Zusammenfassung der mit dem ÖGPW 2015 ausgezeichneten Dissertation

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The Europeanisation of national foreign policy in non-EU Europe:
The case of Serbia and Macedonia

Summary

Despite 20 years of scholarly examination, Europeanisation research remains a heterogeneous, unconsolidated field of inquiry. It is fraught with conceptual and methodological pitfalls, and has by no means become a well-structured research programme in political sciences. This joint-PhD thesis, written between 2009 and 2014 at the University of Vienna and Luxembourg under the supervision of Prof. Helmut Kramer und Prof. Philippe Poirier (with the support of Luxembourg’s National Research Fond), takes stock of these existential pitfalls, and provides a tentative response to some of the challenges faced by Europeanisation researchers’ community.

Conceptually, it proposes to adopt a more progressive approach to concept formation, drawing from governance, rather than EU integration perspectives. This positioning suggests that Europeanisation is more than EU-isation, and that some definitions are better than others in terms of conceptual utility. Spatially, it targets a domain that has long remained underexplored: non-EU Europe. It includes, but is not limited to conditionality studies. Methodologically, it follows an inductive approach combining holistic and individualistic perspectives in a comparative design. It embraces a social constructivist and thick interactionist stance towards institutional change in a multi-level governance system, which replaces actors at the core of research. This approach relaxes the widespread commitment to state-centric rationalism, and opens avenues to more interpretivist accounts. Wary of the risk of prejudging the role of the EU, the thesis avoids reifying EU integration as the neo-positivist cause for states’ transformation. EU norms, after all, have much in common with international norms -they often overlap and often resonate with each other. The thesis therefore considers that the interplay between different sets of norms (and the questionable genuineness of EU norms) should be part of the inquiry. Phenomenologically, the thesis claims that Europeanisation, in its current condition, is a catch-all phenomenon with too little internal consistency to be recognised without further specifics. The thesis therefore prescribes the use of better delineated terms in operational research, keeping in mind both the conceptual contestability and utility of Europeanisation as organising concept. Beyond the so-called “European interaction structure”, which arguably gives shape to the Europeanisation phenomenon in an essential manner, the thesis posits few genuinely distinctive characteristics, which might help recognise Europeanisation. It argues, instead, that the phenomenological
fuzziness, being part of the Europeanisation phenomenon, is also part of the Europeanisation puzzle. Aetiologically, the thesis finally explores a wide spectrum of forces possibly underpinning Europeanisation. Its inductive design opens avenues for a more inclusive understanding of diffusion mechanisms.

In order to give shape to its argument and make an empirical contribution to the field, the thesis explores the Europeanisation of national foreign policies in non-EU Europe. More precisely, it wonders which changes in the institution of national foreign policy can be attributed to those interactions performed on a European interaction structure by national, international, supranational and transnational foreign policy actors; what the prevailing forces behind Europeanisation are; and what factors decisively support and constrain the phenomenon. The empirical research, in practice, follows a two-step process. It includes, in the first place, a descriptive analysis, intended to delineate the explanandum phenomenologically. The question is: how did Europeanisation affect the governance structures of the object under scrutiny? In the second place, the research presents an argumentative analysis shedding light on the aetiological forces underpinning the Europeanisation phenomenon. The question, then, is: what were the forces or mechanisms underpinning the Europeanisation phenomena singled out in the descriptive analysis? The methodological techniques used in the empirical part of the thesis combine quantitative and qualitative methods for the descriptive analysis and qualitative methods for the argumentative analysis.

The thesis is built as a comparative case study between Serbia and Macedonia in the past 15 years. The two countries, being non-EU states, display larger variations in their relationship with the EU and other regional organisations than EU member states. The thesis also proposes an innovative research design: a multi-dimensional framework consisting of three levels of analysis, each reflecting a different epistemological position in the structure-agency debate. In its empirical part, the thesis explores 1) Serbia and Macedonia’s foreign policy behaviour in the United Nations General Assembly and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe; 2) the transformation of Serbia and Macedonia’s foreign policy organisation; 3) changes in Serbia and Macedonia’s border regimes; 4) Serbia and Macedonia’s approach to critical foreign policy issues (towards Greece and Kosovo, respectively); 5) Serbia and Macedonia’s arms export control policy.

In its conclusion, the thesis builds on the empirical findings to tentatively advance knowledge in the field. It starts with a conceptual argument advocating a departure from EU integration perspectives. Europeanisation, it confirms, is best conceptualised through governance approaches as distinct from EU-isation. It can accordingly be defined as “the transformation of political systems based on national governance into systems constituted by actors operating through the prism of European governance”. The conclusion then makes an argument on what Europeanisation entails (more intersubjectivity, more nodality and more homogeneity) and what it does not entail (uniformity, ineluctability). It finally presents a multi-theoretical approach to Europeanisation, which does not elude the issue of complex causality. It argues that Europeanisation, in the end, is a form of political learning, and distinguishes three mechanisms through which it ensues: mechanistic learning, which responds to structural objective necessities, contextual
learning, which builds on shared beliefs, and organismic learning, which is propelled by dissatisfaction.