

## Domestic Europeanization – institutional entrepreneurs and welfare state change

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**REC-WP 09/2010**



Working Papers on the Reconciliation of Work and Welfare in Europe

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# **Domestic Europeanization – Institutional Entrepreneurs and Welfare State Change**

Sascha Zirra



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## **About the author**

Sascha Zirra is Research Fellow at the Jean Monnet Centre for Europeanisation and Transnational Regulations Oldenburg (CETRO). He holds a PhD in Sociology. His doctoral dissertation, defended in 2009 (University of Oldenburg), focused on «The Europeanization of Domestic Employment Policy. European Coordination and Institutional Reform».

His research focuses on the mechanisms of Europeanization and institutional change and is devoted to social inequalities caused by employment regimes, particularly in comparative perspective. He has been visiting researcher at the Centre d'études européennes de Sciences Po and at Sapienza Università di Roma in the course of the former project. Currently he works on the integration of social and employment policy at the local level in European countries.

## **Abstract**

In this paper, we examine the domestic Europeanization of employment policy in two Continental countries — Germany and France. While both countries have experienced substantial labour market reforms in the last decade, the reform fields differ considerably. This paper argues that this is because the appropriation of European resources depends on the domestic patterns of bureaucratic co-ordination. Our analysis reveals that, in Germany horizontal co-ordination has fostered a discursive strategy of a unit in the labour ministry that contributed to the cognitive change towards activation. In France, centralistic co-ordination has blocked the labour ministry from substantial discursive strategy, but by a programmatic strategy it has contributed to improving existing schemes of insertion.

## **Keywords**

Europeanization, Germany, France, neo-institutionalism, employment policy

## Introduction

After a short period of common prosperity and as a consequence of the financial and economic crisis, the member states of the European Union (EU) face again major challenges in the provision of welfare and to the goal of full employment. Due to rising unemployment, decreasing employment rates and falling tax revenues caused by the economic downturn, all member states confront a growing threat of increasing social disruptions and growing public debt (European Commission 2010). As the crisis shows quite plainly the dense European economic – and eventually social – interdependence, the questions on the prospects and boundaries of social – and eventually economic – solidarity among European societies are being posed again. This makes a coherent and integrated European approach towards economic and social cohesion ever more indispensable. While the Lisbon agenda and the European Employment Strategy (EES) have proven to be a crucial pillar of a coordinated and genuinely European answer to ensuring high employment and social cohesion in times of a changing but rather prosperous economy in the years 1998 to 2008 (Tholoniati 2010; Heidenreich and Zeitlin 2009; Dawson 2009), the years to come will be a more demanding challenge. Facing the threat posed to first signs of economic recovery by rising public debt in all EU Member States, to give a new start to a closer economic, employment and social policy coordination by the EU's 2020 strategy will be a major task for the newly elected Commission. Asking for solidarity and eventually financial transfers between European societies, the Greek-Euro crisis frankly demonstrates that a common market and a common currency indispensably depend on reducing the broad variety in productivity wages, public spending and consequently employment policy coordination. However, being institutionalized outcomes of historical conflicts domestic economic, social and employment policies are rather resistant to radical changes (Streeck and Thelen 2005; Pierson 2000). Characterized by mutual complementarities, and entailing increasing returns, these specific, historically evolved, national institutional arrangements are subject to major domestic stakeholder interests (Hall and Soskice 2001). Thus, for the new start of the strategy it will be crucial to understand, how and why European coordination mechanisms do impact domestic institutional reform processes. Europeanization thus refers to understanding the mechanisms of domestic institutional change (Hedström 2008; Cerami 2009): If so, why and how are exogenous resources used in the process of domestic institutional change?

In the post-war period for Continental European countries, the promise of social inclusion has relied on relatively equal income structures and social protection. By regulative interference in the functioning of markets, these states have succeeded in complementing growing economic prosperity by increasing social protection. As a consequence of the change from industrial to knowledge based production, demographic change and individualization, these institutional arrangements are increasing under pressure to reform (Kenworthy 2004, Schmid 2008). Particularly, the concentration of employment and social policy on protecting the lifelong employment of a male breadwinner seems increasingly dysfunctional (Clegg 2007). These countries face a vicious circle of more and more people depending on social

insurance, financed by a decreasing number of people participating in the labour market (Ebbinghaus 2005, Scharpf 2000). Given these challenges of the European welfare state in this ‘new knowledge-based society’ the Lisbon European Council in 2000 decided to “shape these changes in a manner consistent with its values and concepts of society”. The European Employment Strategy (EES) (López-Santana 2009) might be a crucial pillar of a coordinated and genuinely European answer to these challenges. However, does this process of mutual coordination offer sufficient incentives, compared to the institutional barriers which are particularly strong in Continental Europe (Palier and Martin 2007) – and if so why and how?

While there are ample findings indicating that the EES has been impacting domestic reforms (Heidenreich and Zeitlin 2009), there seems to be a broad variety in terms of policy fields and extent of reforms that has hardly been explained so far. Approaches accounting for domestic differences mostly focus on the scope, but rarely the content and policy field of reforms (Mailand 2008, López-Santana 2006). Contrary to these ‘most-different-design’ studies, we have chosen to analyze two Continental countries – Germany and France – that face a comparable level of ‘institutional misfit’ to EES’ goals on the cognitive and programmatic level, but differ considerably in the domestic patterns of administrative coordination. Therefore, we may expect findings on the mechanisms of Europeanization in different regulatory structures. Building on an actor centered institutionalism (Fligstein 2001) we show that depending on the institutional setting, different strategies of appropriation may prove effective for domestic actors. We argue that the creative appropriation of European resources constitutes a pivotal strategy of skilled social actors – *institutional entrepreneurs* – in order to increase their relevance within the domestic employment policy field. However, as a consequence of the necessary coalitions for the institutional change project, we expect that these strategies will be in turn shaped by the institutionalized structure within this field. Thus, we may formulate three hypotheses:

- The characteristic national patterns of bureaucratic co-ordination shape the national co-ordination process of the EES.
- These differences constitute different opportunity structures that favor different institutional entrepreneurs and determine their strategies of appropriation.
- If the EES has affected domestic reform processes, the differences in national welfare state reforms can be explained by these strategies of appropriation.

(1) In order to test these hypotheses, we rely on an actor centered institutionalism, which takes into account the role of pre-existing institutions as well as of skilled corporate actors (*institutional entrepreneurs*) in institutional (re-)production (cf. Hay and Wincott 1998). (2) By a comparative case study building on a most-similar system design we aim to reduce the problems of assessing the EES’ impact. The analysis itself is conducted in three steps: (3) At first, we present a puzzle of



welfare state change: While France and Germany are considered so similar in many institutional aspects, both countries have produced very different welfare state reforms. (4) We show that the domestic coordination of the EES in both countries has been organized according to deeply institutionalized structures of coordination. (5) Finally, we show that these differences in domestic opportunity structures have favored different strategies of creative appropriation by domestic *institutional entrepreneurs*.

### **Europeanization as Institutional Change: Institutional Entrepreneurs as Skilled Actors in Domestic Organizational Fields**

The question to what extent the EES is able to influence domestic employment regimes refers to a twofold inertia: as institutions employment regimes are subject to path dependent evolution and can hardly be shaped by intentional policy making (Pierson 2000), and as domestically evolved social order they are deeply rooted in national social, economic and political contexts (Rokkan 1973). However, domestic institutions of employment policy have actually changed a lot recently (Streeck and Thelen 2005). How can we conceptualize and explain this institutional change? What processes – and which actors - link the EES and domestic institutions? In order to analyze this question, we propose to conceive of *Europeanization* as dialectic process of institutional closure of European fields and the simultaneous opening of respective domestic fields (Fligstein 2008, Ferrera 2005); i.e. “formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms” become institutionalized on the European level and are “then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies” (Radaelli 2003: 30). Thus, we are neither interested in the level of convergence between institutional settings, nor the harmonization of national law or political integration, but the interpretative analysis of the mechanisms and strategies that underlie the emergence of mutual European institutions and constitute their relevance as a legitimate resource in domestic reform processes (cf. Vink and Graziano 2007: 10).

In order to understand the processes of EU-related institutional change, we propose to borrow from an actor-centered institutionalism (Mayntz and Scharpf 1995). This concept focuses on the rational *intention* of corporate actors’ strategies within institutionalized fields (DiMaggio 1988). These fields are characterized by shared set of rules, understandings and power relations that mediate and structure the interactions within the field.

*They frame the kinds of interests and resources which actors can mobilize in favour of, or against, welfare reforms. In part, they also determine who can and who cannot participate in the political game leading to reforms. Depending on how these different variables are set, different patterns of support and opposition are likely to be encountered. (Palier and Martin 2007: 544)*

But as pre-existing institutions shape what options are perceived as ‘reasonable’ the strategic *orientation* of these actors should not be confused with the mostly unintended consequences of their actions (cf. Woll and Jacquot 2010). In this concept, Europeanization refers to the interdependent re-production of institutions in the practice of two social fields that are mutually oriented towards each other (fig. 1, cf. Bulmer 2007). Domestic Europeanization, therefore, depends on whether corporate actors in the national field do actively refer to resources of the European field (Jacquot and Woll 2003: 5).

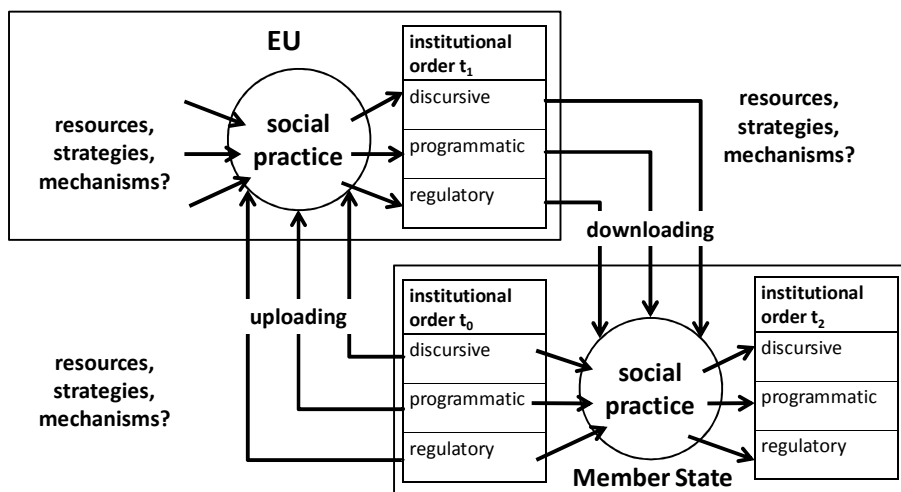


Figure 1

What are the mechanisms and strategies that constitute the increasing domestic relevance of resources generated in the European field? We expect that the reason for the interest in change of institutional entrepreneurs is due to a meta-game: to secure and improve their position within the field, actors have to continuously prove their relevance for the joint undertaking – *the mission* – that constitutes the field (Garud et al. 2007). This makes innovation a cornerstone of institutional order: the struggles that constitute the field are not only about immediate interests but also about the position of actors for future interactions (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996). This refers to the relative relevance actors ascribe to one another for solving the commonly perceived problems (Crozier and Friedberg 1979). It is this mutual ascription of relevance that constitutes the power-asymmetry that exists in every social interaction (Friedberg 1993: 113f). The struggles in this dimension are thus on the control over and evaluation of material (e.g. qualified personnel) and authoritative resources (e.g. evaluation, report or sanctioning capacity) and, thus, eventually on the relevance in the eyes of the others. We may thus analytically distinguish three mutually non-exclusive strategies that cause *institutional entrepreneurs* to suggest innovations (cf. Woll and Jacquot 2010, Zirra 2010): improving organizational capacity (*regulatory strategy*), proposing new solutions to given problems (*programmatic strategy*) and persuading others of new problems (*discursive strategies*).

(1) In order to be perceived as relevant, actors need to have the ability to propose promising new solutions. *They may therefore directly refer to exogenous resources in order to improve their organizational capacity* - quality and quantity of personnel, technique or evaluation capacity (Zeitlin 2009). For example, the evaluation demands related to the EES and ESF financial resources may contribute to an increased capacity of domestic actors (Mailand 2008). The evaluation demands of the EES therefore do not only contribute to improved data and indicators but by *using* these measures the labour ministry may improve its position in the interministerial game (Jacobsson and West 2009: 202f). Additionally, actors may refer to authoritative resources – e.g. co-ordination demands in the course of EES – in order to increase their relevance. This strategy directly alters the mutually ascribed relevance of actors: it causes changes the regulatory power structure in the field. (2) Actors have to prove that their proposed actions can successfully be used to solve commonly conceived problems. *They may use external solutions to propose them as their own concepts in the domestic arena.* By this programmatic framing, domestic actors try to influence the domestic definition of ‘appropriate’ policies and instruments to solve given problems. Accordingly, European norms on appropriate employment policies may at the same time constrain and broaden the scope of ‘legitimate’ alternatives in the domestic arena (López-Santana 2006: 490ff). (3) It is a fundamental characteristic of social interaction that problems do not ‘objectively’ exist but are socially constructed within the field. Therefore, *institutional entrepreneurs may try to persuade the actors of the field of new problems for which they possess the most relevant problem solving capacity from the beginning* (cf. Fligstein 2001: 264). For example, in framing national discourses with world views that have been institutionalized at the European level (e.g. equal participation in the labour market) those European concepts have increasingly been incorporated in domestic discourse (cf. López-Santana 2006: 486ff)

Finally, while it seems that domestic actors use European resources only to further their own interest (Mailand 2008), “by embracing OMC concepts, categories, and metrics to advance their own goals, domestic actors at a minimum acknowledge and reinforce the discursive legitimacy of common European objectives and policy approaches” (Zeitlin 2009: 396). Therefore, even when domestic actors may remain unaware of the European connection, the domestic usage of these resources has contributed to the implementation of EES. We therefore propose to consider Europeanization as an unintended consequence of intentional action rather than a conscious and deliberate process.

## Methodology

The causes and mechanisms of Europeanization are notoriously difficult to assess (Haverland 2005). This is particularly true for EES, not only because of the variety, complexity, and relative newness of the process, but also because of the methodological problems involved in disentangling the independent causal impact of an iterative policy-making process based on collaboration between EU institutions and Member State governments without legally binding sanctions (Barbier 2004). Therefore, our methodological considerations aim at reducing these problems of

attribution inevitably connected to the Europeanization hypotheses (Exadaktylos and Radaelli 2009) while at the same time trying to avoid ecological fallacies, i.e. “assuming ‘if they do something similar to what Brussels want (*sic!*), they must be doing it because of Brussels”” (Radaelli and Pasquier 2007: 40). One important research strategy for avoiding these pitfalls is focusing on processes rather than outcomes (Vink and Graziano 2007: 15). By in-depth qualitative case studies analyzing the course of reform processes in Germany and France, we account for the different interests, strategies and orientation of the actors involved in institutional change over time (Gerring 2004: 348). However, while it is the strength of qualitative design to reconstruct complex causalities, we will not be able to account for the relative weight of European resources in domestic reform processes. We may, however, give a qualitative appraisal (e.g. whether, how and why the European resources have been relevant in the reform process).

The case studies are based on 44 expert interviews with civil servants in the national labour ministries, the European Commission as well as representatives of the social partners and regional authorities, all directly involved in the EES or domestic labour market reforms, as well as document analysis. Despite two informal talks at conferences in 2008, the interviews have been conducted between fall 2005 and spring 2006. We analyzed and mutually contextualizing these interviews and documents by a qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2003). Accounting for the strategic interests of our interviewees (Barbier 2004: 19), we have conducted interviews with many representatives from very different organizations involved assuming that their respective bias would serve as mutual counterbalance. Finally, linguistic artefacts caused by the use of foreign language, are a problem often disregarded in comparative research. While both interviewers are native speaking Germans, in France we have often tried to avoid these pitfalls by resorting to ‘bi-lingual’ interviews – asking the questions in English but being answered in French.<sup>1</sup> However, in Brussels, most interviews have been conducted in ‘Eurospeak English’ (Barbier 2004: 19).

So far, most comparative studies on the impact of EES have followed the logic of a ‘most-different-system-design’. Accordingly, they have had to focus on explaining similarities (López-Santana 2006) in the appropriation of EES – or had to ‘explain’ institutional diversity by institutional diversity (Mailand 2008). Only few studies on welfare state reform have chosen ‘most-similar’ cases (Parlier and Martin 2007) shedding light on the similarities and differences within the Continental reform path. By choosing Germany and France, we follow the second logic. These Bismarckian countries face comparable problems of dual labour markets (Clegg 2007) and ‘institutional misfit’ to EES policy goals (Börzel and Risse 2003). However, apart from these similarities, there are striking differences, particularly in respect to the procedural dimension of domestic employment policy (Kassim et al. 2000, Bulmer 1983). We may therefore expect answers on the mechanisms of domestic Europeanization in completely different regulative environments.

## Different reform paths in Continental Europe

The countries of Continental Europe face considerable needs to modernize their welfare and employment policies. For a long time, these institutions have focused on protecting the employment of a mostly male, qualified family breadwinner. But this has resulted in a rising duality of the labour market and social protection, excluding low-qualified, women, and younger as well as older people from the labour market. Due to international competition, increasingly knowledge-based organizations, and aging society these institutions have become economically, financially and socially inefficient (Scharpf 2000). At the same time, Continental welfare states have been characterized as “ingrained over-commitment to old institutions and historical entitlements” (Kitschelt and Streeck 2003: 28), “frozen continental landscape” (Esping-Andersen 1996) or “immovable objects” (Pierson 1998). Accordingly these countries had been unable to face structural reforms, assuming „the cards are very much stacked in favor of the welfare state ‘status quo’ in these countries” (Esping-Andersen 1996: 267). However, more recently this view has been increasingly criticized as an analytical artefact of the ‘punctuated equilibrium’ concept (Palier and Martin 2007, Streeck and Thelen 2005). Hence, in fact the strong segmentation of the labour market and social protection can be seen as a consequence of incremental – however path dependent – change since the late 1970s (Clegg 2007). Hence, it has been exactly the reaction of these states to the economic and social challenges that has led to intensifying the social and employment dualism between well protected insiders and increasingly marginalized, precarious outsiders. However, after more than twenty years of path reinforcing incremental reform, since 2000 there are indications for an increasingly radical institutional change in Germany and France (Clegg and Palier 2010, Lessenich 2008). How radical have these reforms been? What similarities and differences can be found? We expect that even though the challenges have been quite similar, due to endogenous logic of institutional reforms there will be considerable differences concerning the scope as well as the field of reform.

### Germany: Starting the Path to Activation?

In the 1980s, Germany was considered to be the economically and socially most successful among Western European countries. The ‘high-production order’ (Streeck 1997) which has been at the core of the German model was framed by a set of complementary and mutually reinforcing institutions (Hall and Soskice 2001) – e.g. the strong but cooperative role of industrial social partners, vocational training and ‘professionalism’. Additionally the system of social protection has been oriented to protect the certified and acquired status of the male family bread winner. And even when a job got lost, the professional position within society would be sustained by the savings-account of social insurance (Palier and Martin 2007). But at the same time, the dark side of this congenial regulation of social, economic and employment policy became ever more apparent. Exactly those institutions, the success of the past was build on, became increasingly problematic (Kitschelt and Streeck 2003). In particular, they entailed a high rate of long-term unemployment (3.7 percent in 2000)

and a high gender-employment gap (25 percentage points in full time equivalent in 2000, European Commission 2008).

Thus, the institutional change in Germany provoked by the labour market reforms in 2001 to 2005 are considered to be “among the most amazing developments in social policies that occurred in the Western world during that time” (Ludwig-Mayerhofer 2005: 95, cf. Eichhorst et al. 2008, Kemmerling and Bruttel 2006). After the reforms had been initiated by the Job-AQTIV-law in 2001 a ‘job-placement-scandal’ in the Public Employment Service (PES) created a window of opportunity for a complete reorientation of German welfare and employment policy (Fleckenstein 2008). These reforms express a basically changed concept of employment policy in Germany: While before the central pillar was the demand side protection of existing employment, in the reforms, the supply side activation of all citizens became the focal legitimizing device (Dingeldey 2007).

*Employment policies are now focused on stimulating labour supply and activation strategies. Increasing female participation in the labour market and thereby facilitating family and work reconciliation is also at the heart of the new social policy paradigm. (Palier and Martin 2007: 542)*

Thus, it is not the responsibility of the state to include its citizens into the labour market anymore, but the responsibility of the individual, who can no longer rely on status protecting social insurance (Eichhorst et al. 2008: 60). The state in turn has facilitated inclusion by creating a low wage sector and activation tailored to individual needs. A major achievement of the reform has been that all unemployed are now entitled to the same active labour market policy schemes administered by the PES (Ludwig-Mayerhofer 2005). Accordingly, the „tighter conceptual and practical linkage of promoting and demanding elements” (Eichhorst et al. 2008a: 27) is considered as one of the most coherent and comprehensive activation schemes in Europe.

Additionally, the changes in unemployment benefits for long term unemployed created an unintended “shift from contribution based to tax-funded passive and active labour market policy schemes” (Eichhorst et al. 2008: 56). As a consequence, the traditional boundaries of entitled and ‘undeserved’ beneficiaries (Lahusen and Stark 2003: 369) as well as between labour market and social policy have increasingly eroded (Seifert and Struck 2009): By including ‘hidden’ long-term unemployment, the UB II scheme „dramatically increases transparency regarding non-employment” (Eichhorst et al. 2008: 59). Thus, as a key outcome, the segmentation between short- and long-term unemployed became more evident (Dingeldey 2007: 832). But even the introduction of this basic income scheme was legitimized by ‘activation of the long term unemployed’. And while the reforms have considerably improved the placement for short-term unemployed, for the low-qualified, the new schemes did not serve as a bridge in regular employment but constitute new ‘inactivity traps’ and may even prolong unemployment (Eichhorst et al. 2008: 52ff, Ludwig-Mayerhofer 2005: 110).

### France: The State's Responsibility for Employment

In the post-war era, in France, statist dirigisme in economic and industrial policy was accompanied by a considerable role of public employment (Levy 2005). After the economic crisis in the late 1970s, the state has increasingly retreated from directly intervening into the market (Schmidt 1996), but it has sustained its focal role as employer of last resort and in guaranteeing social cohesion. Thus, „the state [was] being expected to provide temporary (or ‘secondary market’) jobs when the market failed to deliver them” (Barbier and Kaufmann 2008: 94). While additionally to demand side policy and early retirement in Germany labour market policy to a large extent was build on further education, in France, active labour market policy has been the third pillar of employment policy. The scarcity of employment for the low-qualified was conceived of as being caused by weak economic performance “rather than resulting from poor motivation” (Enjolras et al. 2000: 42). Therefore, incentives to employers should ensure social inclusion of disadvantaged groups by ‘insertion’ to employment. Since the late 1970s the state increasingly created subsidized employment for problematic segments in the labour market, instead of direct public over-employment – perpetuating the logic of the state as ‘employer of last resort’. However, these schemes have often entailed a rising risk of in-work poverty and have hardly served as bridge into regular employment (Barbier and Fargion 2004: 447). Particularly for young people, insertion schemes have often substituted missing eligibility (Ughetto and Bouget 2002). The perception „that insertion jobs operating outside of the market economy can themselves become exclusion trajectories” (Enjolras et al. 2000: 44), very early created a debate on ‘new poverty’, ‘social exclusion’ and ‘précarité’ (Paugam 2000). While in 2000 over 20 percent of the 15 to 25 year olds that have not been in education were unemployed (European Commission 2008), at the same time over ten percent of the active population have been on subsidized employment schemes (2.8 million employees) (Barbier and Fargion 2004: 448).

The most ambitious and effective among the broad variety of employment policy reforms in France between 2000 and 2005 has been the social cohesion plan presented in 2004 (Barbier and Kaufmann 2008). This plan has aimed to tackle social exclusion by an integrated approach of employment, housing and education policy. But it can be considered symptomatic that this plan has been perceived as social policy reform rather than of employment policy. In this plan, particularly the rising risk of in-work poverty was identified as a crucial threat to social cohesion. Thus, while the social cohesion plan – together with reforms as the PARE – has also comprised a broad variety of incremental PES reforms (Barbier and Kaufmann 2008, Clegg 2007), its focus has been on ‘making work pay’. This has entailed a silent shift from financing unemployment to increasingly generalized schemes of subsidizing employment (Barbier 2007) and has finally culminated in the introduction of the Active Solidarity Income (*Revenu de Solidarite Active – RSA*) in 2008 (Clegg and Palier forthcoming). In this notion of ‘activation’, instead of promoting individual employability, the state again assumes the responsibility to actively integrate certain groups into employment (Enjolras et al. 2000: 41).

*And one has to see that there are many points of discrimination to young people and immigrated people, so we have to work on that. That is the way we try – in fact more than other countries – to put money on these contracts. (F11)*

As these schemes have contributed to reduce open unemployment and as young people are not eligible to RMI (*revenu minimum d'insertion*) there are considerable incentives for policy makers to perpetuate insertion jobs.

*If you abandon the measure they would have nothing. Maybe that is the consequence of too many initiatives we had in that field. And if you would stop subsidizing we would have a very high unemployment rate. (EU25)*

However, these programs – particularly for the most disadvantaged groups – did not work as a bridge into regular employment (Barbier and Kaufmann 2008). The state's intervention therefore had perverse effects: instead of preparing these groups to compete on the labour market, they produce new inactivity traps, characterized by permanent dependency and in-work poverty (Barbier and Fargion 2004: 449). Accordingly the state, in trying to fight inequality by tailor-made schemes for specific target group has reproduced social inequality along previous social boundaries.

### **Similarities and Differences in Domestic Reform Paths**

In both countries there have been considerable reforms in employment policy. In Germany the reforms constitute a basic cognitive shift from securing highly productive workplaces towards promoting the inclusion of all citizens into the labour market. Supported by growing discourse on equal opportunities on the labour market, the focus was particularly on increasing job-take-up rates of the long-term unemployed. This means a radical institutional change from a system of professional status protection towards an active welfare stated based on individual responsibility for securing personal employability (cf. Lessenich 2008, Eichhorst et al. 2008, Dingeldey 2007). While even the most fundamental reforms of social protection have been legitimized by referring to this comprehensive activation paradigm, there has been no complementary debate on developing new forms of social protection for individuals with discontinuous employment records.

To the contrary, in France there has been a broad debate on social cohesion and *précarité* but hardly any on activation. At the same time only incremental reforms 'à la Français' have been implemented successfully (Palier 2005: 141). At the centre of the reforms was not to develop an approach tailored to individual needs, but to improve the state's intervention on the labour market (Clegg 2007). In these reforms rather than the individual, the state takes over the responsibility for insertion and individual social inclusion (Barbier and Kaufmann 2008). Thus, the problem of integrating low-qualified young people has been solved by demand-side active LMP rather than by improving qualifications and employability. This notion of 'activation à la Français' has contributed to a growing segment of subsidized labour demand that keeps low-qualified people dependent (Levy 2005: 104).



This one-sidedness of reforms – a focus on activation without considering complementary social security in Germany, the state’s responsibility to protect from precariousness without considering individual activation in France – has contributed to perpetuate the social segmentation of the labour market in both countries. Many of the reformed schemes were advantageous only for the privileged group of male, qualified workers, while proving at best ineffective for low-qualified long-term unemployed; finally referring them to an increasingly precarious segment at the margins of the labour market. At the most we may discover that the traditional boundaries between labour market insiders and non-employed outsiders have been transformed to new boundaries between a decreasing segment of well protected ‘core labour force’ and an increasing number of people at the margins of the labour market, employed in permanent precariousness.

## The Domestic Organization of European Employment Policy

While both countries represent varieties of the Continental welfare state, there are important differences, particularly in the deeply institutionalized regulatory patterns of coordinating domestic policy (Kassim et al. 2000). Did the coordination demands by EES change these patterns as some authors had hoped for (Sabel and Zeitlin 2007, Eberlein and Kerwer 2004)? While it has been assumed that due to the integrated character of EES a closer cooperation across policy fields would emerge (Zeitlin 2009: 457), focusing on interministerial coordination, we expect that the EES will rather be organized according to the historically evolved, institutionalized patterns.

### Differences in Patterns of Interministerial Policy Co-ordination

In Germany the inter-ministerial coordination between policy fields is traditionally organized horizontally, involving the ‘desk-office-level’, directly responsible for formulating respective policies (Derlien 2000). This mode of coordination relies heavily on the expertise and the competences of bureaucratic personnel. While the advantage of this mode may be pragmatic and appropriate solutions, it makes micro-political bargaining in between the ministries complex and a coherent national strategy, comprising multiple policy fields, almost impossible. By contrast, in France, traditionally a comprehensive strategy and coherent national policy making across policy fields is seen as an important task for hierarchic inter-ministerial coordination (Kassim 2000: 244). The central coordinator for all policies concerning the EU is the *secrétariat général des affaires européenne* (SGAE)<sup>2</sup> which was founded in 1948 and is a part of the prime minister’s office.

*Here we coordinate and, at last, we give the final position of France. (...) And the idea is that when somebody from France speaks at Brussels, he has always in front of him or her a sheet with the French position. And this sheet is made here by this secretariat. This idea is that when somebody speaks, it has to be in coherence with the rest. (F4)*

The power of the SGAE is reflected by its authority “to send instructions to France’s Permanent Representation, even when only a single ministry is involved” (Kassim 2000a: 244). To what extent does the domestic organization of the EES reflect these patterns?

### Germany: Horizontal Co-ordination of European Employment Policy

The Director-General of the LMP-department in the German Labour Ministry, is core member of the employment committee (EMCO) since 1997. But actually doing most of the substantial work is her alternate member – and at the same time her direct subordinate – the head of the policy unit ‘*international LMP and encouraging job-take-up*’<sup>3</sup> (unit IIa2). This unit played a key role in the domestic coordination of EES. Unit IIa2 has asked all those policy units that they perceived would be concerned by the issues on the next EMCO meeting for their opinion (cf. Fig. 2).

*For example we have the policy field of childcare in the EES (...) – internationally strongly aligned to employment policy - but here dealt with by the Ministry of Education and mainly the Laender. And we try to involve these people as broadly as possible in advance and then develop a common position. (D1)\**

Unit IIa2 coordinates a joint German position which it would defend as best as possible ‘in Brussels’. However, having a negotiation mandate, it would also be able to formulate compromises.

Also in *downloading* – here operationalized as the coordination of the national action plan (NAP) – it had a leading role (cf. Fig. 3). It has asked all potentially relevant units for drafts and contributions to the guidelines that refer to their policy field. After having received the contributions unit IIa2 has written a first draft which was communicated to all relevant actors in the field that have again been asked their opinions. In several steps they elaborated a final version which was sent to the federal cabinet that formally agreed on the NAP.

*By the NAP the guidelines are diffused to the diverse policy fields. (...) I send the guidelines we have agreed on in Brussels to all colleagues affected. And I tell them, on the basis of these guidelines we have to draft a National Action Plan. This is the first of a multiplicity of communication channels that spread the knowledge of EES and the colleagues working on the guidelines then include them in the national policy. (D2)\**

Consequently, EES’s demands for coordination have been institutionalized according to the pre-existing horizontal pattern. But by establishing an ongoing coordination with diverse ministries – such as the Ministry of education, the Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Finance – a new perception of a mutual interdependency of these policies has evolved in Germany. Thus, on the inter-ministerial level the EES has contributed to a new opportunity structure for a more coherent reform of employment policy, transcending the traditional borders of LMP in Germany.

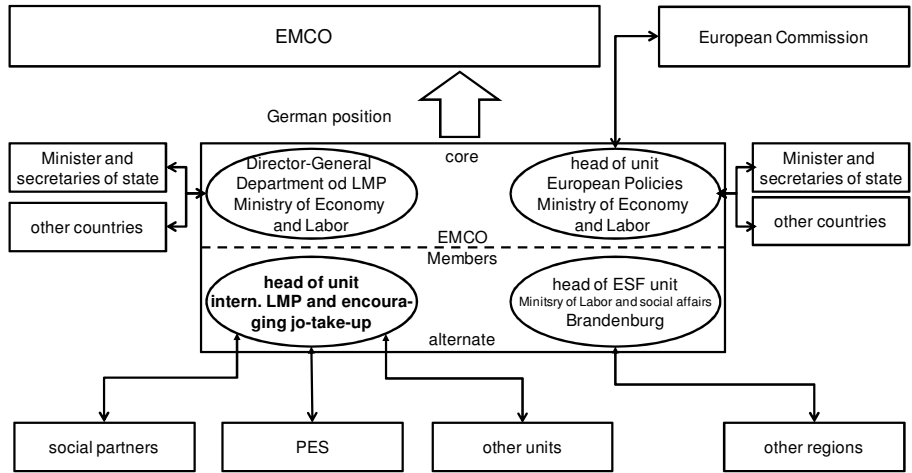


Figure 1: Uploading German Employment Policy Preferences<sup>4</sup>

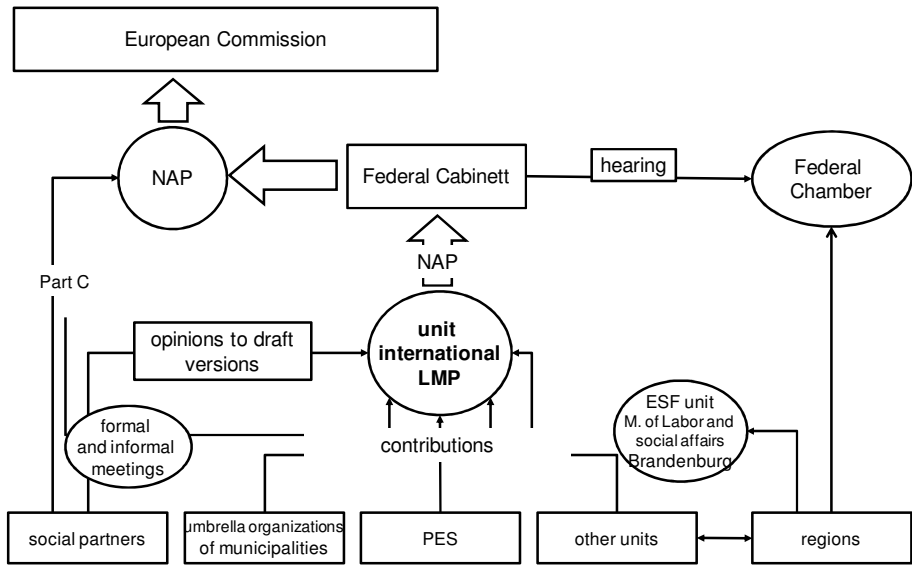


Figure 2: Downloading European Employment Policy Guidelines in Germany<sup>5</sup>

**France: Hierarchic Co-ordination of European Employment Policy**

The French coordination of EES shows a completely different picture. It has been much more hierarchic and by far less complex. Particularly two actors have taken a prominent role: the SGAE and the General Directorate of Employment (DGEFP, *Délégation Générale à l'Emploi et la Formation Professionnelle*). Even though the Director General of the DGEFP has been core member of EMCO, in the *uploading* process he could not substantially formulate the position of France towards the EES. Rather the SGAE claimed directive authority (cf. Fig. 4).

*When France is formulating an official political position, which we forward to the commission, it has to pass the office of the prime minister (...) so before going to the EMCO we always talk to the SGAE about the French position presented in the committee. It is a bit weird, but we have to take into account the French position. (F 1)*

Additionally, contrary to Germany, the Permanent Representation was a member of EMCO, paying attention that the French position and the orders by the SGAE would not be jeopardized.

*This is an informal way for us to have cohesion between Paris and the representation in the EMCO. (...) That is to help our colleagues from Paris: Explaining to them the subject in order to get a more clear view when they speak to other people. (F 11)*

Since the beginning of 2004, also in *downloading* the SGAE has taken a leading role (cf. Fig. 5). While the NAP played a major role for the domestic employment policy, it was not perceived as a European plan, but as a national instrument to coordinate a coherent, national employment policy. As a consequence, an iterative coordination of the NAP was not perceived as necessary. The affected ministries' contributions have directly been compiled to a government plan by the SGAE and the Prime Minister's Office.

*We coordinate the positions and define them. (...) Thus we have the role to give coherence to all this towards the council. (...) We coordinate and it is us who have send this to the commission. It is here where the NAP is made. It is us, who have written the NAP. (...) We have coordinated all Ministries (...) We have presented the fiche to all concerned ministries, collected their remarks and we have send the commission our comments. (F 4)\**

Thus the EES in France has not only been organized according to the traditional patterns of hierarchic coordination but it has even contributed to a further step of centralizing policy making by giving the SGAE a say on domestic employment policy.

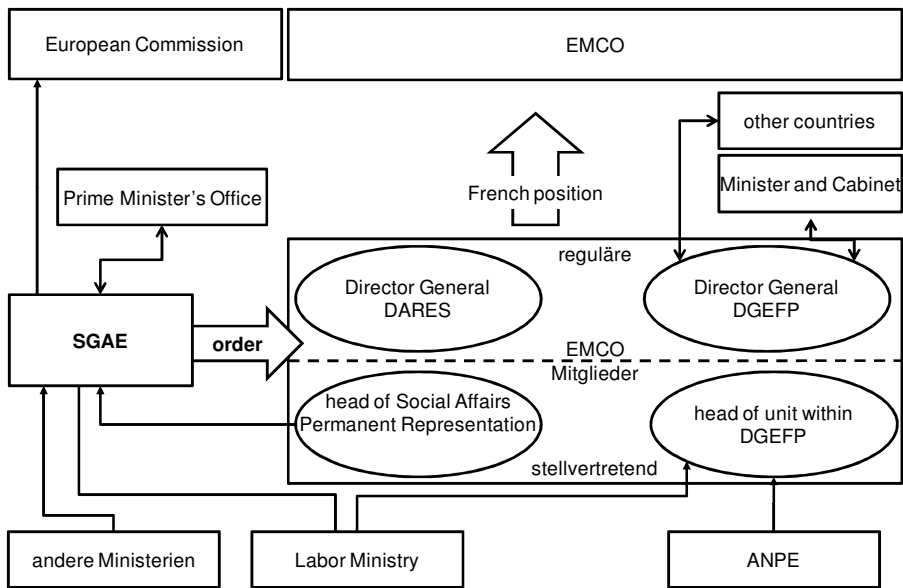


Figure 4 Uploading French Employment Policy Preferences<sup>6</sup>

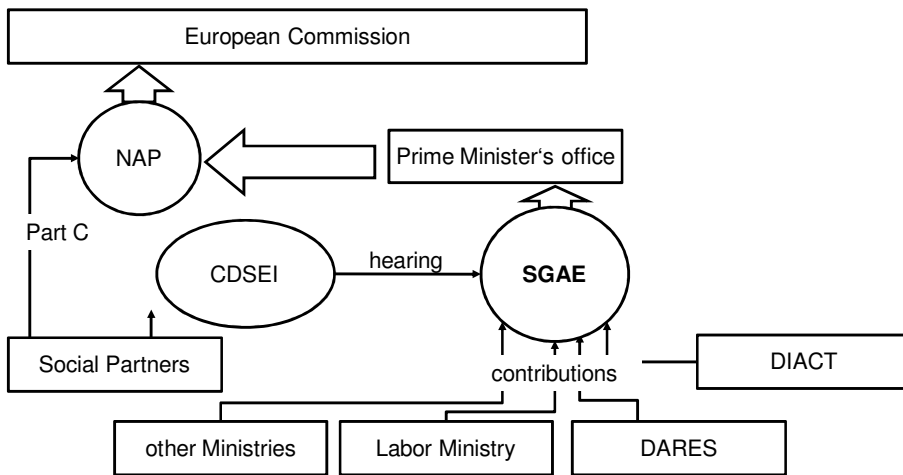


Figure 5 Downloading European Employment Policy Guidelines in France<sup>7</sup>

## Different Institutional Strategies of Institutional Entrepreneurs

We have seen that the domestic co-ordination of EES has been organized according to historically evolved, deeply institutionalized patterns in both countries, creating completely different opportunity structures. We expect that these opportunity structures favour different strategies of appropriating European resources: To what extent did institutional entrepreneurs use European resources? And which strategy did they pursue?

### Germany: Discursive Strategy by a Strong Institutional Entrepreneur

In Germany, unit IIa2 not only was a pivotal actor within EES but it also had a stake in the domestic reform process. Being in the tradition of bureaucratic policy formulation (Derlien 2000), they were actively seeking to change employment policy.

*We as policy advisors – and eventually this is what we are – we are those transporting these insights. We make the reports, we make the drafts, we propose something, at the same time we actively structure the process within the EU. (D 1)\**

Thus, unit IIa2 has used its focal position, in order to influence the reforms of domestic employment policy. By referring to European resources, this institutional entrepreneur was able to consolidate its position within the field and increasingly improve its relevance beyond the narrow confines of labour market policy.

*It has been annoying; it has almost been a running joke. At each and every situation they came up with referring to the European guidelines: ‘But Europe has said this, but Europe has said that’. Yes, this has been getting on our nerves. (D 10)\**

As a consequence of the horizontal coordination a discursive strategy of redefining the problems of employment policy has been particularly successful. This unit – being directly responsible for ‘encouraging job-take-up’ – has tried to reframe the reform agenda towards removing all institutional and individual barriers *against job-take-up*.

*We have used the guidelines in saying: this is what the EU has agreed on, this path we have to go. (D 1)\**

*There are many topics where we have used this as an amplifier, in order to show: this is what we want and this is consistent with the European Employment Strategy. (D 3)\**

Unit IIa2 therefore has not been a passive information interface but as skilled actor has influenced the institutionalization process on the European level and used these resources to influence the domestic reform process by a discursive strategy.

*At least for many parts of LMP we do – at least to a certain degree - both. (...) We are represented at the European level but we are also directly involved in domestic law*

*making procedures. And we are directly responsible for certain areas in the field labour market policy. (...) When we are involved in legislative processes, we take care that the guidelines are considered. We have been involved in all those reforms: JobAqtiv, Hartz I, II, and III, not as responsible unit but we have been closely involved. (D2)\**

Additionally, by a regulatory strategy, in horizontal coordination of the guideline process, as an unintended consequence, they started to establish an inter-ministerial field of integrated employment policy.

*We are a kind of 'hybrid' if you like. On the one hand we are those that represent German interests in the committees in Brussels, and on the other we are those transporting these guidelines into the domestic field. And we try to make them sensitive to that. (...) You have to tell your colleagues: 'look, this is important for you' (...) If a new law is on its way you have to communicate: 'look, we also need to consider the guidelines'. (D2)\**

This hybrid role has allowed the institutional entrepreneur to actively create European guidelines it could then use for influencing the domestic debate. An example that occurred in many interviews was childcare.

*Of course, while formulating the guidelines, indicators and recommendations, we try to construct them in a way that is favourable to our political needs, and could be supportive in the national context. (D6)*

The guideline on childcare was the single case, where the German delegation in the EMCO did rather frankly opt for quantitative indicators and guidelines (interviews EU1, D1). In the Hartz-IV reform this guideline has been included in the negotiations with the municipalities who are in charge of granting child-care facilities. Finally, this has resulted in an entitlement for childcare for under three year old from 2013 on.

*We have agreed that increasing female participation in employment clearly is a major challenge for Germany and that childcare is an important topic. (...) But the commission is rather critic on some things as the tax system, standard marital status reliefs (Ehegattensplitting), we say this is completely misunderstood. (D1)\**

This indicates a selective appropriation by the institutional entrepreneur. Only if he has perceived the European resources as useful for his change project did he actively use them in the domestic interactions. If he was not convinced of the reform necessity, he conceived of the European demands as 'misunderstanding'.

### **France: Programmatic Strategy and Competing Institutional Entrepreneurs**

As a consequence of the dual structure of coordination we may expect two institutional entrepreneurs in the French employment policy field. In fact, two actors – the SGAE and the DGEFP – have competed for dominance. But contrary to

Germany, the department in charge of employment policy conceived of themselves as passive executives rather than active policy advisors.

*The government makes the policy and we are in charge of applying it. (F1)*

Additionally, as European resources have not been legitimate in the domestic field, the actors could not explicitly refer to them. Have European resources been used despite these circumstances? We expect that by a programmatic strategy the DGEFP may use the EES as inspiration for domestic reforms without conceding this publicly, while the SGAE by a regulatory strategy has increased its coordinative position.

*When the government is formulating its employment policy (...) they don't tell the French: 'These measures I am applying come from the European context'. (...) In reality they use the guidelines extensively when elaborating the details of the schemes (F 12\*)*

While for the OMC/Social Inclusion France has been very successful in uploading its concepts to the European level (Preunkert and Zirra 2009), in employment policy the imperative mandate has impeded the DGEFP to successfully negotiate on the European level. On the domestic level, it was subordinate to the policy priorities of the Minister's cabinet. However, within the general policy framework the DGEFP, which is also directly in charge of the French PES, had considerable discretion for delegated legislation. Thus, in fields of direct responsibility, it could use European resources as a 'secret' source of inspiration for programmatic reforms in employment policy (interviews F1, F3, F4, F12). However, these resources have been actively appropriated and strongly re-interpreted according to pre-existing French concepts.

*There is a set of ideas in these guidelines that have been integrated in the greater axis of French employment policy: 'making work pay' or the modernization of the PES. (F4)\**

This proves a high cognitive selectivity of the domestic perception of European resources. Particularly the term 'making work pay' has been interpreted as enforcing the French way in employment policy: it has not been perceived as means to sanction unemployed but in terms of a guarantee of higher wages for people working on low-incomes.

*This more preventive policy (...) this has really (...) been influenced by the EES, which has been a guideline, which gave orientation to our reforms, particularly in terms of 'making work pay'. (F3)\**

The SGAE, in contrast, has pursued a regulatory strategy in order to increase its stake in domestic policy coordination. While traditionally responsible for coordinating international policy, by using the plans, reports and evaluations of EES it has increasingly become an actor in coordinating domestic employment policy. Hence, the NAP – coordinated by the SGAE in the prime minister's office – has



been presented as a *national* governmental plan on employment. Using statistics, benchmarks and indicators as a resource, by this regulatory strategy, the prime minister's office succeeded in strengthening its national control capacity, particularly in respect to the regions.

*The national European Funds are particularly important for the regions as they co-finance the employment policy, formation and insertion (...) while being national competences, these policies are implemented (mises en œuvre) by the regions. (...) The programs of the ESF contribute to implementing the national action plan, which identifies the general agenda of French employment policy. (F5)\**

Thus, in France, the prime minister's office has used the NAP not to report to the EU but as centralized instrument of planning in order to give coherence to French employment policy and to implement genuinely national priorities in employment policy. Eventually, this coordination may contribute to a concerted and coherent reform of French employment policy. However, only most recently there might be indications for this development – which is still strongly contested by many domestic actors.

### **Coordination Structure, Actors' Strategies and Institutional Reform**

We have expected that if the EES has affected domestic reform processes, the differences in national welfare state reforms could be explained by different strategies of appropriation. Did we find evidence for this hypothesis? In Germany, fostered by the active role of civil servants in policy formulation, the institutional entrepreneur was a unit in the labour ministry, which has been responsible for European as well as domestic employment policy. By actively referring to discursive resources of 'activation' this unit ('international labour market policy and *encouraging job-take-up*') has consolidated its relevance in the domestic reform process. Relying on a regulatory strategy, the horizontal coordination process has fostered the formation of a new interministerial field of integrated employment policy that accounts for the mutual interdependencies between employment and financial, economic, social as well as family policies. However, in the long run, this complex interministerial bargaining may prove inefficient for formulating a coherent German position in European committees as each ministry and unit pursues its own goals. In contrast, the EES has been used by the prime minister's office to increase domestic employment policy coordination's centrism in France. In actively referring to authoritative resources, the SGAE has extended its coordination role to domestic policy making. While this centralism impedes from using discursive resources, it may raise the potential of coherent reforms in the long run. In the timeframe investigated, however, a programmatic strategy of the DGEFP has been most effective. While being restricted in its discretion on the European level as well as in domestic policy making, by actively appropriating and re-interpreting programmatic resources, this actor has contributed to reforming delegated legislation in active employment policy. This made the multiple programs of job insertion more coherent and tailored to the needs of specific target groups. In both countries, however, the appropriation of

EES' recourse has been strongly selective. European resources have only become relevant if the institutional entrepreneur did perceive an advantage in using them. Furthermore, the hope connected to the EES of opening the rather close coordination structures in Continental countries cannot be supported by our findings. To the contrary, European resources have improved the position of actors who have been strong from the beginning.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have analyzed the impact of different nationally institutionalized patterns of bureaucratic coordination on Europeanization – i.e. the domestic appropriation of European resources. We have started by a puzzle of welfare state reform: While Germany and France are both considered Continental countries facing similar challenges, the institutional reforms in these countries varied considerably. In order to explain these differences we borrowed from an actor centered institutionalism. Accordingly, organizations that seek to structure their institutional environment in mutual interactions constitute an organizational field. In this practice, skilled social actors reflexively use institutions as a resource for their actions and thereby reproduce these institutions. In order to improve their relevance for future interaction – i.e. to become more relevant in the eyes of the other actors involved – they can rely on three distinct but mutually not exclusive institutional strategies.

In using this approach, we have reconstructed the national organization of EES and the role of different institutional entrepreneurs in Germany and France – two Continental countries that face similar challenges in employment policy but differ considerably in their patterns of policy coordination. We showed that the EES has provided an important resource for these skilled actors that they have used for influencing institutional reforms. However, the national organization of EES has largely reproduced or even strengthened pre-existing differences in coordination. Thus, these different institutional arrangements might contribute to explaining the variety in domestic reforms of employment policy. While this analysis does neither imply that these institutional entrepreneurs were the only actors working in favor of reforms, nor that the EES was the only resource for the actors' strategies, it became evident that in both countries the EES has contributed considerably to the path of institutional reform. But against its claims to open institutionalized patterns of coordination European resources have privileged actors that have already been in a strong position before. They provided these actors with additional resources if they would pursue goals according to EES' guidelines. By creative appropriation, concepts, world views and 'ways of doing things', that had been institutionalized on the European level, have become relevant resources for institutional reforms. However, while Europe constitutes an increasingly important factor in national policy making, it does neither automatically produce desired outcomes nor desired (or desirable) coordination structures. We may thus speak of an unintended Europeanization of domestic employment policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview citations marked by an \* have been translated by the authors.

<sup>2</sup> Before October 2005 named *Secrétariat général du Comité interministériel pour les questions de coopération économique européenne* (SCGI)

<sup>3</sup> Authors' translation of: 'Internationale Arbeitsmarktpolitik und Förderung der Beschäftigungsaufnahme'

<sup>4</sup> Charts 2 to 4 apply to the process in 2004, but in both countries for EES little has changed since then. Abbreviations: Referat internationale AMP: Referat 'international Arbeitsmarktpolitik und Förderung der Beschäftigungsaufnahme' in der Abteilung Arbeitsmarkt des Bundesministeriums für Wirtschaft und Arbeit (BMWA); Ministerium AS Brandenburg: Arbeits- und Sozialministerium des Landes Brandenburg. SGAE: Secrétariat général des affaires européenne, DARES: Direction de l'Animation de la Recherche, des Etudes et des Statistiques, DGEFP: Délégation générale de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle, ANPE: Agence nationale pour l'emploi, CDSEI: Comité du dialogue social en Europe et international, DIACT: Délégation interministérielle à l'aménagement et à la compétitivité des territoires

<sup>5</sup> See endnote 4

<sup>6</sup> See endnote 4

<sup>7</sup> See endnote 4

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