Soós Edit

European Public Policy

2020

Lesson 4

The Europeanisation of Public Policy

READING TIME:

30 min

The European political space

During the last decades number of competencies of the national power has been transferred on a supranational level. As national and European politics get more and more intertwined, the dividing line between the two spheres is fading away and a common European political space begins to slowly take shape.

European political space is gradually opening up. This is due to two interrelated developments: the **'nationalisation' of European policy** and the **'Europeanisation' of national policy**.

Drawing up and implementing EU public policies presuppose the building-up of a European Political Space. The major development towards **European Political Space** was the **'vertical' opening of the Member States' legal and political systems**. The **development of European Political Space is merely a 'top-down' process**. The impacts that EU level institutions, policies and politics have on institutions, policies, and politics at the national level of governance is an overly narrow usage of the term. The bottom-up approach to Europeanisation describes how member states 'upload' or 'shape' policies, politics and institutions of the European Union.

The concept of a political space refers to a shared cognitive mapping of political views and their relations within a political community

The concept of a public sphere

expresses an ideal that all the members of a political community be connected to one another by the possibility of direct or indirect forms of political communication.

The concept of a state

means that a political community consists not only of people but of countries and is separated from other communities.

Polity, politics and policy

There are three major subject areas that cut across the different subdisciplines: polity, politics and policy. While polity refers to the institutional structures characterizing a political system, the politics concentrates on political processes, such as party political cleavages. The public policy focuses on the outputs of a political system: legal acts, measures, programs, strategies, actions adopted by the government, or the legislature.
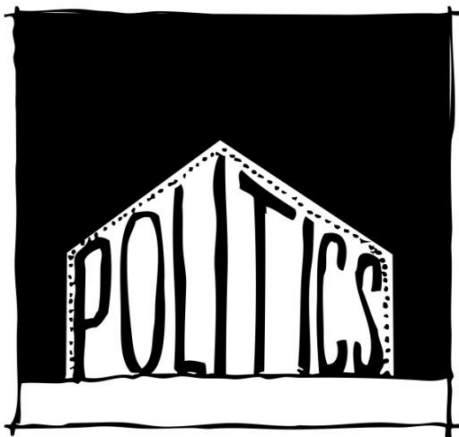
The focus on **public policies**, however, does not imply that polity and politics are not taken into account. The different countries reveal distinctive policy styles, that characterize the policy process, which affects the nature and design of their policies. Theodore J. Lowi (1964) developed his classical distinction of different policy types, arguing that different **policy areas** tend to be characterized by different **politics** which involve more or less conflicting interactions between political actors. So, the **polity** and politics dimensions play an important role either as factors explaining public policies or as phenomena that are determined by policy types.

The *public policy* can be defined as a course of action taken by a government or legislature, with regard to a particular issue. The definition emphasizes two constitutive elements. First, public policies refer to actions of public actors, (governments), although societal actors might to some extent be involved or participate in public decision-making. Second, governmental actions are focused on a specific issue, implying that the scope of activities is restricted to addressing a certain aspect or problem (such as air pollution or animal protection).

The Europeanisation of public policy

The European Union has a rapidly growing influence on public policy across member states. The European Union has influenced national public policies for more than five decades. The Europeanisation of public policy can take different forms. In principle, it can affect all the elements of public policy, such as *actors, resources, and policy instruments*. Additionally, Europeanisation can affect the policy style, for example by making it more or less conflictual, corporatist or pluralist, or more or less regulative.

What is the status of the concept of Europeanisation and the place of public policy therein?

> *'Europeanization as the emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal, and social commissions associated with political problem-solving that formalize interactions among the actors, and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative European rules.'*
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> */Claudio M. Radaelli, 2004/*

The success of the Europeanisation in recent years is due to the realisation that EU policy has become domestic policy, with 80% of all policy sectors influenced in one way or another by the Union. As a multilevel policy-making system, the EU is highly open and dynamic. In practice, it is characterized by a form of **'sector-specific governance'**. It

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is often used for activities of a very different scope. It often used to cover a whole range of different measures in a certain sector, such as environmental policy, social policy, economic policy, etc. A similar approach is used to describe public activities in policy subfields. With regard to environmental policy, for example, subsectors refer to water policy, clean air policy, climate change policy, and waste policy. In social policy, examples of subsectors include pension policy, unemployment policy, and child benefits.

NATIONALISATION OF EUROPEAN POLICY

(Accountability based on national government performance with Europe)

EUROPEANISATION OF NATIONAL POLICY

(Accountability based on European Issues)

Europeanisation dynamics strongly influence the direction of **nationalisation of European policies,** but **if EU requirements are incompatible with national political preferences domestication trumps Europeanisation**. 'Domestication' equally prevails if the relationship between EU and national policy is ambiguous and frontline implementers have high discretion.

In certain policy areas, the **European Union prescribes the adoption of a specific model**. Member states have to bring domestic arrangements into line with a 'European model' which is implicit in the supranational policy decision. Examples are provided by new regulatory policies in the **areas of consumer protection, environmental policy, and health and safety at work.** In these cases, the EU positively prescribes the adoption of a model, and therefore one could use the term 'positive integration' to distinguish this mechanism from the cases of 'negative integration' in which the EU strikes down national barriers to the emergence of European markets without prescribing models. When there are **EU models, member states are under 'adaptational pressure'.**

Put differently, they are **under pressure to adapt to Europe**. Pressure implies coercion, for example, certain directives specify a period of time at the end of which member states are compelled to introduce regulatory arrangements. But some European policies are adopted only by a limited number of member states.

Flexible integration is an option available in a number of policy areas. The open coordination method introduced by the Lisbon summit (2000) is another example of soft Europeanisation of policy, is based on guidelines and the diffusion of best practice. This implies that adaptational pressure can operate with mechanisms different from coercion. If the countries adopting EU models provide a critical mass, the remaining countries can feel the force of attraction of the EU 'centre of gravity' and join in.

The member states have different concepts of development, different levels of commitment, and different ideas about how far development co-operation should be carried out at the EU level. Low-regulating countries are likely to oppose any kind of harmonization of standards at the EU level. The high-regulating Member States share a common preference for harmonizing their strict standards at the European level.

In environmental policy, the Northern European 'first-comers' (Denmark, Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Austria) have a strong incentive to harmonize their strict environmental standards at the European level. They also have the capacity to actively shape European policies according to their environmental concerns and economic interests. The Southern European 'late-comers' (Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy) lack both the policies and the capacity to upload them to the European level, the Southern Member States often have to implement EU policies that do not conform to their preferences.

Government vs. Governance

Government: has a responsibility for regulation, democratically legitimised and accountable to citizens. Policy outputs are passed by legislation, which is legally binding and enforceable by courts.

In contrast, governance excludes governing by government and refers to policy-making by both public and private actors. Decisions are taken in policy networks. Hierarchical relations between actors are absent, and responsibility for coordination and control is shared between public and private actors. Policy outputs are not legally binding.

There are many approaches to Europeanisation. Europeanisation also provides a shift of focus in relation to theories of governance. Some scholars portray **Europeanisation as the institutionalisation** at the European level of a distinct system of governance with common institutions and the authority to make, implement, and enforce European-wide binding policies. **Europeanisation' of European governance**. It is a process that impacts member states of the European Union. Developments in public administration and modernisation of public sector institutions require the concept and process of Europeanisation.

For understanding Europeanisation J. P. Olsen distinguishes different phenomena referred to by the term:

1. Europeanisation as the development of institutions of governance at the European level.

Institution-building at the European level of a distinct system of governance with common institutions and the authority to make, implement and enforce European-wide binding policies. The emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, *of political, legal, and social* institutions associated with the problem solving that formalize interactions among the actors, and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative European rules.

2. Europeanisation as central penetration of national and subnational systems of governance.

Europeanisation here involves the division of responsibilities and powers between different levels of governance. All multilevel systems of governance need to work out a balance between unity and diversity, central coordination, and local autonomy. Europeanisation, then, implies adapting national and subnational systems of governance to a European political centre and European-wide norms.

Europeanisation as a political project aiming at a unified and politically stronger Europe.[1] The degree to which Europe is becoming a more unified and stronger political entity is related both to territorial space, centre-building, domestic adaptation, and how

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[1] Olsen, Johan P.: The Many Faces of Europeanization. p. 3.

European developments impact and are impacted by systems of governance and events outside the European continent.

Europeanisation also refers to the interactions between the EU and its member states. In its most explicit form, Europeanisation is conceptualized as the process of 'downloading' European Union directives, regulations, and institutional structures to the domestic level. Concentration on 'downloading' alone was not sufficient and 'up-loading' needed to be considered in an understanding of the EU as a process in the fields of public policies.

> **Downloading**/Top-Down: member states are subject to influences and stimuli from the EU and other the Member States

> **Uploading**/Bottom-Up: member states seek to influence EU public policy and the public policies of other member states.

Basically, there are two types of mechanisms, that is, **'vertical' and 'horizontal' Europeanisation.** **'Vertical policy transfer'** comes through EU policy or European integration processes. Vertical mechanisms seem to demarcate clearly the EU level (where policy is defined) and the domestic level, where policy has to be implemented. By contrast, 'horizontal' mechanisms look at Europeanisation as a process where there is no pressure to conform to EU policy models. Instead, **'horizontal' mechanisms** involve different forms of adjustment to Europe based on the market or on patterns of socialization. EU policy has a precise direction and aims to produce specific compliance at the level of the member states. The soft' 'framing' mechanisms of 'horizontal' Europeanisation are based on the 'hard' instruments of EU public policy, such as directives and decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Union.

Figure 1**:** European policy-making: bottom-up and top-down processes

European policy-making

bottom-up

supranational
institution building

delegation of national
competences

European
policies, norms, rules,
and political process

top-down

Member States

European policies face deeply rooted institutional and regulatory structures. If both fit together, the implementation should be a smooth and unproblematic process. If European policies do not match existing traditions, however, the implementation should be highly contested, leading to considerable delays, and involving a high risk of total failure. In some cases member states' governments struggled to 'upload' their own policy models to the European level, it was only a short way to the argument that the 'downloading' process becomes problematic if this strategy of policy export should fail.

> When markets are opened, existing domestic equilibria are challenged, but there is no prescription of 'how the new equilibria must look'. The essential mechanism concerns the changing distribution of resources between domestic actors rather than the compatibility between EU and domestic policy. Accordingly, it puts emphasis on the domestic opportunity structures. The overall effect of this indirect mechanism cannot be predicted *a priori*. It all hinges on who is empowered and disempowered by 'negative integration' at the national level.
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> 'Horizontal' Europeanization is a process of change triggered by the market and the choice of the consumer or by the diffusion of ideas and discourses about the notion of 'good policy'. More precisely, the 'vertical' mechanisms are based on adaptational pressure, the 'horizontal' mechanisms involve regulatory competition and different forms of framing.

Offering expertise and information to the European Commission in the drafting of policy proposals is also an effective way of injecting national preferences into the European policy process. Being present in the various networks that prepare and accompany the European negotiation process both at the domestic and EU level demands considerable staff-power, expertise, and information as well as a significant amount of coordination, which the Member States do not have equally available.[2]

QUESTIONS

1. What makes the concept of political space so interesting is its ambiguous character?
2. What is the main difference between government and governance?
3. What does that mean – Europeanisation?

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[2] Börzel, Tanja A., 2003, p. 7.

4. What kind of change is Europeanisation?

5. Could you explain the meaning of the 'nationalisation of European policy'?

Further Readings

Börzel, Tanja A.: Shaping and Taking EU Policies: Member State Responses to Europeanization. Queen's Papers on Europeanisation, No 2/2003, pp. 1-15. Available at: http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.535.1021&rep=rep1&type=pdf

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