

# European Union Politics

Summary

Asst. Prof. Dr. Alexander Bürgin

# Content

1. The purpose of theories/analytical approaches
2. European Integration Theories: Basic differences
3. European Integration Theories: Neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism
4. Governance Theories

# European Union Politics

## 1. The purpose of theories

# Definitions

- **Ontology:** basic assumptions of social reality
- **Epistemology:** established ways of gathering knowledge (e.g. causal explanations vs. interpretation)

# Using theories leads to better analysis

- Theories
  - Helps to identify what is relevant
  - Helps to structure our analysis
  - Allows as structured discussion

# European Union Politics

## 2. European Integration Theories: Basic differences

# Which factors drive the European integration process?

- **Intergovernmentalism:**
  - Governments control integration process
- **Supranationalism:**
  - Role of supranational actors
  - Role of norms
  - Spill over dynamics which cannot be controlled by govt (neofunctionalist argument)

# Are preferences fix?

- **Rationalist approaches:**

Yes (exogen)

- Cost-Benefit calculations of the actors
- Strategy: Maximising benefits

- **Constructivist approaches:**

No (endogen)

- Preferences shaped in interaction



# Preference formation: Variants of Intergovernmentalism

- **Realist Intergovernmentalism**
  - Geopolitical interests
- **Liberal Intergovernmentalism**
  - Domestic (economic) interests
  - Liberal preference formation (= pluralist preference formation)
  - Aggregation of interests of domestic constituencies

# Preference formation: Variants of supranationalism

- **Rationalist Supranationalism**
  - Importance of supranational actors, changed opportunity structure for governments
- **Constructivist Supranationalism**
  - Interaction shapes preferences/identities

# Explaining decisions (1): Intergovernmentalism

- **Bargaining:** relative power of a state
  - Information
  - Outside options: Actors with best alternatives are in the strongest negotiation position
- **Package Deals/Side payments:**
  - Historical agreements due to preference convergence of big member states and side payments to smaller member states

# Explaining decisions (2): supranationalism

- **Rationalist supranationalism**
  - Path dependancy
  - Spill over dynamics/functional necessities
  - Norms as negotiation resource
- **Constructivist Supranationalism**
  - Arguing/Deliberation: openness for the better argument
  - Socialization processes, social learning

# European Union Politics

## 3. Classic European Integration Theories:

Neofunctionalism and Liberal  
Intergovernmentalism

# Assumptions Functionalist Theory

- Integration Process has a transformative, self-reinforcing effect
  - even if milestones of integration reflect interest constellation of states, further integration steps as result of a dynamic which cannot be controlled by the member states
  - Spill-over dynamics

# Spill over mechanisms

- **Functional spill over:**
  - interdependence of policy areas; cooperation in one policy field necessitates cooperation in other fields
- **Political spill over:**
  - Interest groups, bureaucrats orient their activities towards the European level
- **Cultivated spill over:**
  - European Commission establishes networks/advocacy coalitions which promote European solutions

# Critiques of functionalist theory

- Empirical:
  - Evidence for spill over dynamics until 1970's, but afterwards gradual intensification of integration did not take place
  - Elite socialisation has not taken place
- Theoretical criticism
  - Rather a programme than a theory
  - Too much focus on supranational actors, neglecting the power of the member states



# Liberal Intergovernmentalism: Assumptions

- Emerged in 1960's from a critique of neo-functional theory (Stanley Hoffmann)
- States as central actors in international politics
- European Integration does not undermine the nation state
- Integration is limited to economic sector, core functions of the state will not be integrated
- Supranational actors of the EU will remain weak in in these core policy areas

# Mechanism of preference formation

- Shaped by domestic economic interest
- Scope conditions: The more economic interest groups are well organized and the clearer the economic consequences of a policy decision, the more government preferences are shaped by economic interests

# Bargaining power

- Explaining the outcome of interstate bargaining:
  - Most power for those states with an interest/benefit in status quo
  - Unanimity in the Council lead to tough bargaining and less compromise

# Critiques of liberal intergovernmentalism

- Focus on bargaining during  
Intergovernmental conference neglects  
dynamics before/after
- Neglects norms as bargaining resource

# Summary

- Which theory better explains the integration process?
  - Liberal Intergovernmentalism strong in explaining bargaining outcome at international conferences
  - However, bargaining often constrained by agenda-setting activities of supranational actors
  - Both approaches able to explain part of the integration process

# European Politics

## 4. Governance Theories

# Difference: integration theories and comparative/governance approaches

- **Integration theories:** Causes and direction of European integration
- **Comparative/governance approaches:**
  - Focus on policy process in all its complexity and diversity
  - Use of the tools of domestic politics: What are the conditions of actions?

# Focus on the daily work instead of the history of integration

- How is governmental power exercised?
- Under what conditions can the Parliament influence legislation?
- Is the Court of Justice beyond political control?
- How to explain public support?
- Why are some social groups more able to influence the political agenda than other groups?



# Questions/Legislative Politics

- Council:
  - Influence of decision making procedures on voting power/formation of voting coalitions
  - What explains positions (Misfit, venue shopping)
- EP
  - Voting behavior explained by nationality of left/right divide?
  - Influence of decision making procedures (Consultation, co-operation, assent and co-decision) on agenda setting power

# Questions/Executive Politics: Delegation

- Why do the MS (principals) delegate power to supranational actors (agents)?
  - Lower transaction costs:
    - Commit themselves credibly to common agreements/avoid free riding
    - Benefit from policy-relevant expertise
    - Implementation of regulations/monitoring compliance

# Questions/Executive Politics: Discretion

- How big is the autonomy of the agent?

Depends on:

- Distribution of information between principals and agents
- Control mechanisms as comitology

# Institutionalist approaches used to explain these questions

- Definition Institution:
  - political organisations (EP, Com, ECJ)
  - Formal institutionalist structures (e.g. legislative procedures)
  - Informal patterns of structured interactions (cultural practises, moral templates)
- Three variants of institutionalism: rational choice, historical and sociological institutionalism

# Rational Choice Institutionalism

- Institutional structures constrain actors' behaviour
- Actors act according a logic of consequences (maximise benefits)

# Example: Principal-Agent Theory

- Difficulties of MS (principals) in keeping control over their agents (Com), Pollack 1997
  - Range of delegated tasks increased
  - Number of principals increased, hence also the heterogeneity in the Council
  - Expanded use of QMV, therefore easier for Commission to construct a winning coalition

# Example: Logrolling between EP and Council

- Logrolling: quid pro quo/ package deal:
  - MS control financial aspects and ensure timely adoption of policies
  - In return EP is involved in policy areas in which it has no/limited formal powers

# Example: Lobbying Activities of Interest groups

- Whether interest groups choose to try to influence legislation through national governments or through Com/EP depends
  - On their access to national govt/EP/Com
  - Decision rules applied in the Council  
(unanimity – lobby rather national govt)
  - What role the EP has in the final decision



# Sociological Institutionalism

- Institutions shape actors' behaviour (e.g. established norms, moral templates)
- Thus institutions do not only influence the strategic calculations, but have a deeper effect on preference formation)
- Actors act according to a logic of appropriateness

# Example: Empowerment of the European Parliament

- Puzzle: Rationalist interest in a strong EP???
- Sociological explanation: Empowerment = logic of appropriateness, a more democratic institutional architecture

# Example: Institutional constraints for Council Presidencies

- Are Council presidencies pushing their national interests?
- Answer:
  - Countries holding the presidency have a lot of agenda setting power, however this power is not used due to normative constraints
  - Established norm is that presidency should be a rather neutral mediator

# Example: Comitology system

- Comitology committees are composed of officials of the MS and the Com
- According to rationalist institutionalism they are a control tool for the MS
- According to sociological institutionalism they are rather a forum of deliberation
- Empirical evidence for both assumptions can be found

# Historical Institutionalism

- Institutions are both, constraining and shaping actors' behaviour
- Time is important: decision of the past constrain actors later in time – path dependency
  - Past decisions are tested/workable
  - Legitimacy of past decisions
  - Voting Rules in the Council make change difficult

# Examples: CAP reform

- Once established it was very difficult to reform CAP due to Unanimity/QMV in the Council
  - Around 1/3 of vote necessary to block a modification of status quo, but
  - Around 2/3 of votes necessary to modify the status quo

# Example EU health policy

- Critical Juncture: New policy, not fully shaped yet
- Once decision is taken, it will be sticky, reason: Path Dependency (QMV needed to reform a policy)

# Example: Europeanization processes in candidate countries

- EU institutions and policies influence national institutions and policies
  - Adaption pressure of EU regulations (EU conditionality = accession in return for domestic reforms, rational cost-benefit calculation)
  - Changes in domestic power constellation (EU as constraints for domestic actors)
  - Social learning (sociological institutionalism)



# Example: Europeanisation processes in Turkey

- Why did Turkey align (a lot of) its asylum policy with EU standards?
- Membership perspective is uncertain, therefore conditionality strategy of EU rather weak
- Answer:
  - Importance of domestic factors (issue salience: increasing number of asylum seekers, pressure of domestic NGO's, modernisation strategy unrelated of EU accession)
  - Social learning in transnational networks beyond the EU (longterm cooperation with UNHCR)

# Example: Europeanization processes in candidate countries

- Does the pre-accession monitoring led to compliance with EU demands regarding labour rights in CEEC?
- Answer
  - positive correlation found between monitoring (= institutioal constrain) and compliance

# Another influential approach is Network governance

- Complexity of EU governance:
  - wide participation of public, private sector actors
  - Wide participation of national, subnational and supranational actors
- Network governance: coordination rather than hierarchical governance

# Multi-level governance

- Central governments lost control both to supranational and subnational actors
  - Regional level involved in the implementation of EU policies
  - Transnational networks of private actors (issue networks)

# Example: Regional Policy of EU

- Has the implementation of the EU's structural funds led to increased powers for sub-national authorities?
- Answer:
  - Evidence from Netherland and Denmark indicates that the central governments are able to keep control over the implementation process

K. Yesilkagit and J. Blom Hansen (2007) – Abstract No. 2

# Advocacy coalitions

- **Definition:** a policy community from a variety of institutions who share a common approach to a problem/policy
- **Claim:** Understanding the policy process requires looking at these advocacy coalitions composed of bureaucrats, interest groups, researchers, journalists
- **Strength:** Policy developments in the long run

# Role of Nongovernmental Actors

- **Expertise:** Knowledge in order to establish better policies
- **Policy Making:** Co-Producer of policies, affected actors contribute to joint problem solving
- **Legitimacy:** defend European governance in public discourse, bring EU closer to the people

# Example: Biodiversity governance in new MS

- Which factors are crucial for biodiversity governance in the new member states?
- Answer:
  - Characteristics of NGO involvement has an impact on biodiversity government
  - NGOs are more influential if they are part of an advocacy coalition (=networks with European Commission and public institutions)

J. Cent, D. Mertens and K. Niedzialkowski



# Framing

- **Frame:** a schema of interpretation individuals rely on to understand and respond to events
- **Framing:** selective perception of an event to encourage certain interpretations and to discourage others.

# Agenda Setting

- The art of controlling an agenda in order to maximize the probability of getting a favourable outcome.
- Examples
  - Commission proposal frames the policy options
  - Setting the course and content of a meeting: adding/subtracting issues, speaking time
  - Rule interpretation
  - Setting the voting procedures

# Example: Crisis Management of EU

- Which factors contributed to the increase of crisis management missions of the EU?
- Answer: One important factor was the agenda setting power of the former Higher Representative Javier Solana, based on
  - Venue shopping (the art of finding the most appropriate venues for one's policy ideas)
  - Issue framing (the art of defining the art of the problem, consequences of action/non-action)
  - His superior information

# Example: Agenda Setting in Council negotiations

- Why are small states sometimes very influential in the Council?
- Answer: It depends on their argumentative power, e.g.:
  - Arguments that resonate well with prior beliefs of the addressees of the argument
  - Scientific arguments
  - Reframing strategies: focus on normative arguments instead of the distributive effect of a policy
- D. Panke (2012) – Abstract No. 5

# Example: Implementation of EU policies

- Which factors influence the implementation of EU policies at domestic level?
- Answer
  - One important factor is the issue salience (political/public awareness of the urgency of the problem)
  - Higher issue salience leads to faster implementation

A. Spendzharova (2013) – Abstract No. 6

# The Multiple Stream Model

- Three streams which mostly develop isolated:
  - Problem stream
  - Policy stream
  - Politics stream
- A policy solution is possible if these streams can be linked together (window of opportunity)

# Example: opening of a visa liberalization process with Turkey

- Despite the reluctance of some governments the Council gave the Com the mandate to start a visa liberalization talk with Turkey – why?
- Answer: Com successfully used a window of opportunity
  - Problem stream: high issue salience – Turkey is the main route for illegal migration into the EU
  - Policy stream: Linkage between readmission agreement and visa liberalization had been established for the Western Balkan countries
  - Politics stream: Danish Council Presidency had an interest in a solution and was accepted as mediator between the pro/contra visa talk camps