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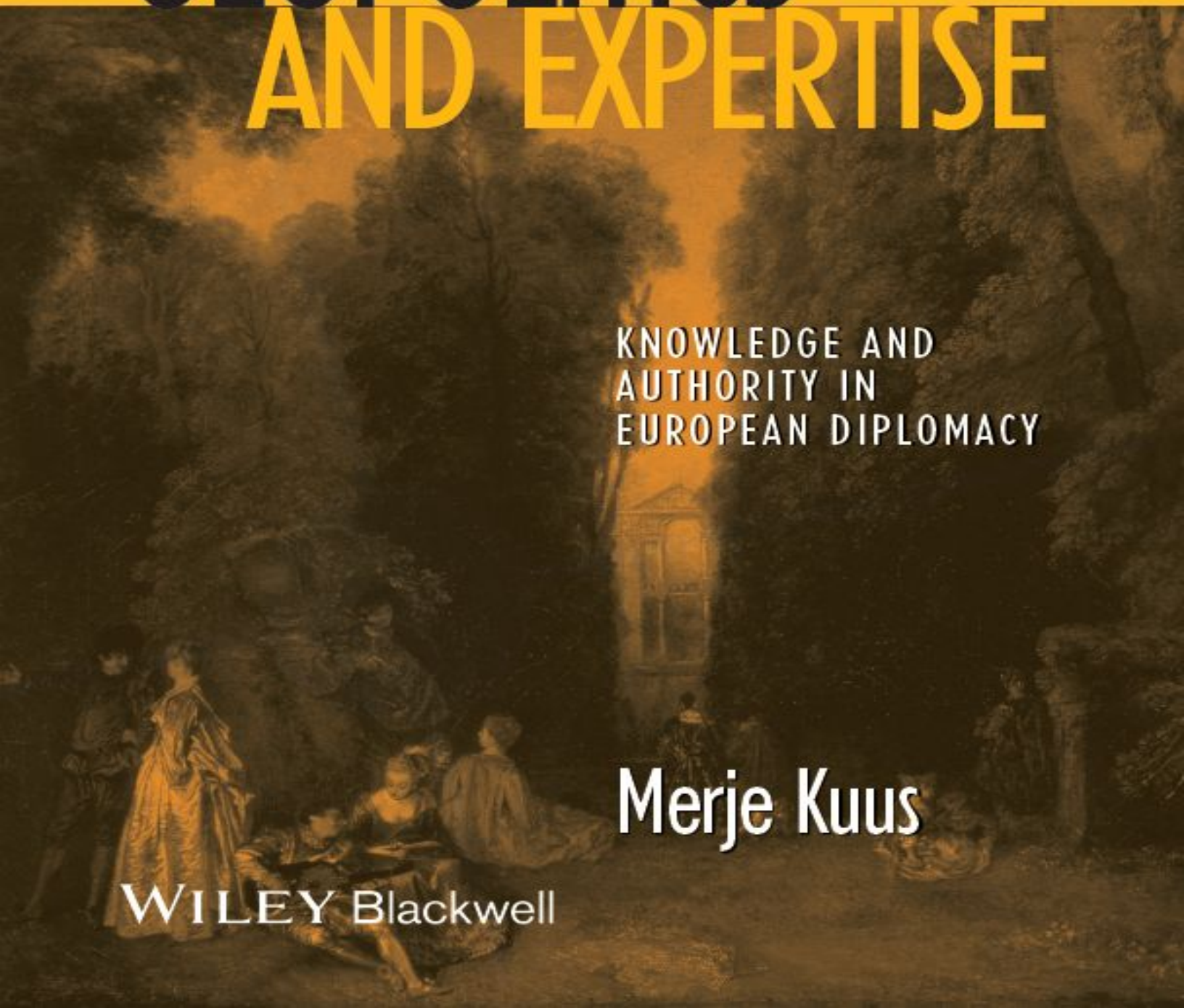

KNOWLEDGE AND AUTHORITY IN EUROPEAN DIPLOMACY

Merje Kuus

WILEY Blackwell

Contents

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Geopolitics and Expertise

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Series Editors' Preface

The RGS-IBG Book Series only publishes work of the highest international standing. Its emphasis is on distinctive new developments in human and physical geography, although it is also open to contributions from cognate disciplines whose interests overlap with those of geographers. The Series places strong emphasis on theoretically-informed and empirically-strong texts. Reflecting the vibrant and diverse theoretical and empirical agendas that characterize the contemporary discipline, contributions are expected to inform, challenge, and stimulate the reader. Overall, the RGS-IBG Book Series seeks to promote scholarly publications that leave an intellectual mark and change the way readers think about particular issues, methods or theories.

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Acknowledgements

This book investigates expert authority in Brussels in conversations with the professionals who work there. Although my central questions about power and knowledge, structure and agency, have animated the study from the start, a number of the specific angles emerged later, in discussions in Brussels. The 73 individuals who were interviewed for the book over seven years, sometimes several times, are busy professionals who regularly field requests from journalists and researchers on top of their daily responsibilities. That they agreed to a conversation with a scholar from a little-known discipline and with a set of unusual and ambiguous questions, sometimes on the basis of an e-mail out of the blue, is a testimony to their intellectual curiosity. Several interviewees also commented on the articles published out of the project early on; those reflections helped me to sharpen my questions and approaches. My interlocutors spoke on condition of anonymity and they cannot be named, but their essential role in the study is gratefully acknowledged. This account includes little new factual information to these professionals and they may well disagree with some of my claims. I hope that by illuminating familiar issues in uncustomary combinations and from thought-provoking angles, the work is nonetheless of value to them.

Academic colleagues have been equally generous and any note of thanks can only partially acknowledge the insight and guidance that have contributed to this book. As this is an interdisciplinary study, a number of scholars reached beyond their disciplinary networks to engage with my work. My greatest intellectual and personal debt is to the geographers who have commented on various parts of the

argument. Recognizing that any list is inadequate, I nonetheless highlight the feedback and advice from John Agnew, David Ley, and Jamie Peck over the years. Support and encouragement from numerous other colleagues has been invaluable. They include Robert Kaiser, Adrian Smith, Alexander Murphy, James Sidaway, Colin Flint, Jason Dittmer, Fiona McConnell, Kathrin Hörschelmann, Alex Jeffrey, Daniel Hiebert, Graeme Wynn, Trevor Barnes, Veit Bachmann, Peter Lindner, Martin Müller, and Alun Jones; each one of them has been generous with their time in some way. Neil Coe as the editor of the Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographers book series has been exemplary in his professionalism. Perceptive comments from Neil, two reviewers, and the editorial board of the series in the prospectus stage, and from Neil and one reviewer in the manuscript stage, made this a much sharper analysis than it would have been otherwise. Outside geography, the influence of the anthropologist Cris Shore is evident in the book: his *Building Europe* is a pioneering study of the European Quarter and Cris shared his knowledge of the existing work on the place with me early on. Comments from many political scientists, especially Desmond Dinan, Pertti Joenniemi, and Paul Evans, were very helpful in my efforts to engage with that discipline. Feedback from the referees and editors of the journals in which some early parts of the research programme were published is gratefully acknowledged. In addition to numerous conference, workshop, and roundtable presentations, parts of the study have been aired as full-length research and plenary talks and received rich feedback as a result. The venues of such presentations include the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University, the Eighth European Urban and Regional Studies Conference in Vienna, the ‘Performing Geopolitics’ workshop at the Department of Geography, Durham University, the EUGEO Congress 2011 in London,

the ‘Translating Diplomatic Cultures’ workshop of the Diplomatic Cultures Research Network in Cambridge, and the departments of geography at Simon Fraser University, Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, and the University of British Columbia. I am grateful to the organizers of these events for their interest in this work. All errors and misrepresentations are my responsibility. Research support from Duncan Ranslem, Alan Grove, Michelle Drenker, Lindsay Turner, and Colin Sutherland has been of much help. The technical assistance of Jacqueline Scott and her colleagues at Wiley-Blackwell is greatly appreciated. At home, Gregory Feldman’s support has been vital for my efforts to juggle family life and academic career.

Research for the book was funded by two separate grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada as well as a smaller pilot grant from the University of British Columbia. That support is gratefully acknowledged. As social science scholarship is increasingly pushed into the mould of Big Science, with incentives to pursue big teams, large data sets, the newest software, and numerous outputs, this work of slow research is a risky undertaking: no team, no fancy-sounding fieldwork, not even a recorder to buy. Its value to society is no less for that.

Introduction

The Crown Jewel

It is often said that the European Union is both an institution and an ongoing political project. When the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the 2012 Peace Prize to the European Union and when two representatives of the prizewinner spoke at the award ceremony, they all referred to the union as a process, effort, and work. Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, spoke of the union as an "unrivalled way" of binding the interests of Europeans.[1] In big picture terms, integration rests on the forging and maintenance of intergovernmental consensuses as well as the creation of supranational norms and standards. If we are to unpack these processes into their constituent components, what does this production of norms and consensuses actually comprise? What work and what efforts does it consist of, who are doing that work, how do they do it, and with what intended and unintended consequences?

Examined at a closer range and beyond the terminology of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism, European integration hinges on the production of new knowledge about how Europe works or ought to work. This knowledge makes diverse places in Europe calculable and manageable in one regulatory space. The often fragile intergovernmental compromises rest on the production of new knowledge that both codifies and re-imagines what is known about Europe, what is desirable or possible there, and how it can be achieved.

This knowledge production rests fundamentally on the expertise of European Union (EU) institutions: their ability to make other actors inside and outside the union use *their* data and *their* analytical tools. Technical and administrative expertise is thus a central pillar of European integration and the crown jewel of its institutions. There are good reasons for this. To build consensuses among the member states – 28 today – the EU needs a coordinating centre equipped with sophisticated technical expertise. Its institutions serve that purpose. Their practices rest on the claim that their expertise is required to synchronize the interests and actions of the member states; that it is brought about by the sheer technical complexity of the integration project. To comprehend EU policy-making, we must grasp what counts as expertise in Brussels: whose expertise, from where, succeeds, and whose fails, and why and how this is so. We must understand how EU policy professionals know what they know, how they know that it is them who know, and how others know that this is so. Although expertise is a category of everyday speech in Brussels, it is too broad and too vague to be a category of analysis.

This book investigates the production of expert knowledge in Brussels. It traces how geopolitical arguments are deployed by policy professionals there and how these practices fit into and transform the social milieu of the European Quarter. It thereby tackles the social struggles through which expert authority is created in that place. For expertise in Brussels is subject to a constant tug-of-war over what claims, by whom, are the most expert among the many. The content of this negotiation may be political power and national interest, but its medium is technical expertise. The phrase “crown jewel” was used with irony by an official at the EU Council – an intergovernmental body – to challenge the expert authority of the European Commission – the union’s civil service. Viewed from the council, expert

knowledge in Brussels is less about objective technical know-how and more about national and institutional power struggles than many commission officials would readily admit. The commission does get its wording into EU regulations, but this happens not simply because of its technical expertise. Rather, the commission tries to tilt the playing field toward its own corporate interests as it manoeuvres within the parameters set by the member states. Yet moving out of EU institutions into the representations of these states, a similarly ironic remark could be made of EU bodies more broadly. From national vantage points, a great deal of the technical wrangling in the European Quarter serves to promote the corporate interests of Planet Brussels over the member states.

I illuminate some of these struggles. To do so, I examine expertise in Brussels not in terms of right or wrong answers but in terms of the social processes by which certain knowledge claims come to be considered authoritative. Viewed through this processual lens, expertise is not a thing but a social relation: not something that one has but something that one uses or performs. Expert authority functions as such only when it is accepted by both sides, and distinguishing some claims as expert necessarily designates others as non-expert. I thus investigate how EU professionals *use* or deploy specific claims of expertise in their daily work: not what the various claims 'really' mean but how they function in EU policy-making. The catchwords of that policy-making – the omnipresent evocation of balanced, prudent, considered, objective, or evolving perspectives – perform specific types of work. Their repetitive use channels discussions in particular ways and we need to understand how this happens. Many of the claims advanced in Brussels are about places and are derived from places: these are geographical and comparative claims that articulate how practices from

different parts of Europe should be incorporated into EU standards. To understand how European integration works, we must untangle the ways in which different places are brought together through knowledge claims in EU policy-making.

Viewed as a social practice, expertise is made in particular places by particular people. Central to these places in Europe is the European Quarter in Brussels and the policy professionals who work there. The frame and vocabulary of EU policies does not emerge from some general EU interest codified in the political mandate; it is rather laboriously devised phrase by phrase by career civil servants. There is a political and social geography to EU-level expertise and there are explicit and implicit rules for how it can and should be made on a daily basis. I try to understand these rules – the networks, conventions, habits, and approaches on which accepted practices rest – while also recognizing their contingency and indeterminacy. In so doing, I people the scene of expert authority in Brussels with the professionals who actually produce it. EU knowledge creation operates through them and often pivots on their skill; we must understand their agency or capacity to act in this infamously cryptic process.

“Evaporative things”

To make any expert claim operational, in Brussels or elsewhere, technical knowledge is not enough. As Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 409) reminds us: “‘technical’ competence depends fundamentally on social competence and on the corresponding sense of being entitled and required by status to exercise this specific capacity, and therefore to possess it”. Expert authority requires a successful embedding within the social group that codifies the expertise in question (Collins and Evans 2007, 7). Power and

institutions are not the same thing: analyses of power must include but not stop at formal institutional structures. We need to grasp the social lives of expertise: the informal social conventions that shape what claims are put forth, by whom, where, when, and how. Such conventions are "evaporative" matters, as one EU professional puts it: they crystallize for brief moments but then recede from view again. This does not make them unimportant; it only makes them difficult to study.

The social lives of geopolitical expertise are particularly complicated in Brussels because of the quasi-diplomatic character of EU institutions. An EU professional remarks: "Brussels is a tough place. You have to be a very smooth operator. If you are a smooth operator, you can get even bad ideas through. If you are not, you cannot achieve anything." Being such an operator is especially important in diplomacy, a field governed by tacit conventions and indirect forms of argument. In the words of Lester Pearson, former Foreign Minister of Canada: "Diplomacy is letting someone else have your way" (quoted as epigraph in Pouliot 2010).

Change and transformation are likewise central to my account. For decades now, the European Union has inspired books about "New Europe". In the 1990s, when I started paying attention to this 'new' political entity, the characterization seemed apt. Over the years, the stream of such accounts remained steady but their story of novel dynamics became too familiar. Change too, although a ubiquitous category of everyday speech, is too broad to be a category of analysis. I thus specify and complicate the notion of change by disentangling what has changed and what has not, and how and with what effects.

The ambiguities of social change and the difficulties of such an unpacking effort are illuminated brilliantly by a light remark in Luchino Visconti's film *The Leopard*: "For things to

remain the same, everything must change."[2] Set in the context of the imperceptible but consequential power struggles between the aristocratic and bourgeois classes in 1860s Sicily, the quip captures the circuitous ways in which stability and change are wrapped up in each other. The question is not whether things are changing – of course they are – but what is changing, how, and why. Mindful of this deliquescence of continuity and change, transformation and adaptation, I move from the general category of change to a more detailed sketch of the social transformations afoot in Brussels and in Europe.

Today's Brussels is a particularly fascinating scene of stability and flux because of the specific institutional configurations there. Within a few years after the Big Bang enlargement in 2004, EU institutions increased their workforce by a fifth. By the end of the decade, the immediate impact of this influx of new professionals was over: procedures and expectations had stabilized and a new normal had been found. Those who had entered the institutions in the mid-2000s as junior professionals had learned the lie of the land and were being promoted, those who had come in at senior levels had made their mark, and those who had arrived in the late 2000s as a second wave of 'new' colleagues had been trained for the institutions by the fellow nationals who had preceded them. Pieces were falling into place and new habits were forming. Yet both at the beginning of my work in 2007 and at the end of it in 2013, the reverberations of this wave of hires were still felt in Brussels. The post-2004 states were still called new, in part because professionals from these states still functioned as relative newcomers in the overall milieu of the European Quarter. A period of transformations was still underway. The patterns in which social relations stabilize now will be felt for years to come. This post-enlargement period is thus an important object of analysis: not as a mere prelude to the

integration to come but as a touchstone by which to illuminate long-term social processes in Brussels. The terminology of ‘return to Europe’ is too generic. We need to sort out in more detail how professionals from the ‘returned’ states perform their dual status as insiders and as newcomers, how they participate in the creation of the new normal, and what comes to be solidified as new and as normal in it.

The struggles over the terms of EU knowledge production are especially pronounced in the sphere of external relations now that the EU is building up its own diplomatic corps, the European External Action Service or EAS. The service was established after the Lisbon Treaty made the union a legal person under international law in 2009. It is a uniquely transnational institution, whose staff is transferred to it from other EU bodies as well as the diplomatic services of the member states. EAS is the first diplomatic corps anywhere that is not in the service of a nation-state: its institutional culture cannot be modelled on any national one. It is being forged in Brussels now out of intergovernmental and inter-institutional compromises. A European diplomat reflects, diplomatically: “At EAS, we are not in the stage yet where we have our own style. I’m not sure whether we want to have it. Maybe this [ambiguity] is built into the institution. Maybe it’s too early to tell.” EU external relations thus bring the variegated geographies of expert knowledge and authority into a particularly sharp focus. An analysis of this first decade of ‘Europe whole and free’ can thus cast light at the formation of a specific political culture at the heart of the European project.

Contexts and Conversations

The effort to qualify and specify the dynamics of EU knowledge production leads me to focus not on institutional structures but on the contexts and practices that underpin and support these structures. I accentuate the circumstantial and the contingent: not the content of what is said but the context in which it is said. To stress context is not merely to add a thin layer of additional detail on top of an institutional analysis. Context is not a background. Rather, the structuring of the context and the power relationships at work in it are central to explanation (Sayer 1992, 248). A carefully contextualized enquiry is necessary to avoid a linear narrative of clear trends and remain alert to the idiosyncrasies of the Brussels scene. The investigation appears less straightforward perhaps, but it can better account for the many inconsistencies and contradictions of EU policy-making. Ambiguity and contradiction do not detract from analytical rigour but add to it. In the words of Friedrich Nietzsche (1969, 119): “There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective ‘knowing’; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity’, be” (quoted in Bourdieu 1990a, 28, emphasis in original). Contextual depth enables us not only to answer questions better but also, and as importantly, to ask better questions. As will become clear in the chapters that follow, my argument is not simply about how the European Quarter works but also about what questions we should ask about it.

This is a story of small things: the specificities, nuances, and mess-ups that constitute the fabric of European integration just as much as the broad strokes that receive most attention in popular media and specialist literature alike. To highlight the small and the circumstantial is not to ignore the big picture of inter-state power struggles. Events in Berlin, London, or Paris – or Washington, Beijing, or

Moscow – are certainly important. It is rather to substantiate the broad-brush explanations with a finer-grade analysis of daily work in the European Quarter. By accentuating social practices like document drafting, e-mail, meetings, lunches, and chats in the hallway, I bring into focus some of those "trifles that only seem like trifles when they are set down in a book, but while circulating the world are regarded as very important matters" (Gogol 1997, 228). In counterpoint to the fast-paced policy environment examined, my project is of slow knowledge: of stepping back from the existing terminology so as to avoid the illusion of contingency that privileges events over processes. I examine the social space from which my object of analysis derives its distinctive, differential, and relational properties (Bourdieu 1996, 180, 188). My goal is to move between local details and transnational structures in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view.

Although immersed in Planet Brussels, the book is not about that place as such. It rather uses the geographical framing of political struggles there to anchor a study of knowledge and power in bureaucratic and especially diplomatic institutions. The analysis thus contributes to our understanding of transnational regulatory institutions. Technologies of expertise in Brussels are important for that broader enquiry because they are central to the nexus between power, right, and truth in Europe and beyond. The production of such specifically transnational knowledge inside bureaucratic structures needs to be studied in its dispersed and diffuse character. This contributes to a discussion of expert authority that is more precise, more thoughtful, and more imaginative.

The account draws in part from interviews with policy professionals in the European Quarter. The 110 interviews were conducted with 73 such professionals in ten rounds between October 2007 and May 2013, in sets of around 10–

20 conversations per year. My goal was not to find out what EU professionals think about substantive issues – the traditional focus of expert interviews. I rather sought to elucidate the entanglements of the technical, the geographical, and the social in the daily production of expertise in Brussels. I likewise tried to move beyond a few semi-random snapshots of the exceedingly complex policy-making settings: by re-visiting the same themes year after year, by speaking to the same individuals several times, and by interviewing professionals who rotated through the same positions over the years, I obtained a more focused series of glimpses into the broader social field of EU policy-making. To anchor the analysis empirically, I concentrate on one specific issue: the EU's relations with its eastern neighbours and the role of the post-2004 member states in that sphere of EU policy. That example undergirds a broader argument about knowledge and authority inside European institutions.

My methodological approach is explained in Chapter 2 but one point must be stressed now. All interviews are non-attributable, all individuals speak in a personal capacity, and all material is used in a manner that preserves the anonymity of the sources. I phrase my account in such a way that interviewees cannot be identified by nationality, native tongue, or specific institutional location: hence the references to EU officials, professionals, interviewees, observers, interlocutors, and so on. These measures anonymize the primary material; they do not alter the analysis. "An interviewee" is often a more accurate reference than "commission official" or "EU diplomat": many interviewees have extensive experience in multiple parts of EU institutions or in different diplomatic services.

The Political, the Geographical, and the Social: A Roadmap of the Argument

The rest of the book proceeds through seven chapters and a brief conclusion. All of these sections investigate the bundling up of political power and geographical definition, but they do so from different angles. Chapter 1 sets up the puzzle about geopolitics and agency. It starts in an unlikely place – the concept of Europe as a central and yet highly ambiguous axis of EU policy-making. Europe is both a cause and an effect of EU: its putative cultural basis and its desired goal. As a term and a metaphor, Europe has a phantasmagoric presence in Brussels: it is invoked but not defined, assumed but not explained. This nebulous idea may seem an odd entry-point into everyday professional practices in the European Quarter. It is a fine starting point, however, if we wish to understand the rationalities of European integration: the systems by which the categories of everyday practice come into being as objects of politics. I use Europe as a touchstone to highlight the unnoticed operation of geographical assumptions in the European Quarter. Foregrounding the explicit and implicit uses of Europe in the European Neighbourhood Policy, I highlight geographical knowledge claims at the heart of the policy and I explain how these claims can illuminate the long-term dynamics in EU policy-making. A close-up study of Europe inevitably raises the question of whose Europe and vice versa: an analysis of political agency in Brussels must unpack the different conceptions of Europe that undergird the work of EU professionals.

Chapter 2, the most explicitly theoretical section, situates the enquiry in political geography and related fields. Conceptually, I argue that despite the substantial bodies of work on both geopolitics and EU policy-making, this scholarship gives us little sense of the daily hum of these processes. There is a great deal on institutions and discourses but little on the agents who build, operate, reproduce, and contest these structures. The dearth of agent-centred research, geographical or otherwise, is particularly noticeable when it comes to diplomatic institutions. Chapter 2 thus clarifies what a more 'peopled' view of EU institutions entails conceptually and what gains it delivers analytically. The chapter also details my use of primary interview material. It thereby highlights some methodological questions and dilemmas about interpretative methods in the study of geopolitical and diplomatic practice.

The knowledge production at hand takes place first and foremost in Brussels, and Chapter 3 concentrates on the European Quarter as the place where most of this activity unfolds. I give the reader a sense of the area and its milieu: its peculiar mix of nationalism and transnationalism, idealism and instrumentalism, and the incessant inter-state and inter-personal competition that relies heavily on social networks and symbolic capital. The picture is one of a tight entanglement of political and technical claims and the crucial role of symbolic resources in the success of some knowledge claims and the failure of others.

The analysis then turns to EU diplomacy and the role of the post-2004 member states in its institutions in Chapter 4. I highlight the ever-present struggles between national and supranational tendencies in European politics and the role of the new member states in these dynamics. My account is not simply one in which supranationalism and intergovernmentalism vie for dominance in EU policy-

making; I rather accentuate the ways in which these two tendencies bleed into each other in Brussels. The national is always visible inside the supranational, and the other way around, but in curved mirrors: the national becomes something else once it hits the ground in Brussels and the supranational crafted there bears the imprint of national agendas in ways that are not always easy to detect. The chapter also explores the impact of the 2004 or Big Bang enlargement (and its follow-up in 2007) on EU institutions in general and its external relations bureaucracy in particular. I cite the magnitude of the quantitative change in the numbers and diversity of staff and I highlight the ways in which this has affected professional climate in the European Quarter.

Chapter 5 takes the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as an example to investigate the field of technical expertise in Brussels through the contextually more sensitive lens crafted so far. I do not offer new facts about the neighbourhood policy. That policy rather serves as an empirical hook on which to hang an examination of the overlapping fields of political and institutional power in Brussels. The account accentuates the role of EU policy professionals in the process and their ability to manoeuvre in the field of power.

Chapter 6 turns to what might be called the social alchemies of EU knowledge production. Drawing especially on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, the chapter investigates the symbolic resources that a field like the European Quarter neither teaches nor explicitly demands but which constitute important assets in it. The argument is about resources like connections, reputation, poise, charm, and presence – in short, the incalculable feel for the game that distinguishes a well-informed and relaxed insider from an ill-informed and ill-at-ease outsider. The workings of the European Quarter as a field of power are closely tied to the translation and

negotiation of nationally based status symbols in Brussels. The process is both social and geographical as it involves conceptions about the centres and margins of European diplomatic culture. The pursuit of symbolic capital in Brussels can therefore illuminate broader struggles over what a new European diplomatic culture would, could, or should be, and who can best represent or embody Europe externally.

The final substantive chapter turns once again to the use of geographical knowledge in the making of the neighbourhood policy. It examines the negotiation of expert claims about the union's eastern neighbourhood: the ways in which political arguments about ENP bring in geographical claims about Europe and eastern Europe and the manner in which the member states compete for legitimacy in Brussels. I detail the presence of historical and cultural claims inside technical ones and I highlight the empirical significance of this for the neighbourhood policy and EU external relations more broadly.

The Conclusion returns to the deeper questions about knowledge and power in transnational regulatory institutions. At a time when many accounts bemoan the slow and convoluted character of EU policy-making, my conclusion is more hopeful. EU decision-making is certainly untidy. This is so in part because it represents pragmatic compromise-based politics: a process of working across competing and sometimes antagonistic positions (Agnew 2011, 468). If measured by a pre-determined outcome, such as reaching specific policy goals in a given time, the process is necessarily inadequate. If viewed as an open-ended process that should not be measured by today's short-term yardsticks, it can teach us something about the complexity and creativity of transnational decision-making. "There are no clean solutions in the EU," a senior diplomat remarks. "Every solution is a half-solution, every decision is a