Preface

Generally politics textbooks lack sufficient space to provide full details of important political actors or of particular political events or crises. They may well refer to political leaders or events, such as Konrad Adenauer or Olaf Palme, the Suez crisis or Poujadism, but usually only in passing and not in sufficient detail to inform the reader adequately about the political careers of these politicians, or the origins, course and consequences of the events. As co-authors of the textbook: *European Politics Today*, we are aware that students need a background in the contemporary history of European countries in order to understand the significance of the political developments which we trace in that textbook. We have therefore endeavoured to write an accessible and relevant guide to the kind of background information which students will need in order to get to grips with the political systems of Western European countries and the changes taking place in those political systems.

This *Companion to West European Politics* has five sections. Sections 1 and 2 provide, in the style of a dictionary, (a) explanations of significant political events, groupings and developments, and (b) details of the political careers of significant West European politicians, especially those who have been head of their country's government or head of state. Entries in both sections contain, where appropriate, cross-references to other entries in those two sections: for instance, the entry for *Mitterrand* has a cross-reference to *cohabitation*, and that for the *Suez crisis* has cross-references to *Eden* and *Macmillan*. The third section consists of lists of abbreviations (or short names) of political parties and

other important organisations which play (or have played in the recent past) a significant political role, together with the names of those organisations. Where appropriate these are given in English translation and in their 'home' language. The fourth section is a set of chronologies, divided into groups based on particular countries or groups of countries. As well as a general chronology for each country or group of countries, specialised chronologies of major developments are supplied, which cover, for example, the reunification of Germany and the transition to democracy in Spain. The fifth section is a set of political data relating to the political system of each country in Western Europe.

Of course difficult choices had to be made concerning what to include and what to leave out. Generally speaking, the time-frame is from the start of the Second World War onwards (with December 2001 as the 'closing date'). We have selected the Second World War as a starting point, as this turned out to be an important watershed in the development of societies and political and economic systems in most Western European countries. We have, though, included occasional references to some earlier developments and events where these have been especially relevant to post-war developments, such as the Spanish civil war and nazism. Geographically, the book is confined to Western Europe. Special emphasis has been placed on the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the political system of the European Union, to reflect the relative size and political importance of those political systems, as well as the fact that they constitute the focus of most courses in West

European politics in universities and colleges. We have, though, been careful to include politicians and events which have proved decisive for smaller and less familiar European democracies, and which have often impacted upon larger countries and the European Union. In the first section, covering events and developments, no attempt has been made to provide coverage of general political science concepts, such as *presidentialism* or *opposition*. Only where a concept has special relevance to Western Europe has it been included. Examples are: *cohabitation*, *consociationalism*, *grand coalition* and *new politics*.

The authors hope that students will find this book useful as a supplement to their textbooks, and that teachers and other readers will make use of the book as a reliable source of information and reference.

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