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EXPLORING LIECHTENSTEIN'S AND POLAND'S PERSPECTIVES ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

SUMMARY OF PROJECT RESULTS



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INTRODUCTION

At first glance, Liechtenstein and Poland have little in common. The two countries differ greatly in terms of size, economic strength and economic orientation. In addition, there is no particular geographical, cultural or political proximity. In terms of European integration, the similarities are also very limited. Both countries are part of the European Single Market. However, as a member of the European Union (EU), Poland is part of the EU pillar of the European Economic Area (EEA), while Liechtenstein participates in the EEA through its membership of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

So what is the value of comparing the two countries' perspectives on Europe? Despite all the differences, on closer inspection there are certainly similarities between the two countries' European policies. Moreover, important insights can be gained from the different approaches.

INSIGHTS FROM LIECHTENSTEIN'S EUROPEAN POLICY

On 1 January 1994 – nearly 30 years ago – the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA) came into force. It aims to create a homogeneous and dynamic economic area between the member states of the European Union (EU) and the members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Even today, the EEA Agreement is the most far-reaching and institutionalised agreement between the EU and non-member states and can therefore be seen as a benchmark for a privileged partnership with the EU.

The various publications and presentation within the project have described how the institutional rules of the EEA and the level of integration of the EEA/EFTA states have changed over time. The research also shows that developments towards more integration as well as more differentiation can be observed in the EEA. It thus addresses various institutional challenges in the relationship between the EU and associated states.

The integration of the EFTA states in Europe is focussed on economic integration, while political integration and the associated transfer of national decision-making powers to European institutions are rejected. This reluctance motivated by sovereignty policy is also reflected in the institutional guidelines and principles of the EFTA states' relations with the EU. As a result there is a tension between efficiency and effectiveness on the one hand and autonomy and legitimacy on the other with regard to the incorporation of new EEA-relevant EU law into the EEA Agreement.

Maintaining the homogeneity of EU and EEA law requires an efficient incorporation. However, this can lead to various restrictions on the autonomy of the EEA/EFTA states. At the same time, experience since the EEA Agreement was signed in 1992 shows that the EEA/EFTA states have been able to protect their interests vis-à-vis the EU in various areas better than it was assumed when considering the high degree of asymmetry between the EU and the EEA/EFTA states.

Despite the high level of integration, the integration policy of the EEA/EFTA states is still limited to individual policy areas and is therefore selective in principle. In terms of institutions and processes, the EEA EFTA states have shown a certain degree of flexibility, but national decision-making powers have only been transferred to EU or EFTA institutions in a few exceptional cases and only in very technical areas.

The functioning of the EEA is mostly assessed favourably by the contracting parties. The high level of material integration should be emphasised, which also extends beyond the actual cooperation in the four fundamental freedoms.

Cooperation between the EU and the EEA/EFTA states can be described as pragmatic and constructive. There is an ongoing and mostly very objective dialogue between the contracting parties of the EEA. Politically, the EEA/EFTA states have repeatedly committed themselves to the objectives of the EEA

Agreement. In addition, they have endeavoured to contribute to improving the functioning of the EEA Agreement by introducing new procedures. As a result, they have succeeded in ensuring that issue-specific conflicts have not affected the general perception of the EEA.

EEA membership was rarely politicised in the EEA/EFTA states. From a democratic perspective, this can be viewed critically, as it has further consolidated the dominant position of the national executive bodies in the domestic debate on European policy. On the other hand, the low level of politicisation increases the efficiency of the procedures in the EEA. Consequently, one can speak of a legitimacy dilemma with regard to the EEA. Greater politicisation of the EEA – e.g. in the form of early involvement of national parliaments in the process of incorporating new EU law into the EEA Agreement – would increase input legitimacy. At the same time, however, output legitimacy would be weakened, as extensive consultation and participation processes would lead to an (even more) delayed adoption and thus to a reduced homogeneity of EU and EEA law. Demands for more democratic participation and control therefore also have a price in the EEA.

After the turbulent early years, this anniversary is a success. The EEA/EFTA states have largely been able to keep pace with the dynamic development of the EU, while at the same time retaining their decision-making autonomy, at least in sensitive policy areas, thus distinguishing EEA membership from EU membership. However, the functional problems of delayed adoption described in this article and the various special regulations of the individual EEA/EFTA states also show that there is always a risk of cherry-picking and free-riding by the EEA/EFTA states.

Three key lessons can be drawn for research on external differentiation. Firstly, the reality of integration in the EEA is increasingly difficult to typologise in view of the diverse institutional arrangements. Secondly, a state of complete homogeneity on the basis of different integration principles remains unattainable. Third, although the EEA Agreements provides for far-reaching integration, the level of integration of the EEA EFTA states is still significantly less than the one of the EU states (even those with a lot of opt-outs). If more integration means more complexity, the future of the EEA can be viewed critically, as the point may soon be reached at which the high level of integration can no longer be managed within the existing institutional framework. So far, however, the contracting parties have always found a solution to such institutional challenges. It is therefore definitely too early to call time on the EEA.

INSIGHTS FROM POLAND'S EUROPEAN POLICY

The various publications and presentation within the project have explored the attitudes towards the European integration in the largest so called new member state – Poland. Identifying the specificities of societal support and opposition towards “ever closer” uniting Europe, this paper examines what value system stands behind these attitudes. The investigated values and norms are nested in the long-standing system of political cleavages, as recognized in the classical political science literature. Additionally, the demand and supply side of politics is discussed and interpreted in the light of newly emerging cleavage concepts which are of critical salience for the European integration process. Following the typology of TAN (Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist) and GAL (Green, Alternative, Liberal) value divides across societies, this analysis takes a transnational cleavage perspective to identify postfunctionalist drivers – that is the Polish political parties and their respective (changing) voter bases.

On the supply side, the author examines the political parties’ positioning towards the European integration process and its constitutive elements. Unpacking the black box of support and opposition towards European integration, as reflected in the political parties’ manifestoes and daily appearances, allows for mapping how their positions express the newly emerging cleavages (in the making). Bringing together the demand and the supply side of politics provides a clearer picture of the domestic politics gravitating around the European integration project and its specific components. The provided

picture is dynamic, for the author observes the evolution of the demand and the supply side since 2004, this is the first year, after the big bang round of EU enlargement. From this moment on the milestones of the analysis overlap with the subsequent crises – from the Constitutional Treaty rejection crisis (2005+), through the economic crisis (2008+), the Ukraine crisis (2014), the migration/refugee crisis (2014/2015+), up to the Brexit referendum (2016+) as well as all the spillovers and externalities that the multi-layered crises have brought about.

Exploring the evolution of normative foundations of the demand and supply at the inner and outer core of the system of differentiated integration contributes to the better understanding of the “tectonic plates” on which the system of European differentiated integration is built. The post-functionalist perspective underlines the salience of the domestic politics in explaining the European integration processes. In line with this paradigm, the author aims at answering the question about the relationship between the newly emerging cleavages and the attitudes towards advancing the European integration project.

Finally, we would like to conclude this summarizing section with sketching some routes for further analysis. Bearing in mind all the above-mentioned potential and limits of the applied methodological and theoretical framework, I strongly believe that the prospects for this stream of research are wide-open. After the European integration scholarship has gained plenty of analyses on the differentiated integration in general, it opened a vast way for studies focused on its relations with the public opinion. More and more studies deal with the attitudes of the European citizens towards various aspects of differentiation, and how they translate to the political competition structures. There is still a great potential into further exploration of the changing cleavage structures and their intertwining with the support and opposition towards European integration and its specific features. Investigations providing insights into the newly emerging cleavages could shed more light on how they interact with citizenry’s normative and ideational preferences, how they connect to the attitudes towards various aspects of European integration process, and how they are translated into the evolution of the party systems. These questions are salient from the point of view of the European Union’s system of legitimation. Addressing these questions would provide us with some better understanding of the dynamics and determinants of the EU’s evolution in the times of multiple crises. Moreover, bearing in mind the results of the parliamentary elections in Poland in late 2023, which delegitimized the TAN-like PiS party government, it is important to highlight the necessity for updating the Polish case in further research. In the upcoming years, when fresh statistical data is going to become available, it will unveil the most contemporary picture of Polish politics as regards European themes. The turn from the illiberal trajectory that is marked by the new coalition government led by Donald Tusk, means also a strong impulse towards the GAL-like oriented policies in Poland.

