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MAKING SENSE OF EUROPEANIZATION

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Making Sense of Europeanization

Bengt Jacobsson

Abstract: Although nation states often want to be perceived as relatively autonomous and co-ordinated, this is not always the case in practice. To a large extent, states are scripted and regulated by environmental forces. Building on the assumption of states as complex and fragmented organizations, this paper is based on the idea that research on Europeanization might be benefited by incorporating lessons from organization theory. I will discuss bounded rationality, preference formation as an evolving process, the logic of rule-following (as an alternative to the logic of consequentiality), complexities, conflicts and fragmentation in organizations, the importance of processes (irrespective of the outcomes), and, finally, the fact that organizations exist in environments that are full of rules, ideas, and models that greatly influence the actions of state organizations. The discussion will be provocatively incomplete.

Making Sense of Europeanization¹

We live in an organized society. Many activities of the modern world occur in and are channeled through formal organizations such as corporations, state bureaucracies, and voluntary organizations. Organizations, commonly defined as social units “deliberately constructed and reconstructed to seek specific goals” (Blau 1964), have become formidable institutions in our societies. One reason for this expansion of organized activities is efficiency. As argued by Max Weber, the most effective way to get things—both good and bad—done in society is through formal organizations working for collective purposes. Another reason for the expansion is legitimacy. To be recognized in its own field as trustworthy and serious, an institution must be properly organized in terms of hierarchies, management structure, etc., and be equipped with all the accoutrements of a formal organization, such as strategies, goals, planning, control and accounting systems, and human resource departments.

Governance directed towards states

States too are organizations, albeit more complex and fragmented than most. In fact, states are organizations of organizations (“metaorganizations,” to use the term of Ahrne and Brunsson 2008). They comprise a great many ministries, agencies, commissions, delegations, etc., all of which are supposed to work together for collective purposes. This necessitates a certain amount of control and coordination from the top (i.e. government) vis-à-vis all those working on behalf of a state. All the complexities and tendencies to fragmentation complicate the quest for control.

¹ Paper prepared for the Conference on European Ideas and Actions, Their Impacts on the Nordic and Other European Models, organized by The Institute for Future Studies and Sciences Po, March 26 - 27 2009. The ideas expressed in the paper will be more thoroughly elaborated in Chapter 2 in Jacobsson, B. (ed), 2010, European Union and the Baltic States: Changing Forms of Governance. Routledge.

States are very much controlled and scripted by rules and ideas that have become institutionalized. If they wish to be considered serious and modern, it is difficult for most states not to have such things as a constitution, a police force, a national anthem, a glorious past (maybe also a bright future), and policies concerning education, the environment, the economy, etc. There are also lots of organizations that offer advice to states about how they shall go about to organize their activities. The European Union is one of them, but there are a host of others: international organizations (e.g. the United Nations, NATO, and the OSCE), non-governmental organizations (e.g. Freedom House and Transparency International), standards organizations (e.g. the International Standards Organization and International Accounting Standards Board), professional organizations, consultancies, and corporations.

All these organizations are involved in governance activities directed towards states. Governance should here be understood broadly sense. It includes *regulative activities*. Included in these are what we traditionally think of as rule-making, that is, obligatory rules and penalties for their violation. More rule-making than before, however, tends to be based on at least some elements of voluntary compliance: standards and “soft rules” abound (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000, Jacobsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2006), and there are highly authoritative and influential rule-makers that regulate only through voluntary rules.

Second, there are *inquisitive activities*. Member states are not obliged to follow certain specific policies, but are required to “open up” and let others examine and critically judge what they are doing. Generally, we see a great deal of auditing, comparison, and ranking of diverse state practices and of whole states. Sometimes the inquisitors conduct their evaluations according to rules that they themselves have previously devised, thereby connecting inquisition with rule-making. Sometimes they conduct their evaluations according to rules produced by other organizations. Such evaluations can be very influential. Those evaluated may even change their behavior in order to look good in the eyes of their inquisitors (Power 1997).

Third, there are *meditative activities*. Many organizations function as arenas where state activities are discussed. These organizations do not always claim to have

rule-making or enforcement authority. Instead, their activities focus more on discussing, probing, and penetrating. They function as arenas where all kinds of experiences are transmitted and compared, where ideas are generated and shared. Organizations involved in meditation may sometimes function as arenas where more specific ideas (concerning, for example, how to organize and what policies to pursue) are proposed and disseminated, but these activities are mainly framed as discussions among experts of the best ways to do something. Such discussions can be quite influential.

Meditation can be seen as one discrete activity, but also as an activity that conditions and envelops all other activities. Rankings or evaluations, like those noted above, are often the starting points both of discussions, seminars, conferences, etc., and of partisan conflicts in specific states. The results of an evaluation by the OECD of administrative functioning in Lithuania could, if negative, be used by opposition parties in attacking the government; if positive, these results could be used by the government to promote its own policies. Processes of imitation, learning, and innovation require activities that yield “best practices.” Those parties that want to be seen as innovators need a supply of good stories and reform proposals to choose from as they bring together and promote their own innovations. All these processes are embedded in discourses about the kinds of structures, policies, and activities appropriate to modern states.

Lessons from organization theory

The expansion and significance of formal organizations (states and others) has led to an expansion of organization theory. Over the past 50 years or so, theories of organizations have developed in an attempt to make sense of the activities occurring inside and between organizations. Organization theory, like many other fields, has developed through the proliferation of scholars, journals, conferences, and theories. Over the years, the field has become crowded with various perspectives on how to

understand and change organizations.² Although particular organization theories have had different foci, many have been concerned with issues of management and control, reform and change, learning, symbols and rituals, decision-making, etc. In recent decades, the focus has shifted to an appreciation of the role of environments in understanding phenomena inside the organization.

My belief is that it would be productive to pay greater attention to how some of these organization theory traditions could aid our understanding of Europeanization and what follows as states become integrated into the broader organizational unit called the European Union (which of course is an even more complex organization). Below, I will present some of the reasoning about the mechanisms and processes used in these strands of organization theory, mainly (but not exclusively) in theories of organizational decision-making. This tradition treats *decisions*, not hierarchy, as the main unifying construct, and discusses issues such as how to change structures and procedures, what goals to follow, and how to control and coordinate organizations. Though others have already reconnected to some extent with these traditions (Andersen 2004, Olsen 2002), we believe there are some additional lessons to be learned.

Europeanization research has developed into a research field in its own right, with its own sacred traditions, creeds, and prerequisites. In fact, it has become so successful that it is necessary to take stock, review efforts, evaluate achievements and shortcomings, and discuss new research agendas (as is nicely done, for example, in Graziano and Wink 2007). This has largely been a very productive and successful process. Here, I would like to contribute to this discussion by adding some conceptual development and modeling, originating in organizational decision-making theory, to add to the existing body of useful models and theories.

This will be done in all modesty, but also with a firm belief that studies of Europeanization would benefit if scholars did not think about themselves only as

² Overviews of the field could for example be found in books by Perrow (1986), Scott (1987), Hall (2004) and Hatch (2006).

area specialists. It is true that the European Union is special, but so are all complex organizations. Since my specific interest during the last years has been adaptations made in the Baltic states in relation to European Union membership, I would especially like to contribute to the theorizing about the impact of the EU on domestic change in new member states (Jacobsson 2009, forthcoming)

The literature on the impact of the EU on domestic change in Central and Eastern European countries has been summarized by Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier (2005). These authors advocated an external incentive models and saw conditionality as the basic mechanism. This line of reasoning makes sense, and captures important elements of the Europeanization process. The authors anchor their reasoning in what they call an “actor-based rational-choice approach”; the assumptions made are conspicuously similar to those of some conventional rationalistic reasoning about what drives political actors, and about how changes in the rules of the political game generally occur. This modeling clearly reflects not only European integration theory, but also organizational and political change theory in general.

Some issues are emphasized in such a tradition. States, like all other formal organizations, are seen as rational actors making choices based on the expected outcomes of alternate actions. The tradition stresses that organizations are collective and unitary actors that know precisely what they want, and act accordingly. Actions are valued solely based on their power to fulfill the pre-stated purposes of the organizations involved. The effectiveness and functionality of the process is the focus, processes as such not being regarded as important. The instrumentality of state organizations is stressed. Couplings between formal structures and actual practices are believed to be strong, and choices made by state leadership are regarded as faithfully implemented in the organization. A strong point is made that the rules of the game (often called institutional constraints) should be seen as primarily resulting from previous processes of interaction between rational actors.

These assumptions are reasonable, and have doubtless led to impressive efforts to make sense of the processes by which the European Union and the candidate states interact. These are also core assumptions firmly rooted in what can be described as

conventional theorizing about decision-making and choice in political and other organizations. Most analyses of state actors are based on ideas connected with knowledgeable actors, consequential action, hierarchical organizations, and institutional constraints. As much as this interpretation of the processes is useful, it is also problematic: the problem is not so much what these assumptions imply about the processes, but rather what they do not capture and fail to understand. They conceal as much as they expose, and they direct our attention away from important aspects of what is going on.

I believe that the assumptions presented above do not sufficiently help us make sense of what is happening. In the follow sections, some alternate ways of interpreting the process of Europeanization will be outlined. I will discuss bounded rationality, preference formation as an evolving process, the logic of rule-following (as an alternative to the logic of consequentiality), complexities, conflicts and fragmentation in organizations, the importance of processes (irrespective of the outcomes), and, finally, the fact that organizations exist in environments that are full of rules, ideas, and models that greatly influence the actions of state or non-state organizations. Examples will be taken from the processes where the three Baltic states worked to become members of the EU (Jacobsson 2009, forthcoming)

Limits of rationality

Individuals and organizations have limited capacities to live up to the demands of the rational choice model. The model requires, among other things, knowledge of the future consequences of current actions. Organizations must know the alternatives, and, according to the model, should be able to compute or deduce the consequences of choosing particular courses of action. In the real world, however, the alternatives to and consequences of choosing a particular course of action are seldom known in advance, but must be postulated. As is clear in the interaction between the EU and the candidate states, different ways of handling specific issues (i.e. policy alternatives) are created in the process, and the consequences of choosing a particular alternative are

negotiable. These informational and computational demands make the rational model very difficult to apply.

More realistic thinking about organizational decision-making and change has therefore been developed mainly with reference to ideas involving some kind of bounded rationality (Cyert and March 1963, March 1994, Simon 1955). The Europeanization processes are in line with what has been described in theories of organizational decision-making since March and Simon's work in the late 1950s (March and Simon 1958). Organizations do not seek optimal solutions, but solutions that are satisfactory and sufficient, that "satisfice." Candidate states are constantly looking for solutions that are acceptable in the eyes of their EU counterparts. Such searching is mainly triggered by problems. Failure to be accepted by the EU stimulates intensified searching, while acceptance by the EU ends the search, letting candidate states move on to other issues still considered problematic.

This simple model explains a lot about the interaction between candidate states and the EU. We tend to see incremental, "muddling through" processes (Lindblom 1959) that follow this pattern. First, a candidate state presents a solution that is close to existing arrangements, claiming that these arrangements are suitable for handling the problem. If this claim is rejected, the state proposes changes in plans, structures, and procedures that will arguably result in adequate performance. If this "counter claim" is rejected, the state may argue that it is involved in (twinning) projects, from which it will surely learn from actors that already know how to achieve acceptable performance. If this argument is in turn rejected, the state may display additional determination to solve the problem by changing laws and regulations. The search is stimulated by the desire to find satisfactory and sufficient solutions.

The state aspires to the level where the European Union accepts a solution as good enough. Failed attempts to reach this aspiration level tend to result in the centralization of decision-making. Politicians and bureaucrats want to ensure that all possible efforts have been made, and they do not favor autonomous actions of decentralized units in the state organizations. However, as soon as a solution is reached that is good enough (i.e. accepted by the EU), central attention shifts to other issues and state domains. With less centralized decision-making, we may also move

into situations that are much more solution driven than that described above (characterized by a simple problem-oriented search). Autonomous units are less focused on seeking solutions to immediate problems, and more focused on becoming accepted in their own activity fields. This means, for example, that they open themselves up and become susceptible to all kinds of solutions offered by the technocratic experts of the modern world, such as professionals, scientists, standards organizations, and consultants.

This description of the process is far from the ideal model in which choices are made based on calculations of costs and benefits. The description is instead one that focuses on the relationships between success, failure, search, attention, and decision-making. Indeed, few would claim that the solutions chosen and accepted as good enough are necessarily the optimal ones. However, this interpretation makes sense of the processes by which EU officials and state representatives meet, interact, and negotiate. It exhibits intelligence but it is definitely another kind of intelligence than that envisioned in rational choice interpretations.

The importance of preference formation

If we still want to pursue a rational choice model, the second requirement is even more intriguing (after all, over the years, ideas of bounded rationality have in many disciplines been introduced in attempts to model organizational change processes). The second requirement concerns the preferences of the actors involved: the values they have now and the values they will likely have in the future. To calculate the value of future costs and benefits, an actor must know its own preferences (including future preferences). The significance of this has frequently been stressed in discussing the demands of Europeanization in member and candidate states. The discussion has often been framed as the necessity of the state organization being able, for example, to coordinate national positions and speak with one voice.

However, we have learned that organizational preferences are mostly non-stable, inconsistent, imprecise, and at least somewhat dependent on the actions taken (Edelman 1971). Preferences change, and sometimes rapidly. Preferences are

sometimes inconsistent: state organizations may fight pollution and health risks while investing in infrastructure and supporting car production. Preferences are often very imprecise, as it is very difficult to specify goals without being ambiguous. Moreover, preferences are created via the processes by which actions are taken. Organizations learn what they want as they act and as they try to make sense of the processes in which they are involved (Weick 1976). Organizational action determines preferences just as much as the reverse.

The general picture is that state preferences seem not to be stable, precise, or consistent. The problems multiply for states discussing membership in the European Union, since they must also act on issues about which they previously knew very little. However, despite all this, states and other organizations seem able to make their way in the world, interact with others, make decisions, pursue actions, etc. The main explanation for these puzzling cluster of phenomena goes like this: What we observe in state organizations results not so much from choices made on the basis of information about and valuation of the consequences of alternate actions, but rather from a process by which state organizations follow appropriate rules. We will later come back to this line of reasoning.

However, the ambiguity of preferences could also be seen as contributing to intelligent action. Ambiguity allows preferences to develop as a consequence of action (Weick 1995). If an organization, despite the problems faced, has to decide in advance what it wants and must stick to that decision, it risks fighting for and upholding obsolescent and no longer adequate ends. On the other hand, if the organization displays some intellectual modesty and allows itself to develop its preferences over time and through participation in the process, it may well discover its preferences via the process. This is the intelligence that is operative in activities such as learning by doing, experiential learning, and apprenticeship. In our view, such intelligence strongly informs the mechanisms of Europeanization processes.

The situation of a candidate state that wants to join the European Union (or of a state that has recently joined the Union or has long been a member of it) is one of abundance: of rules, committees, experts, white papers, green papers, proposals, advices, lobbyists, and so on. It is simply impossible to know how to value all the

demands made (although on some issues, states know exactly what they want to work for or against). However, by participating in committees, talking to lobbyists and experts, or discussing matters with colleagues in other states, it may be possible to find out what can and should be striven for. It may seem paradoxical, but Europeanization processes create strong demands for national positions and points of view, at the same time as these processes allow these positions and points of view to develop (Finnemore 1996, Jacobsson 2006).

The logic of rule-following: a quest for identity

One may claim that states that have expressed a desire to join the European Union have based this desire on rational calculations of costs and benefits, and that it is the future promises connected with EU membership that are instrumental. However, we believe it is truer to the process to argue that the main driving force was a quest for European identity (however vague the concept). The former communist states in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as the newly independent former republics of the Soviet Union, wanted a “return to Europe” (Sztompka 1996). They were striving for identities as normal, modern European states and sought to shed their identities as states formerly belonging to the Eastern Bloc. This reasoning was the trigger of events just as much as any calculations about the future net benefits of joining the EU. Joining the EU was a way to manifest identity change.

As a member of an organization such as the EU, one is expected to follow the rules of the organization. These rules are supposed to be organized in such a way that, if everybody follows them, the organization will be able to attain its purposes. This is the case with the European Union. To become a member, and possibly, though less obviously, to stay a member, a state is supposed to abide by the rules. If a state wishes to join an organization but is perceived as not living by its rules, there is a problem. In addition, as discussed above, solutions must be sought until all relevant parties agree on a single solution that is good enough. Thus, seeking and discovering solutions have been the main component in activities of the Europeanization processes.

Difficulties in satisfying the prerequisites for rational choice have made rule-following an important mechanism for organizations (March and Olsen 1989). If preferences are ambiguous, it becomes impossible to make decisions based on the valuation of consequences. Following rules can be seen as a way to make decisions, despite a lack of well-defined preferences. The logic of rule-following first of all entails determining one's self-identity, which, in the present context, is that of states wanting to return to Europe and join the European Union. Second, one must know what kind of situation one is in, for example, membership negotiations. After this the logic is one of matching identities, situations, and actions: What is appropriate in a situation like this? Rule-following behavior makes it possible to limit the demands for knowledge of both consequences and preferences.

Rules come in different forms (cf. Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000). Here I am speaking of rules that are specified and written down. There are rules concerning democratic and human rights, rules concerning the creation of markets, and rules concerning the whole corpus of the *acquis communautaire*. Rules can be mandatory and assume the form of directives, or they can involve a greater element of voluntariness (as in standards). Rules can be vague and general or quite specific. Rules can be "hard," like those connected with the creation of the internal market, or "soft," like those connected with the open method of coordination.

A member of an organization is in a position to influence its rules, but a candidate state must show that it is following the rules in order to become a member. Often one must follow specific rules (often standards) to prove one's support of the broader purposes of the organization one wishes to join. Rule-following is seldom straightforward, and proving to someone that one is following a rule may involve pronounced elements of persuasion, interpretation, and verification (Brunsson and Jacobsson 2000, Ch. 9).

One argument for the broad use of a logic of appropriateness has been that consequential action is usually unrealistic (for the reasons discussed above). However, rule-following could arguably be seen as a form of intelligence that is not necessarily inferior to rational choice. If we believe that rules develop through some kind of learning process, then organizational experience will in some way (though certainly

imperfectly) be embodied in the rules. If rules result from the imitation of other organizations, then they could in some way (but certainly not perfectly) reflect the experience of successful others.

Complex and fragmented organizations

Most definitions of organizations identify them as collectivities with clear boundaries, rules, hierarchies, and procedures, and stress that organizations engage in activities related to some sort of common goal. Scott (1987) defines organization in rational system terms: “organizations are collectivities oriented to the pursuit of relatively specified goals and exhibiting relatively formalized social structures” (Scott 1987: 22). Organizations have an authoritative center that controls and coordinates action, and that ensures that all efforts are directed towards common goals. Preferences are thought to control action. The conventional assumption is that states—like all other large organizations—can be seen as instruments for making and implementing decisions about what to do.

This is also how state organizations are regarded in much of the Europeanization literature. States act in pursuit of common goals and speak with one voice. If the goal is to join the EU, a state applies for membership. In the application process, the prospective member promises to fulfill its obligations and to follow EU rules. If a state agrees to follow the rules, the normal assumption is that it will do its best to do so, and that it also has the authority to ensure that the rules are indeed followed. It is assumed that the center is in control. The European Union may of course help states develop their management and administrative capacities (e.g. via twinning processes), but states are essentially regarded as coherent and coordinated actors.

The assumption is that states both know and do what they want. However, the notion of organizations as coherent and coordinated units does not always correspond to practice in complex organizations like states. In practice, we could better portray state and other organizations as essentially fragmented and loosely coupled (Meyer *et al.* 1997). State organizations are often much less integrated than is assumed. Policies

largely develop in sectoral networks in which the center sometimes has great difficulty knowing what is going on. Encounters with the environment take place constantly and in several layers of the organization, making it difficult to speak with one voice. To integrate sufficiently, despite all the centrifugal forces in motion, is what management is really all about.

Loose couplings exist between decisions made at the top of an organization and actions taken further down the hierarchy (Brunsson 1989). Decisions do not necessarily result in actions, however, as rules accepted at the top may not be adopted further down in the organization. This is normally framed as an implementation problem, and thought to result from, for example, inadequate resources or capacity (cf. Bardach 1977). However, an implementation deficit could also be the result of unresolved conflicts in the organization. In fact, the organization may speak with different voices, since ideas may differ greatly as to what is appropriate. What may be deemed perfectly reasonable in the higher echelons of the organization (e.g. in the units that negotiate with the EU), may be seen as entirely inappropriate in the operative units. Moreover, not all units may agree on the purpose of activities.

Discussions about implementation often assume that loose couplings are temporary and will be overcome, perhaps with more training and expanded resources. However, we can sometimes better understand loose couplings between decisions and actions in organizations as more permanent phenomena (Baier *et al.* 1988, Brunsson 1985). Demands placed on organizational leadership, for example, by the EU, may differ considerably from those placed on organizational subunits. Through organizational decisions, states may need to show the EU and other organizations possessing resources that they are trustworthy and are endeavoring to reform their activities. However, what is deemed appropriate behavior in the subunits may often be something different, namely, getting on with the work and being responsive to powerful forces that exist in specific fields. In such cases, loose couplings between decisions and actions may be seen as necessary ways to cope with the conflicting demands that exist in the organization (Weick 1976).

Loose couplings and fragmentation may thus be consequences of conflicting demands within the organization (between different units and layers). However, they

can also arise from something that is a recurrent theme in organizational analysis, namely, the fact that organizations are strongly influenced by forces in their environments with which they interact (and sometimes compete). Different versions of such an open system perspective all play down the idea that organizational units are tools in the hands of organizational leadership, and are emphatic about the need to understand how different parts of the organization interact with, and are integrated into, different parts of the environment.

States are organizations that are also fraught with conflict. They must be, since they must be responsive to inconsistent and conflicting demands. Different policy fields do not always support each other; for example, all states need both infrastructural and environmental policies, which obviously leads to conflict. If governments generally favor the free operation of markets (e.g. free movement of goods and services), this may lead to difficulties in the case of restrictive health policies, and the like. Other examples are conflicts between sectoral issues and broader comprehensive ones. The main conflicts, especially in situations of stagnation, are typically those between advocates of specific policies and those functioning as guardians of the public purse (e.g. Ministries of Finance). The requirement that states be responsive to conflicting demands necessarily leads to tension within them.

Reforms and reformers, however, typically stress that states need to behave as though they were controlled and coordinated, that they need to speak with one voice. Changes in state structures and procedures are often made in order to increase the state's capacity to control. This has often been the aim of introducing new public management (NPM) methods and techniques. Since there are always, as we have argued, strong tendencies towards fragmentation in states, it has been easy to argue that such reforms are needed. Europeanization processes, which entail urgent requests to states for national positions and detailed statements about preferences, have also led to vigorous attempts to coordinate and control. However, the complexities and conflicts inherent in states often make such efforts seem to be displays of wishful thinking. Problems remain, as do demands for reform.

Rituals of transformation

The symbolic importance of decision-making is often considerable (Feldman and March 1981). As argued above, decisions may be important even though they are not implemented. It has been a recurrent theme that decisions and reforms can sometimes be seen as ritual acts, mainly intended to reassure people inside and outside the organization that vigorous and rational decision-making is taking place (Arnold 1935, Edelman 1971). Since it is difficult to reassure someone that the expected outcomes are actually being achieved, organizations may instead try to demonstrate that their structures and procedures are indeed appropriate (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Consequently, such structural and procedural devices as reforms, strategies, plans, and goals proliferate in modern organizations, including states. Such devices can be seen as rituals and ceremonies celebrating rational decision-making.

The transformations occurring in Europe with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the creation and recreation of new states are of course loaded with symbolic value. That the post-communist states were allowed to apply for membership and later became members of the European Union and other organizations (e.g. NATO) indicated that these states finally had “returned to Europe.” This European enlargement process was accompanied by a strong intention to ensure that all states were following the rules governing democracy, safeguarding markets, and the administrative ability to implement the *acquis communautaire*. Although there were some doubts as to the ability (and will) of some of the states to meet all the demands, the pressures were strong to accept all the candidate states as full members. The decision to accept the new members, together with all the ceremonies accompanying the process, were strong manifestations of affinity and kinship. On the administrative side, plans, aims, visions, strategies, and reforms not yet implemented piled up, probably resulting in additional loose couplings.

The processes by which states first were candidates and then, only after developing and maturing, were finally accepted as EU members can be seen as rites of passage. In one well-known formulation, van Gennep (1908/1960) divides such rites of passage into three phases: the separation, liminal, and incorporation phases. Even though this model is intended for individuals and focuses on baptisms, bar mitzvahs,

etc., it can also be applied to states. In the first phase, in the EU enlargement context, states separated themselves from the old. In the liminal phase, they have left the old but not yet entered the new; negotiations with the EU were important parts of this phase. In the final, incorporation phase, states entered the new and became accepted in their new surroundings, completing the rite. Similarly, these have also been described as graduation processes in which powerful international organizations, such as the EU, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and Transparency International, act as scrutinizers (Dahl 2007).

The symbolic significance of being accepted as a candidate state and later being accepted as a member state was immense. The rituals and ceremonies created a sense of belonging and national solidarity in the new member states. There were “sacred” rituals celebrating the incorporation of these states into the community of the West. However, this did not mean that intrastate conflict simply disappeared. As is often the case, rituals created a sense of solidarity without creating shared beliefs (Kertzer 1988), as the rituals concerned what was *done*, not what was thought. It is an often-neglected fact that rituals and symbols are important in constructing and maintaining legitimacy and solidarity in all kinds of organizations, even though the rituals and symbols differ between contexts. If outcomes are ambiguous, it is necessary to gain credence and legitimacy by showing that the proper procedures are in place. We may end up with a range of strategies, reforms, goals, plans, NPM techniques, quality assurance systems, etc., all intended to convey the impression that the state organizations involved are progressive and rational.

The EU and EU states as embedded in broader systems

One of the assumptions discussed above stressed the rules of the game as determined by the actors involved in the processes (through intentional and willing actions). This is, however, a problematic assumption. As was outlined above, states are subject to numerous forms of regulative, inquisitive, and meditative intervention. The European Union is an example of such expanding governance directed towards states but also many other organizations also seem to know what states should be like: international

organizations, professional organizations, standards organizations, expert organizations (i.e. scientific or technocratic organizations), consultancies, etc. Consequently, states can be seen less as autonomous rule-making organizations than as organizations deeply embedded in their environments and scripted by broader systems of rules and ideas (Jacobsson 2006).

This means that states may sometimes not have to choose, or perhaps not be in a position to choose (although they may want to). As soon as they open up to external forces (as the Baltic states did at the beginning of the 1990s), they are subject to pressures from many other parties that know exactly what these candidate states need in terms of policies and structural arrangements. This could be seen as an example of what we previously described as a solution-driven process. Many certified and legitimate experts offer their solutions and can identify or even “create” problems in policies and outcomes that necessitate the adoption of their own specific solutions. In the simple problemistic search model, these states need not search intensively for solutions to their problems; instead, they may have difficulties shielding themselves from the onslaught of solutions offered by active reformers and do-gooders. If there are strong institutionalized ideas about what should be done in a specific field (e.g. education, environment, and competition), this may result in similarities between states subject to very different conditions.

In Europe, the EU is the main actor in terms of issuing rules (both hard and soft), monitoring whether these rules are being followed in practice, and organizing all kinds of discussions, comparisons, and other meditations concerning what should be done in states. It has been argued that the EU is not held together by either a constitution (in any proper sense) or any sort of collective identity, but rather by a belief in rationalistic ideas about markets, progress, justice, etc. (Meyer 2001). The main factors holding Europe together are thus soft ones. Europe appears as a kind of network polity (Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999), with strong interlinkages and interdependencies between the states and other organizations involved. Voluntariness prevails and membership in the EU is optional.

Since the identity of Europe or the EU is rather ambiguous, it is often difficult to spot something that can be clearly identified as a specifically European interest.

Instead, what the EU wants is simply what “reasonable” people want and have agreed upon. The programs, directives, reforms, etc., determined by the Council of Ministers are not connected with anything even remotely corresponding to some national interests that at some point in history were heroically defended. Instead, EU aims are connected with what is in the common interest, and considered rational and scientifically sound. As Meyer has argued, there are many *others* in the European Union, “disinterested consultants, more in touch with the truth than his own interests. Or ... the scientist, disinterestedly analyzing the problems of economic development or global warming ... Europe is all otherhood, not action ... This is why there are so few heroes and so little drama to the process: it is made up, not of actors, but of observers and commentators, associations and professions and scientific analyses” (Meyer 2001: 234–235).

Making sense of Europeanization: A More Complicated Story

This paper started by claiming that most interpretations of Europeanization processes share some common features. They all regard states as purposive and rational actors that know what they want. States “have” interests and use their power to pursue or safeguard them. States are also regarded as unitary actors. Loose couplings between talk and action as well as between top and bottom are seen as temporary and pathological, something to be remedied by reform. Much of this view of states is also reinforced by what those in charge (i.e. politicians and bureaucrats) actually say and do. In recent decades, due to planning ideals of the 1960s and 1970s as well as new public management ideals of the 1980s and the 1990s, states have worked hard to become exactly the purposive, goal-directed rational actors that the models assume.

This has not resulted in a situation, however, where states have become more controlled and coordinated than before. I have argued that the conventional model fails to appreciate important aspects of the transformation of states. We advocate a model that emphasizes environment pressures and the offering of ideas, models, solutions, and reforms that accompanies these pressures. Instead of a top–down model that starts with the goals, purposes, and interests of states, and then discusses how to

organize to reach the goals, one can start with the predicament that states (like most organizations) are open and responsive to their environments. This goes for states as collective actors and for state organizations in specific fields (e.g. the environment, education, and labor market policy).

As soon as states open up, as did the Baltic states after the break-up of the Soviet empire, they are immediately flooded with advice about what to do. The problem for a state (as for most other organizations) is not one of accepting and applying offered ideas and models concerning how to work, but being able to resist the tide if one so wishes. It is easy to follow the advice; what is difficult is to object. In particular, if certain ideas have become institutionalized—for example, that states should have aspirations and programs for democracy, education, research, and the environment—it becomes extremely difficult for any state *not* to espouse these ideas. There are pressures to conform to this agenda at all levels in the organization, and if someone on top wants something else, he or she may be in big trouble.

The basic logic is one of rule-following, and it is the will to become something else (e.g. normal, modern, Western, or European) that triggers the reform process. Imagined identities change as do the situations facing the states. Rules do not have to be sought; instead they are offered in abundance by other states, the EU itself, other international organizations, standards organizations, experts and scientists, consultants, NGOs, and many other actors that know how to do things. All these pundits are in a position to offer advice to the state in question, to help it achieve the desired identity. Such processes are mainly solution driven, and have sometimes been orchestrated by the European Union, especially in the pre-membership stage. Even without that boost, however, reform processes will be launched, since they are in the interest of these organizations.

The logic is also one of preference formation. The consequence of opening up is that a state becomes involved in processes by which it learns what other states do, as well as what various authorities in the field advise it to do. It may well be that the initial attitude of the leadership of state organizations is to stick to established ways of doing things. However, as they engage in various processes (e.g. meetings, conferences, rankings, high-level consultations, low-level consultations, and other

kinds of meditations), preferences change and state representatives may start to want something different from what they wanted at the outset. They come to learn what they want as a state, and they do this via the processes by which they interact with others.

Processes that follow this logic will probably result in a certain amount of decoupling in state organizations, though not necessarily in the sense that there are rationalized, front-stage presentations, on the one hand, versus inert back-stage practices, on the other (although this could be the case). Everyday practices may change, since the candidate states interact with their colleague states and other advisors at all levels. This may lead to changes in practices “at the bottom,” without any change in presentations “at the top.” Since most interaction and meditation take place in sectoral networks involving experts and bureaucrats who have common interests and worldviews (e.g. about food inspection, work safety, and competition policies), we may also have changes in one sector of the state, without this necessarily influencing any other sector.

Symbolically, it may be extremely important to point out that changes are underway, especially in states that want to turn their backs on the past (like the Baltic states in the 1990s). In those cases, rationalized presentations are important, and we may experience many ceremonies, rituals, etc., celebrating the transformations underway. However, in other situations where the historic legacies are more legitimate than the pressures from the European Union (or the international community), we may witness something different. In those cases, we may instead see attempts to claim that very little really has changed or needs to be changed because of the opening up to Europe. In Sweden, with its fairly legitimate welfare state organization, leading politicians have consistently argued that membership in the European Union would not necessitate any fundamental changes in the aims or organization of the state (Jacobsson and Sundström 2006).

The question of whether states are becoming more or less similar lies at the heart of Europeanization discourse. It is fair to say that, no matter what states may want, they are subject to strong pressures to change their practices and self-representations. There are many organizations that offer advice on these processes. To

some extent, this will probably result in increasing homogeneity, since all states will need to incorporate at least some new policies and structural arrangements in different fields. However, there is often a multitude of willing and knowledgeable organizations, and they may advise differently regarding how to meet the demands of Europeanization. State capacities and traditions are quite robust, and this will result in a situation where not only homogenizing forces are at work.

One major reason behind the argument that states, in the process of becoming more similar than before, will still manage to retain some differences, lies in the increasing use of softer forms of governance. If all states, including those that are much less resourceful than others, have to adapt to the same rules, these rules will have to allow for some differences between the states. States may of course also choose different means to achieve the ends to which they have agreed. In a new and inclusive Europe, one must also allow for at least a certain degree of loose coupling between representation and practice. However, this does not mean that states only present façades and that everyday practices will necessarily remain the same. States will seek new identities, open themselves up to external influences, and accept new models and ways of doing things; they will have to ponder what they are doing in the company of other states. All this signifies strong homogenizing forces.

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