Part II looks into the mechanics of policy-making in the SPD in the light of the political parties’ literature tackled in Chapter 1. The examination of ‘policy contexts’ is an especially helpful way of looking at policy formation, as it maps out the central actors and structures that have impacted upon SPD EU policy since 1990. The purpose of the section is to lay out the context for EU policy formation within the SPD, and the pursuit of its policy objectives both in opposition and in government since 1990. The climatic changes described in Chapter 2 demonstrate the transient nature of the policy contexts, and the chapters in this part will seek to bring out this dynamism (Figure 3.1).

Before looking at the policy contexts and the structures and the actors operating within them, it is necessary to explore two vital factors outside the model for European policy depicted in the introduction. Chapter 3 will therefore start by examining at the organisational framework for European policy within the SPD and the key transition from opposition to government. The party organisation must be defined as it represents the institutional framework of the SPD (Figure 3.1) and is, thus, essential in determining the opportunity structures for European policy-making. Second, it is acknowledged here that the process of policy formation is to a large extent based upon the anticipated reaction to policy proposals and/or upon their chances for implementation. SPD European policy has, for this reason, been critically dependent upon whether the party has been in opposition or in government (Figure 3.1) as several interviewees have pointed out. Here, the shifting relationships between policy formation and policy implementation are captured in the opposition–government paradigm.

In the institutional (party) context, the key to understanding SPD policy is to realise that there has been more than one stream of thought – the
views of the party’s leadership *Troika* of Gerhard Schröder, Oskar Lafontaine and Rudolf Scharping in the mid-1990s on European Monetary Union were, for example, very far detached from those of the party’s specialist European policy groups. This underlines the need for a detailed examination of the interplay between the federal leadership, the parliamentary party, the SPD’s European Policy groups, and – in brief – the party in the *Länder* and at grass-roots level. The SPD is a prism for the aggregation of a wide multiplicity of interests, the most important of which will be addressed in this section. The *institutional context* explores the nature of this prism, which is crucial to the SPD’s role as the ‘lens’ of this study (Figure 3.1), concentrating on the locus of policy-making at the *federal* level, within the broader German and EU contexts explored in Chapter 4.

**Party organisation**

Social democratic parties across Europe have sought to emphasise their democratic credentials, to show that they are working for the people.