Europeanization and Environmental Policy Change: A Research Design for the Study of South Europe

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Introduction

Environmental policy has often been described as one of the most regulated policies at the European Union level and one that reflects a high level of Europeanization (Jordan, 2002). It is an area where EU competencies are highly developed and at the same time high regulatory variety can be observed (Knill, 2001: 119). This makes environmental policy an interesting area of research for its content but also because of its rich impact at the domestic level (e.g. Knill, 2001, Borzel, 2003, Haverland, 2003). The aim of this paper is to contribute to the theoretical discussion on Europeanization and environmental policy change and to offer a research design for the study of policy change in the South of Europe. The study of Europeanization is multi-level and inter-disciplinary by nature and what is proposed is a theoretical framework that will allow for cross-national and cross-policy comparisons.

With this in mind, section one takes a three-step approach to the study of Europeanization. First, the different mechanisms of Europeanization are outlined and classified as ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ depending on the level of coercion that can be observed. Then, drawing on Schmidt (2002) some common mediating factors to change are discussed. Finally, the possible outcomes of the interaction between the mechanisms of Europeanization and the mediating factors to change are offered. It is argued that a relationship between ‘hard’ mechanisms such as coercion and macro-level mediating factors such as economic vulnerability exists and often leads to convergence. On the other hand, ‘soft’ mechanisms such as polydiffusion are related to more complex mediating factors such as discourse and can lead to inertia. Divergence is not linked to specific mechanisms and mediating factors. It is always a possibility and it can be the result of unexpected shifts or of the empowerment of radical coalitions at the domestic level.

Further empirical research is needed in order to elaborate and possibly alter the above propositions. Section two offers a discussion of Europeanization and environmental policy change as well as an initial design for the study of change in the South of Europe. It is argued that two types of environmental policy exist: reformative and symbolic. Changes of a symbolic nature are easier to take place because of their low political and economic cost while reformative changes are more complex and are dependent to the economic and political balance of power. The
empirical design proposed includes a study of the mechanisms of Europeanization in the field of environmental policy by focusing at the European level and an in depth analysis of the mediating factors and outcomes up to now in a selection of Southern EU member-states by analysing the domestic level.

**Europeanization: Mechanisms, Mediating Factors to Change and Outcomes**

How does environmental policy change in the EU member states? Is it a result of endogenous factors and processes, is it the outcome of Europeanization or is it a combination of the two? In order to answer this fundamental question two terms need to be defined and a theoretical framework has to be developed and applied to empirical case-studies. The first term that needs to be clarified is *Europeanization* and the second one is *policy change*.

Europeanisation is a term that made its first appearance in the 1990s (e.g. Ladrech, 1994) in order to describe a process different to European integration and to harmonisation that are concepts focusing on the domestic adjustment of the member states to EU obligations. Europeanisation is a concept acknowledging the two-way process of policy change between the EU and domestic environments (Featherstone, 2003). It has been defined as ‘a process by which domestic policy areas become increasingly subject to European policy-making’ (Borzel, 1999: 574) but it can also be a structure or a discourse.

For Radaelli (2003: 30) *Europeanisation* refers to:

Processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies.

Radaelli’s definition of Europeanization is useful for three reasons: first, it sees Europeanisation as a process of institutional and policy change that takes place at both the European and national levels. Second, it acknowledges the importance of policy transfer and of diffusion and third it leads us to broad definition of *policy change*. Policy change can be traced at the domestic discourses, identities, political structures and public policies and it is the result of the institutionalisation of formal and informal
rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles and shared beliefs and norms. The question that follows is how do these rules, procedures, paradigms, beliefs and norms are constructed, diffused and institutionalised? What are the mechanisms of Europeanization?

Mechanisms of Europeanization

The literature on Europeanization proposes a number of mechanisms that range from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’. Knill (2001: 214-225) suggests that three mechanisms of Europeanization exist: institutional compliance, changing opportunity domestic structure and framing domestic beliefs and expectations. Institutional compliance refers to explicit European policies that prescribe a specific institutional model that has to be introduced at the domestic environment. It is the ‘hardest’ mechanism identified by Knill given that the member-states have only limited discretion about how to implement the institutional change. The second mechanism suggested is changing domestic opportunity structures and it would be placed somewhere in the middle of a scale that descends from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’ mechanisms. It describes instances where European policies alter the distribution of power and resources between domestic actors and as a result institutional change occurs. The final and ‘softest’ mechanism proposed is framing domestic beliefs and expectations. The EU goal here is to prepare the ground for institutional change by altering the ‘cognitive input’ of domestic actors. Knill’s classification of mechanisms of Europeanization is one of the clearest in the literature because there is no overlap between what he refers to as a mechanism and to what he refers to as a process.

Page (2003: 163-176) in a chapter that makes little distinction between Europeanization and homogenization suggests four mechanisms that blur between what Radaelli (2003) describes as processes of Europeanization and what Knill (2001) refers to as mechanisms of Europeanization. They are coercion, imitation, adjustment and polydiffusion. The ‘hardest’ mechanism is coercion of a policy or institution through European legislation. As he designates, the term is problematic given that member-states consent and participate to the creation of the change imposed by the EU. The next mechanism is imitation and refers to EU or domestic initiatives, that without having the force of law, become dominant and are copied across the EU. An even less ‘hard’ mechanism is adjustment and describes instances when member-
states react in a similar way to conditions created by the EU. Finally, polydiffusion is the ‘softest’ mechanisms and is similar to what Knill (2001) describes as framing domestic beliefs and expectations. For Page (2003) this is an unimportant mechanism because he argues that for policy change to occur choice and deliberation as well as generation and maintenance of public support are needed. His classification of mechanisms of Europeanization is less useful because of the lack of rigorous distinctions between mechanisms and processes and as a result of methodological tools for in depth empirical research.

A third useful classification of mechanisms of Europeanization is offered by Schmidt (2002: 894-912). She distinguishes between coercion at a high level, coercion at a less high level, mimesis and regulatory competition. Coercion at a high level refers to instances of fundamental change at the European level that translate themselves to very strict rules that have to be followed by the domestic actors. A good example is the European Monetary Union (EMU) and the convergence criteria. Coercion at a less high level is the next mechanism suggested by Schmidt and has the same meaning to what Page (2003) also describes as coercion. A less ‘hard’ mechanism is mimesis where it is in the discretion of member-states to follow or not EU suggestions. Finally, the ‘softest’ mechanism put forward by Schmidt is regulatory competition where there is no institutional framework proposed by the EU but because of an EU decision competition is created and the member-states are forced to institutional or policy change.

A summary of the three approaches can be found in Table 1. Three points need to be made here: First, the three approaches identify a diversity of mechanisms ranging from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’. Not all three writers see ‘soft’ mechanisms of Europeanization as equally important to ‘hard’ mechanisms but they all acknowledge their existence. Second, as Schmidt (2002) notes coercion can take place in such a high level such as the convergence criteria for participating at the EMU. In these cases, theoretical and methodological tools from international political economy are necessary for the in depth understanding of changes that take place. Third, ‘soft’ mechanisms of Europeanization are difficult to observe and to demonstrate but it is argued that they are important because they often are the initial sign to other more coercive mechanisms to come. Theoretical and methodological tools from sociology, social psychology and linguistics could assist us in explaining ‘soft’ mechanisms of Europeanization.
Table 1: Mechanisms of Europeanization

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<td>Hard</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Changing domestic opportunity structures</td>
<td>Imitation</td>
<td>Coercion at less high level</td>
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<td>Soft</td>
<td>Framing domestic beliefs and expectations</td>
<td>Adjustment</td>
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<td>Polydiffusion</td>
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Mediating Factors to Change

Since the introduction of the term ‘Europeanization’ in the social sciences vocabulary, the majority of the authors acknowledge its two-way process from the European to the national level and vice versa. As discussed in the previous section what has been increasingly important is the study of the way domestic public policy adapts to the European challenges. Cowles et al. (2001) as well as Heritier et al. (2001) argue in favour of the importance of the ‘goodness of fit’, which says that the adaptation process depends on the fit between European policies and national policies. Schmidt (2002: 898-900) and Schmidt and Radaelli (2004: 183-210) move closer to an ‘inside-out’ or ‘bottom-up’ perspective and argue that in order to explore when the mechanisms of Europeanization lead to policy and institutional change we need to study five mediating factors.

Schmidt (2002: 898-900) introduces five mediating factors useful for empirical research that can be applied in the study of environmental policy change in the South of Europe. The first mediating factor is economic vulnerability and it refers to the presence or not of economic crisis as well as the state’s competitiveness in international markets. It is argued that states are more open to change if they face an
economic crisis or if they occupy a weak position in the international political economy environment. This is a very significant factor because it places domestic policy change in the context of the international political environment and pressures. Schmidt and Radaelli (2004: 186) replace economic vulnerability with a more general factor which is international or EU problems that act as pressures for EU policy change. Such a more general factor could be useful for the understanding of policy change in an area such as the environment where ecological problems can play the role of external pressure.

The second mediating factor refers to political institutional capacity which means the ability of the political actors to impose or negotiate change depending upon the political interactions and the institutional structures. This second factor puts light in the relationship between structures and agents at the domestic level and the implications that this has for policy change. The third mediating factor is more structural and concerns the policy legacies. It refers to the ‘fit’ with long-standing policies and policy-making institutions. In contrast, the fourth mediating factor moves the attention to the agents and their policy preferences which has to do with the ‘fit’ with their old preferences and their openness to new. Finally, the fifth mediating factor is the discourse and has to do with the “ability to change preferences by altering perceptions of economic vulnerabilities and policy legacies and thereby enhance political institutional capacity to impose or negotiate change” (Schmidt, 2002: 899). Whether all mediating factors are equally significant for policy change to occur or not is an empirical question and the answer may differ between countries and policy sectors.

Outcomes

The final question that needs to be answered is the possible outcomes of Europeanization. The majority of writers outline three possible outcomes: inertia, absorption or convergence and retrenchment or divergence (Knill, 2001, Schmidt, 2002, Radaelli, 2003). The question of whether different societies are converging or diverging is not a new one. Contemporary discussion started in the 1960s, at a more normative level rather than as an interpretation of reality, when social scientists (e.g. Tinbergen, 1959) predicted the socio-economic convergence of the USA and the USSR. In recent years the discussion of convergence and divergence has reappeared,
but the framework has shifted from industrialisation and modernisation to internationalisation and globalisation (e.g. Berger and Dore, 1996; Cerny, 1996; Drezner, 2001; Unger and Van Waarden, 1995a, Ladi, 2005). As a continuation of this path the discussion of convergence and divergence as outcomes of Europeanization has followed.

Inertia, or as Knill (2001) describes it, persistence, refers to a situation where lack of change can be observed. It can happen when one or more of the five mediating factors described in the previous section do not facilitate change at the member-state level. The second possible outcome is convergence. Schmidt (2002) and Radaelli (2003) break it into two different outcomes: absorption and transformation depending on the level and intensity of change. The term convergence is preferred here because it is more compatible to a bottom-up approach where Europeanization is not only about how the member-states adapt to EU initiatives and absorb them but more generally about the process of policy change as a result of continuous interactions between the European and the domestic levels. Finally, a third outcome is divergence or in Radaelli’s (2003) terminology retrenchment. This is an empirically surprising effect but theoretically a vital parameter. It is paradoxical to observe instances where a policy becomes less European but it is very important to acknowledge them in order to avoid falling into the trap of a deterministic view of Europeanization.

Up to now we have defined Europeanization, we have discussed its possible mechanisms, the mediating factors to change and its potential outcomes. Whether specific mechanisms relate to particular mediating factors and have as a result specific outcomes is an empirical question. It is proposed that ‘hard’ mechanisms such as coercion are often linked to macro-level mediating factors such as economic vulnerability and lead to convergence. On the other hand, ‘soft’ mechanisms such as polydiffusion are linked to more complex mediating factors such as discourse and can lead to inertia. Divergence is not related to specific mechanisms and mediating factors. It is always a possibility and it can be the result of unexpected shifts or of the empowerment of radical coalitions at the domestic level. The empirical study of instances of inertia, convergence and divergence can lead to an elaboration and sophistication of these initial propositions. In the next section the attention is moved to an application of the Europeanization framework presented here to the case of environmental policy change.
Europeanization and Environmental Policy Change

Environmental policy is one of the best-researched fields of the impact of Europeanization upon the domestic level (e.g. Knill, 2001, Borzel, 2003, Jordan, Liefferink and Fairbrass, 2004). Knill (2001: 119) identifies two reasons for selecting environmental policy as an area of research. First, environmental policy is very well developed at the EU level and a comprehensive framework of regulations that the member-states are called to follow exists. Second, not only a large number of regulations exist but also a diversity of regulatory instruments and practices can be found. In this section, an initial discussion of the way the mechanisms of Europeanization can be applied in the area of environmental policy is offered. First, a summary of the development of environmental policy at the EU level and of its characteristics is discussed.

Although the Treaty of Rome made no mention of environmental policy, after the UN Conference on Human Environment in 1972, a decision was made to move it to the top of the policy agenda and consequently the first Environment Action Programme was developed. The pressure for initiating environmental regulations came from ‘green states’ such as Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands. In the 1980s this push was made even more forceful and in 1986 with the Single European Act, a legal basis was given to environmental policy. This reforming energy in environmental policy was confined during the 1990s because of the economic climate and the cost of implementing environmental directives. Germany, which was one of the pioneers in the area, became more restricted because of the impact of unification and the social, political and economic pressures that this brought to bear. On the other hand, countries such as the UK, which used to be a weak actor in EU environmental policy, became more active. Another interesting development was that in order to guarantee its competitiveness in an antagonistic global environment the EU acted as a driving force for the adoption of international agreements for the protection of the environment. Finally, as far as the nature of EU environmental policy is concerned, two changes can be observed. First, the integration of environmental considerations in other sectors such as agricultural policy, and, second, the inclusion of the concept of ‘sustainable development’ in its programmes (Sbragia, 2000: 293-298).
Knill (2001: 121) provides a useful categorisation of three different dimensions of the EU environmental policy. First, there is a variance in the nature of regulations: reactive as well as proactive regulations can be found. Second, regulations that only focus into one medium (e.g. a regulation that focuses on the quality of air) but also regulations that refer to the environment as a unity exist. Third, a multitude of regulatory instruments can be observed: numerical standards that concern the state of the environment or of the products in relation to the environment, procedural requirements concerning the authorization of industrial processes as well as the public participation and finally voluntary agreements and industrial self-regulation. This categorisation is very useful for the realisation of the regulatory variety that characterises environmental policy but it is argued that another type of classification is needed in order to explore environmental policy inertia, convergence or divergence.

Two types of environmental policy exist: reformative and symbolic. Reformative environmental policies aim to drastically reform the environmental situation at one place and/or time and they normally have general consequences for the economic competitiveness of the unity that implements them. An example of reformative environmental policy is the energy tax. Energy taxes are taxes on the production or consumption of energy that aim to reduce the energy consumption or to alter it to renewable sources in order to mitigate climate change. An energy tax can be described as reformative because it affects the economic competitiveness of the unity that adopts it and it also has a redistributive character (see Busch, Jorgens and Tews, 2005: 159-161). Symbolic environmental policies are less intrusive and more peripheral in character. They do not really target the actual environmental damage and that is why their cost is normally low. An example of a symbolic policy is the free access to environmental information (FAI). FAI is a regulation concerning the citizen’s access to information. Bush, Jorgens and Tews (2005: 161-164) observe that has quickly spread across the globe and often by counties that don’t even have the means to provide free access to their citizens. It is part of the idea of ‘good governance’ and it is better described as symbolic.

The next step to the understanding of Europeanization and environmental policy change is a discussion of all the actions of the EU in order to relate them to the mechanisms described in the previous section. The question that can be answered is whether we can find patterns of relationships between specific mechanisms and reformative or symbolic environmental policies? The method that will be followed
will be qualitative analysis of the legislation and documentation of the EU and when it is necessary in depth interviewing with key actors of EU environmental policy-making. The next step will be the study of environmental policy change in the South of Europe by building on the existing literature (e.g. Borzel, 2003, Pridham, 1996, Kousis, 1994 and Aquilar Fernandez, 2003) and by elaborating it with primary empirical research where it is necessary. The mediating factors and the outcomes of Europeanization in the South of Europe will be analysed in light of the discussion of environmental policy at the European level.

The research will focus on changes that have occurred in policies, programmes, institutions and ideas in the Southern European states that joined the European Economic Community in 1981 (Greece) and in 1986 (Spain and Portugal) and in the states that joined the European Union in 2004 (Malta and Cyprus). A number of comparative studies of Greece, Spain and Portugal have already been conducted. The comparison has been proved fruitful because of historical, political, economic and social similarities (see Pridham, 1984 and Matsaganis, Ferrera, Capucha and Moreno, 2003). What has not been explored in depth however, is the comparison of these three states with Cyprus and Malta. Indeed little has been written about Europeanization and its impact upon Cyprus (with the exception of Featherstone, 2001) or Malta. Both cases are very different from Greece, Spain and Portugal because they are small states, they are islands and they have politically turbulent past; in the case of Cyprus the problem is still unresolved. Even though they are differences between these five states, their societal similarities make the comparison valid and interesting.

Conclusions

This paper offers an initial discussion and a set of propositions on Europeanization and environmental policy change and sets the parameters for an empirical investigation of environmental policy change in the South of Europe. At a theoretical level two arguments are made in the paper. First, that ‘hard’ mechanisms of Europeanization (e.g. coercion) are related to macro-level mediating factors (e.g. economic vulnerability) and are expected to lead to convergence. ‘Soft’ mechanisms such (e.g. polydiffusion) are linked to more multi-level mediating factors (e.g. discourse) and can lead to inertia. Divergence is linked nor to specific mechanisms,
neither to concrete mediating factors. It is always a possibility and it can be the result of unexpected shifts or of the empowerment of radical coalitions at the domestic level. The second argument is more specific about environmental policy. It is claimed that two types of environmental policy exist: reformative and symbolic. Changes of a symbolic nature are easier to take place because of their low political and economic cost while reformative changes are more complex and are dependent to the economic and political balance of power. Only thorough empirical research can demonstrate the validity or not of this arguments and it can to lead to more sophisticated propositions. The South of Europe is a fruitful and under-researched geographical area where some interesting answers can be found.

Bibliography

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