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► **To cite this version:**

Sophie Jacquot. National Welfare State Welfare Reforms and the Question of Europeanization: From Impact to Usages. 2008. hal-03459787

**HAL Id: hal-03459787**

**<https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03459787>**

Preprint submitted on 1 Dec 2021

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**REC-WP 01/2008**



Working Papers on the Reconciliation of Work and Welfare in Europe

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Working Papers on the Reconciliation of Work and Welfare in Europe  
RECWOWE Publication, Dissemination and Dialogue Centre, Edinburgh

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## About the author

Sophie Jacquot is associated researcher at the Centre for European Studies at Sciences Po (Paris, France). PhD in political science, she defended her thesis on “European Public Action and its Instruments. Gender Equality Policy and the Test of Gender Mainstreaming” in December 2006. Her research deals with anti-discrimination policies, European governance and Europeanisation processes. Her publications include “Europeanization Through its Instrumentation: Benchmarking, Mainstreaming and Open Method of Coordination; Toolbox or Pandora Box?”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 13, n° 4, March 2006 (with I. Bruno and L. Mandin); “Usages of European Integration. Europeanisation from the perspective of comprehensive sociology”, *European Integration online Papers*, volume 7, n° 12, 2003 (with C. Woll).

## **Abstract**

This paper reviews the literature concerned with the interaction between the European Union and national welfare state reforms. Its interest lies in the studies that have been proposed of the interplay between the European Union and national policy-making in the field of social protection.

Two main ways of approaching the analysis of this interaction can be identified. These two strands of literature are linked to different understanding of the question of the impact of the EU. A first one relates to the eventual outcomes of the influence of European integration on national welfare state reforms: does Europe matter at all? What is the content of this influence, its meaning and orientation?

The second strand is linked to the assessment of the mechanisms of the influence of European integration in a changing policy-making environment: how does the EU matter? Many variables have to be taken into account, including informal and interactive forms of influence.

Having reviewed these debates, this paper turns to the main axes for future research, pointing to the role of actors as mediators of European impact – and not only as transmission and intermediary variables. In order to capture the processes of transformation related to domestic adaptation to European integration, a crucial point is the political construction of impacts, i.e. the “usages” of Europe.

## **Keywords**

Actors; Europeanization; Impact of European Integration; Usages; Welfare State Reforms

## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to review the literature, which has addressed the question of the interaction between the European Union and national welfare state reforms. In other words, its interest lies in the studies that have been proposed of the interplay between the European Union and national (and subnational) policy-making in the field of social protection.

Consequently, the main questions addressed will be the following: Is the European Union an important variable to understand recent welfare state transformations? How has the European Union been important to recent national welfare state changes?

As clearly stated by Romain Pasquier and Claudio M. Radaelli in an article on conceptual issues regarding Europeanization (Pasquier, Radaelli 2006), when engaging in studying any Europeanization process, the notion of impact is crucial and complex. The domestic impact of the European Union can be understood as static and mechanic – a response to European pressures, i.e. harmonization of legislation or standards. It can also be understood as dynamic and contingent – taking into account informal norms, discourses, socialization, learning, the role of ideas. In fact, the very way in which the impact of the European Union on national welfare state reforms is defined and taken into account by different strands of the literature can help us to categorize the main debates, which animate the scientific community on the question of the relationships between the national, and the European levels in the field of social policy.

After a first part devoted to definitional and conceptual clarifications regarding the sometimes vague notion of Europeanization, we will indeed see that two main debates and ways of approaching the analysis of the interaction between the European Union and national welfare state reforms can be identified and that these two strands are linked to two different understanding of the question of the impact of the European Union.

A first one relates to the eventual outcomes of the influence of European integration on national welfare state reforms. The first question addressed is that of the role of the European Union as such: does Europe matter at all? While most of the literature we will study in this paper takes as a starting point the fact that European integration induces increasing pressures on national welfare states, some authors have underlined the absence of convergence between the national systems and the weight of institutional path dependence. Among the authors arguing that Europe matters, and even more that it undermines national social sovereignty, one interesting question concerns the reasons for this influence – the direct effect of the development of a “social Europe”, the indirect effect of economic integration. Another question, which is linked to the assessment of the outcomes of the influence of European integration, is that of the content of this influence, its meaning and orientation.

The second debate is linked to the assessment of the mechanisms of the influence of European integration in a changing policy-making environment. The

question of the very influence of the European Union when it comes to welfare state transformation settled, the question becomes: how does the EU matter? The most recent literature on the subject shows that the European Union participates to the definition and construction of common policies and reforms mainly thanks to soft and cognitive means of action, among which the open method of coordination (OMC) is certainly the most important – and the most discussed.

Having reviewed these different debates and these different ways of conceiving the impact of European integration on national welfare state reforms, we will turn our attention in the concluding part of this paper to the main axes for future theorizing and research, pointing the importance of the role of actors and political action as mediators of European impact. In order to grasp this role of creative actors, we will focus on the notion of “usages” of Europe, particularly useful in this perspective.

## **The notion of Europeanization: conceptual clarifications**

### **The evolution of integration theories. Why using the notion of Europeanization?**

The first political science studies, which looked into the phenomenon of the European integration, are to be found in the international relations field. Their aim is to explain the nature of a regional cooperation between States. The main debate in this field confronts a functionalist school – which became a neo-functionalist one in the 1990s (see Sandholtz, Stone Sweet 1998; Stone Sweet, Sandholtz, Fligstein 2001) – gathered around Ernst Haas seminal works (Haas 1968) to an intergovernmentalist school, mainly represented by Andrew Moravcsik liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik 1993, 1998). This debate is far from being linear, and from almost for decades, one can witness theoretical – and popularity – cycles in the literature, which are strongly linked to the historical cycles of European integration.

The ambition of these explanatory and predicative macro-theories is to analyse an international regime and to define and categorize its nature. The main question is that of the originality of the European system compared to other types of cooperation between States. For the functionalist school, the political and institutional European dynamics is to be considered as fundamentally original and it is supposed to be heading towards the formation of a federal State and the fading of classic and statist forms of sovereignty. On the contrary, the intergovernmentalist school considers the process of European integration as a classical process of cooperation with only a high level of integration.

The other important interrogation for these two veins of research is to understand why States decide to share some parts of their sovereign competences: how does European integration progresses and who is the main element of progress? A synthetic answer to these questions could be the following: according to the functionalist school, it is the elites and the supranational institutions who play a role of entrepreneurs; and according to the intergovernmentalist school, it is the States, depending on the definition of their interest by aggregation of preferences. Haas and its followers tend to predict an inexorable weakening of the States and a



reinforcement of the new institutional and political structure; whereas Moravcsik's approach allows to consider a strengthening of the Member States because of the development of new strategic opportunities for governments and decision-making arenas not affected by national pressures. Hence, this debate presents two opposite visions of the State and its power – and consequently of the force and resistance of national models, including welfare regimes.

For some years now, many researchers have shown that this paradigmatic opposition between the functionalist and intergovernmentalist school of thoughts could and should be overcome, that it was more fruitful to synthesize them than to try to produce a general theory of European integration.

It is indeed possible to see these two analytical perspectives as complementary. They are complementary from an empirical point of view – because of the institutional and administrative fragmentation of the EU; from an analytical point of view – one privileging the interest variable and the other the institution variable; and also from a historical point of view – one focusing on phases of crisis and political density and one on “normal” and progress phases (Peterson 1995; Peterson, Bomberg, 1999; Palier, Surel et al. 2007; Pierson 1996).

This new synthetic conception is illustrative of the turn of the European studies in the mid-1990s. This growing field of the literature tends to go away from macro-theories questioning the nature and meaning of the integration process to focus on the actual functioning of the European system. This turn can be summarised by the change of the main questions that are explored. The “old” questions were the “what” (what is the nature of this regime?) and the “who” (who is the main actor?) questions, while the “new” main question is “how” (how does this political system function?). The post-Maastricht European Union implies new theoretical and analytical stakes (Hix 1994).

The notions appearing during this period aim at taking into account the complexity of the EU and its specific mechanisms. “Multi-level governance” (Kohler-Koch, Eising 1999; Hooghe, Marks 2001) or the “regulatory State” (Majone 1996) are new tools in this effort to capture this new EU. The objectives are to explore and explain the political process of the EU but also its products and outputs (policies, regulation) and their effects. As the impact of the European integration on national societies has been growing, an important field of research has been developed to question and analyse the consequences of the integration on domestic policies and institutions. These studies start to be gathered around the name of “Europeanization” since the end of the 1990s.

The emergence of the notion of Europeanization and the end of the hegemony of functionalism and intergovernmentalism in the analysis of the process of European integration reflects the fact that the EU cannot be seen and studied as an external phenomenon to the domestic sphere. Asking the question of the impact of European integration on the Member States, the notion of Europeanization represents a change of perspective: from the analysis of domestic sources of international politics to the analysis of the impact of international politics on national politics (Radaelli 2001).

Theoretically, the notion of Europeanization can be used to analyse the policy, politics and polity dynamics of the effects of European integration on its Member States. However, taking into account the general picture of the growing literature on Europeanization, one has to notice that even if more and more researches are conducted on the questions of political and social conflicts (Tarrow 1995; Marks, Steenberg 2003), of political institutions (Goetz, Hix 2001; Anderson 2002) or of specific national structures (Ladrech 1994; Falkner 2001; Lavdas 1997), the most developed – from a theoretical and empirical point of view – field of research is that of the transformation of public policies.

### **Which definition of ‘Europeanization’? Europeanization as a process**

The first important work on the general question of the influence and impact of the EU are published by Svein S. Anderssen and Kjell A. Eliassen (Anderssen, Eliassen 1993). They use the term “Europeification”, but the academic convention will later chose to use “Europeanization”. This change of denominations isn’t insignificant. The language diversity reflects the multiplicity of the notion and its conceptual instability: the absence of unified definition of Europeanization remains a subject for debate (Radaelli 2000; Olsen 2002; Radaelli, Pasquier 2007).

The first influential – and most discussed – general model of Europeanization is the “fit/misfit” model (Green Cowles, Caporaso, Risse 2001). European integration, in this model, is treated as the independent variable so as to explain its impact on the Member States and the adaptation of the national level. In this perspective, the notion of Europeanization essentially implies an adjustment of a national variable at the national level to a European constraint. More precisely, the “fit/misfit” pattern is a theory of change according to which the convergence and divergence phenomena as well as the degree of adaptation of the different Member States can be best explained thanks to their reaction to European pressures. The degree of adaptation is determined by the compatibility between national conditions and European constraints. In a top-down perspective, the Member States are subject to adaptational pressures due to EU interventions, mediator institutions conduct these pressures and the transformations that can be witnessed at the national level are an answer to these pressures. The greater the gap (“bad fit” or “misfit”) between the national and the European level, the higher the adaptational pressures.

This model has proven very fruitful from an empirical point of view, however many authors have underlined significant flaws in its design, especially:

- it tends to mix up the process of Europeanization with the process of European integration,
- it focuses on a top-down perspective which implies a linear and one-sided vision,
- it gives only low attention to the role of the actors in the implementation of the effects of the integration,
- it does not take into account informal or non-binding processes.

For all these reasons and for the purpose of this report, we can consider that the definition given by Claudio Radaelli is more satisfying. According to him, the notion

of Europeanization “deals with the impact of European Union on domestic policy, politics, and policies. It 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 EU processes and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies” (Radaelli 2003). This definition takes into account the formal and informal rules and the cognitive dimension of public policies, which gives the analyst the opportunity to include elements that cannot be defined as direct “adaptational pressures”.

More generally, the literature that has developed in the most recent years (Palier, Surel et al. 2007; Graziano, Vink 2006) agrees on the necessity to distinguish between, again put in Radaelli’s words (Radaelli 2001; Featherstone, Radaelli 2003), “vertical” and “horizontal” mechanisms of Europeanization. Vertical mechanisms refer to traditional, top-down, direct and formal mechanisms of adaptation, where policy is designed at the EU level and implemented at the national level – the most obvious example being a Directive. Horizontal mechanisms take into account processes where there is no direct pressure to conform to EU policy models or rules. It includes regulatory competition, framing, the role of discourse, etc. In this way, the EU can be a catalyst for change by giving to the Member States a common framework of reference, of vision, of meaning, common solutions to answer common problems.

Another important point highlighted by Bruno Palier, Yves Surel and their co-authors, is that the notion of Europeanization should be thought of as an “interactive process” (Palier, Surel et al. 2007), which include top-down but also bottom-up dynamics and eventual retro-active effects, and which does not suppose the only passive reaction of national actors. Actors are not frozen in one identity or one level of action, there are not either European or national actors, they use political opportunities given by the EU but they are also transformed – or Europeanized – by their actions.

To conclude this section on conceptual delimitation, some final definitional points given by the most recent literature should also be indicated to assess the perimeter of the notion of Europeanization and to sum up (Featherstone, Radaelli 2003; Graziano, Vink 2006; Irondelle 2003; Palier Surel et al. 2007; Radaelli 2003):

- Europeanization allows taking into account the top-down pressures on domestic systems due to European integration, but also bottom-up and more complex retroactive dynamics,
- Europeanization includes direct effects (vertical and formal mechanisms) but also indirect effects (horizontal and ‘softer’ mechanisms),
- Europeanization does not necessarily equals with uniform impact (that is to say harmonization or convergence); Europeanization leaves open the issue of diversity and the possibility of differential impact of European integration,
- Europeanization does not presuppose that a EU policy must exist for Europeanization effects to occur,
- Europeanization cannot be reduced to “EU-ization”. It can include the study of the impact of the EU on non-member States (or candidate countries), but

also the impact of regional integration at the European level (i.e. role of EFTA, OSCE, COE).

### **Assessing the impact (1): The outcomes of the influence of the European Union**

The second part of this paper reviews the original debate on the outcomes of the influence of European integration. It can be summarized thanks to three broad questions, which are differently answered by the authors engaged in this debate:

- Does Europe impact at all national welfare state systems and their reforms?
- What are the main channels of influence of Europe on national welfare states and social sovereignty (positive integration, negative integration)?
- What is the meaning of the influence of Europe on national welfare states? How does it orientate the current reforms?

#### **The role of the EU: a question in debate**

The question of the existing role and influence of the European Union on national welfare states can be approached through two main dimensions of the scientific debate on the transformations of European welfare states.

First, an ample literature has been devoted since the mid-1990s to the assessment of the welfare state crisis in European countries and to the causes of the problems they are confronted to. From a very panoramic point of view, the main causes that are highlighted can be listed as follows:

- International factors are privileged by some authors as one of the main causes of the welfare state crisis. This includes: globalization (i.e. Mishra 1999), and/or the new international economic context (i.e. Scharpf, Schmidt 2000).
- Other authors study primarily domestic factors. This includes: changes in the labour market organization (such as the passage from an industrial to a service economy, the mass entry of women into the labour market), and/or demographic ageing, changes in the family structure (i.e. Pierson 1998).

In this framework, the possible role and influence of the process of European integration as such is scarcely taken into account as an autonomous factor of change (Palier 2000; Falkner 2006).

Second, when it comes to the analysis of the content of recent welfare state reforms in European countries, few references are also made to the European Union in the literature. Or, more precisely, the role of the European level tends to be considered as negligible or, at least, redundant if one wants to understand welfare state changes at the national level. Analyses of the reforms have focused on institutional constraints and have underlined the remarkable continuity and remaining diversity of the European welfare states. Path dependence is certainly the theoretical key word, enhancing continuity over change (Castles 2004; Clasen 2005;

Daniel, Palier 2001; Esping-Andersen 1996; Ferrera, Rhodes 2000; Huber, Stephens 2001; Leibfried 2001; Palier, Martin 2008; Pierson 2001; Scharpf, Schmidt 2000; Swank 2002; Sykes, Palier, Prior 2001; Taylor-Gooby 2001; Wilensky 2002). The literature on this subject agrees on the existence of, at least, three worlds of welfare reforms. Each “world of welfare” tend to follow its own path of reform: re-commodification in the liberal welfare states; rationalizing recalibration in the Nordic welfare states; updating recalibration in the Continental welfare systems (Pierson 2001). Current reforms are seen as reinforcing the logic of each model. There is no or little evidence of convergence in the solutions and reforms adopted within European welfare states (Ferrera, Rhodes 2000).

These findings are reinforced by the literature on the implementation of European law (i.e. its transposition, enforcement and application in the member states), which provide an insight into the general question of the domestic impact of European Union policies. One of the more exhaustive studies in this field has been directed by Gerda Falkner and her co-authors, who have qualitatively analyzed the implementation of European Union labour law Directives in 15 member states. They conclude that three different patterns of “how member states handle the duty of complying with EU law” can be distinguished and have built a typology of three “worlds of compliance”: a world of law observance, a world of domestic politics, a world of transposition neglect (Falkner, Treib, Hartlapp, Leiber 2005). Hence, diversity and absence of convergence in national reactions to the process of European integration appear as a common feature.

To understand the recent welfare state responses to new challenges, it then seems to be more useful to refer to national institutional specificities. Consequently, most authors accept the following reasoning: if Europe had any influence on national welfare reforms, one could witness some convergence of the welfare systems in the Member states, however, as studies don’t sustain the idea of convergence, European influence isn’t really meaningful to understand changes.

This position is moreover supported by institutional elements, by the predominance of the principle of subsidiarity in social matters, and by the fact that the European Union has no direct competencies on the core dimension of social protection (i.e. health care, old age pension, unemployment protection and employment policy) but merely only “subsidiary competence provisions” under which intervention is possible only if considered functional for market integration (Hantrais 2000).

Some sort of consensus seems then to emerge, considering that a reference to Europe does not necessarily allows for a new and better understanding of national welfare state reforms. We will see now that an increasing number of authors have pleaded, in opposition to this large strand of the literature, for an inclusion of the European Union in the picture: in order to grasp all the aspects of welfare state transformation, the relationships between the European integration, European policies (social and economic) and national social policies has to be addressed. The time frame is important here, and authors like Jon Kvist and Juho Saari, who have edited a volume on *The Europeanisation of social protection* (Kvist, Saari, ed. 2007),

underline the importance of policy developments and the consecutive new “waves” of literature and change of analytical perspective on the subject. The transformation of the relationship between the national and the European Union level with respect to social protection has been significant since the mid-1990s.

### **The impact of European policies and of the “European social model”: the undermining of national social sovereignty**

The seminal work to argue that Europe does matter in relation to national welfare states and that it does impose increasing pressures on Member states is certainly the book edited in 1995 by Stephan Leibfried and Paul Pierson, *European Social Policy. Between Fragmentation and Integration*. Remarking the growing institutionalization and expanding scope of authority of the European Union, including on social policy issues, they offer an analysis of the impact of European integration that differs from the aforementioned literature. To the question: “Does the EU play a significant role, or do welfare states remain largely untouched?”, they answer that the process of European integration has eroded “both the sovereignty (by which we mean legal authority) and autonomy (by which we mean de facto capacity) of member states in the realm of social policy” (Leibfried, Pierson 1995, 43-44). In a context of increasing constraints (legal, institutional or economical), they forged the concept of “semi-sovereign” national welfare states.

However, if certainly the most influential, they were not the only ones to insist on the necessity to take European political transformation in consideration to understand domestic welfare states changes and we will see how the different dimensions of the European constraint have been taken into account since the mid-1990s in the literature on social policy and welfare states reforms.

The first dimension to be taken into account, as early as the end of the 1980s, is that of the indirect effects of the European economic integration. This question that has been framed first under the label of “negative integration” and that, later with the prospective great enlargement to the East, became synonymous with a possible “race-to-the-bottom” between the national social protection systems.

The field of European social policy is studied as an illustration of Scharpf’s “joint-decision trap” (Scharpf 1988). There is a widening gap between a loss of capacity at the national level (Member states are constrained by European rules of economic integration, liberalization and competition law), and an absence of parallel gain at the European level. The result is supposed to be a social dumping process, implying competitive devaluation of national standards (Falkner 2006), the main medium of this process being the completion of the Single market and the implementation of the European Monetary Union (EMU), imposing competitive pressures on the member states.

More precisely, one can trace a direct link between the Maastricht criteria for joining the EMU and the realization of the EMU, and the content, or at least the orientation, of contemporary welfare states reforms: elimination of traditional Keynesian policy tools like deficit spending, monetary policy or exchange rate policy and the retrenchment of social benefits. Economic integration has largely

contributed to the evolution of the general economic context in which social policies are implemented (Scharpf 2000). It is even considered by some authors as a decisive element in the shift to what has been called a Schumpeterian workfare state (Jessop 1994). This new model, away from the traditional Keynesian welfare state, implies reforms of the national welfare states to make them more market- and employment-friendly.

Even if, according to Scharpf again, the idea of a race to the bottom has been supported by little or no empirical findings (Scharpf 2002), the diagnosis of a diminution of the Member states room for manoeuvre remains accurate. The increasing overlap of European and national policies in the monetary and budgetary fields diminishes the possibility of action of the Member States, and even if national welfare systems are not *a priori* concerned by the integration process, it does have an impact on the processes of welfare state changes.

The second dimension to be taken into account has been specially brought to light by Leibfried and Pierson in their will to study what they call “the dynamics of this extraordinary process of social policy integration” (Leibfried, Pierson 1995, 4). This emerging dimension, which adds an increasing constraint on Member states autonomy and reduce their sovereignty, is a “system of shared political authority over social policy”. Within this multileveled and fragmented system, different types of constraints or limitations restrain Member state power, mainly:

- the institutionalization of European Union organizations and their autonomous activities (i.e. policy initiatives taken by the European Commission and Council of ministers and ECJ rulings),
- policy locks-in due to previous commitments,
- the density of European policy-making,
- the activity of non-state actors.

Consequently, member states are not able to define their preferences in a totally autonomous and sovereign way when it comes to European social policy initiatives but also, as an indirect result, to national reforms.

It is also important to note that one of the main contribution of the Leibfried and Pierson’s book is the re-definition of “Social Europe”. They indeed argue that the scope of activities of the European Union in the domain of social protection has to be re-evaluate. The traditional understanding is, as already mentioned, that its perimeter is extremely limited by the principle of subsidiarity and the absence of full legislative competencies with regard to health care, old age pension, employment and family. However, they prone a larger definition of European intervention in the social protection domain and include in their definition fields sometimes considered as marginal: redistribution policies in the agricultural and regional sectors, but also social regulations like regulations on gender equality, on health and safety on the workplace or on industrial relations. This extensive definition supports the idea that the EU does not have to impose directives setting common standards on the retirement age or the organisation of health care systems to influence national welfare states and their reforms.

**The EU and the welfare state crisis: a further de-structuring of national welfare states or a social policy paradigm shift?**

With the acknowledgement of the influence of the European Union – whether direct or indirect; whether economic, political or institutional – the new debate arising in the literature is that of the “constitutional asymmetry” between national welfare states and European social policy (Scharpf 2002), or that of the “divorce” between national social policies and European economic policies (Manning, Palier 2003). The core question concerns the content of the impact of Europe in a context of welfare state crisis. What is the nature of its influence on the transformations undergone by national welfare states?

The discrepancies between market-making and market-correcting measures at the European Union level induce changes in the welfare states equilibriums at the national level. To sum up: from equity to efficiency, from solidarity to market (Goetschy 1999; De Schutter 2006). In an interesting reversal of perspective, by compromising these historical equilibriums, this EU-produced asymmetry could be considered as one of the main cause of the welfare states crisis. However, considering this question of the nature of the impact of the EU, the literature is precautionous on the development of such on-going processes and, most of the time, authors present scenarios of further developments rather than definitive conclusions.

By imposing new strains between social groups instead of creating new ties, as has always been the political function of the welfare state, the European Union can be at the origins of a further de-structuring of national welfare states. This is the argument of Maurizio Ferrera’s book, *The Boundaries of Welfare. European Integration and the New Spatial Politics of Social Protection*, which is one of the first to really tackle the question of the relationships between European integration and national social policies and to demonstrate the central role of the European Union to understand welfare state transformations (Ferrera 2005). According to him – and combined with a pluralization of pillars of national social protection systems and a revival of subnational territorial units as relatively autonomous solidarity spaces – European integration is one of the main elements of the reconfiguration of national welfare states. But the form and content of the process of “destructuring” and “restructuring” remains with a question mark: will we witness a scenario of “national destructuring with no supra-national restructuring” or one of restructuring through “incremental social supra-nationalism”? Empirical developments point in the two directions. Even if European integration has “embarked upon an ambitious attempt at system-building” (Ferrera 2005: 237), including a new territorial centre in the economic sphere, a common membership space and new voice channels, a scenario of what he calls “virtuous structuring at the EU-level” would entail the emergence of extremely complex institutional arrangements and political dynamics. These developments are impeded by a general lack of legitimacy, by the current processes of domestic adaptation to socio-economic transformations (even more so in the new Central and Eastern Europe member states), and by regulatory competition.

Examining social policy developments in recent and new member states after accession processes, Ana Guillen and Bruno Palier build four possible future



scenarios for the transformation of social policy in Europe. First, a scenario of liberalization of social Europe among old and new member states; second a scenario of chaos (i.e. market without regulation) in new member states; third a “catch-up scenario” for new member states, but which would need strong political will and an increase of social funds; fourth, a “race to the bottom” scenario which would concern both old and new members and would be the consequence of the refusal of old members to provide the necessary means for the development of the new ones and the application of a strategy of competitive social-dumping and social-devaluation (Guillen, Palier 2004).

### **Assessing the impact (2): The mechanisms of the influence of the European Union**

The debate on the role of the European Union in welfare state transformation has shown that, despite continuity and path dependence, the integration process participates to the understanding of the national measures of reform. However, this influence is not necessary direct nor is it strictly limited to legally binding regulations. To be captured, this role has to be put into perspective and the definition of Europeanization of the welfare state reforms we are talking about needs to be broadened. According to the definition by Radaelli already mentioned: Europeanization “deals with the impact of European Union on domestic policy, politics, and policies. It 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 EU processes and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies” (Radaelli 2003). The literature has shown that the European Union (European integration as a general environment, as an institutionalization process and also European policies, either social and/or macro-economic) has indeed been “incorporated” at the national level. European political, social and economic dynamics have become “part of” domestic political discourses and public policies in the welfare state field (Palier 2000). In the past 10 years, the national and the European levels have become increasingly “interwoven” in the field of social protection (Kvist, Saari 2007). In this sense, the process of welfare state reforms can be considered as Europeanised.

To put it differently, if one cannot account for a convergence of welfare state models – different worlds of welfare remain, as long as worlds of welfare transformations – it does not mean that there is an absence of impact of European integration. The fact that there is influence but no convergence is only an apparent paradox: Europeanization does not equal convergence, and absence of convergence does not equal absence of changes. Europeanization leaves the issue of diversity and overall convergence open. Consequently, the question that has to be tackled by the analyst certainly needs to be reformulated: Europe matters, but how does it matter? ? The aim of “the how question” is also to investigate into the diversity of the mechanisms of influence of Europe and to insist on variable such as actors and interests who are sometimes overshadowed, or rather considered as passive

intermediary variables, in a literature mainly focused on institutions. This new question of the identification of the diversity of the mechanisms of influence of European integration on domestic welfare states transformation will be the subject of our third part.

### **Between “traditional” and “new” channels of influence: the development of “non constraining” and cognitive Europeanization of welfare reforms**

Speaking of a “new” question concerning the examination of the ways in which the EU matters makes sense if we consider that the forms of European policy-making are changing and that “new governance” at the EU-level generates both new modes of governing and new modes of reacting to European influence. These new trends and developments are at the heart of a growing literature, as most of the empirical realizations and innovations of this “new governance” concern the domain of social policy and Social Europe.

The “new modes of European governance” have been defined within European studies in order to capture the general evolutions of the European system of policy-making, which functioning tends to move away from the Community method – representing the “traditional” system of European governance (Lebessis, Paterson 1997, 2000; Kohler-Koch, Eising 1999; Eberlein, Kerwer 2002; Boussaguet, Dehousse 2008). If the creation and harmonization of the Single market was built on an intergovernmental consensus authorizing the supranational institutions to use the law against the member states, the consensus broke on the creation of an economic and social regulation system. Consequently, the mechanisms of European policy-making have evolved and some distinctive features of these new modes of intergovernmental coordination can be singled out of the vast array of literature on the topic:

- an increased partnership between public and private actors (deliberation, openness to civil society in the construction of diagnosis and definition of solutions);
- a softening of the forms of authority (development of non-coercive processes based on the will of participants to agree, by way of collective deliberation, on procedural norms, modes of regulation and common political objectives, while the diversity of national experiences are preserved);
- a cognitive dimension (importance of benchmarking, knowledge diffusion, mutual learning, exchange of best practices).

The process of Europeanization should therefore not be limited to the direct impact of legislation or to spill-over effects. “Horizontal Europeanization” has developed since the end of the 1990s in the social policy field, especially with the European Employment Strategy. This new form of governance has progressively institutionalized a process of coordination between the member states. In domains covered by the principle of subsidiarity, they can elaborate a consensus on a common path – common understanding of the problems and of the welfare state crisis, common perception of the diagnosis, comparison of national situation, elaboration of common solutions and broadening of the panel of possible responses. This

common path can then be implemented at the national level, respecting national diversity, agendas, political constraints, etc. (Bruno, Jacquot, Mandin 2006). Recent works (Boussaguet, Dehousse 2008) show that this kind of European influence is more likely to continue its development, rather than the re-emergence of legal harmonization of national policies and regulations or than the development of EU-level policies.

This development of horizontal processes (as opposed to vertical policy-making) has two main consequences in terms of research design. When looking for the impact of European integration, the analyst should, first, not only look for adaptation but for “more subtle impacts” of socialization processes or ideational convergence (Pasquier, Radaelli 2006: 5). Second, s/he has to take into account the fact that influence is not necessarily to be found in the imposition of a common solution, but rather in common trends and in convergence not on substance but on objectives, principles and instruments of reforms (Palier 2000). In sum, Europeanization impacts on national welfare reforms, but it should be seen and analyzed as a process of participation of the European Union to the construction and definition of reforms by soft and cognitive means. To sum up with the words of Jon Kvist and Juho Saari, “perhaps the most profound impact lies in the way Europe plays a much greater role in how policy makers think about social protection than it did only 10 years ago” (Kvist, Saari 2007: 247).

These common trends can be deciphered in the literature on recent reforms (Palier, Martin 2008): welfare states should become “employment-friendly”, they should be more targeted and open to new private actors. The buzzword for employment policies is “activation” and there is a focus on the necessity to increase the employment rate to deal with unemployment and ageing, even if implementation differs on the national level (Clasen 2000; Clegg 2008; Guillemard 2003; Mandin 2007). Health care systems have seen an increased competition with the emergence of care givers and insurance companies (Hassenteufel et alii 2000; Hassenteufel, Palier 2008). As regard pensions, most of the countries are developing a multi-pillar system, introducing the principles of repartition and capitalization; changes are more important in systems based on insurance and repartition, like in Continental Europe. (Bonoli 2000; Bonoli, Palier 2008). All the countries seek to develop women employment, especially through care policies (Morel 2008).

### **The role of the open method of coordination as an informal mechanism of influence**

In March 2000, during the Lisbon summit and while a majority of governments in Europe are left-wing governments, the European Council tried to give a new impetus to the development of Social Europe, and it decided to set social protection issues on the European political agenda. The open method of coordination (OMC) has been elaborated as the main instrument of this political orientation.

The OMC typically belongs to the “new modes of governance”. We can even consider that most of the ever-growing literature on this subject, which aims at categorizing the evolving European governance, has been built around the case and

example of the OMC, which main institutional ingredients are common guidelines, “national action plans”, peer reviews, joint evaluation reports and recommendations. It has been the point of departure for the theorizing of the evolution of the regulatory, top-down, uniform “old-style governance” (Eberlein, Kerwer 2002).

The literature in this field has put some light on the genesis and conditions of emergence of this non-binding macro-instrument. It is considered as the result of a double political compromise: first, between the “economically-” and the “socially-oriented actors”, and second, between the member states and the European Commission (Bruno, Jacquot, Mandin 2006; De la Porte, Pochet 2002; Dehousse 2004; Mandin, Palier 2004; Zeitlin, Pochet 2002). Indeed, the EMU had reinforced the weight of the “economically-oriented actors” (Ecofin Council and DG, financial and industrial lobbies). This intrusion of the “economically oriented actors” in the field of social protection, generated a reaction from the “socially oriented actors” (Employment and Social Affairs Council and DG, social partners). Their interest in the issue of pensions led to an awareness: without the development of the role of the “socially oriented actors”, a Social Europe will be limited to following the evolution of the Common Market. However, the agenda-setting of this issue was problematic, because it questioned the sovereignty of the Member States and the principle of subsidiarity. The design of a soft instrument of governance is then a compromise, which takes into account social protection issues without questioning the sovereignty of the Member States in this policy field: each member state keep its autonomy and the Commission only formulates political orientations through a process of consultation with the intergovernmental committees (Dehousse 2004).

Thematic declensions of the OMC have developed in the fields of employment, pensions, social inclusion and health and long-term care. Consequently, the OMCs – or the different OMC processes – can be considered as an important point for the analysis of the evolution of social protection in Europe. From a general perspective, most authors agree on the fact that, in the end, the primary concern of the Lisbon summit in March 2000 was with the global competitiveness of the European Union, as was clearly acknowledged by the Heads of state and governments in the conclusions of the Council. “Thus, we find OMC embedded in the master discourse of competitiveness. No consideration was given to the tension that exists between the quest for competitiveness on the world-market and the idea of social balance” (Joerges, Rödl 2005: 156).

### **The open method of coordination and its domestic impact in debate**

To come back to our main question of the interaction between the European Union and national welfare state reforms, the specific domestic influence of the OMC is the object of intense discussion in the most recent literature.

Some like Gerda Falkner or Andrew Moravcsik consider that “no satisfactory account exists yet of the domestic Europeanization process in the field of the much-debated OMC” (Falkner 2006: 15), or that when focusing on outputs “it is clear that the system has, to date, generated few if any measurable policy outputs, and has little realistic hope of doing so” (Moravcsik 2004, ?). Others, like Bruno Palier, Paolo Graziano, Maurizio Ferrera or Jon Kvist and Juho Saari, consider that the OMC is

crucial to the precise and fine understanding of recent national welfare state reforms. In sum, there is a wide range of (often opposite) interpretations of the effective impact of the OMC at national level. While some authors insist on the evidence of such “impacts” (Zeitlin, Pochet 2005; Heidenreich, Bischoff 2006), some authors associate this instrument with cheap talk, window dressing, mere rhetoric or ineffectiveness (Chalmers, Lodge 2003; Hatzopoulos 2007; Kröger 2004; Smismans 2004; Ideman, Keleman 2006; Trubek, Trubek 2004). Manuele Citi and Martin Rhodes have categorised the OMC literature in four main branches: theoretical (explaining and conceptualizing the emergence of new modes of governance in the EU); normative (i.e. with a positive stance, insisting on the OMC as a solution to Europe’s democratic deficit and as a deliberative policy-making device); empirical (focused on case studies) and critical (“a useful antidote to the normative perspective”) (Citi, Rhodes 2007).

In fact, as remarked by Marie-Pierre Hamel and Bart Vanhercke, there seems to be a critical or sceptic turn in the scientific production on this topic. While “many of the writings were quite supportive of this new mode of soft governance..., the academic community has indeed taken a far more critical stance towards open coordination” (Hamel, Vanhercke 2008: 1).

The difficulty to assess the specific impact of the OMC lies in the fact that the aim of such an instrument is not to produce common identical measures, which would be nationally implemented as such. The preservation of the diversity of national systems of social protection was even one of the reasons and pre-conditions for the development of the OMC. Here again, the focus of the analysis should not be reduced to traditional and vertical Europeanization and it certainly needs to take into account the horizontal and cognitive impact of soft modes of governance to account for the whole process of change. Indeed, the OMC guidelines tend to define what should be a “good” policy: first by proposing policy orientations, second by identifying good practices, which results in a classification of the member states and in a definition of the “good” ones and the “bad” ones. Through the OMC, the European Union has become a common forum for debates, and contributes to the development of a common conception of problems and solutions, which, in turn, introduces a new mode of harmonisation that is not institutional and legally binding, but cognitive and normative (Bruno, Jacquot, Mandin 2006; Palier 2000).

In order to better understand the potential domestic impact of the OMC, Citi and Rhodes advocate for the construction of an analytical framework, which would make a more precise use of the literature of policy diffusion and learning, and which would also integrate more systematically what they call after March and Olsen the “logic of consequences” (material incentives and coercion via hard law) and the logic of appropriateness (role of ideas, socialization, social learning, etc.) (Citi, Rhodes 2007). One should also certainly differentiate between the nature of policy changes at the national level: “if one is ready to look beyond regulatory changes (...) to measure the effectiveness of OMC, then labelling this process ‘cheap talk’ seems particularly misleading” (Hamel, Vanhercke 2008).

In any case, surely, some more work needs to be done to add up to the existing knowledge of the effective influence of the OMC at the domestic level and on national welfare reforms.

### **Conclusion. Redefining the questioning: from ‘impact’ to ‘usages’. The role of creative actors**

We have seen in this literature review that the question of the Europeanization of national welfare state reforms is much more diverse and complex than may seem at first sight. It cannot be reduced to comparing the different processes of transposition and implementation of European regulation to determine if convergence is at work. Many variables have to be taken into account, including informal and interactive forms of influence of European integration.

To end this paper, we would like to take the issue one step further and stress the importance of research on the role of actors as necessary mediators of the reforms – and not only as transmission and intermediary variables. In order to capture the eventual processes of transformation that are at work with regard to domestic adaptation to European integration, one has to study the political construction of impacts. To understand and analyse the meaning of a reform, an essential element is the political work of actors within a normative system imposing its constraints. Domestic actors are at the same time “filters and users of European norms and rules” (Pasquier, Radaelli 2006) and they are creative in their relation to European norms, opportunities, constraints, rules, discourse: they use them as a resource even in the absence of integration pressures, they re-appropriate and re-define them to advance their own agenda, etc. Some authors have underlined the importance of this “leverage effect” (Erhel, Mandin, Palier 2005; Zeitlin 2005): national actors can creatively appropriate the European opportunities as a toolbox to advance their own interest or agenda, to legitimize their position, etc. Other authors have conceptualized this ability of actors as a specific form of “two-level game”, concerning not only grand intergovernmental bargaining but also the more day-to-day policy-making process (Börzel 2003; Büchs 2008).

However, actors not only act strategically, they are also transformed by their relation to Europe. In this light and in the same vein, the notion of “usages of Europe” can also be helpful (Jacquot, Woll 2003; 2008). It allows to re-equilibrate the strong concentration of the literature on institutional dynamics, leading to an underestimation of the discretion and role of political actors in the adaptation processes. The objective of this perspective is to insist on the role of actors in the concrete translation of European integration effects and the motives of action that can be identified.

### **Europeanization and the notion of usages: EU as constraints and opportunities**

Paying attention to the role of actors implies studying the mechanisms of appropriation, re-appropriation, engagement and disengagement of domestic actors

in the process of European integration. More precisely, the term “usage” covers practices and political interactions, which redefine themselves by seizing the European Union as a set of opportunities – whether they are institutional, ideological, political or organisational. These practices and political interactions happen as the actors go back and forth between the European level and the level on which they act (or wish to act), creating a context of interaction and reciprocal influence. The aim is to analyze the changes at the national level, which result from the use of the process of European integration by many and diverse actors.

Concentrating on practices, and thus on usage, allows focusing on political action or political work and on the substance of political relations. How does the political role of domestic actors materialize? How do they translate their social position (their institutional situation, their interests, their visions) into practices, which are in turn framed by specific political settings? How do national actors use the tools and resources offered by the process of European integration (formal or informal, binding or non-binding, etc.) to help them in the national dynamics they are engaged in (bargain assets, legitimization, room for manoeuvre, power increase, etc.)? The notion of national usage of Europe is interesting in this perspective, as it allows to take into consideration how actors are transformed by their relations with European policies, instruments, actors. An important process which has been witness concerning Europeanization and national policies reforms is that of “re-nationalization” (Palier, Surel et al. 2007; Smith 1996). As European policies and intervention gain in importance and “spill over” their original field of competences, strategies of reinvestment of the domain by the national level and by national governments representatives can be witnessed. However, concentrating on actors and usages, allows to see that this process is really a new sequence of the Europeanization process rather than a nationalist regression. Indeed, the systems of public action and the actors have changed meanwhile, they have become “impregnated” with Europe through socialization, they have incorporated it to their strategies (Stone Sweet, Sandholtz, Fligstein 2001) and they tend to perceive problems and solutions through the lenses of Europe (Palier, Surel et al. 2007).

### **The usages of the European Union within member states with respect to welfare reforms: a promising research agenda**

If the European Union influences member states policies and reforms thanks to the usages of domestic actors, important research questions to assess the European contribution to the transformation of the welfare state are the following:

- Who can do what usage of Europe?
- Which actors have access to the definition and translation of European effects?
- What are the European instruments, which provide the domestic actors with supplementary resources for their national reforms (i.e. a new legitimating reference, a new opportunity to engage in a two-level game when dominated at the national level, etc.)?

- What are the room for manoeuvre and role of the creativity of actors in a political system where reforms are more and more diffused by coordination and non-binding processes rather than by harmonisation of legislation?
- What is the influence of these new instruments and resources on actors and on the general orientation and meaning of the reforms (when using them domestic actors import and incorporate the principles on which European guidelines are based)?

These research paths could help to seize some of the complexity and intricacies of the influence of Europe in shaping or reshaping national welfare states and in orientating national social policies reforms.



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