Europeanisation/German Politics

Outline

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Institutions & heuristics
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Bundestag and Europeanisation

- National parliaments widely seen as losers of Europeanisation
- Bundestag acquired host of rights and prerogatives in European matters (European Affairs Committee)
- Integration of German MEPs in European Affairs Committee
- But European Affairs committee not extremely active . . .
  - . . . Few incentives (parliamentarism, national interest etc)
  - . . . Informal channels of influence/information seeking
- Can/should Bundestag address democratic deficit?
- Most important collective actors within Bundestag: parliamentary parties/groups

Parliamentary groups/parties

- Parliament effectively run by parliamentary groups
  - Division of labour/specialisation
  - Powerful ‘working groups’ of experts within (larger) parliamentary groups
- ‘European Affairs’
  - Rarely about integration as such
  - Rather nitty-gritty policy making
  - ‘Normal’ standing committees and parliamentary groups
- Behaviour of parliamentary groups more relevant than European Affairs Committee?
Theories of institutionalism provide general hypotheses on behavioural incentives for MPs.
Complemented by elite/expert interviews with MPs and their staff.
- Reality check; additional factors
- Beware: respondents have their own interests to protect
- Practitioners are not necessarily more competent, knowledgeable etc than scientists.

Institutionalism: three points of departure

1. Path dependency
   - Once a path for development is chosen, departure becomes costly
   - (Very) incremental adaption to changing circumstances
   - Existing solutions for new problems

2. Formal vs informal rules/procedures
   - Formal EU institutions fragmented
   - Management of europeanisation best left to informal channels (?); co-steering

3. Parliamentary roles
   - Different types of MPs
   - Some formal roles (positional)
   - But also more fluent, self-styled roles
1. Working groups (not parliament as a whole) will monitor/scrutinise government
2. MPs will rely chiefly on informal channels to influence EU policy making
3. Roles
   ▶ Emerging role(s) of EU policy expert, relying on informal channels
   ▶ Increase of parliamentary roles undermines cohesion of parliamentary groups

Belief systems and heuristics

▶ Cognitions (ideas, beliefs, heuristics) shape MPs interaction with Europe
  ▶ Heuristics: hopefully efficient problem solving strategies (simple ↔ complex)
  ▶ Belief systems: multi-tiered, complex systems of normative ideas & beliefs about political reality, e.g.
    ▶ Deep core beliefs (central values)
    ▶ Policy core beliefs (domain-specific core assumptions)
    ▶ Secondary (beliefs re specific instruments etc.)
▶ Example
  ▶ MPs may have few incentives to scrutinise government over integration
  ▶ May also believe that integration should go ahead (no matter what?)
Conflict & inconsistencies

- Normal people hold many incompatible beliefs about politics
- MPs’ belief systems also often inconsistent (conflict between values and/or beliefs about reality)
- Heuristics to ignore/resolve conflict
- Potential conflict between
  - ‘Deep core’ support for integration
  - Incompatible ‘policy core’
- Conflict ‘solved’ by relying on incomplete information? (hypothesis 4)
  - Another reason for inactivity?
  - Bundestag (or rather conflict about EU issues) a ‘sleeping giant’

Improvement of formal procedures

- Bundestag established Brussels based clearing house in 2007 & new unit at home
- (Compete with existing federal structures controlled by government)
- Some MPs unaware of their existence, others reluctant, a small group of policy specialists rather happy
- Kropp: evidence for path-dependency (extension of existing structures)
- Either way, Bundestag tries to address europeanisation through institutional change
Europeanisation and parliamentary groups

- Parliamentary groups are complex institutions, well-suited to deal with europeanisation
- Or maybe not
  - Many EU matters highly technical
  - MEPs rarely attend
  - Meetings (oft the governing parties) often dominated by (Junior) ministers
  - A handful of policy experts work with government/bureaucrats
- Specialists within working groups have become somewhat more assertive
- Potential to affect EU policy making not yet fully realised

Informal channels

- Many MPs shy away from EU issues (complexity, time constraints)
- Those who see themselves as EU policy experts rely mostly on informal channels to
  - Commission officials
  - MEPs
  - Länder structures in Brussels
- Attempts to systematically connect MPs with EU officials via party leadership
- Informal contacts between government bureaucrats (involved in EU draft legislation) and (majority) MPs
- Informal channels very relevant; emerging normative conflicts (hypothesis 2)
EU policy experts

- (Domain specific) policy expert roles now extended to include EU.
- Experts attempt to influence EU policy making, not to monitor it ex post, and rely on informal channels.
- Plurality of practices and procedures.
- So far, not seen as a problem by party managers (hypothesis 3b).

The role of beliefs and heuristics

- EU integration universally (!) cherished.
- But: potential for future conflict, e.g., anti-discrimination directive, and public becoming more eurosceptic.
- Five ‘heuristics’ to deal with cognitive contradictions:
  1. Importance of core value ‘Europe’ trumps policy concerns.
  2. MPs accept leadership, hierarchy, and trade-offs/bargains.
  3. MPs assume that the supremacy of Europe is (quasi-)rational.
  4. MPs accept authority of the government in EU matters (contra recent Constitutional Court rulings).
  5. EU policy experts highlight new opportunities for policy making brought about by Europeanisation.
- Supports hypothesis 4, but growing potential for conflict.
  - FDP ‘Euro-Rebellion’.
  - Government-Opposition conflict over ‘euro bonds’/’austerity’.
Conclusions

- Bundestags' alleged passivity has an institutional and a cognitive base
- Heuristics/beliefs allow (many) MPs to stay inactive
- But there is evidence for change
  - New roles (EU policy experts)
  - Formal procedures and informal information channels
  - Growing awareness of potential for conflicts over ‘Europe’ (more relevant today than in 2010)
- How will this play out over the next 5-10 years?

Summary

- Bundestag has become more active since Auel (2006)
- Informal channels matter
- Bundestag massively affected by europeanisation, but not a passive victim
- Reaction still dominated by tradition, consensus, parochialism (?)
- But: diverging responses to europeanisation
  - Different types of MPs
  - Diverging political points of view
- Correlate: Germany speaks with many, many voices
In pairs of two, discuss if and how the European Sovereign Debt Crisis™ has transformed the traditional pro-European mind-set of German MPs

Mock parliamentary debate in the face of a new Greek crisis, three groups:
1. Nationalists (CSU), argue for leaving the Euro, re-introducing the Deutschmark (and blowing up the coalition in the process)
2. Government (CDU, SPD, rump-CSU), argue for sticking to government policy
3. Opposition (Greens, Left), argue for ending austerity and some deficit spending, backed by euro bonds

Additional twist: You must keep up the appearance of being pro-European in principle