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Beyond Europeanization? Mainstreaming European Studies

What puzzles Europeanization?

Ramona Coman, professor assistant in Political Science, Université libre de Bruxelles
Ramona.Coman@ulb.ac.be

Introduction

It will be a truism to say that the literature on Europeanization developed in a spectacular way during recent decades. Many authors compared this field with a “cottage industry”. The expression has been reproduced to highlight the success of this concept in political science, sociology, European studies, IR, Comparative Politics and even in anthropology and history. The expansion of this scholarship is certainly due to its (apparent) novelty and fashionable character, but also to the fact that it poses a couple of questions “important in the real world”, to paraphrase King, Keohane and Verba (1994: 15). This widespread enthusiasm reflects nowadays the collective effort to better understand how European integration influences politics, policies and polities of old/new Member States, accession and potential candidate countries and even beyond. The popularity of the concept is related to the attempts to elucidate very complex phenomena, meaning the effects of EU integration.

In the development of this scholarship, several stages could be identified. The initial debate focused on the conceptual definition of Europeanization and the elaboration of a theoretical understanding of the impact of the EU and the ways it “hits home” (Borzel & Risse, 2000). These first series of contributions gave rise to an increasing number of empirical studies aiming at finding evidence in favour (not opposed) to the hypotheses associated to the concept. The accumulation of empirical studies contributed to the sophistication of the initial conceptual framework, enriched with assumptions and methodological tools inspired by the existing theories in political science. Combining classical theories with Europeanization allowed researchers to add new hypotheses and to operationalize them. The concept travelled all over the world. It has been borrowed by specialists on transitions and democratic consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe in order to consider the international dimension of democratization. It has been used to assess how the European Union affects (the non) Member States and how it plays the role of a “soft power” at the international level. This growing scholarship led to new attempts to, on the one hand, recast the research agenda on Europeanization in order to address unquestioned assumptions and, on the other hand, to try to improve the theoretical reflection on the usefulness and the limits of the concept (Graziano & Vink 2008).

In spite of this valuable literature, we still do not know what the boundaries of the concept and its ontological features are. Because of the eclecticism of recent academic achievements in this field, it is difficult to construct a descriptive overview of what do we know about Europeanization in empirical and in theoretical terms. Even if the body of literature includes hundreds of case studies and comparisons, there is still a need for a theoretically informed generalisation. Stated differently, it would be useful to be able to distinguish between general

knowledge on Europeanization and particular facts. Bennett and Elman refer to the special contribution of researchers who “are deeply engaged both with theory and with close analysis of cases, giving them an unusual capacity to see the general in the particular” (Bennett and Elman, 2007: 178). The need for an overview is necessary for another reason. Empirical confirmation of a set of hypotheses is not enough in itself. Empirical research is supposed to support the theoretical and conceptual improvement. The academic dialogue on Europeanization rarely considers what has been done and transforms it into new ideas, recasts concepts and improves the theoretical framework on which this scholarship is based. The academic community working on Europeanization is mainly divided between those who conceptualize it and those who try to confirm the assumptions related to the concept. Stated differently, the empirical conclusions of scholars of Europeanization are rarely used to think in terms of “puzzle” and to generate new hypotheses. In addition, the theoretical debate is still dominated by the initial seminal contributions on Europeanization, disseminated through the *European Research Papers Archive*. “Almost all the contributors feel obliged to discuss it all again, but they then settle for what-in most cases-is an interesting and informed account of their subject that owes nothing to the preceding theoretical discussion” (Keating, 2004: 482). Even if each scholarship has its strengths, they are never put together in order to improve the existing theoretical debates. “The difficulty lies in pulling it all together” (Keating, 2004: 481).

The paper intends to contribute to this current theoretical debate. Certainly, this endeavour is not completely new. It is difficult to “make a contribution” in this field, since the number of studies increased and the attempts to propose “new” research agenda flourished. In recent years, different authors engaged in this theoretical and methodological debate.

Based on recent papers and collective books devoted to the concept of Europeanization, the paper addresses a less original but maybe necessary research question: What is “new” in the “new” research agenda on Europeanization on which the current scholarship is flourishing? Taking into account the increasing number of valuable contributions devoted to this topic, the question is what puzzles Europeanization in 2011? To answer these two questions the paper reviews empirical researches and a couple of recent theoretical contributions (Ladrech, 2010). The main argument of this paper is that thinking in terms of puzzles is one possible approach to theory development. In this line, Europeanization could be thought in two ways: as a phenomenon which can be explained with the classical theoretical and methodological tools in political science and European studies or as a phenomenon which needs a proper grammar.

The article is divided into four main parts. Conceived as a state of the art, it explores the background of this scholarship and points out the part of the “new” and the remaining intellectual dilemma. The first part will show that Europeanization is not only an old concept, but also a transdisciplinary one. The second part highlights what is “new” in the new research agenda on Europeanization and how this scholarship moved from *causality* to a more *comprehensive approach*. Each research design is briefly described in order to show how it changed. In this part, it is argued that thinking in terms of puzzle is one possible approach to theory development. To conclude, the third section deals with some methodological aspects and how to assess Europeanization.

1. Europeanization: an old and transdisciplinary concept

When it comes to ask “where did this research agenda come from?” (Vink, Graziano, 2008: 3), various authors (Caporaso, 2008) relate the success of this concept to the need to

distinguish between European integration and its effects at different levels. However, Europeanization is **an old transdisciplinary concept**. Its origins could be found far beyond the scholarship on EU integration. Analysing the usage of Europeanization in a *longue durée* perspective, we discover that its actual meanings are similar to the definitions it received several decades ago. Comparing contributions on Europeanization produced in the first part of the 20th century and the definitions devoted recently in political science and European studies, it appears that Europeanization is an old concept which has always been understood as a process implying transformation, adaptation of adoption and which always had strong social and political implications.

In spite of its recent popularity in relation to the impact of European integration on the politics, policies and polities of EU and non EU Member States, one should mention that the word had been used one century ago with reference to the modernization process and the influence of the West on countries located at the periphery of the continent and beyond. For historians, the debate about “Europeanization” in which political scientists recently engaged, is not new at all. They devoted particular attention to the periodization and considered the historical context in which the term has been used by intellectual and political elites. At the end of the 19th century, Europeanization designated the political will to catch up with the economically well developed West (Hitchins, 2005). In Asia and northern Africa, in the first part of the 20th century, “Europeanization” or “Westernization” denoted “the political, social, economic and intellectual transformation” (Kohn, 1937: 259) under the influence of industrialized societies. “While sometimes the diffusion of European models occurred through coercive mechanisms such as colonization, it has also taken the form of imitation and voluntaristic borrowing” (Ulusoy, 2009: 364). Within this scholarship, Europeanization has been understood as the spread of forms of life and production, habits of drinking and eating, religion, language, and political principles, institutions and identities typical for Europe and unknown in the rest of the world beyond European territory. If at the end of the eighteenth century, the development of “Europeanism” in different parts of the world was associated with the values of “progress, liberty and freedom”, nowadays a similar research agenda focuses on the normative power of the European Union at the domestic and international level. The term is still related to “exporting beyond European territory forms of political organization and governance that are typical and distinct for Europe” (Olsen, 2002: 924).

For example, the definition of Europeanization 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. Kohn used the concept to speak about “*the process of transformation, to which the term 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*”. 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 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*” (Radaelli, 2000: 4). Even if the recent understanding of Europeanization is no longer limited to the “forms of life and production, the similitude is obvious. What these two definitions do they have in common? Europeanization is conceived as a process, implying transformation, adoption and adaptation, as well as a top down perspective. This brief comparison of the uses of Europeanization in different political and geographical contexts allow saying that the term kept over the time its original meaning.

The assumption formulated by Kohn several decades ago, according to which “the forms of adaptation vary from country to country” as well as the list of explanatory factors he advanced, reminds to the reader the recent debates on Europeanization between the most prominent contributors concerning the “facilitating factors” and “veto players”. In his attempt to conceptualize the Europeanization of the Orient, Kohn notes that “*Much in the tempo of the process depends upon the government: it is fastest where national governments promote it; it is slowest where colonial governments try to impede its development*” (Kohn, 1937: 261). Now and then, Europeanization conceived as a process depends on the *bonne volonté* of a very divergent set of national, provincial and local agencies (Schmidt, 1996: 35).

The concept of Europeanization still has normative **social and political implications**. “The relatively positive spectre of an Americanization of Europe and the negative spectre of a Sovietization of Europe are being replaced by the anxiety of a Europeanization” (Borneman & Fowler, 1997: 488) or the deception caused by the slow process of adaptation to Europe. Its usage and development in political science and other disciplines is strongly correlated with the historical, political and cultural “zeitgeist”. From the very beginning, the concept has had a strong euro-centric (i.e. the political, social and cultural European model performs better and it is “naturally” superior) as well as a top-down connotation (i.e. the process of adaptation is “naturally” a center-periphery one).

Initially, Europeanization referred to an outward-facing process. The "rebirth" of the concept since the early '90, however, was based on completely different assumptions, mainly because the historical context and the international role of European countries have radically changed. If the previous research agenda developed by historians focused on the Europeanization beyond Europe, at the beginning of the '90, political scientists look at the process of change within EU, resulting from the dynamics and interaction between the Western European countries. The perspective has been reversed and Europeanization became also an inward-facing process. These developments confirm, on the one hand, that Europeanization studies deal with issues "important in the real world" and, on the other hand, that its own meaning depends on changes in this “real worlds”. Therefore, what distinguishes the recent literature concerning Europeanization from other similar processes (including globalization) is the aim to “trace specific domestic changes to developments emanating from the policy-making output and/or decision-making style of the European Union” (Ladrech, 2010: 2).

2. Dealing with research designs: from causality to comprehensiveness

In political science, initially, scholars referred to Europeanization to denote the “transfer of sovereignty to the EU level” (Lawson, 1999), “the emergence and development at the EU level of distinct structures of governance” (M. Green Cowles, J. Caporaso, T. Risse: 2001, p.3) and the “institution-building at the EU level”. Because of the confusion with the concept of “integration”, they tried to make a distinction between the two processes. A clear line of division has been established between “European integration”, understood as the “the delegation of policy competencies to the supranational level to achieve particular policy outcomes” and “the establishment of a new set of political institutions, with executive, legislative and judicial powers” (Hix & Goetz, 2001: 3) and Europeanization, defined as the “effect” (Hix & Goetz, 2001: 21) or the “responses by actors to the impact of the European integration” (Ladrech, 2001: 1).

Therefore, the initial debate in European studies focused on definitions and the elaboration of a theoretical framework, including explanatory factors and methodological advice in order to explain how and when Europeanization occurs at different levels and in different contexts.

The term was applied in different ways to describe a variety of phenomena and processes of change (Olsen, 2002: 921). The first series of definitions offer “different conceptions of Europeanization” which “complement, rather than exclude, each other” (Olsen, 2002: 923). By presenting the EU as a source of change, by including in his definition both hard and soft elements of Europeanization and by mapping a plurality of domains potentially affected by this process, Radaelli and his collaborators narrowed the boundaries of the term and determined the path of the first generation of studies. Defining Europeanization was not an easy task: “it was extremely difficult to find models, mechanisms and explicit (sic) explanations” (Radaelli, 2003: 332).

Meanwhile, all these elements put together in a “conceptual framework” gave rise to an increasing number of empirical studies supporting rather than falsifying the hypotheses associated with the concept. The EU became the main explanatory factor which creates considerable incentives (Borzel & Risse, 2000:17) and “constitutes an opportunity structures” (Borzel & Risse, 2000: 19) for domestic politics, policies and politics. The EU as a source of change became the main independent variable. The dependent variable had had to be found at the domestic level.

On this basis, a “three-step model” has been conceptualized including a specific grammar to explain Europeanization: the goodness of fit, the mediating institutions and the impact (conceptualized in different terms) at the domestic level (Borzel & Risse, 2000; Caporaso, 2008). The empirical research based on this first research design allowed disclosing only one part of the immersed iceberg and to reveal a couple of shortcomings which are briefly synthesised in the following paragraphs. The application of this first model unveiled a couple of difficulties in the operationalization of the independent variables and in establishing the stages of the process.

First, empirical research has shown that Europeanization is not always (not only) a “passive” adjustment of European pressures. What happens at the domestic level was presented as following a clear European path, while “situations” that act as pressure for policy change are not perceived as “problems” only at the European level. Several empirical contributions demonstrated that the domestic level could be also an incentive for EU development (Palier, Sural 2008). It appeared that Europeanization is not only vertical. Europeanization demands explanation of what goes on inside the process, not a simple black-box in which one correlates the input ‘EU independent variable’ to the output ‘domestic impact’ (Radaelli, 2004). Even its promoters argued later that this model is too tainted by a top-down perspective and by a too linear path.

Let us consider one example to illustrate the need to better understand the nature of what is believed in this three-step model to be an independent variable. The number of works confirming the impact of EU conditionality on the politics and policies of the new member States occupies a major place within the scholarship on Europeanization. Conditionality has been conceptualised as a mechanism of Europeanization and a source of change. However, few scholars focused on how conditionality is defined at the EU level. For most of them, EU conditionality is something emanating from the top. But a careful investigation of what is considered as a “European source of change” is or could be, in reality, the result of the

interaction between European, (international) and domestic actors or the institutionalisation at the EU level of specific domestic claims. As Ladrech pointed, the problem is that “domestic actors, ranging from interest groups to national executives, may have had a role to play in influencing the very EU legislation that is to be transposed into national law” (Ladrech, 2010: 22). Consequently, trying to better understand how Europe hits home, scholars of Europeanization opened two black boxes: one at the domestic level and another one at the EU level. The second condition of Europeanization enunciated by Borzel is related to the presence, at the domestic level of some facilitator factors, actors or institutions, to respond to the pressures of adaptation deriving from the policy-making at the EU level. Examining this second condition allowed researchers to open the “black boxes” of the domestic policies and politics and to improve, indirectly, the knowledge on the functioning of ministries, public administrations, agencies. The empirical conclusions enable to understand the nature and the role of a variety of actors involved in these processes. In this respect, the literature on Europeanization shares with neo-functionalists and liberal intergovernmentalism the interest for the uses of Europe and the formation of the national/domestic preferences. The emphasis on the role of actors offers a comprehensive understanding of the integration process, since Europeanization means also interaction between the actors. Opening the black boxes and accounting for how States, actors, policies...react/adapt to European pressures led to a multifaceted analysis.

Second, similar methodological problems followed from the application of the concept of “goodness of fit” and “misfit” (Risse, Green Cowles and Caporaso, 2001; Borzel and Risse, 2000) that is seen as the first condition of Europeanization. The question is: who defines how big is the gap between the EU level and the phenomenon under investigation at the domestic level? Is it the researcher, on the basis of its own analysis? Or the researcher considers “fit” and “misfit” on the basis of the evaluation made by the European Commission and other international actors? When it comes to analyse the “misfit” in terms of EU implementation and transposition or with regard to policy and institutional “misfit”, it could be measured on the basis of clear indicators. But when it comes to analyse “fit” and “misfit” in relation with European standards and principles, the difficulty is greater because of lack of standards and reliable data.

Why assessing the degree of “fit” or “misfit” is important in this debate? First, “fit” and “misfit” are used as criteria in selecting the cases to be considered. When research designs are built on the evaluations made by international actors (including the European Commission) and the cases selected on this basis, researchers assign roles as “front runners” or “laggards” of some countries compared to other. But, the second reason is that, according to the policy fields, “fit” and “misfit” could be socially and politically constructed. What does it mean? It means that the “gap” between the EU and the domestic situation could be based on subjective evaluations made by a variety of domestic or European actors with the aim to support the adaptation to Europe or to prevent it. Therefore, fit and misfit – the first condition of Europeanization - could be a topic of inquiry in itself. Again, if we take the example of conditionality and the Regular Reports produced by the European Commission on the efforts made by the candidate countries, it is important to keep in mind that the institution collects information from a variety of domestic actors (Coman, 2009). My argument here is to say that this “official acknowledgement of success in transformation” (Ladrech, 2010: 39) cannot be taken for granted. The limits of this approach have been emphasised in some specific policy fields such as the reforms of judicial institutions in new and old EU Member States.

Last but not least, the Europeanization research agenda aimed from the very beginning at assessing the “impact” and to explain variation across countries, policy fields, institutions. Here again, as Radaelli and Pasquier argued, “what one researcher may classify as “adaptation” may look like “transformation” to another” (2008: 40). The problem is not only the lack of conceptual clarification, but also a problem of triangulation of data, a point which is developed in the next section.

Third, the “three-step” model is still dominant within the literature on Europeanization. In recent works, their promoters and other empirically oriented researchers highlighted its implications on the empirical test. Empirically oriented researchers discovered that each variable could affect directly or indirectly all other variables. The EU as a source of change is a moving target, difficult to isolate as independent variable. This is to say that within this model “everything is endogenous – nothing exogenous” (Caporaso, 2008: 33). This idea is confirmed in other works which show that in the Europeanization process the causality is circular (Coman, 2009). It is more difficult to capture the reality to be observed in terms of dependent and independent variables, since national and European are in a constant interaction. In addition, what happens at the domestic level has consequences at the European one. What is supposed to produce an effect at the domestic level could affect the European *explanans* considered as independent variable in the analysis. Therefore, the question is not only how Europe hits home, but also how the *iterative process* between domestic and European level impacts on the politics, policies and polity of the European Union? How the “horizontal” Europeanization affects the supranational construction? What is the impact of the domestic change on the functioning of institutions, actors and policies at the EU level? Just to give an example: to what extent the enlargement policy and the mechanisms of Europeanization empowered the European Commission in its relationship with the European Parliament and the Council?

The “orthodox” way of doing research in a causal model (as proposed by the first research design on Europeanization) implies the existence of exogenous variables, not of a variety of independent variables influenced by the dependent variable (because of the constant interaction between the domestic and European level). The methodological problem faced within the three-step model is that the dependent variable influences the variables considered as independent. The consequence is therefore a lack of clarity in analytical terms and results. Therefore, the question is how to avoid overestimating the impact of the EU in domestic politics and to clearly distinguish between *explanans* and *explanandum*. It is not only about considering alternative variables (such as globalization) in order to control other causes and effects of integration (Favell and Guiraudon, 2009: 559), but about how to control the independent variable given that the EU is a moving target and the result of the interaction between actors. A consensus has grown around the need to understand Europeanization as a “two-way relationship” (Bache, 2007: 11).

Hence, this first model has been reviewed, but not amended.

The empirical conclusion of this first generation of studies led to the development of new propositions for further inquiry. A second generation of contributions tried recently to distinguish between the direct and indirect effects of the EU as a source of change; they also emphasise the “feedback effects” and conceptualise Europeanization as an “interactive process, rather than a mechanism of uni-directional reaction to Europe” (Jacquot and Wall, 2004; Palier and Surel, 2008; Coman, 2009; Crespy & Petithomme, 2009; Saurugger, 2009). This careful reconsideration of the first research design led to the elaboration of a second one which takes a different perspective. Instead of starting from the assumption that EU is an

incentive for the phenomenon under investigation, it starts from “actors, problems, resources, policy style and discourses at the domestic level” (Radaelli and Pasquier, 2008: 41). This model is influenced by the *process tracing analysis* and the understanding of Europeanization as an iterative process. In my view, the difference between the two models lie in the fact that the first one focuses on causality, while the second one is more *comprehensive*.

The research agenda on Europeanization moved from causality to a comprehensive (re)conceptualization. The two ways to consider the impact of the EU are useful and complement each other. The interest for explaining causality allowed political scientists to distinguish their works from other contributions produced in other disciplines.

However, in spite of the opportunity offered by the accumulation of knowledge on this matter, most of these attempts to “renew” or to “improve” both the research agenda and the conceptual framework suffer of **eclecticism**. The reader who carefully followed this debate over the two last decades would agree that the part of “new” is still inferior to what it is already known. “*The proliferation of variables, concepts, models, metaphors, and descriptive devices (...) leave the reader exhausted but unsure whether he or she really knows anything more*” (Keating, 2003: 482). In a context in which in political science the methodological pluralism and eclectic research designs are encouraged, the literature on Europeanization followed this trend. Many of the problems faced in operationalizing Europeanization have been solved by putting together a variety of theoretical assumptions and methodological assumptions. **The more (sophisticated) the better**. The widespread interest for the concept as well as the desire of every researcher to “make a contribution” (in the sense of King, Keohane and Verba) led to the *sophistication* of the initial conceptual framework. Since the *methodological pluralism* and *eclectic approaches* seem to be the solution to solve complex intellectual dilemmas, the initial framework on Europeanization has been enriched with assumptions and methodological tools inspired/borrowed by/from the existing theories in political science. Combining classical theories (neo-institutionalist, constructivist...) with Europeanization allowed researchers to consider new hypotheses or to operationalize postulates related to Europeanization. However, without a methodological rigour and because of the overestimation of the EU impact, it is difficult to replicate them. Confirmation comes from repeatable manipulation of data under controlled conditions. Otherwise, Europeanization will become freedom of research where everything goes. To paraphrase Lakatos, if scholars respond to shortcomings or anomalies by simply relabeling them rather than providing an explanation, the new version of the concept or theory will not be a real improvement (Bennett and Elman, 2007: 178).

The risk of conceptual stretching is, however, very high. The researcher is facing a twofold dilemma: the more the Europeanization studies overcome the top-down or bottom-up approach, the more this scholarship is likely to overlap the studies on European integration (and its theories) losing, therefore, its specificity. At the same time, scholars of Europeanization are bounded to adapt their definitions and analytical frameworks to the increasing complexity resulting from the combination of the top-down and bottom-up processes. This trade-off is therefore crucial for the meaning and implications of the concept.

The concept of Europeanization is thus a "living concept" (Buller and Gamble 2002), which evolves and changes over time. Europeanization is a process, not an “end-state” (Goetz, 2001). The question still remains: what Europeanization is and what is not?

Therefore, what is new in the research agenda is to see Europeanization as *iteration* and as a *top down up* process. After a decade of assiduous research, new attempts have been made to recast the research agenda on Europeanization, to address unquestioned assumptions and to try to improve the theoretical reflection on the usefulness and the limits of the concept. This recent debate in political science about Europeanization as iteration is not new when we look at other contributions in other disciplines. Historians have traditionally defined the terms Europeanization for talking about *the making of Europe*. A similar research agenda emerged in anthropology. “To the extent that anthropologists do not restrict study to national stereotypes and their legacies”, they are “situated between historians and political scientists, concerned with the *making of Europe* in *interaction* with the EU” (Borneman & Fowler, 1997: 497). There is a common ground between researchers investigating Europeanization in different fields. Political scientists use historical, sociological or anthropological tools, but their interest is limited to the need to find methodological or theoretical support in order to fill the gaps in our disciplinary ways of questioning Europeanization. However, the research agenda of historians, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists is not so different. They 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” (Borneman & Fowler, 1997: 498). Historians have extensively studied the impact of European integration on the nation State (Milward, Brennan & Romero, 1992) or focused on the social construction of the EU and the impact of the creation of the first Community on the social policies of the six Member States (Verschuere, 2009). Sociologists are more concerned with the diffusion of norms and ideas from below and from above in relation with the policy making of/in the EU. They pay particular attention to the “broader societal processes” that might lie behind EU impact in national contexts (Favell & Guiraudon, 2009: 552).

What these apparently different research agenda could bring to the literature in political science? They certainly could enrich our ways of elaborating puzzles since they offer plenty of historically informed contributions on the invisible part of the iceberg. To quote Dina Zinnes, who explains the difficulty to think in theoretical terms and to elaborate puzzles in international relations, “we do not use these pieces of information” and we do not see our research problems “as problems in fitting the pieces together” (1980: 316).

A couple of dilemmas or open questions still remain:

First, what is specific to “Europeanization? If Europeanization opens two black boxes, what distinguish Europeanization from European integration theories as the neo functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism? Second, if Europeanization could be understood and explained with classical tools provided by the discipline, do we need a special grammar? The proliferation of pluralistic and eclectic theoretical frameworks in recent years seems to confirm that Europeanization as a phenomenon can be explained and understood with the classical methodological and theoretical tools in political science?

Second, if causality in understanding Europeanization is no longer the primary aim and since political scientists need historical, sociological and anthropological tools to explain it, what is our contribution and how political scientists can improve the knowledge on Europeanization? If theorization makes the difference between disciplines, to what extent political scientists reached this aim?

3. Dealing with data and methodology

In spite of its importance in a research, the sections devoted to methodology, data collection and analysis are in general lacking in the scholarship on Europeanization. Only recently Haverland (2008) but also Radaelli and Exadaktylos (2009) have explicitly addressed this aspect. There are however some regularities in approaching Europeanization.

On the one hand, qualitative case study method is dominant. Case study methods present considerable advantages in studying complex phenomena (Yin, 2003; Lijphart, 1971; Elman, 2006; Mahoney and Goertz, 2006). Case study – as a method - is generally suitable when the research is oriented by the familiar series of questions: how, why, where, what, who (Yin, 2003: 5). This method is in general preferred in examining *contemporary events* (Yin, 2003: 7) or when the researcher has little control on the phenomenon under study. One important reason why qualitative methods have been important in Europeanization research is that such a compound outcome (Schmidt, 2005) involves interaction effects among many structural and agent-based variables across multiple levels of analysis. The initial research designs on Europeanization focused on questions (how, why, when...) which are proper to the case study method (Haverland, 2008). The form of the question always provides a clue regarding the research strategy to be used (Yin, 2003: 7). Therefore, these questions oriented the way Europeanization has been approached. The focus on contemporary/ongoing events and the extent of control a researcher has over the outcome and the variables (Yin, 2003: 5) lead in general to qualitative case study methods. The advantage is that intensive study of one or a few cases, allow for the development of more closely focused concepts (Bennett and Elman, 2007: 178). But to what extent the accumulation of cases studies allowed a conceptual improvement is still a topic of vivid debate. Conversely, quantitative methods guarantee a better control of variables, the possibility of increasing the number of observations in order to have valid and reliable results and, above all, they are more suited to the competitive test of different theories. Explaining the variation in responses to EU influence implies to elaborate comparative frameworks, including several cases.

On the other hand, the major shortcoming is the lack of triangulation of data. Scholars carefully examined reports, documents produced at the European and domestic level, met actors and interviewed them, used archives, surveys, domestic legislation, parliamentary debates, participatory observation... In spite of the classical methodological rigour promoted by the canons of the discipline, there is little concern about *triangulation*. And for this reason, the empirical evidence is often contested (Olsen, 2002: 922). In some specific fields, to the same research question using different kinds of data and without triangulation authors provided opposed conclusions. The role of the EU appears to be overestimated because of the predominance of documents and data emanating from the EU institutions. The lack of triangulation combined with a dose of subjectivity in assessing the degree of “adaptation” or “transformation” or the “fit” and “misfit” increased complexity of the empirical validation. Not less important, the empirical studies on Europeanization focused on **ongoing** phenomena, which means that the outcome to be explained was not totally happened at the time the research was done. What is also surprising in the elaboration of the research design is that “Europeanization” is never wrong (in the sense that the initial theoretical assumptions are not confirmed). If Europeanization is a **process** characterized by the interaction (be it vertical or horizontal) between domestic and European actors, which take place within the political regime of the EU as a result of its soft and hard mechanisms of regulation, then, Europeanization (understood as a process leading at different degrees of change, inertia or retrenchment) could be observed everywhere. There is no possibility of falsification.

There is no doubt that social sciences are doomed to inexactness. But even if the aim is not to produce well confirmed “laws” about Europeanization, a serious reflection should be engaged about the specificity of Europeanization and about the meaning of the term. Even if Europeanization is a concept rather than a theory, it would be interesting to evaluate the conceptual frameworks to which it gave rise on the basis of a well established list of criteria.

According to Ben Rosamond, evaluation implies to look at how well the concepts are developed, how rigorous the authors are in “*their quest to explain and how they follow good practice in theory building*” (2000: 190). Europeanization is a process captured in the definition of a concept. It is, like European integration, a phenomenon to be explained. Therefore, the current scholarship provides us insightful empirical evidence in order to understand it. *Europeanization is a phenomenon in search for a theory*. The existing conceptual frameworks proposed by academics contain, like theories, several specific and causal hypotheses inspired by the classical theories of the discipline: the 4 branches of the neo-institutionalism, the constructivist approaches. They have been used together, every author using the “methodological pluralism” as the solution to understand such a compound outcome like Europeanization. This “venue shopping” stimulated the originality in elaborating sophisticated research designs, but it was also a comfortable way to rapidly provide an answer to the research questions addressed. Researchers forgot the classical methodological advice which is to try to *explain as much as possible with as little as possible* (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994: 8) and to use assumptions *capable of generating as many observable implications as possible*. 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” (Lijphart, 1971: 690). As Lijphart stated, “scanning all variables is not the same as including all the variables”. Drawing up an inventory of the possible theoretical explanation for a compounded process or outcome like Europeanization does not necessarily mean to include all of them in the research design. Testing different explanatory factors and (indirectly) the explanatory power of different theories could be appreciable in terms of ambition and originality, but in a way disappointing in terms of concrete results. One thing is to consider alternative explanations and another is to constitute a patchwork. The pluralist theoretical frameworks have been elaborated in such a way to validate the initial assumptions, never putting the theory at risk of being falsified (meaning producing a reproducible result that is in conflict with it). In the research on Europeanization we rarely see that the original hypothesis is weakened and that the author suggests a modified theoretical assumption that may be stronger.

Conclusion

There is always an ample room for continuing improvements in any field of political science.

To summarize, in the first research design Europeanization is about policy compliance and how politics, policies and polities are reshaped at the domestic level under the influence of the EU. The prime concern is establishing the causality link. In the second research design, which follows from empirical inquiries, Europeanization is conceived as an interactive relationship (horizontal and/or vertical) between actors. The policy output of this interaction could affect (at different moments) both domestic and European structures and agencies.

The conclusion of this paper offers two ways of looking at this topic.

The first one is to see Europeanization as an empirical inquiry for which no specific grammar is needed since the existing tools in political science allow researchers to explain and understand it. In this line, Europeanization would be a challenging contemporary phenomenon whose boundaries are not clearly evident. 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. In this sense, Europeanization is a bridge between classical theories of EU integration, such as neo functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism. The concept captures both the *top down* and *bottom up* dimension in reshaping domestic and European politics. Europeanization could be therefore approached with the classical theoretical and methodological tools offered by the discipline. A starting point in puzzling Europeanization would be to ask “what processes are understood as Europeanization” (Blumer, 2008: 47). The methodological issues are then solved by the ability of the researcher to find the good tools and to know how to use them. The contributions of these works would be twofold: one the one hand, it will be an improvement of our empirical knowledge on how domestic and European actors interact and reshape national and/or European politics, policies and polities; on the other hand, the theoretical challenge will be to approach the dynamics between European and domestic politics with classical tools existing in political science (as Bartolini suggested).

The second one is to see Europeanization as a concept accompanied by a specific set of assumptions and a proper vocabulary. If Europeanization is conceived in this way, then there is still an ample room for theoretical improvement. This theoretical improvement should follow from the accumulation of empirical knowledge. According to Palier and Surel, approaching Europeanization as a process implies to develop analytical tools adapted to the dynamic adjustments induced by the EU integration (2008: 42). In this case, what is needed is to narrow its focus and to be able to distinguish between general and particular facts. For this second approach, the solution would be to reconsider carefully both the theoretical and methodological problems and to try to think Europeanization in terms of *puzzles*. Thinking in terms of puzzle is one possible approach to theory development (Zinnes, 1980: 315). Puzzlement means thinking in process terms which is coherent with the understanding of Europeanization. What are the pieces of a potential puzzle on Europeanization? “Puzzle” does not mean a research question. According to Zinnes, three factors describe a puzzle: “pieces of information” (which means to try to assemble empirical knowledge on Europeanization), “the belief that the pieces fit together into a meaningful picture – but the inability to fit the pieces together initially” (Zinnes, 1980: 316). Improving theory should be the result of the empirical analysis and the iteration between theory and empirical evidence.

The theoretical understanding of Europeanization could be improved by:

- Using *process tracing* in order to better distinguish between European and domestic (horizontal and vertical) feedbacks. In doing so, the risk of overestimating the role of the EU actors, ideas and institutions could be reduced. By doing process tracing, researchers should be able to identify the division line between European integration and Europeanization.
- By “a sustained focus on the question “what else must be true” of the process through which the outcome arose if a proposed hypothesis explain the outcome” (Bennett and Elman, 2007: 183)
- By the triangulation of data with “due attention to the potential motivated and informational biases of each source” (Bennett and Elman, 2007: 183)
- By paying particular attention to the specificities of the concept of Europeanization (the menace being to see it diluted in *eclectic or pluralist* theoretical frameworks)

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