Chairman of the Federal Trust, London.Simon Usherwood is Lecturer in Political, International, and Policy Studies at the University of Surrey.

This book describes the sequence of events by means of which the European Union (EU) was contrived from the time of its inception immediately following World War II up to the time of the book's publication in 2007. The word "contrived" is used here because it best describes the manner in which the Union of 2007, as portrayed in this book, was cobbled together. Its use is not intended to disparage either the political elitists who created the Union or this book's authors. For in reading about the process one can only marvel at the fact that the European elitists were able to create, compromise, adapt, jury-rig, and keep the Union together at all, let alone expand it; and equally impressive is the fact that this book's authors were able to outline that arduous process as well as they did in such a small book as this. For the most part, I found the book to be both interesting and informative; and it gave me a much greater appreciation for the difficulties involved in the EU's creation and maintenance, a few of which surprised me.To illustrate: I didn't know that the Union owes its beginning, at least in part, to fear on the part of France that Germany might one day regain its pre-WWII strength and once again dominate France and Europe; leading to this attempt to constrain Germany and tie it as closely as possible to the rest of Europe. I did know, however, that the EU was created solely by "treaty," i.e. without popular vote, but I was surprised that these authors seemed to downplay that fact although it was apparent throughout the book. And, although it was mentioned in passing that the EU's Constitution was put up for a popular vote only twice --- once in France and once in the Netherlands --- failing both times; I was surprised that this fact was glossed over so quickly. Somehow that didn't seem appropriate since the authors noted that the political elitists who were devising and governing the Union were concerned that they somehow had to convince the people of the separate once-Sovereign States that they were being represented by the Union and owed their allegiance to it much as they owed their allegiance to their native lands. Finally, I was surprised a bit by the hypocrisy of the EU's political leadership which, according to these authors, intended for the Union be the equal of the United States but decided that Europe should remain under the protection of the United States because it would be too expensive for the EU to defend itself. Apparently, all Unions are equal, but some are more equal than others.What did I like least about the book? Two things: First, much has changed since 2007 regarding the EU and much of what I was reading seemed outdated. I would like to have been reading a more current evaluation of the Union, perhaps as of 2011-12. (The book could certainly use another revision.) Secondly, it was clear to me in reading the book that radical environmentalists had infiltrated the

European Union’s institutions and that the authors of this book clearly believed in man-made "global warming" as it was being pushed by Britain’s now-discredited Climate Research Unit (CRU) and by the equally-discredited United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). That would have been acceptable if the authors had merely expressed that as their personal opinions. But they consistently expressed it as fact and as a desperate problem which if ignored would have a devastating impact on the entire world and, in doing so, they took great satisfaction in the fact that the EU was a major player if not leading the charge.That said: This is still an interesting book which should be of interest to anyone seeking to better understand the European Union and the foundation upon which it was built. In reading it, however, it would be well to take the authors’ personal opinions with a grain of salt. I would also suggest that, as a primer, one might consider reading "The New Road to Serfdom" by Daniel Hannan before taking on this more challenging read.

This book is very short and very small, but the authors make up for its size with an easily readable and understandable primer on the European Union. This is an excellent companion for any student interested in learning the basics of the European Union. It was required as part of a course on West-European Politics. The authors break the book up into a number of sections, each describing different aspects of the institution.

They aren’t lying when they call it A Very Short Introduction. It is. That is great for me, as someone who is interested in understanding current situations without really being a huge history buff - or wanting to be, for that matter. This was concise and easy to follow and understand.

Most Americans know more about the operation of the Starship Enterprise than about the structure of the European Union. More of the history of Hobbitland than the history of the EU. Sorry, folks, if this seems to be a snarky generalization or a denigration of your electoral capacities! It IS a blatant generalization, but deep in your hearts, can’t you admit that it’s true? In any case, here’s a book that will slip into your purse or pants-pocket and still leave room for your passport -- 200 pages, roughly 3" x 5" -- which will bring you up to speed on America’s most important diplomatic and economic partner. It’s not a gracefully-written book; the prose is what you’d expect from two professors of Political Science. But it’s concise, well documented, forthright in its ’federalist’ sympathies, and fair to the positions of those Europeans who are not entirely pleased with the evolution of the EU.Possibly the chapter titles will offer some idea of the scope of this ’short introduction’:1) What the EU is for2) How the EU was made3) How the EU is governed4) Single market, single currency5)

Agriculture, regions, budgets: conflicts over who gets what6) Social policy, environmental policy7) "An area of freedom, security and justice"8) A great civilian power ... and more, or less?9) The EU and the rest of Europe10) The EU in the world11) Much accomplished... but what next?Uf ta! That's a lot of stuff for such a tiny book! You'll have to expect it to be dense and difficult. You'll have to tax your memory from chapter to chapter, because there's no space for reiteration, and you'll have to keep you thumb on the page of alphabetical abbreviations. But the EU is not going away, my friends, and increasingly the USA will be compelled to negotiate/cooperate/imitate/integrate its economy and policy with it. The EU may be a much younger sibling of the USA, in terms of federal constitutional government, but it represents a vastly more mature civic tradition in every other way.The book could be more lucid, though in fact the structure of the EU is inherently imprecise and ruled by tacit gentlemen's consensuses, not unlike the 'unwritten constitution' of the UK. And I suppose it could be more entertaining without losing its integrity. That's why I'm giving it only four stars. Nonetheless, I strongly recommend it.

I have to agree with the one-star reviewer about how this book is a little too "Academic". However, I think this is a good and bad thing. First, if you are looking for an "Idiot's Guide..." or "Dummies" version of the European Union then this book is not for you. However, since it is a short book I found it was a good tool to look up definitions and found out what was truly meant by "federalist", "intergovernmentalist", etc. In that way I expanded my horizons on politics and government without being daunted by a 300+ page tome.To conclude, the book is not truly academic, but requires some research by the reader to become more accessible, unless they are already familiar with a lot of political jargon.As a side note, I have read three of these "Very Short Introductions" and I'm beginning to find that a well written Wikipedia article is just as good a resource and $10 cheaper.

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