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Europeanisation

Social Actors and the Transfer of Models in EU-27

edited by

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and

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Cover: Street demonstration, Prague, 21. 7. 2009
Photo Martin Mádl.

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**Conclusion:
towards a more sociological understanding
of Europeanisation**

Sandrine Devaux and Imogen Sudbery

The issue of the relationship between widening and deepening has been raised every time the European Union has enlarged, but the latest rounds of integration, concerning states from the former soviet bloc, have led scholars also to question the impact that the accession of ten post-communist countries may have on the EU's functioning. The specificity of these enlargement rounds compared to former rounds, lies in the scale of the endeavour that the candidate countries had to undertake in order to adapt to European rules and the *acquis communautaire*. Within this transformation process, the role played by social actors, who were required to adapt in order to seize the opportunity of engaging with the EU decision making process, has yet to be fully addressed by academics. In order to address this gap, this collective volume focuses on the role of social actors in the Europeanisation process; not only in the most recent enlargement rounds, but also in previous enlargements and in a current candidate state, Turkey. Thus its originality lies in the comparison of the impact of EU accession on social actors in old, new and prospective member countries.

We chose to focus our analysis on the role of social actors because of their relevance to the question of the relationship between deepening and widening processes inside EU. Through the lens of lobbying, collective action and mobilisation, it is possible to understand how civil society organisations familiarise themselves with European rules, and how they use and react to European models, especially when they have contacts with partners from older member states. Thus, this collective volume sought

to address the following questions: Does participation in the EU arena contribute to the consolidation of actors at the national level? Does the recognition of social actors at EU level provide them with greater legitimacy at national level? And conversely, to what extent does legitimacy at the national level help social actors to achieve recognition at EU level? Since we consider social actors as endogenous to the process of Europeanisation, we take into account that these actors may also become weaker or stronger as a result of their interaction with the EU. Therefore the contributions have challenged the prevailing understanding of Europeanisation by questioning the links between the national and the European level and the mechanisms through which interests and claims are expressed. In the Portuguese, Turkish, Estonian, Bulgarian and Polish cases, the analysis focused on the impact of the growing involvement of the former in the European arena on relations between social actors and national political authorities. Through this collective volume we also aimed to compare the four scenarios proposed by the EU-Consent programme against empirical findings, in order to gain an insight into the direction that the EU has taken over the course of the last two enlargements. This collective book identifies a number of variables that explain the differential domestic impact of Europeanisation.

According to the *spill-over scenario*, we consider whether adaptational pressures arising during the process of Europeanisation open up new opportunities for social actors. The main hypothesis was that even if these actors try to resist certain national and European decisions, they can gain political or financial resources for collective action by using the European framework. In addition, new interest groups may emerge to defend new categories of social actors, such as consumers, house owners, landowners. Furthermore, according to this scenario, collective action should contribute to the emergence of an enhanced European public space.

Mathieu Petithomme's contribution demonstrates that this scenario may be overly optimistic, at least in the short term. He showed, in the case of the 'Attac' campaigns that although Attac associations do address their demands and grievances towards the European level, it is individual, national, associations who formulate these demands, from a national standpoint. In other words, on the basis of this case, we can observe that as yet collective action towards the EU remains mainly in the national frame, and we cannot yet speak of a European public space¹. This supports Sidney Tarrow's observation that it is primarily national actors who protest at the European level, which suggests that the role of a European civil society remains limited. (Tarrow, S. 2001b). In the context of the post-communist countries, this tendency is reinforced in the sense that social actors from these new member states seek to preserve the autonomy that they have so recently achieved. The interaction between the processes of democratisation and European integration in these societies therefore creates tensions between, for example, the European Commission's attempts to impose its model on the one hand, and the attempts of social actors to block the implementation of certain European rules that they consider a threat to national diversity.

Generally in the post-communist context, we observe that, at least during the pre-accession period, it is the actors that were already strong at the national level that have benefited the most from engaging with the European policy-making process. In this sense, Europeanisation cannot be said to have contributed to the deepening of the democratisation process. For example, the greater the level of recognition of the trade unions at national level, the greater legitimacy they are accorded at the European

¹ Only the trend to develop european strikes is an attempt to defend and promote collectively common interests.

level. This has been acknowledged elsewhere in the case of Czech environmental organisations (Devaux, 2009). In this sense, we find a *status quo* scenario at both national and European level. Indeed, as Yakova's contribution demonstrates, during the accession period the EU enlarged the scope of countries represented with European platforms *quantitatively*, but without diversifying the nature of interests *qualitatively* (Yakova). Thus in the first phase, a widening process took place without deepening. This is a consequence of the fact that the recruitment of stakeholders at European level is based on recognised and well-established organisations, which in the case of the post-communist countries sometimes includes organisations who were established under the former regime. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that communist ideology is still relevant, only that former communist organisations were more used to dealing with institutional partners than more recently formed organisations. This trend also occurs because European platforms enhance the role of transmission belt which the European institutions expect social actors to play. From this point of view the transfer of European models (eg. multifunctional agriculture, sustainable development) induces in the first phase a strengthening of existing actors.

However, we then discern a second phase, which relates to the post-accession period, in which a wider range of organisations penetrate the European arena and a greater diversity of collective identities and interests are represented. Therefore, we suggest that not only has there been a deepening in the democratic and representative dimensions of European integration since 2004 but also that the Europeanisation process has become more complex. The multiplicity of social actors directly involved in European policy-making and represented within European platforms or euro groups should allow for a broader debate at national level on European issues. Nonetheless, further research needs to be undertaken to

confirm this trend. The scope of the papers presented in this volume does not allow us to make categorical claims as to whether social actors from new member states have already managed to frame or reframe the European agenda. We can, however, put forward the hypothesis that in certain fields such as the protection of the environment, these actors have at least managed to exert a significant influence on the development of several Directives. The recent mobilisation of social actors from the new member states at European level could potentially compensate for the fatigue of their counterparts in older member states (Devaux 2009), a phenomenon which would fit with the *Re-invented Union scenario*.

In addition, all the chapters show that European notions and values are vague enough to lend themselves to differing interpretations and have varying impacts. If models transferred (ie implemented at local level) can have deepened impacts on societies (like in the case of professional figures of farmers developed by Igljka Yakova), it is only due to the fact that national actors use these European references and “translate” them (Lascoumes, 2004) to the national context. Therefore, we provide evidence to support the hypothesis of many Europeanisation scholars (Caporaso, Cowles and Risse, 2001; Börzel and Risse, 2000; Radelli, 2004) that European integration has differential domestic impacts that vary according to national contexts and time periods.

The specific case of Turkey, which combines the status of candidate country with a democracy that does not yet meet the EU criteria demonstrates clearly that social actors can benefit greatly from engagement at European level. Claire Visier highlights the paradoxical case in which social actors from a non member state manage to gain legitimacy at European level while they are not recognised by their national authorities. In this case, Europeanisation clearly corresponds to a process of democratic deepening and to the *Re-invented Union*

scenario. Indeed, this shows that a non member state may have an impact on the functioning of the EU, while the status of candidate state produces political benefits for certain social actors. If we compare the results of the Turkish case with those of the Portuguese case, we can even hypothesise that European integration may have more important political consequences than economic ones. For example, banned trade unions in Turkey can continue to exist by being supported by European eurogroups as ETUC. In the specific context of Turkey, which is still undergoing a process of democratisation, the perspective of European integration can also be used by social actors to politicise the local agenda: the goal of EU accession stimulates social debate in the national political context and promotes domestic changes, such as the creation of an Economic Social Committee in 2001. Contrary to the Turkish model, in the Portuguese case neither business organisations nor trade unions' confederations managed to obtain greater legitimacy at the national level by using European resources. Nevertheless, the question of which scenario is most relevant remains open. From the point of view of the member state, the situation corresponds to the *status quo scenario* but from the point of view of the European Commission, if social actors function as a form of 'transmission belt' for the dissemination of European values and policies, it may fit more closely with the spill over scenario.

The *spill over* scenario also occurs when we observe the development of civil society in the post-communist countries. Although certain non profit organisations date from the struggle against the communist regime, the majority were created in response to the new challenges arising as a result of democracy and the liberal economy. In this context it can be argued that European discourse on the importance of civil society has been a crucial element in convincing the national government of the necessity of supporting such a development. Anna

Paczésniak describes this process in her contribution and points to the financial incentives that have been created to incite governments to promote civic activities. To a certain extent, this approach is testimony to the attempts of the European Commission to use carrots as well as sticks to promote the transfer of models, which is also demonstrated by the development of the open method of coordination.

The specificity of the book lies in its analysis of the impact of the overlapping processes of post-communist transformation and integration into the European Union (i.e. democratisation and Europeanisation) on social actors at national level. In this respect, the role of the European Union in terms of socialisation cannot be underestimated, yet its effect is in part determined by the post communist context. It is clear, for example, that the European Commission sought to contribute to the socialisation of social actors from candidate countries by accepting them as observer members before their accession to the Union. Although the aim may have been to integrate the new players and make them more familiar with the Commission's own rules, participation in these procedures has also enabled the social actors concerned to benefit from the experience of their counterparts in older member countries. Thus, they have learnt how to act effectively at the European level, and how to object to European policies, by following the example of their future partners. This phenomenon has been described by (Pernot, 1998, 61) as a "trade unions' university" which allows the actors concerned to "experience European codes, especially practical and symbolic norms".

The importance of this type of socialisation has been described by the contributions from Juri Ruus and Iglıka Yakova, respectively in the Estonian and the Bulgarian case. Estonian trade unions, for example, have been socialised in the framework of the Council of Nordic

Trade Unions. Both authors have also demonstrated that Europeanisation has occurred in a context which was still characterised by the sustainability of certain former organisations inherited from the communist period. This is the reason why Elsa Tulmets in her chapter puts forward the idea that the word Europeanisation is not necessary a synonym of cognitive harmonisation, but rather of organisational and institutional adaptation through the narrow pathway of legacies of the past. Ruus' and Yakova's empirical findings demonstrate that Europeanisation has different effects on the development of social actors at national level and that European models are transferred and implemented differently according to social and economic conditions. Juri Ruus argues that social actors from small countries have greater difficulties in making themselves heard but nevertheless benefit from the transfer of institutional models, such as the concept of tripartite negotiations promoted by the European Commission.

It would be misleading to conclude that Europeanisation systematically strengthens democracy. It would be more realistic to say that it *can* reinforce the democratisation process when, for example, it helps to support social dialogue or when it provides new arenas for various minority interests or causes to be heard at both national and European level (such as the voting rights of third country nationals discussed in Séverine Lacalmontie's chapter). However, the process can also be weakened, if, for example, the actors who are already strong at national level are the ones chosen as 'legitimate' representatives of their cause at the European level, while smaller, grass roots organisations are marginalised.

Through the Turkish case, Claire Visier has formulated a pattern to grasp the meaning of Europeanisation of social actors. It consists of three steps: struggle against national bureaucracy, European integration perspective as a resource, impact of European involvement on social

actors. Rather than being constrained by European demands, these actors re-evaluate and redefine their own resources, identities and political references within the new dynamics of domestic political contexts in light of the EU integration process. This is in this direction that Elsa Tumets proposes to re-examine the definition of Europeanisation and to establish new research designs, which are better placed to interpret empirical data explaining both euro-enthusiasm and resistance to Europe. In fact, although we observe several trends confirming the re-invented Union scenario, we have also to take into consideration the politicisation of the European agenda and the growing opposition to the liberal conception of the European market, as voiced in Spring 2009 during the European demonstrations in different European capitals.

All the contributions tend to prove that Europeanisation can be “largely conceived as an emerging political opportunity structure” in line with Börzel and Risse’s approach (2000:6). But all also emphasise the fact that national configurations still matter and that the pressure for adaptation concerns interests and identities as well as institutions. Interestingly, the path dependency theory that has been applied to the analysis of the post-communist transformation (once the limits of ‘transitology’ had been reached) can be also used here to explain the manner in which Europeanisation operates. If the implementation process of European policies offers new resources to actors who were until then “dominated, in minority or marginal in the policy networks” (Muller, 1996, 308), it can also produce constraints. Finally, social actors who act and represent their causes and interests at the European level are those have previously domesticated the European discourses and models and have managed to convert them as resources in the national context.

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