A critical assessment of the concept of europeanization in light of the state of the Union

Coman, Ramona; Crespy, Amandine

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Coman, R., & Crespy, A. (2014). A critical assessment of the concept of europeanization in light of the state of the Union. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, *14*(1), 9-28. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-445987

A Critical Assessment of the Concept of Europeanization in Light of the State of the Union

RAMONA COMAN, AMANDINE CRESPY

INTRODUCTION

As many scholars of EU integration, we belong to those who have at least once embraced Europeanization and demonstrated in a paper that our object of study – may it be an organization, an institution, a policy, an actor, a phenomenon, or a country etc – was subject to a Europeanization process. Since the late 1990s, Europeanization has become a catch-all label for investigating all kinds of transformations (allegedly) induced by the economic and political unification of the European continent. Today, we believe, the dramatic state of the Union calls for a collective effort among the scholarly community to understand how we can better account for the problems that the EU and its Member States are facing. While journalists, various observers or even ordinary citizens are speculating on the collapse of the EU, there is a need to re-examine what we mean by Europeanization and, according to a well-known phrase, how we know when we see it. This article is a first attempt to take up the debate with those who have been prominent in theorizing and driving this research agenda, those who have been inspired by it and have contributed to it, as well as those who have been more critical. Our main argument is that, after an extremely productive decade where thousands of academic articles and books on Europeanization were published, we, students of the EU, are still in search of Europeanization: the concept, the causes and the effects connected to Europeanization remain, to a large extent, dark matters.

The study of EU integration has long been driven by the question of the drivers of integration. Besides this debate, complementary research agendas have emerged. Together with multi-level governance, Europeanization has been a central concept in this respect. While the definition of Europeanization has fed a vivid academic debate[1], it is today mostly understood as the impact of EU integration

[1] Claudio M. RADAELLI, "Whiter Europeanization? Concept Stretching and Substantive Change", *European Integration Online Papers*, vol. 4, no. 8, 2000, pp. 1-28; Johan P. OLSEN,

on domestic political systems. This impact has been studied in relationship with the three fundamental dimensions of political science: the politics, policies and polities of the EU Member States and even of non-EU countries. While they made a substantial contribution to the theorization of Europeanization, scholars of politics have agreed that – although triggering processes of national institutions[2] and modifying the opportunity structures for interest groups[3] – the impact of integration on political competition in the national arenas remained modest. Findings have been more significant in the realm of public policy: numerous case studies have brought evidence of policy change as a result of the implementation and translation of EU policies[4]. Besides formal adjustment to new EU provisions, scholars have also focused on the cognitive and normative adaptation of actors and policy communities, including local and regional authorities[5]. One of the main claims here is that Europeanization has a differential impact, depending on the existing national structures and agents. The Europeanization of national polities has called for more mitigated results. On the one hand, many scholars have found only a weak Europeanization of national public spheres[6]. On the other hand, many scholars have provided accounts of the disruptive effect of EU integration on national democracies, especially as far as „simple" polities are concerned[7] and the re-composition of centre-periphery relationships in recomposed multi-level governance in Europe[8].

"The Many Faces of Europeanization", *ARENA Working Paper*, 2002; Robert LADRECH, "Europeanization and Political Parties: Towards a Framework for Analysis", *Party Politics*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2002, pp. 389-403; Thomas POGUNTKE, Nicolas AYLOTT, Robert LADRECH, Kurt R. LUTHER, "The Europeanization of National Party Organizations: A Conceptual Analysis", *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 46, no. 6, 2007, pp. 747-771.

2 Yves MENY, Pierre MULLER, Jean-Louis QUERMONNE, *Adjusting to Europe: the Impact of the European Union on National Unstitutions and Policies*, Routledge, London, 1996.

3 Rosa S. SALGADO, Cornelia WOLL, *L'Europe en action: l'européanisation dans une perspective compareé*, l'Harmattan, Paris, 2007; Richard BALME, Didier CHABANET, *European Governance and Democracy. Power and Protest in the EU*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2008.

4 James CAPORASO, Maria G. COWLES, Thomas RISSE, *Transforming Europe. Europeanization and Domestic Change*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2001; Bruno PALIER, Yves SUREL, *L'Europe en action. L'européanisation dans une perspective comparée*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2007.

5 Romain PASQUIER, "*Cognitive Europeanization* and the Territorial Effects of Multilevel Policy Transfer: Local Development in French and Spanish Regions", *Regional & Federal Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2005, pp. 295-310.

6 Ruud KOOPMANS, Paul STATHAM, *The Making of a European Public Sphere: Media Discourse and Political Contention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010.

7 Vivienne A. SCHMIDT, *Democracy in Europe. The EU and National Polities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 2006.

8 Beate KOHLER-KOCH, Rainer EISING, Hans HERMAN, Jan W. VAN DETH, *The Transformation of Governance in the European Union*, Routledge, London, 1999.

While it has brought an impressive sum of knowledge about political processes in the EU, the literature on Europeanization also displays a number of problems and contradictions which fall under two related aspects. The first is the tension between Europeanization as a broad research agenda and Europeanization as a concept. For sure, the pioneers of Europeanization were soon aware that Europeanization "is not captured by, nor does it fully constitute, any single explanatory term"[9]. However, the numerous scholars inspired by Europeanization have mostly understood it as middle-range explanatory theory, relying on EU integration as an independent variable and, hence, have sought to "trace specific domestic changes to developments emanating from the policy-making output and/or decision-making style of the European Union"[10]. The second contradiction is related to the connection between Europeanization and the EU. While most scholars acknowledge that the political transformations under way in Europe cannot be solely accounted for by the constraints created by the institutional framework of the EU alone, only a very small number of them have engaged with explanatory factors unrelated to the former. The consequence of those two methodological problems is a hiatus between, on the one hand, the desire to explain a process of deep (structural) transformation, and, on the other, a focus on mechanisms and agents that turn out not to be conducive to such an impact.

Our objective here is neither to provide for a state of the art of Europeanization research nor to deny the relevance of what has been accomplished by Europeanization scholars. Rather, it is to provide a critical and reflexive assessment of this research. We are aware that many of the arguments put forward here are not completely new and some have been addressed by scholars of Europeanization themselves[11]. Those reflexive remarks or mitigated results scattered in the literature have nevertheless failed to trigger a broad reflexive debate concerning the unsolved problems related to the Europeanization approach. Such a reflection shall not remain *in abstracto* or simply for the sake of feeding epistemological discussions. These issues are important because they have influenced the way scholars have interpreted and conveyed "out there", i.e assessments of EU integration in the real world of political actors and decision-makers. In this respect, we will examine the consequences of methodological biases in two areas that are paramount for what we call the current state of the Union, namely democracy and economic

---

9 Kevin FEATHERSTONE, Claudio RADAELLI, *The Politics of Europeanization*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 333.

10 Robert LADRECH, *Europeanization and National Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010, p. 2.

11 Paolo GRAZIANO, Maarten P. VINK (eds.), *Europeanization. New Research Agendas*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008; Claudio M. RADAELLI, Theofanis EXADAKTYLOS, "Research Design in European Studies: The Case of Europeanization", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2011, pp. 507-530.

integration. The first and second section of this paper deal with the problems related to Europeanization as a concept (section 1) and as a causal explanation (section 2). Section 3 explains how some methodological biases have arguably led to the over-estimation of the effects of Europeanization. For doing so, we address two main issues at stake in the EU today; namely the democratization and socio-economic reforms in Southern Europe.

IN SEARCH OF A CONCEPT: UROPEANIZATION INSIDE AND OUTSIDE EU STUDIES

An Old Concept: The Historical Dimension of Europeanization

Europeanization is an old trans-disciplinary concept. Its origins can be found far beyond the recent scholarship on EU integration. Analyzing its genesis in a historical sociological perspective, it appears that Europeanization "is not a new phenomenon that can be bracketed in the present"[12]. Trying to better capture the evolution of its meaning, scope and content, different stages of Europeanization have been identified in a historical perspective: a period of European self-realization (which ends in 1450), a period of proto Europeanization (1450-1700), a period of incipit Europeanization (1700-1919), the period of contemporary (inward) Europeanization (1919 to present) and a period of contemporary (outward) Europeanization (starting with 1945). Comparing them, Flockhart argues that each stage of Europeanization is characterized by "different ideational structures, agents, processes and diffusion patterns"[13]. The reality depicted by each stage is certainly not the same because the political and social reality to which they refer is substantially different. Meanwhile, Europeanization has always been understood as variety of political, social, economic and cultural processes of transformation. A careful examination of the old definitions attributed to the concept leads to the conclusion that the term has kept its original meaning over time, regardless of the emergence and development of the political regime of the EU. Europeanization is "an ongoing process across time and space, which has changed over time in response to different structural conditions and changing agent identities"[14].

[12] Trine FLOCKHART, "Europeanization and Eu-ization? The transfer of European Norms across Time and Space", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2010, p. 788.
[13] *Ibidem.*
[14] *Ibidem*, p. 793.

Inward and Outward Looking

Initially, Europeanization referred to an outward-facing process:

> "For a long time, the term was primarily used with regard to non-European spaces, to conceptualize the Europeanization of the world, mainly as part of the European processes of expansion which took place from the early modern period onward"[15].

This outward dimension of Europeanization corresponds to the Enlightenment when the West, considered as superior in terms of values and developments, fascinated intellectuals and political elites from the periphery of the continent. They borrowed the Western state political system, administrative and organizational practices, institutional and constitutional forms of political development. In Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the 19th century, Europeanization designated the political will to catch up with the economically well-developed West[16]. In the first part of the 20th century, "Europeanization" or "Westernization" denoted „the political, social, economic and intellectual transformation"[17] under the influence of industrialized societies.

In recent years, Europeanization has been conceptualized as an inward process but the difference between the inward and outward Europeanization is thin. For example, the definition provided by Kohn in 1937 concerning the Europeanization of the Orient is not totally different from the well-known and extensively used definition of Europeanization provided by Radaelli. According to Kohn:

> "The process of transformation, to which the term Europeanization refers, consists of the adoption and adaptation of forms of life and production which were first developed among the intellectual classes and the rising bourgeoisie in certain western European countries"[18].

Even if the recent understanding of Europeanization is no longer limited to the forms of life and production, the similitude with the current meaning of the term is obvious. For Radaelli, Europeanization is seen as a

> "processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared

---

15 Ulrike VON HIRSCHHAUSEN, Kiran K. PATEL, "Europeanization in History: An Introduction", Martin CONWAY, Kiran K. PATEL (eds.), *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century. Historical Approaches*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010, p. 5.

16 Keith HITCHINS, "Formă şi fond: intelectualii români faţă cu Europa. 1860-1949", in Ramona COMAN, A.M. DOBRE (eds.), *România şi integrarea europeană*, Romanian transl. by Sorina-Raluca Bobu, Anca-Gabriela Alexa, Institutul European, Iaşi, 2005, pp. 59-95.

17 Hans KOHN, "The Europeanization of the Orient", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 2, 1937, p. 259.

18 *Ibidem.*

> beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies"[19].

If the previous definition refers to a diffuse source of change, the third part of the paper will show that the emergence of the EU's political regime does not mean that we are in the presence of a homogenous driver of change in content and scope. Inward or outward looking, the definitions of Europeanization share a number of similarities: a) they both designate a process; b) imply different degrees of change; c) Europeanization is not uniform; d) it is not unidirectional; e) has no fixed geographical boundaries; f) is not just about Europe because Europeanization never occurs in isolation.

Transdisciplinary and Common Ontological Grounds

Europeanization has the advantage of bringing together scholars from different disciplines with a common interest in this process of change. Historians, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists share *bottom up* and *top down* approaches. Anthropologists look at "everyday experiences in interaction with the EU", "the EU interaction with local communities", "wine growers and the EU", "the Iberian fisher-man and EU policy" or the "appropriation of EU symbolism"[20]. Historians have extensively studied the impact of European integration on the nation State[21] and focused on the social construction of the EU[22]. Sociologists are more concerned with the diffusion of norms and ideas from below and from above in relation with policy making in the EU. They pay particular attention to the "broader societal processes" that might lie behind the EU impact in national contexts[23]. This heterogeneity does not alter the ontological statements on which they are based. What these literatures have in common is the attempt to offer macro explanations about the impact of the EU on its Member States (and beyond) on the basis of micro and meso analyses. They reveal the mechanisms that give rise to the patterns to be

---

19 Claudio M. RADAELLI, "Whiter Europeanization?...cit.", p. 4.

20 John BORNEMAN, Nick FOWLER, "Europeanization", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 26, 1997, p. 498.

21 Alan S. MILWARD, George BRENNAN, Frederico ROMERO, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, University of California Press, Berkley & Los Angeles, 1992.

22 Nicolas VERSCHUEREN, « Réactions syndicales aux premières heures de l'intégration européenne", in Amandine CRESPY, Mathieu PETITHOMME (eds.), *L'Europe sous tensions. Appropriation et contestation de l'intégration européenne*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2009, pp. 197-208.

23 Adrian FAVELL, Virginie GUIRAUDON, "The Sociology of the European Union: An Agenda", *European Union Politics*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2009, p. 552.

explained and the variation in time and space. One problem, however, seems to be that studies on Europeanization have so far tended to reproduce the complexity of empirical reality, rather than provide tools to simplify and explain it. Europeanization as a concept still has little heuristic value for categorizing, modeling and explaining the complex and intertwined processes of transformation at play in Europe and beyond.

IN SEARCH OF A CAUSE: RESEARCH DESIGNS AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The Top-down Model: EU Integration as an Independent Variable

Following some pioneering studies, Börzel and Risse put forward a three-step model that became quite prominent in the Europeanization literature. According to this framework, Europeanization results from: a) a necessary gap (or "misfit") between domestic arrangements and models promoted by the EU, thus resulting in adaptational pressure[24]; b) facilitating actors in the national arenas who see themselves empowered by the new opportunity structure provided by the EU and/or are engaged in a process of socialization and learning; c) their mediation leads to an impact on national political processes, that can be conceived as absorption, accommodation or transformation[25]. The following paragraphs explain that non-benign problems arise at each of these three steps.

Fit or Misfit: Does it Really Matter?

The original argument about the "goodness of fit" claims that adaptation depends on the fit between European provisions and the national institutional arrangements: the more similar the policy models, the higher the compliance, the faster the implementation[26]. This hypothesis was nevertheless criticized on

[24] Tanja BÖRZEL, Thomas RISSE, "When Europe Hits Home: Europeanization and Domestic Change", *European Integration online Papers*, vol. 4, no. 15, 2000, pp. 1-24.
[25] *Ibidem.*
[26] Christopher KNILL, Andrea LENSCHOW, "Coping with Europe: the Impact of British and German Administrations on the Implementation of EU Environmental Policy", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1998, pp. 595-614.

empirical grounds[27]. Considering a larger number of variables, Börzel and Risse hypothesized that a misfit can be overcome by adaptational pressure from above, such as infringement proceedings, or from below, in the form of domestic mobilization[28]. Therefore, they practically reversed the argument while claiming that an important misfit was likely to result in a large degree of change. Today, these two understandings of the argument co-exist in the literature. Even in its most sophisticated forms, the goodness-of-fit argument displays little empirical robustness, as a review of the literature testing this hypothesis demonstrates[29]. More recent works about the impact of EU integration on national Parliaments, for example, show that the existence of a fit or misfit does not determine the extent and the nature of change in the legislative-executive relations[30]. There are therefore strong doubts as to: a) whether the existence of a misfit is a necessary condition and thus a predictor for change, b) whether a strong misfit is more likely to impede or fuel change, c) whether it is a relevant starting point for the analysis. In any case, in fact it seems that it is domestic actors' preferences that are decisive.

We see further – methodology-related – reasons to wonder about the heuristic usefulness of the "goodness of fit". Firstly, the existence of a misfit between the models prescribed by the EU and domestic policies becomes increasingly problematic over the course of integration, and thus less and less relevant as an analytical tool. Since most policy areas are today no longer untouched by integration, the misfit is becoming confused with the outcome of implementation, as it appears in recent textbooks on EU integration[31]. Secondly, and consequently, the question to be considered is ontological. What is the "reality" to be observed in order to determine the degree of fit and misfit? If the misfit constitutes the point of departure in this theoretical model, then the methodological aspects of this concept should be carefully considered in order to avoid tautology. The gap between the national and the European level could be "measured" in different ways. It is not so much problematic when scholars

[27] Markus HAVERLAND, "National Adaptation to European Integration: the Importance of Institutional Veto Points", *Journal of Public Policy*, vol. 20, no. 1, 200, pp. 83-103.

[28] Tanja BÖRZEL, Thomas RISSE, "When Europe Hits Home… cit.", p. 3.

[29] Ellen MASTENBROEK, Michael KEADING, "Europeanization Beyond the Goodness of Fit: Domestic Politics in the Forefront", *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2006, pp. 331-354.

[30] Tanja BÖRZEL, Carina SPRUNGK, "The Goodness of Fit and the Democratic Deficit in Europe", A Review of Vivien A. Schmidt: Democracy in Europe. The EU and National Polities, *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2009, pp. 364-373; Emiliano GROSSMAN, Nicolas SAUGER, „Political Institutions under Stress? Assessing the Impact of European Integration on French Political Institutions", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 14, no. 7, 2007, pp. 1117-1134.

[31] Frédéric MERAND, Julien WEISBEIN, *Introduction à l'Union européenne*, De Boeck, Brussels, 2011, p. 139.

generate and use their own indicators (for example infringement procedures, delay in transpositions etc.) for evaluation. However, the evaluation reports produced by the European Commission – and international organizations such as the World Bank or the OECD – are used by numerous scholars, for example in connection with Eastern enlargement (see section 3). Here the political nature of these reports leads to question the reliability of data. From a scientific point of view, neither the "official acknowledgement of success in transformation"[32] nor the distinction made by international organizations between "laggard" and "front runner" countries can be taken for granted. Thirdly, the fit and misfit are, to a certain extent, socially and politically constructed, as the need for change is not only perceived among European decision-makers. Policy problems identified by the European Commission are often influenced by strategic usages of Europe by domestic political and social actors. A careful investigation of what is considered as a European source of change or an adaptational pressure can therefore be the result of the *interaction* between European, international, and domestic actors and take the form of the institutionalization at the EU level of specific domestic claims. These methodological remarks lead to the conclusion that the goodness of fit should be an object of investigation rather than the point of departure of a scientific analysis.

How to Measure to Impact of the EU?

Once the "black box" of the domestic arenas has been opened in order to detect the mediating factors related to domestic agents, the last step in the top-down Europeanization framework consists of assessing the impact of EU integration on domestic structures and arrangements. The outcome of policy change has mainly been conceptualized as inertia, absorption, accommodation, and transformation. However, as Radaelli and Pasquier recently argued, "what one researcher may classify as 'adaptation' may look like 'transformation' to another"[33]. While it is possible to establish a set of indicators to assess the degree of change, too few researchers spell them out explicitly. Here again, serious methodological issues arise as to how to measure the outcome. In this respect, one well-known criticism is that it has excessively focused on – if not overestimated – the impact of the European variable in contrast with, on the one hand, endogenous drivers of change within the domestic political realms[34] and

[32] Robert LADRECH, *Europeanization*… cit., p. 39.

[33] Claudio M. RADAELLI, Romain PASQUIER, "Conceptual Issues", in Paolo GRAZIANO, Maarten P. VINK (eds.), *Europeanization. New Research* Agendas, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008, p. 40.

[34] Cornelia WOLL, Sophie JACQUOT, *Les usages de l'Europe: acteurs et transformations européennes*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2004.

the impact of globalization, on the other[35]. Few scholars have actually sought to disentangle the "net effects" of EU integration[36]; most likely due to the important methodological challenges involved. As Saurugger suggested[37], a more rigorous measure of Europeanization would require, for example, a) the systematic use of comparison in order to isolate the factors of change involved with the domestic contexts, and b) the incorporation into research designs of control variables in order to determine whether the transformations in actors' behavior assigned to Europeanization can also be observed outside the realm of EU politics. This implies a certain amount of data triangulation because some primary as well as secondary sources may be misleadingly geared towards the EU. When one looks at the Europeanization of collective action, for example, a number of case-studies based on qualitative data such as interviews with NGOs, union representatives and MePs, press material etc. revealed how transnational dynamics and networks can be activated in the multi-level realm of the EU[38]. However, as pointed out by Favell and Guiraudon[39], large scale quantitative studies are also needed to understand the overall weak level of Europeanization of collective action. In a nutshell, the top down model of Europeanization entails crucial methodological challenges. While some – but actually only very few – scholars have attempted to address these challenges, many have turned to alternative and more complex accounts Europeanization.

The Interactive Model: Feed-back Loop and Circular Causality

As students of Europeanization have consistently claimed, domestic actors' preferences could not be derived from changing opportunity structures and the response to adaptational pressures was neither passive, nor automatic. This led a number of scholars to question the top-down nature of Europeanization and to develop interactive theoretical accounts[40]. In this perspective, Europeanization is the result of constant interactions between the

[35] Martin RHODES, "Globalization and West European Welfare States: a Critical Review of Recent Debates", *Journal of European Social Policy*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1996, pp. 305-327.

[36] David LEVI-FAUR, "On the 'Net Policy Impact' of the European Union Policy Process: The EU's Telecoms and Electricity Industries in Comparative Perspective", *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2004, pp. 3-29.

[37] Sabine SAURUGGER, "Europeanization as a Methodological Challenge: The Case of Interest Groups", *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2005, pp. 291-312.

[38] Amandine CRESPY, « Qui a peur de Bolkestein? Résistances, conflit et démocratie dans l'Union européenne", Economica, Paris, 2012.

[39] Adrian FAVELL, Virginie GUIRAUDON, *The Sociology of the European Union*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011, p. 137.

[40] Bruno PALIER, Yves SUREL, *L'Europe en action...* cit.

national and the European level, or even of horizontal diffusion processes where the EU as such is not necessarily involved[41]. These theoretical developments have featured a so-called "normalization" of European studies, i.e the incorporation of concepts and theories from comparative politics, public policy and sociology. One claim is that Europeanization is the result of policy feedback[42]. This entails that EU policies not only impact domestic policies, but once established, they also alter resources and preferences among domestic actors, and feed back into further shaping of EU policy[43]. Another claim has been made by sociology-driven scholars who have depicted Europeanization in terms of strategic usages of Europe by domestic actors[44].

The focus on micro-sociological processes and agency, mostly through in-depth case studies, led to a complexification of research designs rooted in theoretical eclecticism. Sociological concepts have often been combined with the central tenets of neo-institutionalism or constructivism and one could even argue that the focus on domestic actors' preferences and politics was at the core of Ernst Haas' neo-functional account of early integration. This development stemmed from the view that Europeanization research had to "consider multiple feedback loops and complex causal relations"[45] Instead of going from the EU to the domestic arenas, the causal arrows multiplied and were placed in all directions. This research became even less understandable in the language of dependant and independent variables. Rather it relied on analytical and sociologically informed narrative accounts of the multiple and complex interactions among the relevant social and political actors as well as between them and European actors.

Some methodological dangers arise here too, as it becomes even more difficult to break the loop of circular causality and strike the balance in the trade-off between proximity to empirical reality and the explanatory power of an argument. It also became even more difficult to understand what was specific to the EU: if Europeanization is merely a policy transfer, diffusion or emulation that can also take place on a horizontal basis or in countries that are not members of the EU (such as Switzerland or Norway), what remains of the

---

41 Bastien IRONDELLE, "Europeanization without the European Union? French Military Reforms 1991-96", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2003, pp. 208-226; Pauline RAVINET, "La coordination européenne 'à la bolognaise'", *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2011, p. 23.

42 Paul PIERSON, "When Effect Becomes Cause: Policy Feedback and Political Change", *World Politics*, vol. 45, no. 4, 1993, pp. 595-628.

43 Tanja BÖRZEL, "Shaping and Taking EU Policies: Member State Responses to Europeanization", *Queen's Papers on Europeanization*, vol. 2, 2003, pp. 1-15.

44 Cornelia WOLL, Sophie JACQUOT, *Les usages de l'Europe*… cit.

45 Claudio M. RADAELLI, Sabine SAURUGGER, "The Europeanization of Public Policies: Introduction", *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2008, pp. 213-219.

impact of the EU itself? As Exadaktylos and Radaelli (2009) have found out in their quantitative review of the Europeanization literature, research designs today are dominated by rich sets of variables and complex causality versus parsimony.

Again, it seems that scholars have tended to reproduce the complexity of the phenomenon under study, instead of capturing it in their research design. This way of using the methodological pluralism was a kind of *bricolage*, in which both the reader and the researcher must "avoid the danger of being overwhelmed by a large number of concepts and variables and losing the possibility of discovering controlled relationships"[46].

The following section explains that these issues are crucial not only from a methodological point of view; they matter with respect to our empirical assessment of the reality of European integration.

IN SEARCH OF EFFECTS: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM THE STATE OF UNION

The puzzling and gloomy state of the Union today comes as a brutal affront the theoretical debate about Europeanization. In order to support and illustrate the issues addressed above, the following section focuses on how Europeanization has been used as a concept and as a framework to explain and understand the outcomes of democratization in the new Member States of the EU and the economic integration in Southern Europe. Those two examples offer two paramount and contrasted areas for development of the EU; they also offer contrasted areas for the assessment of Europeanization, as economic integration can be considered as relying on more objective interests and data. Our analysis shows that, in both cases, methodological biases led to an over-estimation of Europeanization. Our argument is that if scholars respond to shortcomings or anomalies by simply relabeling them rather than providing an explanation, our understanding of Europeanization will always be partial.

Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe

The former candidate countries represented a promising empirical field to test the hypotheses of Europeanization. First, according to many, the adoption

[46] Arend LIJPHART, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method", *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 65, no. 3, 1971, pp. 682-693.

of EU rules implied "the most massive international rule transfer in recent history"[47]. Second, the external incentives set by the EU were reinforced by the asymmetry of power between the EU and the CEECs[48], which hypothetically creates strong convergence toward EU policy models. Third, applying the Europeanization conceptual framework to the former communist countries strengthens the assumption according to which „the degree of adaptational pressure generated by Europeanization depends on the 'fit' and 'misfit' between European institutions and domestic structures"[49]. In the same vein, Brusis argued that

> "the lack of consolidated institutions may facilitate the incorporation of EU rules because the given formal institutional arrangements are not embedded in a social and cultural infrastructure and are therefore more amenable to institutional engineering"[50].

We witnessed a surge of promising scholarship covering a wide area of topics, including actors and their field of action, public policies and institutional reforms. Approaching the process of change in the post-communist context in terms of Europeanization became not only fashionable but also a *prêt à porter* conceptualization, supposedly enabling researchers to understand and explain how the EU effects structures and its impact on agencies. One open question still remains: To what extent has the EU been decisive for shifts in the choice of these institutional policies?

EU conditionality is the main mechanism explaining adaptation and compliance[51]. Adaptation is enacted because it contributes to the overall stability and functioning of the EU. Therefore, the literature on Europeanization applied to Central and Eastern Europe corresponds to a functional analysis. Conceived in this way, it supposedly explains the phenomenon in terms of its beneficial effects for both the political regime of the EU and the continuation of

---

47 Frank SCHIMMELFENNIG, Ulrich SEDELMEIER, "Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2004, pp. 661-679.

48 Ana E. JUNCOS, "Europeanization by Decree? The Case of Police Reform in Bosnia", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2011, p. 372.

49 James CAPORASO, Maria G. COWLES, Thomas RISSE, *Transforming Europe*… cit.

50 Martin BRUSIS, "European Union Enlargement and the Europeanization of Eastern Europe: Research Puzzles and Policy Issues", Zdenka MANSFELDOVA, Vera SPARSCHUH, Agnieszka WENNINGER (eds.), *Patterns of Europeanization in Central and Eastern Europe*, Kramer, Hamburg, 2005, p. 24.

51 Heather GRABBE, "How does Europeanization Affect CEE Governance? Conditionality, Diffusion and Diversity", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 8, no. 6, 2001, pp. 1013-1031; Geoffrey PRIDHAM, "Assessing Democratic Consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe: The European Dimension", *Acta Politica*, vol. 41, 2006, pp. 342-369; Bernard STEUNENBERG, Antoaneta DIMITROVA, "Compliance in the EU Enlargement Process: the Limits of Conditionality", *European Integration online Papers*, vol. 11, 2004, pp. 1-22.

the modernization/adaptation process at the domestic level. As in any functional analysis, scholars of Europeanization identified a few mechanisms to show how the needs of the EU system influence domestic structures and agencies. The ultimate aim of these studies was to provide a macro explanation of transformation based on an analysis at the level of individual activity, which reveals the mechanisms that give rise to the pattern to be explained.

Once we begin looking for such mechanisms, we observe that they include norms, incentives, rhetoric, rules, blaming and shaming tools, financial suport, monitoring – all of which received ample attention in the literature[52] – and they revealed the complexity of the puzzle for empirically minded scholars. Considering conditionality as an independent variable, stable and emanating from the top, led to overestimating the impact of the EU in CEECs. Scholars showed that conditionality is neither something emanating from the top[53], nor "a clear-cut independent or intervening variable and does not fit narrowly positivist framework"[54]. What was considered as a "European source of change" was, in reality, the result of the *interaction* between European, (international) and domestic actors or the institutionalization at the EU level of specific domestic claims. Therefore, the usage of conditionality as mechanisms calls for examining how it is framed. Conditionality is, like Europeanization, a process in itself[55].

Treating conditionality as a uniform variable is highly problematic[56]. In any field related to political criteria and democratization, the common feature of EU conditionality is the lack of models around which to converge. Regional policy and administrative and judicial reforms – pillars of the State and of the rule of law – are hard cases for "conditionality doubters". Certainly, the EU offered an "important legitimizing force for 'selling' these reforms to the CEECs' electorate"[57]; but, despite its insistence on the speed of transformation, the choice of tools through which the conditions are to be achieved remained very much in the hands of domestic political elites. The absence of an EU

---

52 Heather GRABBE, "European Union Conditionality and the Acquis Communautaire", *International Political Science Review*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2002, pp. 249-268.

53 Ramona COMAN, *Réformer la justice dans un pays post-communiste. Le cas de la Roumanie*, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, 2009.

54 James HUGHES, Gwendolyne SASSE, Claire GORDON, "Conditionality and Compliance in the EU's Eastward Enlargement: Regional Policy and the Reform of Sub-national Government", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2004, pp. 523-551.

55 James HUGHES, Gwendolyne SASSE, Claire GORDON, "Enlargement and Regionalization: the Europeanization of Local and Regional Governance in CEE States", Helen WALLACE (ed.), *Interlocking Dimensions of European Integration*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2001, pp. 145-178.

56 Rachel A. EPSTEIN, "The Paradoxes of Enlargement", *European Political Research*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2005, p. 388.

57 Dimitris PAPADIMITRIOU, David PHINNEMORE, "Europeanization, Conditionality and Domestic Change: The Twinning Exercise and Administrative Reform in Romania", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2004, p. 662.

model in these fields is a reflection of the strength of national traditions across the old EU Member States[58]. As Goetz pointed out:

> "The differential impact of European integration on the administrative arrangements of current member states has more to do with the relative weakness of European integration as an independent source of domestic institutional change than with the strength of national administrative cores or traditions"[59].

In these cases, the EU could be an intervening variable but, according to Goetz, it "explains little on its own". The Europeanization hypothesis is correct in maintaining that the EU "opened up a critical juncture for reform"[60]. Conditionality explains the timing and the integration of the EU dimension in domestic politics. However, what lies behind the formal compliance deserves better attention.

Several authors pointed out that the institutions of the former candidate countries had been affected by the EU accession process. According to Ladrech[61], "the impact of the EU on the domestic politics and institutions of the post-communist states has been profound". It has been argued that the enlargement process strengthened the executives in their relation to parliament sand empowered judicial institutions[62]. However, there is no weight of empirical evidence to support these assumptions. Recent works promote a more cautious approach with regard to the power of the EU to change polity in the former communist countries[63]. In recent years some scholars took a more skeptical view on this matter. Certainly, the EU conditionality proved to be effective when the EU coerced the countries reluctant to compliance with the threat of exclusion (Slovakia under Meciar), postponing accession (Romania and Bulgaria), or cutting financial support (Bulgaria). The European Commission sanctioned inertia and rewarded any form of absorption and accommodation. These examples show the primacy of material incentives in producing rapid formal outcomes and undermine constructivist claims about the power of norms and socialization.

---

58 *Ibidem*, p. 623.

59 Klaus H. GOETZ, "Making Sense of Post-communist Central Administration: Modernization, Europeanization or Latinization?", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 8, no. 6, 2001, p. 1040.

60 Conor O'DWYER, "Reforming Regional Governance in East Central Europe: Europeanization or Domestic Politics as usual", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2006, p. 222.

61 Robert LADRECH, *Europeanization*... cit., p. 109.

62 *Ibidem.*

63 James HUGHES, Gwendolyne SASSE, Claire GORDON, *Europeanization and Regionalization in the EU's Enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe: The Myth of Conditionality*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2004.

Europeanization and Socio-economic Reform in Southern Europe

Until those countries were hit by the crisis, the Europeanization of Southern Europe and their integration into the Eurozone was one of the success stories of EU integration. Many scholars have insisted that Europeanization led to more diversity than convergence and that Southern Europe was still facing country-specific challenges in order to cope with the European Monetary Union (EMU). However, roughly considered, the prevailing narrative was one of modernization of the Southern periphery[64]. Although the limits of Europeanization have been increasingly pointed out[65], the accumulation of literature on Europeanization tended to emphasize the transformations at stake: scholars spoke of a "new Italy"[66], of the latest "Spanish miracle"[67] or, in the case of Greece, of "suitable accommodation"[68]. And in fact, in some specific policy areas – such as environment or social policy – scholars found some empirical grounds for claiming that "there is no Southern problem"[69] and that "the South" was slowly adjusting to EU policy patterns[70]. In fact, the scattered findings in the literature are often mitigated or even contradictory. Today, scholars, decision-makers and public opinions alike are faced with the brutal reality of the failure of Europeanization of socio-economic policies in the southern members. How can we explain that, generally speaking, the stress on Europeanization has obscured the resistances to it?

Part of the answer, we believe, lies in methodological aspects in the Europeanization literature identified in the previous sections of this paper: conceptual fuzziness, a strong focus on mechanisms and difficulties to measure outcomes. It has been too quickly assumed that the mere existence of

---

64 Kevin FEATHERSTONE, Georgios A. KAZAMIAS, *Europeanization and the Southern Periphery*, Routledge, New York, 2001, p. 2.

65 Kevin FEATHERSTONE, Dimitris PAPADIMITRIOU, *The Limits of Europeanization: Reform Capacity and Policy Conflict in Greece*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008.

66 Marco GIULIANI, "Europeanization and Italy: A Bottom-Up Process?", *South European Society Politics*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2000, pp. 47-72.

67 Gonzalo CABARELLO, "The Institutional Foundations of the Spanish Economic Miracle, 1950-2000. A New Institutionalist Approach", *Warwick Research Euro-workshop*, University of Warwick, 8-19 July, 2002, pp. 20-40.

68 Kevin FEATHERSTONE, "Greece and EMU: a Suitable Accommodation?", in Kenneth DYSON (ed.), *The Euro at 10: Europeanization, Power, and Convergence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, pp. 165-181.

69 Tanja BÖRZEL, "Why There Is No 'Southern Problem'. On Environmental Leaders and Laggards in the European Union", *Journal of European public policy*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2000, p. 141.

70 Steen MANGEN, "The 'Europeanization' of Spanish Social Policy", *Social Policy & Administration*, vol. 30, no. 4, 1996, pp. 305-323.

mechanisms lead to deep transformation. In this perspective, a lot of research has been devoted not only to formal mechanisms but also to informal and cognitive mechanisms of Europeanization. What seems to remain, however, is that large sections of domestic socio-economic as well as normative structures have proved resilient to Europeanization. While, as we will see below, some traces of such an assessment can be found in the literature, this needs to be investigated more in depth.

First of all, we explained that various understandings of Europeanization coexisted in the literature, which can be roughly divided into two types: a broad definition, featuring a deep process of change related to the social and cultural transformation in a core Europe and its diffusion towards an even larger territory; and a narrow definition, depicting the impact of EU policies on the national states. This is not benign in the sense that the two do not necessarily require an investigation of the same explanatory variables. However, it has been consistently assumed that Europeanization, as an outcome, "represents a process of major structural transformation"[71] and that it called for identification of the "structural impact of the EU"[72] Hence, the causal relationship between the independent variable – the EU – and the outcome – structural transformation – is already embedded in the concept of Europeanization itself and more assumed rather than investigated.

These problems have been reinforced by a focus of the causal mechanisms at stake. While identifying mechanisms (rather than variables) is not problematic as such, these mechanisms did not allow for the identification of a) what the relationship between EU policy and domestic agencies were and b) whether the impact of such mechanisms was structural (or deep) and c) whether a structural impact should be seen in agents' behavior or in institutional and policy arrangements, or both. One central hypothesis is that outcomes are highly dependent on the existence of the "commitment devices" available for the EU to impose policies upon countries where the misfit is considered to be important: the more coercive the instruments, the greater the impact of the EU, not least because the availability of strong constraints allows domestic actors to elaborate more efficient strategies and gather reform coalitions susceptible to overcoming veto players[73]. But it is not clear whether this can be qualified as structural change. In the Greek case, agents' behavior constitutes a structural impediment to reform:

> "Institutional roles are undermined by structural deficiencies, cultural norms, and conflict of interests [...] An embedded culture of clientelism pervades the state's

[71] Kevin FEATHERSTONE, Georgios A. KAZAMIAS, *Europeanization and the Southern Periphery*, Routledge, New York, 2001, p. 3.
[72] *Ibidem*, p. 10.
[73] Kevin FEATHERSTONE, "Greece and EMU… cit.".

> relationship with wider society, exchanging favors and interests and undermining liberal values of the separation of institutional roles and values"[74].

In contrast, in the Italian case, Europeanization is often depicted as a bottom up process in which domestic reformers were able to take advantage of an opportunity window, for example, to push for the reform of the pension system[75]. And overall, it has "affected the internal arena by changing the attitudes of domestic policy actors rather than by imposing reforms on the political structures"[76].

Where coercive mechanisms were not directly available to the EU and domestic reformers, cognitive and normative adaptation or learning were supposed to lead to Europeanization. In the realm of social policy, for instance, a "catch up scenario" was found in Greece and Spain, notably through the open method of coordination[77]. Economic reform in Italy within the framework of EMU has been connected to the diffusion of the sound finance paradigm among Italian elites[78]. Legitimizing ideas and discourses about joining EMU played a major role in Europeanization. But here again, it is not clear to what extent these ideas have been institutionalized and whether learning has led to deep changes. As Featherstone and Papadimitriou state:

> "The role of the state in the economy, the scope of the welfare state, and the functions of social policy and education diverge across member states for historical reasons. Europeanization has produced no convergence on those fundamental issues"[79].

The main explanation here is that "most, if not all, the southern periphery states were 'importing' the policy paradigm against the background of isolated indigenous support for its key principles"[80]. One can therefore wonder whether we should not recast diversity as an outcome of Europeanization into diverse structures as a main impediment to Europeanization. One of the most enlightening studies concerning the impact of EMU on the national arenas conducted by Dyson and his associates in 2008 re-directs the attention towards fundamental variables such as material factors (size and openness of economies,

---

74 *Ibidem*, pp. 200-201.

75 David NATALI, "Europeanization, Policy Arenas, and Creative Opportunism: The Politics of Welfare State Reforms in Italy", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 11, no. 6, 2004, pp. 1077-1095.

76 Marco GIULIANI, "Europeanization and Italy… cit.".

77 Anna M. GUILLEN, Bruno PALIER, "Introduction: Does Europe Matter? Accession to EU and Social Policy Developments in Recent and New Member States", *Journal of European Social Policy*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2004, pp. 203-210.

78 Claudio M. RADAELLI, "Discourse and Institutional Change: the Case of Italy in the Euro-Zone", *Queen's Papers on Europeanisation*, vol. 5, 2000, pp. 1-27.

79 Kevin FEATHERSTONE, "Greece and EMU… cit.", p. 337.

80 Kevin FEATHERSTONE, Georgios A. KAZAMIAS, *Europeanization*… cit., p. 12.

endogenous capacity of firms), time (date of entry, path dependencies) and political cultures[81]. Talking about the future of the Euro area, they formulated the strikingly premonitory conclusion that "much depends on whether exogenous shocks and leadership failures expose the stronger or the weaker parts of its economic and social foundations"[82].

CONCLUSION

Over the past 15 years, students of the EU have found that Europeanization was everywhere, even where there was no hard law or specific policy models at stake, and even where the EU itself was not involved. The starting point of this article was the provocative claim that, in spite of the accumulation of a spectacular amount of literature, we are still in search of Europeanization. We believe that the current state of the Union, calls for a re-examination of the transformation processes under study. Our main argument is that a number of methodological issues, especially with regard to Europeanization as a concept and Europeanization as a causal explanation, have led to misleading assessments of the impact of the alleged impact of European integration on national policies, politics and politics. This argument was illustrated with problems and contradictions emerging from the literature on democratization in Central and Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and economic integration in Southern Europe, on the other. The purpose of this article is neither to provide a new recipe for the analysis of Europeanization, nor to advocate a specific methodological or theoretical approach against others. Rather, our reflections lead us to a number of conclusions which could feed a reflexive debate among the scholarly community as to how to deal with the puzzles that arise in the current state of the Union in order to avoid an overestimation of the role played by the EU. These are:

1. Europeanization, as a concept can be best understood as a process of deep transformation in Europe. This is in contradiction to a narrow understanding of Europeanization focused on the EU as the main independent or explanatory variable. While this is one of the many dilemmas that scholars have to face, the implicit co-existence of these two understandings of Europeanization in research designs has led to a hiatus between the explanatory variable and the impact: either deep

[81] Kenneth DYSON (ed.), *The Euro at 10: Europeanization, Convergence and Power*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, p. 413.
[82] *Ibidem.*

transformation was at stake but could not be attributable to the EU, or the EU was found to have a limited impact.

2. In this respect, one of the problems is that the span of time considered in our studies on Europeanization is too short. Most of the contributions are in general based on recent developments at the EU and domestic level. The attempt to explain and understand is simultaneous to the phenomenon observed. What is challenging is not only the interaction between actors and the feedback effects, but also the difficulty to distinguish between the phenomenon and its context. The impact of EU policies should therefore be more systematically put into diachronic perspectives.
3. A further problem is that studies focused on the EU have identified causal mechanisms of formal and informal change that, most of the time, did not lead to any deep (or structural) impact. In the realm of socio-economic reform in southern Europe, for example, the mediation of paradigms guiding EU policies and the corresponding policy arrangements themselves have only been assimilated superficially; while the economic, political and ideational structures proved to be highly resilient.
4. Therefore, we conclude that Europeanization, as a result of EU integration, is mainly functional: it is a strategic, selective, and temporary answer in a given moment to a given need. For example, regarding democratization in Central and Eastern Europe, judicial reforms are a tool in order to ensure the effectiveness of the internal market. Regional policies are also functional in the sense that they are required in order to implement the structural funds. Similarly, socio-economic reform in Southern Europe could be only prompted in the run-up of accession to the Eurozone and came to a stalemate afterwards.

As all these issues are involved in the current crisis, in the political responses and policy recipes formulated and enforced by European and domestic elites to tackle the current crisis of the Eurozone, the Europeanization agenda should still have a long life.