An end to Nordic exceptionalism? Europeanization of Nordic development policy.

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Introduction
The Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden - have traditionally been praised for their generous and advanced development policies. The ‘Nordic Model’ has i.a. included a large share of multilateral assistance, a focus on low-income countries and a large portion of grant aid. The Nordics’ emphasis on democracy, gender, environment and human rights has also been applauded. In recent years, this idyllic picture has been challenged. It has been claimed that the Nordic model has faded: that the Nordic donors have become more similar to other European donors but also that their development policies have taken off in different directions, at least to a certain extent and in some respects. One possible reason for such trends is pressures or indirect influences from EU policies, that is, Europeanization. This article critically evaluates such claims by presenting arguments for and against Europeanization effects, with a focus on four aspects of development policy: structures, values and norms, instruments and practices.

I argue that changes have indeed taken place. The Nordic exceptionalism that existed up until the 1990s has been eroded, although still visible in certain areas, and the foreign assistance of the individual Nordic countries have to a certain extent diverged in their emphases and foci. At the same time, a convergence of European aid policies has occurred. These trends have simultaneously been interpreted as an effect of Europeanization, as a result of a ‘Nordicization’ of EU aid, and as a consequence of unifying international trends in aid policy. I suggest that Europeanization, in the case of the Nordic states, has been very weak and that it has taken place mainly on the level of general preferences and principles, not least with reference to development policy in general, with a growing focus on private actors and on links between security, growth and development aid – though these changes may also, and more persuasively, be explained by the influence of broad global development policy trends. Aid practices, including aid co-ordination, in the field have hardly been affected by Europeanization. I also argue that strong Nordic attitudes of superiority (‘what have we to learn from the
EU?’) and strong identities as ‘good donors’ have obstructed Europeanization and fostered a feeling that it is the Nordics that have influenced the EU and not vice versa.

The article starts with a brief discussion of how it relates to the conceptual framework of this special issue, with a focus on different levels or aspects of foreign aid that may be Europeanized. This is followed by a short section on method - not least on the challenges of empirically pinpointing effects of Europeanization - and sources of evidence. I then briefly recapitulate the main elements of the ‘Nordic model’. The main empirical section analyses the degree of erosion of this model, specifying on what levels (structures, values and norms, instruments or practices) and to what extent change has actually taken place. In the next section I discuss the cause(s) of change: is it a result of Europeanization? In the conclusion, I delve into the reasons behind the relative lack of Europeanization in the Nordic case and discuss future trends and developments.

**Conceptual issues and aspects of development aid policy**

In this article, I follow the definitions and the conceptual apparatus developed by Carbone and Orbie (in this issue). Thus, Europeanization is seen primarily as a top-down phenomenon (see also Rye Olsen 2012; Zemanová 2012), where elements of EU policies are adopted by Member States. I will, however, also refer to policy transfers in the opposite direction (‘bottom-up Europeanization’), as it is in the Nordic debate often taken for granted that ideas of Nordic foreign aid have more often influenced the EU than vice versa. I will also – regarding the degree of Europeanization - refer to the distinction between absorption, accommodation and transformation of European ideas (Börzel and Risse 2003: 69-70). Absorption implies a low degree of adaption, primarily on the discursive level (cf. Horký 2010). Accommodation means adapting existing processes, policies and institutions without changes in their essential features, while transformation indicates fundamental change and a genuine internalization of ideas.

Carbone and Orbie (in this issue) distinguish between the Europeanization of policy, polity and politics, respectively. Policies refer to ‘instruments, objectives and discourses in a specific domain’. The polity includes institutions and state-society relations, with an emphasis on changes in formal administrative structures and institutional reforms in the foreign assistance sector. Politics concern ‘processes of interest formation’, notably
the role of civil society in foreign aid. My focus will mainly be on the Europeanization of policies, though I will also briefly discuss institutional changes in the Nordic countries and their links to EU influence.

It is, for the purposes of this article, fruitful to make further distinctions within the broad category of ‘policy’. My motive for this is the empirical observation that EU may impact upon some aspects of policy, while hardly affecting others at all. Europeanization may thus be uneven and patchy, depending on what aspect of development policy we look at. Against this background, I differentiate between (potential) effects on structures, values and norms, instruments and practices of foreign aid. Structures in this context concern the volume of aid and patterns of recipients (To what geographical areas? Multi- or bilateral?). Values and norms refer to the overarching objectives of foreign development policy and the priorities made between them, and are primarily revealed by discursive practices. It is here important both to scrutinize development policies in a broad sense and foreign aid policy more specifically. Instruments imply the major modes of giving aid, including choices between project aid, budget aid, aid via NGOs etcetera. Practices, finally, indicate what donors do ‘on the ground’, how donor aid offices in developing countries work in order to carry out their missions, including patterns of co-ordination.

**Some methodological considerations**

As pointed out by Carbone and Orbie (in this issue), it is remarkably difficult to pinpoint the existence and extent of Europeanization. This is because it is tricky to isolate the impact of EU policies from that of other independent variables. Broad international ideational currents, often expressed by major intergovernmental organizations, may influence both EU and Member State policies (Orbie 2008). Member States may influence each other. Furthermore, convergence between EU and Member State policies may be the consequence of influences going in both directions (Lee-Ohlsson 2009; Rye Olsen 2013).

In the case of the Nordic countries, these have for a long time had well-defined policies and practices, situated in well-developed institutional settings. They have by many been considered to be at the forefront of development policy with generous and ‘altruistic’
programmes and have been seen as leaders and good examples in this regard. The EU’s development agenda has come later and has often been considered as less advanced, being a compromise between groups of Member States with various background and interests (often conveniently labelled ‘North’ and ‘South’). For this reason, one would hardly expect to find much of EU influences on Nordic state policy. Any such influences would be expected to have occurred in recent years. To determine Europeanization, EU policy change must precede domestic change. We must also be able to discern a logical chain or mechanism between the two changes, using thick description or process-tracing (cf. Carbone and Orbie, in this issue). The possibility to compare Norwegian – being a non-EU member – with the other Nordics seems less promising, as Norway is generally perceived to follow EU policies to the same extent as similar Member States (reference).

This article mainly relies on existing scholarly sources. There are number of detailed descriptions and analyses of the traditional Nordic model, but also of changes in Nordic policy and practises. Some of the latter concern aid policy specifically (Development Today 2010; Odén 2011; Selbervik with Nygaard 2006), while others discuss Nordic Africa policies and development policy more generally (Rye Olsen 2010; 2013) and still others only Swedish aid policy change (Odén and Wohlgemuth 2006). None of these studies have, however, been primarily guided by a Europeanization perspective. Many of these sources are based on interviews with large numbers of aid practitioners in the Nordic countries and therefore rest on solid empirical data. Therefore, I have only complemented these with two additional interviews, both with Swedish officials intimately involved in EU-Swedish aid relations. Both were semi-structured, conducted by telephone and based on a list of broad questions concerning the main themes of this article.

The traditional Nordic aid model

Nordic experts on development policy agree on the existence in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s of a ‘Nordic aid model’ (Odén 2011: 20; Development Today 2010) and of ‘Nordic exceptionalism’ (Rye Olsen 2013; Selbervik with Nygaard 2006). Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden stood out as generous donors, driven by solidarity, altruism, and by moral and humanitarian concerns rather than by material interests. While there were,
and are, certainly differences between the countries – with Finland often seen as the ‘odd man out’ in terms of less generosity and with Denmark and Finland demonstrating more aid tied to domestic interests – I will in this context treat the Nordic countries as one group.

The Nordic states have for decades provided more assistance than the OECD average to developing countries. Their aid levels have generally been above 0,7% of GNI while the OECD average has been between 0,2 and 0,4% (Selbervik with Nygaard 2006: 11). Moreover, the assistance has been mainly given as grants and has had a strong focus on low income countries, particularly in Africa, making credible the expressed objective of poverty eradication, based on solidarity and moral concerns. In the 1990’s, Sweden, Norway and Denmark allocated on average 50% or more of their bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa (Selbervik with Nygaard 2006: 22). They have demonstrated a stronger support for multilateralism, and not least for the UN aid system, than other donors (Odén 2011: 20). Denmark and Norway, for example, for many years had a policy indicating a 50-50 split between bilateral and multilateral aid (Selbervik with Nygaard 2006: 20). The Nordic countries have favoured a distinction between aid and export funding and have, at least up to the mid-1980’s expressed a critical distance from the policies of the International Financial Institutions (Odén 2011: 20). In principle, if not always in practice, there has been a strong emphasis on recipient co-influence, on ownership and on development relations as partnership (Odén and Wohlgemuth 2006: 19).

Nordic foreign assistance has traditionally featured a strong poverty orientation and a focus on social infrastructure and welfare. Much aid has thus been distributed to health, education, water and sanitation. Another strong focus has been on good governance, especially since the 1990s, and on women’s rights (Development Today 2010; Selbervik with Nygaard 2006: 24-6). In the provision of aid to these sectors and areas, the Nordic donors have considered themselves as frontrunners and as breaking new ground. They have been described as ‘humane internationalists’ (Pratt 1989; Stokke 1989) and as ‘norm advocates’ (Rye Olsen 2013: 410), trying to export norms that are prevalent in their own societies to developing countries (and to other donors!), notably regarding good governance and gender issues.
We can thus clearly distinguish a traditional Nordic development and aid model, despite the differences that exist between the countries. In the next section, I turn to the question whether this Nordic exceptionalism is still there. To what extent have changes taken place in the Nordic model, how far-reaching are these changes and do they concern all aspects of development policy or just a few of them?

Changes in Nordic development policies: how important and regarding what policy aspects?

In brief, the Nordic donors are still different compared to most other donors – but much less so than 20 years ago. Selbervi (with Nygaard 2006: 51) describes the differences in the following way: ‘They often both say and do the “right things” … At the policy level they are embracing coherence, harmonisation, and the new aid modalities. In addition, they channel most of their aid to the poorest countries and have a preference for Africa. Generally, they have few strings attached to their assistance and give strong support to multilateral organisations’. This picture of the Nordics as generous and value-driven donor actors is quite similar to the one drawn in the previous section.

On the other hand, two important caveats are in order. First, the Nordics are today not the only countries within the EU with such policies, and not necessarily the most important ones. References are often made to the ‘like-minded countries’ or to “Nordic plus’ (including also the Netherlands, the UK and Ireland) (Rye Olsen 2013: 420; Selbervik with Nygaard 2006: 51). In some areas, the United Kingdom, for example, may be more ‘progressive’ than the Nordic group. This belonging to a larger club obviously diminishes the exceptionalism of the Nordic countries. Second, the differences between the four Nordics seem to have grown. According to Rye Olsen (2013: 421), ‘the traditional Nordic aid cooperation has faltered somewhat … cooperation with the other Nordics is not longer a priority’. Norway, being outside the EU (though still often following EU policies), is claimed to have ‘become a lonely player’ (Development Today 2010: 5) or a ‘free-wheeler’ (Odén 2011: 48), giving Oslo a higher degree of freedom of action, but also less chance to influence the policies of the EU. Within the Union, the Nordics do not any longer necessarily form the ideological core and may prefer to work in other constellations within the framework of the like-minded countries. Recently,
references are made to ‘the Nordic plus plus’, including also France and Germany and sometimes also Poland and Spain (interview 1), possibly indicating a spread of Nordic aid ideology to a larger group of countries – thereby increasing its political weight considerably.

When turning to an analysis of the aspects of development policy defined above, we see a diverse and somewhat heterogeneous picture, although the general picture is one of very limited Europeanization. On the structural level, the aid budgets of the Nordics are still well above the OECD average. Despite economic and budgetary difficulties – admittedly of a lesser magnitude than in most other EU donors – they have kept up their levels of foreign assistance. They still give more than others to multilateral institutions (including of course today also the EU itself). For example, Sweden has for decades allocated between 25 and 30 % of its aid to such institutions. The share of aid allocations going to sub-Saharan Africa continues to hover between 30 and 40 % (Odén and Wohlgemuth 2006: 26). Tanzania, Moçambique and Ethiopia are still major recipients and were so already in the 1980’s and 1990s (ibid., p. 29).

The underlying motive for giving foreign assistance has remained virtually the same during 60 years of aid giving. Founded in domestic principles and given the lack of colonial history, international solidarity became the cornerstone of Nordic assistance programmes already from the beginning (Odén and Wohlgemuth 2006: 6). Furthermore, the main aid objectives have also remained approximately the same. In the Swedish case, a Government Bill of 1962 laid the foundations for the country’s aid policy and its principles have continued to guide Swedish assistance over the year to a surprising extent. The fight against poverty has always been the overarching goal, while economic growth, equal distribution of resources and a support for recipient states’ responsibility for their own development were basic elements of Swedish policy, later complemented by environmental concerns and gender equality as additional objectives (Odén and Wohlgemuth 2006: 8-9). Similar goals have guided the aid policies of the other Nordic states (Selbervik with Nygaard 2006: 20).

In recent years, priorities have, however, changed to a certain extent. In the context of aid, more emphasis has been put on the importance of the private sector for economic
growth, as well as on the perceived necessity to integrate poorer countries into the global economy (Odén 2011: 28, 31, 35). We can thus witness a greater attention to ‘the Market’ as a mover of prosperity and development, and consequently relative less focus on the State as the main force behind development – a clear change compared to the 1970s and 1980s. Another development is the increasing attention to good governance and human rights (Odén 2011: 32-3), a theme that has been visible in aid policies from the beginning but has more and more been made a centrepiece of Nordic development strategies. Next, development policies have come to prioritize policy coherence as a prerequisite for effectiveness (Stochetti 2013). All relevant policy areas – be it trade policy, agricultural policy, security policy or migration policy – should work for the same goal: sustainable development. This was an insight that came from the realization that sector policies sometimes contradicted each other and that development concerns often came out as losers when competing with commercial or security interests. The fact that different political and administrative institutions are in charge of different sector policies makes policy coherence a daunting challenge, but its importance has been increasingly emphasized, not least as a result of Swedish government policy initiatives (Odén 2011: 30; interview 1).

Finally, and when looking at development policy in a broad sense, links between development and security concerns have been increasingly put into focus. The link could work in both directions: no development is possible without peace, but peace can also be seen as dependent upon growth and increasing prosperity among large portions of society. In the context of the Nordic countries, we have – besides changes in discourse in this direction - witnessed more assistance being allocated to conflict areas, *nota bene* where EU forces have been involved as peacekeepers (Rye Olsen 2013; cf. Development Today 2010).

Considering modalities of aid giving and policy *instruments*, it can first be noted that sector allocations have always shifted, following international trends (Odén and Wohlgemuth 2006: 10). While health, education, infrastructural and rural development projects have always been present in aid programmes, we have since the Millennium seen a growing emphasis on new policy fields, including support for conflict prevention, democracy and private business initiatives. A trend towards general budget support,
associated with the belief in the virtue of recipient country ownership of its own development policy, is clearly visible.

Regarding the actual implementation of *aid policy on the ground*, there is little evidence of major change, due to EU co-ordination efforts. The Nordic countries have over the many years as major donors developed huge experience and substantial knowledge about aid mechanisms and processes (Rye Olsen 2011: 96). Aid implementation being highly decentralized in the Nordic states (Selbervik with Nygaard 2006: 52), these countries’ development offices and embassies in developing countries have become sites of considerable expertise. This is obviously one factor that has spoken against increased co-ordination within the framework of the EU. Co-ordination, when existing, has been with the other Nordic donors, or – in recent years – increasingly with other like-minded countries (within the ‘Nordic plus’ framework) (interview 1; Odén 2011: 21, 49; Rye Olsen 2011). In this context, the initiative, from Sweden and other like-minded states, to introduce joint EU programming in several recipient countries is worth special attention (interview 1). One empirical study has shown that hardly any evidence of EU integration efforts was visible at the local level in Tanzania (Guma 2010). Swedish country strategies almost never refer to EU documents and there is no increase of such references over time. This result is echoed by a more ambitious study of EU donor co-ordination on the ground in Tanzania and Zambia (Delputte and Orbie 2014; cf. Söderbaum and Stålgren 2008). The authors point to ‘the limited nature’ of the EU’s co-ordinator role.

To summarize, while changes, although not drastic, can be detected in Nordic policy objectives and instruments during the time period after the Danish, Finnish and Swedish accessions to the EU in 1995, no such traces are visible either in the structural aspects discussed above, or ‘in the field’. The changes that we have observed rather consist of additional elements to an existing structure of goals and instruments than of shifts in essential features of policy, that is, they are on the level of absorption or accommodation, rather than transformation. In the next section, I will discuss if the changes that have taken place may be interpreted as signs of on-going Europeanization processes.
Europeanization, Nordicization or following international trends?

Above, I have identified a number of elements that have been introduced into Nordic development policy during the last two decades or so. Similar conclusions, pointing in the direction of a noticeable but still limited erosion of the Nordic aid model, are drawn in existing literature. Some of these publications furthermore argue that we can see a clear on-going convergence of European development policies (Rye Olsen 2013; Zemanová 2012; cf. Lee-Ohlsson 2009 on convergence of European security and defence policy). The policies of the EU itself have undergone continuous changes. Many EU Member States have, more or less thoroughly, carried out reforms of their policies, often resulting in policies and strategies that are more similar to traditional Nordic aid practices than before. I have already underlined the emergence of a Nordic plus constellation of like-minded countries, including Great Britain and the Netherlands besides the Nordics and the more recent emergence of a ‘Nordic plus plus’ coalition, including also France and Germany (albeit differing across issue-areas). Such groups of countries with ‘progressive’ ideas may, according to some sources, have exerted influence on EU policy (Rye Olsen 2013: 421). Other long-standing members have also introduced novel elements into their aid arsenal, while newer Member States in Eastern and Southern Europe have created entirely new structures and policies after their accession to the Union (Horký 2010; Lightfoot and Szent-Ivanyi 2014; Zemanová 2012). The result has arguably been an EU where both Member State policies and EU policy have converged, and now demonstrate many more similar traits and features than ever before. According to one interviewee, the EU is today ‘very much speaking with one voice’ in aid policy (interview 1), a concordance that was formally expressed in the new ‘Agenda for Change’- policy of 2012. My other interviewee described the existence of a ‘European consensus’, where actors are in agreement on 98 % of all policies (interview 2).

The question then is if the changes in Nordic development policies and the tendencies described above are the consequence of Europeanization (the EU influencing Member States), of Nordicization (the Nordic countries influencing the EU but also perhaps other Member States), Like-Mindization (the Nordic plus having had similar influences) or of over-arching international trends that have spread to all actors, although to varying degrees. As pointed out in the methodology section, it is not an easy task to determine
causes and effects in this case. The discussion below must be seen as a first and rather impressionistic effort to disentangle the intricate and complex causal links that exist between these competing processes.

Evidence of a Europeanization of Nordic policies is hard to find, although ‘non-governmental sources’ are reported to have stressed that ‘the general trend in Swedish EU policy since 1995 has been one of adjustment to the EU and to its policies’ (Rye Olsen 2013: 415). Brommesson (2010) introduced the concept of ‘normative Europeanization’, referring to ‘a top-down process based on the logic of appropriateness, where states with a close relationship to the EU, i.e. candidate and member states, develop a commitment to a European centre … and their normative point of departure is changed’ (Brommesson 2010: 228; see also Rieker 2003 on Europeanization of Nordic security). A European loyalty becomes the point of reference, rather than national loyalty. According to Brommesson, tendencies of normative Europeanization of Swedish foreign policy can be detected. Is the same true for development policy? The Nordic states are in general well known for their propensity to follow and implement EU directives, and this could speak in favour of at least an absorption or accommodation of EU values in this policy area, too. However, the Nordics have been extremely proud of their aid record and their aid policies, which have generally (and not only in the North) been considered progressive and at the forefront of aid ideology. Mirroring this image, there seems to have been a tendency in aid circles (notably in aid agencies and within the NGO community), especially when the Nordics became EU members in 1995, to regard EU foreign assistance as much less advanced and much less progressive. The idea that ‘we have something to learn from the EU’ appears to have been far-fetched for many Nordic politicians and practitioners. EU aid was considered ‘outmoded’ and its aid structures were considered frustratingly bureaucratic and ineffective (interview 1). Such attitudes obviously speak against any impact of ideas stemming from the EU. Such attitudes may, however, have changed gradually over the years. One of my interviewees thus argued that Nordic aid officials today are much more open to ideational influences from other EU actors and more sympathetic to other countries’ ‘ideological hobby-horses’ (interview 2). To the extent that this is the case, this may be evidence of a growing feeling of ‘EU solidarity’ as a result of an on-going socialization process.
Empirically, there might arguably be influences from the EU’s long-standing focus on market forces and the importance of private business in its development policy, as expressed for example in the Lomé-agreements. Certainly, there has been an increasing emphasis on these aspects in Nordic aid recently, appearing well after such elements appeared in EU policy. On the other hand, there are also international trends here to reckon with, which point in exactly the same direction. A totally transformed aid landscape, with many more financial flows to take note of and a diminished role for governmental assistance, had created a situation where private actors ‘had to be taken into account’ (interview 1). Another potential area of Europeanization is the increasing securitization of foreign aid. The links between security and development have been underlined in EU discourses, but also in international discourse in general, for some time while we have recently witnessed more Nordic assistance going to countries where the Nordic states are involved in peace-keeping missions. Still, evidence of normative Europeanization is inconclusive as these shifts in ideational priorities may also have resulted from international ideological currents (see below).

Is there then any more solid evidence of a Nordicization of EU policies? In official documents, the Nordics have stressed the importance, and the possibility, of influencing EU policies towards Africa (Odén 2011: 39). Aid practitioners unanimously discard the notion that EU policies should have had any significant influence on Nordic aid policies, and instead pay tribute to the beneficial effects of Nordic influence on EU norms and values (interview 1). Gender equality and increased transparency are often cited examples of Nordic ideational influences. Gorm Rye Olsen has investigated the possibility of Nordicization in a recent article, with a focus on the EU’s Africa policy (Rye Olsen 2013). Referring to an analysis of five separate cases involving policies towards Africa, Rye Olsen finds that the case of policies towards Zimbabwe ‘may show it is possible for small Nordic countries to influence the Africa policy of the European Union’ (Rye Olsen 2013: 415). Likewise, the 2005 EU consensus on development assistance ‘may be interpreted as an illustration of Nordicization’, as the Nordics initiated the debate on European aid harmonization and coherence and suggested the content of the policies that ensued (ibid. p. 420; cf. Odén 2011: 30). The Nordic countries thus arguably demonstrated agenda-setting power in this instance. However, Rye Olsen adds that in both cases the Nordic states worked in close co-operation with a number of like-minded
countries. Thus, ‘Denmark, Sweden and Norway have has close and positive working relationships with the UK, the Netherlands and Ireland on the issues of aid harmonization and in particular on the improvement of the delivery of development aid’ (Rye Olsen 2013: 420). One interviewee gave the growing importance placed on ‘soft values’ in EU discourse and policy, clearly expressed in the 2012 ‘Agenda for Change’, as another example of Nordic plus influence (interview 1). These examples can thus be interpreted as illustrations of ‘like-mindization’, with a coalition of ideologically similar, ‘progressive’ countries working in tandem to influence EU policies, rather than as proofs of Nordicization per se.

Many observers argue that the convergence of European aid models to a large degree is the result of international trends in development policy (Odén 2011; Odén and Wohlgemuth 2006). It is well known that aid has its fads and fashions that are closely followed by most donors. I have indicated above that such ideological trends may explain changes in Nordic policy objectives that may otherwise be interpreted as signs of Europeanization. During the last 15-20 years, the increasing emphasis placed on trade flows and on co-operation with the private sector in aid has resulted in a dramatically changed environment for traditional inter-governmental foreign assistance (interview 1). This development has arguably given rise to new debates and new trends in aid giving, further strengthening the over-all importance of global transnational ideological influences. To determine the causal chains between global debates and inputs from international organizations, national governments and civil society would, however, require a detailed and thorough process-tracing investigation into documentary sources in order to find out ‘who was first’ and in what ways innovations were imitated and spread, something that I have not been able to do in this context.

**Summary and a concluding discussion on future trends**

In this article, I have investigated the impact of Europeanization – if any – on Nordic development and aid policies. My main finding is that such influences have been very limited. Some aspects of policy (larger aid flows and others structural characteristics, but also the specific character of aid practices on the ground) have not changed at all, or to a very limited extent, while we have witnessed additions to the set of aid objectives and instruments of the Nordic countries, indicating a degree of absorption and
accommodation of novel policy elements. The latter can, however, better be explained by impulses from the global aid debate that have influenced both the EU and the Member States alike.

I have also highlighted the convincing arguments for, and examples of, Nordificication (the Nordic countries influencing EU policy and the policies of other members) and, increasingly more important, of what I have called like-mindization; the impact of an ideological core of ‘progressive’ Member States, which includes the Nordics but also some heavy players on the European stage, like the UK, the Netherlands and more recently also France and Germany. The result has been a convergence of European aid policies and practices. Nordic exceptionalism is still there – but less visibly so than before the turn of the century.

How can this lack of Europeanization be explained? The simple answer is that the Nordic countries already had well-developed foreign aid policies when they (excluding of course Norway) became EU members and that these policies were considered – not least, but not only, by politicians and practitioners in the Nordic countries – to be both more generous and more ‘progressive’ than the existing EU aid policy. There was, consequently, no demand for ideational inputs from the EU level. The lack of ideational fit (cf. Lightfoot and Szent-Ivanyi 2014) that existed was by the Nordics seen as something that should be solved through normative changes in the EU, and not the other way round. Therefore the emphasis voiced in the Nordic countries on the opportunities for norm spread within the EU, that is, on potential Nordicization. The attitude that ‘we have nothing to learn from the EU’ may still be there, but has been more and more replaced, as EU policy has gradually become more ambitious, by a feeling that ‘we are all working within the EU with the same goal, to improve aid policy and practices, and we Nordics have something to contribute within this process’ (interview 1). This could pave the way for joint efforts to improve aid practices, with the aim of making EU aid more effective.

Will we see more of Europeanization in the years to come? On the structural level of policy, we can perhaps expect Europeanization – but not concerning the Nordic Member States. Their high aid budgets, and their focus on multilateral aid and grants, do not
seem to be threatened and have withstood the economic strains of recent years. On the other hand, pressure from the Commission – and from recipients and NGOs – for increased aid budgets in other, today less generous, Member States will continue. If it will succeed is another matter, and to a large extent depends on the state of the European economy. Therefore, we can expect Nordic exceptionalism in these areas to continue for a foreseeable future. Neither can we expect Europeanization in the case of aid objectives. Changes in this respect will probably come, but then as the result of global development trends, rather than of EU initiatives. There seems to a bigger chance for a Europeanization of aid instruments and of co-ordination on the ground. In order to compete with other emerging donors (nota bene China and India) for influence in the developing world, Lightfoot and Szent-Iványi (2014: 14) argue that the EU ‘must act in a more concerted and coherent way’. Furthermore, the creation of the EEAA will probably lead to renewed and strengthened efforts of EU foreign aid co-ordination in recipient countries. There is, I expect, a willingness in Denmark, Finland and Sweden to comply with such pressures in order to demonstrate their commitment to EU unity and to initiatives to increase the effectiveness of European aid. If this will actually result in real changes in practices and co-operation patterns on the ground depends on the Union’s ability to implement its ambitious plans.

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**Interviews**

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