The Domestic turn in europeanization studies: Elite perceptions of Europe.

DRAFT

Comments are welcome

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Abstract
The paper argues that there is a domestic turn in europeanization studies. There is growing awareness and agreement in the field of europeanization studies that domestic factors need to be taken more seriously into account if we want to convincingly asses and explain processes of europeanization. Building on an institutional approach, which includes rulemaking as well as normmaking, the paper shows that elite perceptions can be a fruitful way to conceptualize the impact of domestic factors. Domestic elites filter European impulses through existing national interpretations of what Europe is. This can be done through “decoupling” i.e. adapting to Europe by separating organization talk from organizational action. In this way a national discourse can show change while existing ways of doing things are protected from europeanization pressure (or vice versa).
Introduction

For almost a decade now, europeanization studies have been concerned with the impact of Europe on nation states (Featherstone 2003). After establishing a framework for researching how this impact causes domestic change - most notably through the misfit thesis (Cowles et al. 2001) – the field encountered a problem: Empirical studies revealed that either Europe did not have the expected impact on nation states or the research designs were not sufficiently able to account for the causal relation (Mastenbroeck 2005). I argue that this has led to a “domestic turn” in europeanization studies. In order to understand and explain processes of europeanization, domestic factors are increasingly taken into account (Bull and Baudner 2004; Kallestrup 2005; Radaelli 2003, Radaelli and Pasquier forthcoming; Thatcher 2004). In continuation of this development, this paper aims to show how national elites can act as a filter between European level impulses and domestic change. In this way the paper focuses on the interplay between European and domestic developments, and it offers an explanation of why Europe does not have the expected causal impact on national institutions. Elite perceptions and interpretations incorporate understandings of Europe in existing national discourses. Doing this, national elites are able to make sense of European demands even when these demands are inconsistent and contradicting. This happens through an act of “decoupling”. As a consequence, a misfit might not lead to domestic change simply because national elites do interpret it as such and therefore do not adapt to it. Another possibility is that national elites do indeed adapt to a misfit but they do it through decoupling how they talk about the problem from how they handle it in real terms. In this way a national discourse can show change while existing ways of doing things are protected from europeanization pressure (or vice versa).

This study will look at the Danish Parliament and its adaptation to developments in European decision-making. I have chosen to study the Danish European Affairs Committee because of the general agreement in the literature that the Danish committee stands out as an institution which has been able
to adapt to Europe in a successful way (Arter 1996; Börzel 2001; Holzacker 2002; Maurer and Wessels 2001; Travers 2002). But even in this most favourable case it seems that the processes of elite interpretation and decoupling guard sub-functional national institutions from exposure to europeanization pressure.

The paper proceeds with a section on conceptual considerations. Here I develop and elaborate the argument that europeanization studies are witnessing a “domestic turn” and that the notion of elite perceptions should be seen as an integral part of this domestic turn. The section builds on an institutional approach that deals explicitly with rules and norms as two dimensions of the way in which the EU influences nation states. Hereafter follows an analysis of developments in decision-making in the EU and in Denmark since Danish membership in 1973. The purpose is to map the actual changes and asses the extent to which the Danish parliament faces a europeanization pressure. The analysis is separated in two main sections, one which deals with rules and another which focuses on norms. The first examines the developments in the number of directives and the decision-making procedure used to issue them, and the way this influences the Danish EU-coordination procedure. The latter examines European norms about national parliaments and relates this to Danish elite perceptions of the EU. This part concludes that regulatory developments in the EU constitute a substantial pressure for reform of the Danish EU-coordination whereas the developments in EU norms only do so to a limited extent. The last section in the paper takes the first steps into understanding how the members of the Danish European Affairs Committee make sense of these European and domestic developments. The paper argues that we can witness a decoupling that serves to protect existing national institutions from europeanization pressure. This means that the Danish parliamentary elite adapts the way it “talks about Europe” while leaving the rules of the EU-coordination system at a status quo. Finally, I return to the domestic turn in europeanization studies and discuss how it benefits from taking domestic elite perceptions into account.
Two dimensions of europeanization

The field of europeanization studies has been heavily influenced by the misfit thesis, which has gained “pole position” since it was put forward by Risse et al. in 2001 (Kallestrup 2005). The misfit thesis has the advantage of being a 3-step analytical approach with a clear conception of independent, intervening and dependent variables. It is within this framework that mainstream europeanization studies have been carried out. These studies have primarily focussed on transposition records and change in national policies as a consequence of EU policies, especially in areas as telecommunications and environmental policy (see e.g. Schneider 2001; Knill and Lenschow 2001) but also include broader studies of institutional change (see e.g. Héritier et al 2001; Falkner et al 2005). As have been pointed out in the literature before, mainstream europeanization studies have at least one serious methodological problem: The causal relation between the European and the domestic level. It has not been sufficiently accounted for that the changes found on the domestic level are indeed caused by European level developments. In this way europeanization studies pre-judge the role of the EU. Adding to this methodological problem comes the fact that empirical findings have not supported the misfit thesis in a convincing way (Haverland 2000; Héritier et al. 2001; Knill and Lenshow 1998; Mastenbroeck 2005). The response to this problem has been a “domestic turn” in Europeanization studies. Works within this domestic turn are united by a notion that national political actors must be taken much more seriously into account than hitherto if results of europeanization are to be properly explained and assessed. There has been two different takes on how to carry out this domestic turn. The first branch stays within the existing (misfit) framework but strengthens the focus upon domestic factors as important intervening variables (Falkner et al 2005; Thatcher 2004). The second branch views domestic factors as independent variables alongside impulses coming from the EU. The proposition has been to study domestic change over time using methods of process tracing and counterfactual analysis – including European factors when they are relevant to explain domestic change and only then (Haverland 2005; Kallestrup 2005; Radaelli 2003, Radaelli and Paquier forthcoming). We have not
witnessed many of these studies yet, maybe because they are both difficult and time consuming to carry through (but see Bull and Baudner 2004). Nonetheless, this “domestic-domestic” approach deserves merit because of its attempt to solve a methodological problem of general concern in europeanization studies, namely the problem of causality. It does, unfortunately, also take away the distinctness of europeanization studies by focussing on national studies of changes in a given policy field.

What is needed is an approach that includes two things: First it should take seriously the importance of national political actors for the actual results of europeanization. Second, it should be concerned with European level impulses without pre-judging the role of the EU. Factoring in the role of elite perceptions in europeenization studies might be a way to meet those aims.

The role of elite perceptions builds on the, by now trivial, insight from social constructivism that an event or a phenomenon like European integration does not possess an essential meaning. However, the phenomenon of European integration is continuously being interpreted and made meaningful by actors in social settings (Berger and Luckmann 1967). When this insight is combined with studies of europeanization it follows that a misfit is not just a misfit. Impulses from Europe are interpreted by national elites and this interpretation and perception of Europe is decisive for the kind of response, which is considered appropriate. If we want to understand the impact of Europe on nation states we first have to understand how actors in those nation states perceive Europe. National elites are exposed to impulses from the European Union but this exposure does not take place in a political vacuum. Elites respond to Europe in ways that are influenced by the way in which Europe is socially constructed and made meaningful in the national context. A study of europeanization should be concerned with how best to study this process of political interpretation and sensemaking.
The distinction between what people do and how people interpret and evaluate these acts has been subject to considerable research within a branch of institutional theory. Following Scott (1995), an institution can be seen as having a regulative, a normative and a cognitive dimension - simplifying his concepts a little, this means that an institution includes both material and ideational factors. An ongoing discussion has been which of the dimensions that can be said to cause or precede change in the other (Farrel & Héritier 2002; Laffan 2001; North 1990; Schmidt 2003). Within this literature there is an assumption that these two dimensions co-evolve in some form or another. Contrary to this, Brunsson (1986, 2000) proposes that developments in the material and the ideational dimension might develop along two different lines - and for good reasons. By separating “acting” and “talking” an organisation can meet several contradicting demands at the same time. This decoupling between rules and norms can even be a stable setting over time (Brunsson 2003). National elites may therefore be expected to make sense of these contradicting dimensions rather than try to make them approach each other. This can explain why a seemingly misfit between European and domestic institutions does not lead to change at the national level.

Thus, understanding europeanization pressure as having more than one dimension and factoring in the possibility of decoupling these dimensions has several implications for the domestic turn in europeanization studies: First, EU level impact includes rulemaking as well as normmaking and these two dimensions might not be consistent. Second, the domestic response to these impulses may be to adapt along one dimension and resist change along another. And, third, national elites act as bridge-builders making sense of seemingly contradicting demands and states of affairs. In this way they act as a filter between European developments and national responses. The result may be that a misfit is not perceived as such and therefore does not lead to domestic change.
In the next section, we will take a look at regulatory developments in the EU and Denmark in order to map the developments, which the Danish parliamentary elite perceives and interprets.

**Rulemaking**

The central feature of the Danish EU-coordination system is that the European Affairs Committee gives political mandates to the government before meetings in the Council. The purpose of the system is on the one hand to ensure government that decisions made in Brussels can be passed in parliament and on the other hand to secure parliamentary influence on Danish EU-policy. This section will first give a short introduction to the Danish system, then examine the developments in European decision-making which act as a pressure on it and finally turn to the developments in the EU-coordination system in light of the European influence.

The Danish European Affairs Committee was established in 1973 when Denmark joined the European Union (see Jensen 2003; Riis 2002). Then, as now, the committee consists of 17 members, seats are allocated according to party group size. The committee meets on a weekly basis and discusses the agenda for the up-coming Council meeting with the relevant minister(s). The minister in question orally presents a negotiation brief, which is endorsed by the committee unless there is a majority against it. From this it follows that the strength of the Danish European Affairs Committee depends on the ability to influence Danish EU-policy through governmental action in the Council. Therefore, I hold, this strength is under pressure if the Danish government losses power in the Council or the Council itself looses its centrality in the decision-making process. This is of course seen in comparison with the conditions underlying the system in 1973, which is the starting point of analysis.
The argument above on the developments, which might put the Danish system under pressure, guides the qualitative analysis of EU decision-making. Is there in other words reason to believe that the Danish government loses power in the Council or that the status of the Council has changed?

*European rules*

One way to analyze the development in rulemaking over the 30-year time period is through an examination of the directives issued in the period. This sort of database extraction says nothing about the substance of the directives nor their qualitative importance but the figures nevertheless reveal trends in European decision-making.

Figure 1: Directives according to decision-making procedure 1973-2001
In the graph above the directives are mapped according to the decision-making procedure by which they were passed. This gives us at least three important pieces of information. First of all the number of directives augments from 44 in 1973 to 102 in 2001, an increase of 132%. Second, it is clear that the co-decision procedure introduced in Maastricht giving the European Parliament a real veto power over legislation is gaining salience raising from 21.5% of all directives in 1994 to 41.2% of all directives in 2001. Third, the directives issued by the Commission under the comitology procedure have also increased with 144% in the time period under study.

When these figures are combined with an overall knowledge about EU decision-making (see e.g. Hix 2005; Nugent 2003) they give a good indication of the problems the European Affairs Committee is facing when it tries to secure influence over Danish European policy through the EU-coordination system which was established in 1973.

First, the more directives are passed in Brussels the more work there is for the members of the European Affairs Committee – the problem of a steadily growing workload has been emphasised by several studies of the Danish EU-coordination system (Jensen 2003; Nedergaard:156; Togeby et al 2003:130). And since the directives are spread over a broader area of policy fields the handling of the directives also demand more specialized knowledge than was the case in 1973. Second, the fact that co-decision is growing in importance is connected to the changing status of the Council and has significant consequences for the European Affairs Committee. Internally the Council now uses qualified majority voting in app. 45 policy areas compared to app. 15 policy areas in 1992 (Maastricht). Even though the use of qualified majority voting has been possible since the Treaty of Rome the voting culture did not allow for its use before the middle of the 1980 (with the Single European Act). The veto gave the European Affairs Committee a possibility of blocking proposals through restrictive political mandates to the government – this possibility is no longer present within many policy areas. Externally, the
Council now has to share legislative power with the European Parliament in many policy fields. This complicates the political game, as there is now one more actor (or many, depending on the internal coherence of the European Parliament). The power of the European Parliament has led to an increased use of the so-called “trialogues”, which are more or less informal meeting between politicians from the European Parliament and Council representatives. The meetings are used to speed up the decision-making process by reaching compromises before the act is voted upon in the EP plenary. For the European Affairs Committee the consequence is that the decisions are made earlier in the decision-making process and in other forums than the Council. This tendency is also reflected in the third trend, which the graph reveals. The fact that more and more directives are passed by the Commission through comitology committees also moves decisions from the Council to other - more or less informal - forums. And since the Council is the focus for the work of the European Affairs Committee this development represents a decrease in the possibility of the European Affairs Committee to influence Danish EU-policy.

Danish rules

In Denmark the development in the EU-coordination has taken place through the special reports from the European Affairs Committee. The special reports represent the mean through which the Committee can regulate and reform its own work and interestingly, this means that the committee is itself responsible for adapting the Danish EU coordination system to the ongoing developments in the European Union. There have been 33 special reports from 1973 to 2005.

The European Affairs Committee has primarily focussed its efforts in three areas: 1) Defining the policy areas within which documents are discussed in the committee. 2) Enhancing the quantity and quality of the information from the government and 3) discussing the relation to the other standing committees in parliament.
The work of the European Affairs Committee is not specified in the law of accession so the first task for the committee members was to lay out the purpose and basic working conditions for the committee. The purpose was defined as “securing the parliament the greatest possible influence on European matters” (Beretning 1973, page 1) and it was stressed that the government should consult the committee in all “European questions of considerable significance” (Beretning 1973, page 1). The interpretation of this has over the years decreased in importance since almost all EU acts now are put before the committee.

The information of the committee was in 1973 confined to information charts over proposals from the European Commission. In 1994 and 1996 these were changed in order to include an assessment of the proposal’s consequences for Danish legislation (Dosenrode 1998; Warburg 1998). The government has also been called upon to indicate the cases on the agenda, which necessitate a political mandate and the cases, which are presented to the committee for information only. These changes have come about through the active use of special reports. Since the beginning of the 1990s the European Affairs Committee has also received factual notes about cases in the European Parliament. The committee thus receives a lot of information on a weekly basis; in fact it is the committee in the Folketing, which receives the largest number of documents (Togeby et al 2003).

The relationship with other standing committees in the parliament was mentioned in the second of the special reports where it was stated that there was a need for cooperation but that this cooperation was to be conducted on an optional basis (Beretning 1974, page 2). The question of the standing committees’ treatment of EU-policy popped up again in the special report from 1994 (Beretning 1994, page 3-4) and has been discussed continuously since. The members of the European Affairs Committee face a dilemma: They need the special expertise of the standing committee members but they are not
willing to give away the power to delegate mandates to the government. Representatives from standing committees express that they have no “carrot” for using time and energy on European policy when they do not get proper influence in return (interview with chairperson of the Business Affairs Committee 2003). In practice the relationship is still governed by declarations of intent and characterised by disagreement within the European Affairs Committee. The involvement of standings committees in European issues has increased since 1979 but the effort has been fluctuating and dispersed (Jensen 2003:111-128).

The ability of the European Affairs Committee to gain access to almost all EU policy areas and the improvement of the quantity and quality of the information from the government have clearly enhanced the possibility of the committee to secure parliamentary influence over EU-policy compared to 1973. Information is a key resource for a parliament in its quest for influence. There are, however, two pertaining problems. First, what are clearly improvements of the European Affairs Committee have ambiguous consequences. The widening of areas under the committee and the steady stream of notes landing on committee members’ desks represent a danger of information overload. The members simply do not have the time and resources to process the amount of data, which is necessary in order to be prepared for a European Affairs Committee meeting and this damages the influence and control function of the committee. Second, these improvements are not directed towards meeting the challenges, which EU-developments since 1973 have created for the Danish EU-coordination. There is still a focus upon the council of ministers even though the political conditions of 1973 are no longer present. In conclusion, the European developments have created a substantial europeanization pressure on the Danish EU coordination system and the members of the European Affairs Committee who are responsible for reforming it – but this seemingly misfit has not resulted in domestic change.
Norms about the role of parliaments in EU decision-making

As discussed in a previous section, the influence of the EU on nation states has (at least) two dimensions; a material and an ideational. The European impact on national political systems is not confined to rulemaking but includes “normmaking” as well. European norms specify legitimate action for actors in the political system and thereby both constrain and empower national institutions and their responses towards Europe. This section therefore deals with the discourse about the role of national parliaments in European decision-making both as it is expressed at the EU level and at the national level. First the reader will find an analysis of norms at the European level; methodological considerations concerning the choice of data material and an account of the development over time in the norms about national parliaments’ relation to the European decision-making system. Then follows an analysis of the Danish norms about the proper role of the Folketing towards EU and this section also begins with some methodological reflections over the choice and use of empirical material. Finally, I make an assessment of the relationship between developments at the European and the domestic level in order to establish the europeanization pressure on the Folketing.

European norms

The Presidency Conclusions from meetings in the European Council are used as empirical data for the analysis of European norms about the role of national parliaments. The European Council is not an institution, which is part of the original treaty and was in its first years an informal institution. The founding of the institution took place in Paris in 1974. The European Council was first mentioned in the Single European Act and formally institutionalised with the Maastricht Treaty. Since its initiation it has publicised the “Council Conclusions” and these conclusions have several advantages as data material. First of all, they cover the time period in which Denmark has been a member of the EU and therefore allow for a comparison over time. Second, the conclusions deal with the general questions of political concern for the EU and are therefore a place where perceptions of the European identity, the
purpose of the community’s work and different forms of legitimation find voice, and are therefore a place where you would expect the role of the national parliaments to be dealt with if at all. Lastly, the foreign ministers and head of states represent an important group in defining the activities of the Union and therefore constitute a fair answer to the question of who can be said to represent the European Union. The council conclusions will be supplemented with the constitution treaty text where the newest agreement on the role of the national parliaments can be found.

In the period from 1974 and until 1990 the national parliaments and their role in the European decision-making are not mentioned one single time. The parts of the conclusions, which deal with the European decision-making system, comment first and foremost on the role of the European Parliament and the question of direct elections to this institution. It is mentioned that direct elections for the European Parliament will enhance democratic legitimacy and the sense of solidarity between the citizens of Europe. Based on this empirical material it seems as if the proper role for national parliaments is no role at all. The focus is upon enhancing the democratic features and legitimacy within the existing EU institutions. This serves to uphold the distinction between domestic and foreign policy – placing the European community clearly in the latter category and the work of national parliaments in the former.

In 1990 the role of the national parliaments was mentioned for the first time in terms of a way to enhance the democratic legitimacy of the European Union. The comments and specific suggestions within the section on democratic legitimacy are, however, concerned with the role of the European Parliament. These sorts of expressions about the national parliaments are found throughout the council conclusions from 1990-1995. In these statements the role of the national parliaments is not specified as such, and there is an overweight of rather unsubstantial statements of intent: “[The European Council]... stressed the need for national Parliaments to be more closely involved in the
Community's activities” (Presidency Conclusions Copenhagen June 1993). The possibility of a dialog between the European Parliament and the national parliament is the closest the conclusions come to any specification of the form of involvement in European affairs, which the national parliaments could be imagined to take. In this period there seems to be a small breaking up of the clear distinction between domestic and foreign policy in relation to the role of national parliaments but only to a very little extent.

In 1995 the preparation for the intergovernmental conference put the role of the national parliaments on the agenda. In the Madrid and Turin Conclusions it is not only emphasized that improving the democratic character of the Union must involve the national parliaments, it is also discussed in which ways this could be done. It is stated that the national parliaments should receive information about the IGC from the Commission in due time for them to have a serious debate. The question of national scrutiny over decisions within the area of justice and home affairs is touched upon and so is the possibility of letting national parliaments contribute to EU collectively through COSAC. Although these discussion points are neither elaborated nor clear in their expectations towards national parliaments they represent a break with the rather empty statements of intent that preceded them.

The role of the national parliaments did not reach the agenda again before the meeting in Laeken in 2001. The question of the role of national parliaments and their contribution to the EU was one of the issues the convention was asked to discuss. In the Laeken conclusion there was pointed to 3 different approaches: The first was that national parliaments could be represented via a new EU institution. The second approach suggested that national parliaments should have influence in areas where the European Parliament did not. And the third approach was to let the national parliaments concentrate on the relationship between the EU and national political systems through the principle of subsidiarity.
As the question of the national parliaments is dealt with in the convention, the conclusions from 2001-2005 do not devote much attention to the matter. In the convention treaty, however, there was made a choice between the 3 possible roles for the national parliament discussed in the Laeken conclusion. The third approach was chosen: National parliaments should concentrate on the relationship between the EU and their national political systems by guarding the principle of subsidiarity.

Summing up, the expectations from the EU towards the national parliaments as they are expressed in council conclusion have changed during the time Denmark has been a member. In the first period from 1974-1990 they were not thought of as independent actors in the European political landscape. The years from the Madrid and Turin meetings in 1995/96 to the Brussels meeting in 2005 are characterised by a growing although not stable attention to the role of national parliaments most notably expressed in connection to the intergovernmental conference in 1996 and the convention in 2001. The result of the convention as expressed in the constitution treaty displays a role for national parliaments in the European decision-making system as actors who should guard the limits of the EU via the principle of subsidiarity. As a consequence the distinction between domestic and foreign policy, which was evident in the early days of community life, is not as much under attack as the continuous attention on national parliaments could lead us to believe. It has become harder to draw the line but the line is there and should be drawn and this is what the national parliaments should do in relation to the European community.

**Danish norms**

The special reports from the European Affairs Committee can be seen as more than factual information about the functioning of the committee’s work. It can also give insight into the meanings which the committee attach to European developments and committee members’ understanding of the Folketing’s role within the European decision-making system. The common understanding of
European developments and their relation to the Danish EU-coordination system can be seen through the attention devoted these matters in the special reports as well as the expressions concerned with the problems or opportunities, which they cause for the European Affairs Committee.

The 16 special reports in the time period from 1973 until 1986 do not reflect upon any European developments. They are concerned with the internal functioning of the Danish system and the relationship to the government. The only reference to European developments concerns the European Parliament: The special reports express a wish for contact and information sharing with Danish members of the European Parliament.

The first time European developments are directly incorporated in the special reports and related to the work of the European Affairs Committee is in 1986. The Single European Act and the changes it brings about for European decision-making is touched upon; the focus is upon the increase in qualified majority voting in internal market policies and the possibility of stricter national rules for protecting the environment.

10 years later, in 1996, it is the intergovernmental conference and its discussion about the role of national parliaments, which is reflected in the special report. The Committee supports a proposal to send Commission proposals directly to the national parliaments and expresses the need to exert a pressure in order to have this proposal passed. This is the first time where influence directly on EU institutions is discussed as an option and it is also the first time where a joined effort through COSAC is thought of as a mean to gain influence.

In the 1999 special report the cooperation with the EP is mentioned once again. Only this time it is seen in relation to the growing power of the EP because of co-decision and it is also emphasized that
the informal cooperation between the European Affairs Committee and the EP can take place “without offending the borders which must exist between two independent parliaments” (Beretning 1999, page 3). In the following special report from 2001 the committee stresses the fact that decisions are reached faster through co-decision (first reading) and finds that this affects its possibility to influence Danish European policy (negatively).

The last special report is from 2004 and stands out from the others in at least two ways. First of all it motivates the reforms in the Danish EU-coordination system with changes, which the European decision-making system has experienced. The reason why it is necessary to change some of the existing procedures in Denmark is to follow suit with European level changes – especially the constitution treaty is in focus but the effects of co-decision are also particularly stressed. “The Folketing and the other national parliaments are herewith put under a considerable pressure if the possibility to influence EU-policy is to be utilized” (Beretning 2004, page 7). The framing that the Danish parliament is exposed to a pressure from the EU is thus present in the special report. The second thing, which is remarkable, is that the special report is concerned with the distinction between domestic and foreign policy. It is mentioned several times that EU-policy now has domestic-policy characteristics and that this must affect the way in which the committee works: “The need for openness must be assessed continuously not least in light of the dynamics of the European development, which to a great extent has watered down the distinction between foreign- and domestic policy” (Beretning 2001, page 17). Summing up, the special reports show a growing awareness of changes in European decision-making, which affect the work of the Danish European Affairs Committee. The way of understanding the parliament vis-à-vis European policy has changed from being a strictly national affair (1974-1986) over a beginning awareness that European developments affect the possibilities and working conditions in the committee (1986-1996) to an integration of some relevant European developments in the special reports and thus in the response options of the European Affairs Committee (1996-2001). The 2004
special report clearly states that the Danish parliament experiences some form of europeanization pressure and that the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy are blurred.

A juxtaposition of developments in EU and Denmark over the 30 year time span reveals that the two dimensions have exposed the Danish Parliament to different pressures of europeanization and that the Danish response has also been different along the two dimensions.

When it comes to rulemaking in the EU, we have seen a change in the Council status, which means that it is more difficult for the European Affairs Committee to secure influence through political mandates to government. This is primarily because decisions are made earlier in the process and in other forums. In Denmark, the European Affairs Committee receives more information now than in the beginning of the time period studied, but this has resulted in problems with information overload. And the system still focuses on political mandates to government from European Affairs Committee. All in all, the analysis of rulemaking shows that the Danish parliament experiences a europeanization pressure because changes in European decision-making make it more difficult for the European Affairs Committee to influence Danish EU-policy through the EU-coordination system.

When it comes to norms it is clear that the expectations confronting national parliaments have changed during the time span studied. For the first 16 years they are not expected to engage in European decision-making at all and the distinction between foreign and domestic policy is upheld. From 1990 to 1995 the national parliaments are devoted some attention and with the convention in 2001 it becomes clear that national parliaments are expected to contribute to European level decisions. Their proper role is to guard the distinction between domestic and foreign policy via the subsidiarity principle. The europeanization pressure is present but in a form that emphasizes the distinction between the two political systems. In Denmark the development follows the same trends. For the first 13 years there is
not devoted much attention to European developments or the way they influence the Danish EU-coordination system. In 1986 we can see the first signs of awareness and these signs are strengthened in the years from 1996 to 2001. In 2004 the Danish norms seem to move a step further than the European ones in stating that the EU-policy is a form of domestic policy and that the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy are challenged.

The European rulemaking and normmaking affect the Danish EU-coordination system in two different ways. Developments in European rulemaking are undermining the focus upon mandates to government in the Council as the sole way for the parliament to gain influence. Therefore, regulatory developments in the EU constitute a substantial pressure for reform of the Danish EU-coordination. European norms prescribe that national parliaments are engaged in European decision-making but in a way that serves to uphold the distinction between domestic and foreign policy. In this way, the ideational developments in EU represent only a limited pressure for domestic change.

A domestic elite making sense of Europe

The paper has so far given an assessment of regulatory and ideational developments in EU and Denmark. What is needed now is a look into how the Danish parliamentary elite perceives these developments. This section therefore probes into the domestic interpretation of EU by using interviews with politicians from the European Affairs Committee. The interviewees have been selected so that all political parties in parliament are represented but even so they are more explorative than representative in nature. In this way the section aims at illustrating the potential value as well as the current limitations of factoring in elite perceptions in europeanization research.

Interestingly, all the politicians in the European Affairs Committee, with whom I have spoken, have been very informed about developments in European decision-making. But it seems that they view the
consequences of these changes quite differently and these interpretations of European level
developments set the boundaries for appropriate Danish responses.

All interviewees are aware of the fact that the conditions for rulemaking in the EU has changed since
Danish accession in 1973. The politicians from the wing parties are troubled by these changes and the
way they affect the Danish EU-coordination system as this statement from a central politician in the
Danish Peoples’ Party shows: “The Danish model is still very much aiming at the time where you meet in the
Council and make decisions, where the minister goes to the Council to vote and we give him a political mandate. This is
still where the focus is and this is fundamentally wrong when you start using qualified majority voting because then it is in
the process that the influence is possible; at the end it’s over and done with.” The connection between a specific
European development and the way it affects the ability of the European Affairs Committee to
influence Danish European Policy points to an understanding of the EU as a problem in the domestic
political arena and the Danish EU-coordination system as being subject to a europeanization pressure.
Another connection between EU developments and the EU-coordination system in Denmark is made
by a politician from the Socialist Peoples’ Party which is also one of the wing parties: “Because the EU
lawmaking is such a big part of the total lawmaking in Denmark we need to move the work from the European Affairs
Committee and out into the standing committees.” It is quite another picture when you talk to politicians from
the centre parties. Parties who are pro-Europe and do not see developments as threats to the Danish
system. Asked about a number of specific EU developments a politician from the Social Liberal Party
said: “Concerning the comitology…there is nothing wrong with the [Danish EU-coordination] system…but we are not
enough on our toes, and I don’t think we need to be. I think it works fine. And the open method of coordination: We talk,
with the minister on the [committee] meetings and I think that works excellently. We tell him or her “try to stress this
and try to emphasise that.” It is a conversation where you try to find out how to reach a common goal. The method is very
constructive and useful. And then there is the co-decision procedure and that also includes putting forward a proposal and
then discussing it.” There is clearly awareness about developments in EU decision-making but they are not
interpreted as something, which has consequences for the influence of the parliament or the Danish EU-coordination system as such. Another politician from the Liberal Party sums up the general perception of the Danish EU-coordination system among centre parties like this: “The method that we have is as ideal as it can be. Of course you can make adjustments and we are making some…papers that you don’t need or that you would like to have in another format but I see that as minor revisions.”

The perceptions of EU rulemaking and the way this affects the Danish EU-coordination system are connected to the norms, which the politicians hold about the relationship between national parliaments and the EU – about the distinction between foreign and domestic policy. Again we can see a division between centre and wing parties. Politicians who do not interpret the europeanization pressure as something undermining the Danish system share norms that uphold the division between the two political systems: “It is important to pay attention to the division of labour. You shouldn’t think that through COSAC or a European Affairs Committee you can be a democratic guarantee for what is going on in the EU. I think that is a dead end.” says a politician from the Liberal Party. In contradiction to this, politicians from the wing parties express the view that the distinction between domestic and foreign policy has been eroded and that this affects the Danish system: “Concurrently with the EU becoming domestic policy I actually don’t believe that the so called Danish Model has succeeded in handling it, and I think it’s going incredibly slow taking the consequence of EU law-making being domestic policy in Denmark.” (Interview with a member of the Danish Peoples’ Party).

Overall, the members of the European Affairs Committee make sense of the inputs coming from Brussels in quite different ways. There seems to bee a division between, on the one hand, the centre parties who are in favour of European integration and believe that the europeanization pressure does not demand much change in the Danish EU-coordination system. And, on the other hand, the wing parties who are against or sceptic towards European integration. The wing parties seem to understand
the Europeanization pressure as a substantial challenge for the Danish parliament and as a consequence they see a need for considerable change of the Danish EU-coordination system. Elite perceptions relating the EU to domestic political discourse have an impact on possible roads for future action. The paper now turns to the latest special report in order to see how these interpretations of Europe are expressed in real time political reform.

As mentioned above, the 2004 special report does not reform the rulemaking of the EU-coordination system in any substantial way but it does go far in stating that the distinction between foreign and domestic policy is breaking up and that the Danish model should accommodate itself accordingly. As such, it seems that there has been change in normmaking more so than in rulemaking. This means that there is a decoupling between what the politicians say about the Danish EU-coordination system and how the politicians act when it comes to actual reform of the system. The insight that politicians can say one thing and do something differently is of course not new – what is important is the way the decoupling can be used to accommodate to Europeanization pressure on one level while, at the same time, securing existing national institutions on the other level.

In the case of the Danish EU-coordination system, we are witnessing that a national institution, which has been know for its ability to adapt to EU in order to give its parliament maximum influence, is not reformed in spite of a Europeanization pressure. And following the thoughts of Brunsson (2003) this can turn out to be a stable phenomenon as long as the Danish elite adapt through decoupling and show change along one of the two dimensions. Interestingly, there is more adaptation along the norm dimension than the rule dimension even though the Europeanization pressure is most substantial on the latter. Another interesting point is that the European Affairs Committee in the 2004 special report goes further than prescribed by EU norms when it states that the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy are breaking up. It is clear that the notion of causality between the European level and the
domestic level found in much of the europeanization literature cannot account for these findings. The empirical data on the Danish parliamentary elite is not sufficient to explain why the two contradicting interpretations of Europe result in adaptation in discourse rather than reform in rulemaking. Nor is it sufficient to explain the reasons behind the different understandings of Europe and its effect on the Danish parliament, which the two groupings in the Folketing express. Nonetheless, these empirical findings substantiate the claim that national elites act as a filter between European level influence and domestic change, and that decoupling is one of the ways in which domestic elites act as a filter. We need to go further into the political processes of interpretation and sensemaking in order to both understand and explain europeanization. And this is exactly the task for future studies on europeanization dynamics. In this paper, I have argued that we are seeing a domestic turn in europeanization studies. The field has established that Europe has an impact on nation states, consequently, the second generation of europeanization studies need to move on to how this influence is perceived, interpreted and used by domestic political actors. Europeanization is a political process and we need to bring the element of politics back in – focussing on elite interpretations and sensemaking could be a way forward.
References


The special reports from the European Affairs Committee can be found at: http://www.euo.dk/dokumenter/ft/eeu/beretninger/

The European Council Conclusions can be found at: http://www.euo.dk/dokumenter/DER/