

# Beyond the ‘worlds of compliance’: a sociological and discursive approach to the Europeanisation of gender equality policies

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## **Abstract**

Drawing on the analysis of gender equality policies in Europe carried out within the QUING project, the volume that this chapter introduces aims at contributing to the literature discussing Europeanisation and the comparative analysis of public policies in a gendered perspective. This general purpose makes necessary to clarify various concepts and to set-up the common theoretical and methodological background of the contributions. This introductory chapter has two main aims. The first is to isolate a few research directions, making explicit references to the most recent developments of the literature on European integration and domestic policy changes in Europe. The second aim is to discuss theoretical and methodological aspects of the discursive politics approach that we employ in the volume for our analysis of the Europeanisation of gender and other inequality policies. By articulating a sociological and discursive approach to Europeanisation, this chapter expects not only to introduce the main empirical findings detailed in the other chapters, but also to develop a more comprehensive approach in the analysis of the “external” variable in the making of gender equality policies in Europe, thus contributing to the overall debate on the Europeanisation of public policies.

## **Introduction**

### *Europeanisation at the crossroads*

“Europeanisation”, if a concept at all, is a hugely discussed one. Over the past ten years, it has generated plenty of definitions<sup>1</sup> and attempts of operationalization, whether as a new theory, a very inclusive, all-you-can-eat ‘background’ concept, or a principle for organising existing theories of European integration and (often diverging) empirical findings. The main aim of this volume, nonetheless, is neither to provide a further conceptual clarification or another assessment to this discussion, nor to place a new definition under consideration. Similarly, our purpose is not to contribute to the fortune of a theoretical tool of which the star is fading, as it becomes clear that Europeanisation, be it in its most stretched and “catch-all” use, does not provide any macro-explanation to policy change in Europe<sup>2</sup>. If the value of a concept (not to speak about a theory) is proportional to its ability to make sense of a wide range of phenomena in a variety of

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<sup>1</sup> Among the most consistent efforts, see: Börzel and Risse (2000), Olsen (2002), and Radaelli (2004).

<sup>2</sup> If it is true that there has been an inflation of synthetic approaches in the past few years, especially among those promoting quite a demanding definition of Europeanisation (Graziano, Vink, 2008, Baisnée and Pasquier, 2007), this might announce a decrease in the overall presence of the concept. Indeed, the academic fortune of a concept, to be measured by the number of references published, is rarely compatible with a more intensive use.

contexts through the arrangement of a same set of variables, then Europeanisation can hardly be considered a “long range concept” or an organized theory. Instead, *exacting uses* drawing on a narrow definition of what is at stake still coexist with *stretched uses* contemplating a wide variety of political, social and even cognitive phenomena referring to the making of a EU policy framework (Baisnée and Pasquier 2007). Even unspecified, sometimes opportunist “*usages*” recycling theorization on the overall direction – or even the meaning- of European integration have not vanished.

It is significant, however, that the dynamics addressed under the notion “Europeanisation” tend to prevent any univocal explanation or generalization. While institution building at the supra-national level had been at the core of the preoccupations of intergovernmentalist and neo-functionalist points of view, Europeanisation studies, beyond the lack of clarity and the broad scope of the concept, have contributed to change the lens through which European integration is analyzed. Indeed, the strengthening of the EU legal and institutional order, as well as successive and increasingly conditional enlargements, have shaped the interest for the “domestic impact of Europe”. Beyond the making of a new model of governance at the EU-level, to be characterized by a very specific process of institutionalization, the emergence of new political and administrative elites or a new arena for interest intermediation, scholars have thus addressed the internalization of EU norms and policies into the national polities. Such an interest, to be declined in each member state as well as in a comparative perspective, has mainly developed from a top-down point of view, focusing on processes of internalization, norm adaptation, with a strong premise: convergence is the rule, conflict or increased variety/divergence, the exception.

These assumptions, nonetheless, have been increasingly questioned in the light of empirical studies carried out throughout the enlarged European Union. By looking at the details of institutional and political “opportunity structures” to be affected by the *acquis* and EU-modeled policy solutions, it became clear that rather than a proxy for convergence, Europeanisation was often a synonym for political contention, competing discursive patterns and institutional “misfit”. As a consequence, over the last decade broader analyses of the EU-MS relations have developed, providing more sophisticated and realistic frameworks. Far from constituting a consistent field of investigation unified by a common research agenda or methodology, these analyses can nevertheless be characterized by a more comprehensive approach that takes into account institutional, discursive, and interactional factors (Radaelli 2000, 2004; Jacquot and Woll 2003).

Drawing on these relatively new premises, and more explicitly referring to sociological *and* cognitive-discursive approaches to Europeanisation, this volume expects to make a contribution to the literature in the light of the comparative analysis of gender equality policies in 27 member states and 2 candidate countries carried out within the European QUING project<sup>3</sup>. The main arguments that make such a contribution much needed, also conditioning its value for the overall reflection on the domestic impact of Europe, are the following:

Firstly, whereas the history and development of EU gender equality Law have been intensively explored and often referred to as an illustration of various theories on European governance and integration, only a few gendered contributions made reference to the Europeanisation literature. Secondly, gender equality, as a field of EU intervention, has a rich record as regarding the development of both “hard” and “soft” policy mechanisms, with a special emphasis on the latter, through the diffusion of mainstreaming and the open method of coordination. Hence, it provides an excellent

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<sup>3</sup> Quality in Gender Equality Policies, 6th Framework Program EC, 2007-2011, [www.quing.eu](http://www.quing.eu)

starting point to explore the cognitive dimension of the domestic impact of Europe. Thirdly, drawing on social movement literature and public policy analysis, there is a rich reflection on the making of gender equality and anti-discrimination policies that shed light on the importance of policy frames that shape the meaning of policies in different ways (Verloo 2007). By comparing frames on gender equality and other inequalities around a set of policy issues in 29 countries, the QUING project thus paved the way for an extensive comparison of the domestic impact of Europe in the field. Finally, by covering *all* the member states, the master project in which this volume originates mobilizes much differentiated institutional, social and political contexts which are likely to shape differently the domestication of EU paradigms and policy practices.

The analysis of discursive and institutional factors that characterises our research agenda and the focus on gender equality and other inequality policies could contribute to further developments in the sociological and cognitive turn to be noticed in the analysis of Europeanisation processes. In particular, our common contribution, by privileging a focus on diversity, aims at challenging the most static and narrowly defined approaches which remains quite pervasive in European studies in general and gendered perspectives in particular. For instance, the strong conditionality of the Enlargement to CEE countries, to which most of the chapters of this volume are dedicated, has generated rather normative and almost exclusively top-down perspectives. These fail to account of the differential impact of the EU and the increased variety of “gender policy regimes”, intuitively maintaining the division of Europe between different “worlds of compliance” (Falkner and Treib 2008). Instead, drawing upon the results of QUING, we suggest a focus on the diversity of the policy response to EU incentives in the member states. Analysing legal and institutional developments, but placing special emphasis on the level of policy practices and discourses, the present contributions all together contribute to a much more fragmented and differentiated outline that suggests mapping and testing a few common variables.

As a very first step, the present chapter provides a review of the literature on Europeanisation and the “gendering of Europe”, defining a joint research agenda (1). Focusing on gendered studies on EU integration, it firstly makes the distinction between different approaches to Europeanisation (1.1) and then lists a set of policy transfers to be analysed in our study (1.2), as well as the levels of governance addressed in our analysis (1.3). In section 2, we extend our reflection beyond the existing literature, to advocate a discursive politics approach (2.1) and the way it echoes the most recent contributions to the literature on policy change in Europe (2.2). In our conclusions we challenge Europeanisation approaches that unilaterally focus on the analysis of compliance mechanisms, leaving out other important factors of policy change as those related to norm diffusion and social learning, and we argue in favour of a more pluralistic and discursive approach to the study of Europeanisation.

## **1. Gendering Europeanisation: theoretical debates**

### ***1.1 From a focus on convergence to a sociological approach?***

A review of relevant literature on Europeanisation is important to develop an understanding of Europeanisation processes that may account for its institutional and discursive aspects. By emphasizing the wide range of processes addressed through the concept of Europeanisation, we critically assess the shift from a set of approaches

dominated by a focus on convergence, to a more complex assessment of the impact of Europe on domestic politics and policies. Differentiating between different streams of analysis (institutionalisms, sociological and cognitive approaches), we oppose unspecified references to Europeanisation to those that aim at generating hypothesis and comparison. The shift towards a more sociological and cognitive understanding, that includes the diffusion of policy paradigms and good practices, social learning, and the Europeanisation of collective action around gender issues, will be enlightened as of special relevance for gendered policy analysis. Empirical works on gender equality policies that draw on a comprehensive definition of Europeanisation will also deserve closer attention in our analysis.

#### *Europeanisation as an explanatory variable?*

The concept of ‘Europeanisation’ was developed, from the nineties onwards in particular, to refer to the impact of the European integration process on national political systems. It usually refers to the modification of national systems either as a direct result of the integration process, or as an indirect result of changes to other parts of the political system caused by the same process of integration (Andersen and Eliassen 1993; Mény, Muller and Quermonne 1996; Closa 2001). The Europeanisation of national systems was defined as taking place through the transfer of competencies to the supranational level, the adaptive response of member countries to EU inputs and, in some cases, conditionality, and the subsequent convergence of policies.

In many cases, the “domestic impact of Europe” has been contemplated as an independent (and external) variable to explain policy change. Mostly focusing on institutional policy transfers and norm adaptation – the internalization of the *acquis* -, top down approaches, although from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives, do share the assumption that Europeanisation shapes policy change *from above*. While assuming that changes can also affect the level of ideas or policy practices, a great part of the literature considers Europeanisation as a rather unidirectional process from the supranational to the national, whereas literature on European integration drawing on neofunctionalism (Haas 1968) has been tracking the processes by which national polities have uploaded a certain amount of sovereignty and political contention to the supranational level. Alone, its usage to describe a top-down process of adaptation does not account for the fortune of the “label” Europeanisation, however. Instead, by studying how “Europe hits home”, many scholars have explored the complex relations between the European Union and the member states, describing political conflicts around norm adaptation or processes of redistribution of resources among domestic actors due to the emergence of new “opportunity structures” (Börzel & Risse 2003). For studies dedicated to a specific (policy) area of Europeanisation, the overall assessment has rarely been an easy one, where domestic actors and institutions easily fit with EU incentives (see, for instance, Lehmkuhl 2000; Grossmann 2003). In many cases, Europeanisation appears as a set of processes (institutional, political, cognitive) affecting the way a problem is framed in a specific polity, and the content of policy solutions which are developed.

#### *Neo-institutionalisms and European integration*

Still far from drawing on a common research agenda, the abovementioned approaches tend to put the emphasis either on *institutional paths*, or *discursive patterns*. The first category includes the various types of neo-institutionalism described by Peter Hall and Rosemary Taylor (1996). Historical institutionalism points out the paths of institutionalization of a public area of intervention – as social policies – in a concrete

domestic context, and the influence those paths are likely to have on the impact of the EU. Institutional legacies, “policy style” and the general institutional framing of a policy issue are then particularly at stake (see the contributions in Cowles, Caporaso and Risse 2001). Also inspired by the “path dependency” approach to institution making<sup>4</sup>, which assumes that these variables are crucial to explain institutional outcome even in the presence of strong external incentives, historical-institutionalist approaches are rarely articulated in isolation from other perspectives and reveal to be highly compatible with rational choice and/or actor-oriented institutionalisms (Sedelmeier 2006).

By contrast, sociological institutionalism suggests focusing on the level of actors: administrative, social and political agents who are primarily concerned with policy change. This point of view is of specific relevance not only to analyze the emergence of “Europeanized” elites both at the EU level and in the member states (Georgakakis 2002), but also the role of “veto-players” (Tsebelis 2000; Radaelli 2000) and the incorporation of the EU dimension into domestic politics, in the form of anti-integration arguments and electoral platforms (Neumayer 2006). As stressed by Sedelmeier (2006: 13), sociological (or constructivist) institutionalism “is especially well suited to analyze processes of socialization and persuasion as a mechanism of EU domestic impact, phenomena which are disregarded by rationalist approaches”. At the same time, it draws attention on different dimensions of policy change that neo-institutionalism had left merely unexplored. If we refer to an inclusive definition of policy transfers, i.e. of processes “by which knowledge of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system, is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system” (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996: 344), then one may question how solutions, institutional arrangements and policy practices developed at the EU-level shape national politics, politics and policies.

Besides, given that the EU is developing both “hard” and “soft” law instruments (see Beveridge 2008) and facilitates norm diffusion through social learning (Jacoby 2004), it is also possible to contemplate these aspects from a *cognitive* point of view. As part of a constructivist approach to political reality, cognitive analysis of public policies is now a consolidated field of investigation, in which a number of methodological and theoretical influences coexist. It has been articulated in different ways, as shows the reference to comparable but not similar concepts such as policy frames (Verloo 2005), paradigms (Hall 1993) or “référentiels” (Muller 1996). Although starting from different premises, cognitive approaches tend to emphasize discursive patterns and ideational change. As regarding the study of domestic policy change, this perspective identifies variables shaping policy outcomes through processes of social learning and framing. Therefore, along with a sociological approach, it is likely to shed light on the internalization of the “external” variable by a number of actors, even in the presence of a moderate pressure for adaptation or through soft-instrument. As we will argue, this methodological combination is of special relevance to study the making of gender equality policies in the EU (see section 2).

#### *A shift toward a ‘pluralistic approach’?*

Far from being mutually exclusive (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005), above-mentioned research directions can draw upon the extensive definition suggested

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<sup>4</sup> More explicitly in the case of Central-Eastern Europe member states, where the analysis of the post-socialist transformation has contributed to extend the application of this theory borrowed from economics to the making of democratic institutions (Bruzst, Stark, 1998).

by Claudio Radaelli, that describes Europeanisation as consisting of “processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies” (2004). As stressed by Baisnée and Pasquier (2007), it is maybe not so much this widely used definition that makes the clarification of Radaelli valuable, but rather its ability to distinguish Europeanisation from other phenomena such as convergence and integration, thus leaving space for analyzing political conflict and the way it affects policy discourse. Moreover, Schmidt and Radaelli (2004) stress the need for what they call a ‘pluralistic approach’ to the study of policy change in Europe, arguing that ‘only by considering possible factors from a variety of methodological perspectives can one get a more complete explanation of policy change’ (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004: 184).

Despite the analytical opportunities opened by the ‘pluralistic approach’ for capturing the complex dynamics of Europeanisation, social sciences do not always proceed in a cumulative way, and unspecified uses of the concept of Europeanisation are still appearing in a number of studies. Simultaneously, the unprecedented extent and conditionality of the on-going Eastern Enlargement paved the way for an understanding which is usually limited to the legislative and institutional levels. Whereas Graziano (2007), Radaelli and Saurruger (2008), and Schmidt and Radaelli (2004) explore the new directions in the research on the Europeanisation of public policy, Falkner and Treib (2008) adopt a relatively narrow – and rather normative focus, which establishes a ranking of pioneers and laggards in matter of compliance that often matches common sense and stereotypical national features<sup>5</sup>. This study is nevertheless especially challenging from the point of view of this volume, for a number of reasons. Firstly, because of the ‘politics of ranking’ that it endorses (see Verloo and Van der Vleuten 2009 discussed in the next section). Secondly, but also since it includes the field of gender equality policies in the labour realm.<sup>6</sup> Thirdly, because studies of Europeanisation in post-accession countries, such as Krizsan (2009), that analyse EU mechanisms based on social learning and financial incentives, have provided more thorough explanations of the factors that promote or hinder enforcement of EU norms in CEECs. Through a constructivist analysis of how EU soft law mechanisms work in Hungary in the area of equality, Krizsan (2009) explains how developments in state capacity, norm appropriation, and NGO involvement reveal potential for slower but steady Europeanisation, that a simple analysis of compliance would not be able to capture. This shows, on the one hand, that compliance studies, to be more explanatory, need to complement their research with the analysis of soft policy measures indicating EU social learning. On the other hand, impact of soft law measures and social learning

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<sup>5</sup> According to Falkner and Treib’s analysis (2008), Denmark, Finland and Sweden belong to the ‘world of law observance’, where a culture of compliance with the law promotes a successful transposition and implementation of EU directives; Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK belong to the ‘world of domestic politics’, where domestic concerns prevail over compliance with the EU norms; France, Greece, Luxembourg and Portugal belong to the ‘world of transposition neglect’ where these ‘neglecting countries’ tend to ignore transposition obligations due to ‘national arrogance’ or ‘administrative inefficiency’; and two old member states like Ireland, Italy, together with new member states like the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia belong to the ‘world of dead letters’, which means that these countries may be compliant in transposing EU directives but not in monitoring and enforcing the measures.

<sup>6</sup> This disregards theoretical and empirical findings of gender scholarship that understand gender relations as systemic (see among others Walby 2009) and gender equality issues as cutting across all policy areas (see among others Rees 1998).

can better be achieved through more constructivist and discursive methodologies than the ones employed in the literature on Europeanisation that essentially focuses on compliance.

A shift towards a ‘pluralistic approach’ to the study of Europeanisation indeed appears more in line with gendered analyses, and could favour a fertile exchange between the two disciplines (see following section). But even beyond the ‘pluralist approach’, the extensive literature on Europeanisation, of which we do not claim to provide an exhaustive overview, points out challenges and theoretical insights that may contribute to deepen the understanding of policy change in the field of gender equality. At the same time, addressing the domestic impact of the EU through the gender equality lenses helps to clarify which processes shall be addressed by an inclusive definition of Europeanisation, especially regarding its cognitive dimension. As a consequence, we argue in favour of bringing closer both research agendas.

## ***1.2 Bringing gender into Europeanisation studies (and vice versa)***

### *Gender and European integration: the prevalence of an EU-level focus*

If the history and development of EU gender equality law is well known and has been often referred to when analysing (gendered) welfare regimes in Europe (Beveridge 2008: 11), it has been nonetheless at the core of a relatively limited number of studies dedicated specifically to European integration. The role played by the European Court of Justice in the judicialization of equality (Hoskyns 1996; Shaw 2000) as well as the strengthening of the *acquis*, have received some attention, often as an illustration of neo-functional approaches (Mazey 1995, 2002; Pollack & Hafner-Burton 2000). Therefore, the bottom-up perspective adopted by much of the researches driven by neo-functional, intergovernmentalist or multi-level governance approaches to European integration, also contributed to draw some attention on the institutionalization of the intervention of EU institutions in the field. However, rather than focusing on the processes by which claims in favour of gender-friendly policies were uploaded from the national to the supranational level, most of these studies have concentrated on the *EU-level* of policy making, thus analysing the content of gender equality regulation or the building of epistemic communities (Haas 1992). To a lesser extent, the uploading of the advocacy of women’s interests to the EU-level has been investigated, both through the lens of social movements literature (Banaszak 2003), as a part of collective interests intermediation (Helferrich and Kolb 2001; Rolandsen 2008) and as a process of professionalization (Cavaillé 2006). A few studies have discussed the implementation of EU gender equality policies at the national level (Hoskyns 1988; Ostner and Lewis 1995; Lombardo 2004). However, apart from Hoskyns (1996), only Van der Vleuten (2007) so far has explored more indepth the dynamics of European governance by explaining not only supranational but also national factors that accounted for the adoption of EU gender equality directives. Until early 2000s, the Europeanisation of gender equality had therefore mainly been addressed by privileging the sole level of EU institutions and policy arena.

### *Addressing the domestic impact of Europe from a gendered perspective*

Meanwhile, following Börzel and Risse’s insights (2003), there has been an increasing interest for the domestic impact of Europe: that is, the way regulations and policy practices or paradigms developed at the EU-level shape national policies, politics and polities. Understood as “a process of institution-building at the European level in order to explore how Europeanisation processes impacts upon the member states”

(Börzel & Risse 2003: 59), Europeanisation was thus conceptualized in terms differing from those of integration or convergence (Radaelli 2004). While there has been a growing literature contemplating Europeanisation processes as an *explanandum* (a thing to be explained) rather than an *explanans* (an explanatory variable), the contribution of gendered approaches to the conceptualization of the domestic impact of Europe has been scarce, so far. From a top-down and an historical-institutionalist perspective, Caporaso and Jupille (2001) explored the comparative impact of EU legislation on the making of equality in France and the UK, emphasizing domestic respective institutional heritages and the way it shape the paths for internalizing EU legal order<sup>7</sup>.

Also drawing on historical institutionalism, Ulrike Liebert's edited volume (2003) attempted a first comparative mapping of the patterns of Europeanisation in the field of gender equality policies. Focusing on six member states, case studies shed light on the diverging patterns of Europeanisation of gender equality policies, which illustrates that increased diversity, instead of convergence, is one of the plausible outcomes of norm adaptation (Héritier 2001). The authors identify three mechanisms driving Europeanisation of gender equality policies: *institutional* (i.e. EU legislation, policy and legal sentences); *cognitive* (i.e. frames that mobilize public opinion and help to reframe public policy issues); and *interaction* mechanisms (i.e. related to developing political representation and building transnational advocacy networks). Domestic developments of gender politics in relation to the EU pressure will rely in some cases mainly on institutional factors, in others mainly on cognitive factors or on interaction mechanisms.

Findings in Liebert's study on gender equality policies warn about the possibility of fast generalizations about "typically national paths" to Europeanisation. They rather expect 'different "ideal typical" constellations of necessary and sufficient causal mechanisms' that are not so rigidly attributed to one country rather than to another (Liebert 2003: 300). Liebert and other's constellations are summarized in the five templates the authors use to explain different forms of Europeanisation (Liebert 2003: 302-303): "Stubbornness" (a stubborn refusal of EU norms or ideas)<sup>8</sup>; "Compliance" (transposition which is not merely changing existing national frames); "Domestication" (a proactive attitude towards Europeanisation to make EU frameworks fit domestic needs); "Transformation" (interacting with EU incentives, dominant are reshaped); and "Innovation" (national development of EU norms beyond their original scope). While paths of institutionalization and domestic gender regimes are among the main variables, Liebert *et alii* simultaneously emphasize the role of "mediating factors" such as women's organizations that Jupille and Caporaso had left merely unexplored.

One of the important contributions of Liebert and others' work is that it broadens the approach to study Europeanisation to aspects such as the analysis of institutions, frames, and interactions, which had not been explored jointly before in a gendered perspective. This in turn provides a more complex and realistic picture of the EU-member states dynamics. Moreover, by not fixing one particular ideal type of Europeanisation to one specific country, it avoids a normative and rather static assessment of performance in compliance of EU norms that – as Verloo and Van der Vleuten (2009) have argued- does not necessarily derive from actual quality performance but rather from the relative power position of a state.

### *Towards an actors-oriented and bottom-up analysis?*

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<sup>7</sup> More recently, Geddes and Guiraudon (2004) have adopted a similar perspective concerning the impact of EU anti-discrimination policy in Britain and France.

<sup>8</sup> Examples vary in time, but include UK and France.

Even more recently, a few approaches have focused on the Europeanisation of gender equality policies mainly through its instruments: benchmarking, Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and, more specifically, gender mainstreaming. Yet, beyond a critical assessment of its operationalization (Mazey 2000; Woodward 2003; Walby 2005), some of the most recent contributions adopt a constructivist perspective (Bruno, Jacquot, Mandin 2006; Jacquot 2006), “questioning the assumed political neutrality of the instruments used as ‘new’ soft modes of governance”. Gender mainstreaming, in particular, is analysed as a kind of social engineering and through its subversion by the priority agenda of the European Employment Strategy, which makes it “less Europeanized as an instrument for reducing gender inequalities than as a mean for promoting the development of the labour force and its flexibility” (Bruno, Jacquot, Mandin, 2006: 519, 531). In a less politicized (and controversial) way, Beveridge et alii (2008) also make a valuable contribution to the study of the instruments of EU gender policies, thus making clear that the Europeanisation of gender equality policy does not consist exclusively in the implementation of the *acquis*.

Whether focusing on hard-law or soft mechanisms, some of the gendered approaches to Europeanisation suggest an increased attention for the role of domestic actors<sup>9</sup>. So far, however, the sociological point of view on European integration still counts with a limited number of gendered perspectives. Only a few authors have analysed the making of new Europeanized elites at the EU-level, such as female Members of the European Parliament (Freedman 2002 ; Beauvallet & Michon 2006, 2009), lobbyists (Cavaillé 2006), or EU-femocrats (Jacquot 2009). Similarly, as regarding the domestic level, the consequences of the new opportunity structures shaped by the emergence of a EU policy paradigm on women’s organizations, gender rights advocates, female politicians or political parties have been explored only marginally. Although still incipient, the interest for the actors of the Europeanisation of gender equality has received new incentives, as the Eastern Enlargement<sup>10</sup>, despite its unprecedented conditionality, revealed the complexity of the domestic ‘logics of appropriateness’ and the contentious dimension of the politics of Europeanisation (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier 2005; Neumayer 2006). As a number of studies point at the highly differentiated patterns of Europeanisation in the new member states, the increased diversity of the EU after the 2004 and 2007 enlargements makes even more necessary a complex understanding of the domestic impact of Europe.

So far, the responsiveness of gendered approaches has been rather low. While the Eastern enlargement has generated significant scholarly attention for the implementation of EU gender equality policies in the new member states and candidate countries, it mainly adopted the form of a monitoring of implementation. Meanwhile, in many cases, the EU influence has been addressed marginally, as an additional “external variable” possibly shaping policy discourse and collective action, by the most informed scholars as regarding the gendered dimension of post-socialist transformation (Gal & Kligman 2002). By contrast, only a few analyses have focused on the Europeanisation of gender in Central-Eastern Europe taking into account paths of institutionalization, norm diffusion and cognitive aspects. These have mainly addressed how the EU is shaping women’s organizations and gender rights advocates (see Forest 2006; Fuchs 2007; Buzogány 2009), as well as policy change (Röder 2007; Krizsan and Popa 2008, Krizsan 2009).

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, most of the contributions to Beveridge’s edited volume raise issues about actors who participate in OMC processes.

<sup>10</sup> That has coincided with the ‘constitutionalization’ of the principle of gender equality in the Amsterdam treaty, and its institutionalization through gender mainstreaming.

### ***1.3 Research agenda and levels of analysis***

This overview of Europeanisation and gender analyses, which by no means claims to be exhaustive, reveals that research agendas on the domestic impact of Europe and the making of equality policies significantly overlap and could fruitfully learn from each other. However, what might be the specific contribution of gendered approaches to the overall discussion on Europeanisation?

A first contribution is the increasing body of literature on discursive politics analyses that is developing within gender studies (Bacchi 1999; 2005; 2009; Ferree et al 2002; Kantola 2006; Verloo 2007; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009). Within this scholarship, the QUING research pays special attention to the different ways in which a policy issue is framed by different actors in a particular member state and then, to the frames co-existing within the enlarged European Union and those elaborated at the EU-level. This makes possible, despite its complexity, to draw fruitful comparisons between EU and member states' discourses on gender equality and other inequality policies. A cognitive focus, especially as it concentrates on the level of discourses, not only derives from a constructionist perspective on public policies and social reality in general. Simultaneously, it contributes to make clear that Europe hits home well beyond legislation and institutional politics and affects the flesh and bones of policy practices through paradigms, beliefs and "ways of doing things".

Due to the requirements of the policy area we are studying, that is gender and other equality policies, our research design is necessarily 'bottom-up' (see Radaelli and Schmidt 2004). Domestic political dynamics, often related to the institutions-civil society relations concerning the making of equality policies, are key to understand policy change around equality and the role of the European Union in it. Moreover, gender equality policies are exposed to the influence not only of the EU but also international actors such as the UN, as well as transnational advocacy coalitions on particular policy issues. Thus, the analysis of Europeanisation must take into account also other external factors and differentiate the role of EU and non EU actors.

Focusing on institutional, cognitive and interactional aspects, our research agenda engages with a number of questions that current Europeanisation studies pose to gender equality policies. At a general level, it means to explore what are the conditions under which Europeanisation affects or not domestic policy patterns. Here, the questions to be tackled are particularly related to how issues are *framed* and what the existing *political contention* and *EU usages* by institutional and civil society actors are, as follows: what is the meaning of EU pressure? How contested is it at the domestic level? Were there any shifts in frame that could be attributed to the EU? What similarities and differences can be identified between EU and domestic frames in policy areas of EU competence? To what extent were EU policy issues strategically framed to resonate within national hegemonic discourses? How is the EU discourse used by policy actors? And by whom, amongst institutional and civil society actors, is the EU frame contested or used?

Another set of questions concerns the issue of anti-discrimination policy in the EU, an issue that is particularly relevant to scholarly work on *intersectionality* or the intersection of gender with other inequalities: in what ways does the EU offer a window of opportunity for putting intersectionality on the domestic political agenda? What are the consequences of translating the EU framing of intersectionality on the national level? What are the results of Europeanisation when an EU issue is not

embedded in the national political system? What are the dynamics between internal and external drives to intersectionality?

It is also meaningful to engage with questions that more directly concern the *literature on Europeanisation*, such as: to what extent do patterns in European countries researched in QUING challenge the ‘worlds of compliance’ framework? To what extent does it make sense to make country clusters when we look at gender equality policies? And should those clusters perpetuate the East-West divide, among others? To what extent does the ‘fit-misfit’ theory work for specific country cases?

The contributions to this volume cannot possibly contemplate *each* of these questions. Yet, drawing on a common definition of Europeanisation and a similar concern for its complex implications on the domestic scenes, they cover a number of the abovementioned issues. Additionally, through the lenses of gender equality policy, the contributions to the present volume also contemplate the “multi-level” dimension of the politics of Europeanisation, which can refer either to different field of public policies or different levels of governance impacted by the EU. Opting for the longitudinal study of particular policy issues (‘non-employment’, gender based violence, politics of intimate citizenship), they illustrate the varying institutional and political dynamics that emerge in different member states within the same sector of public intervention. Besides, addressing the Europeanisation of gender equality at the sub-national level underlines that the domestic impact of Europe is not limited to the nation-state level. This point of view, in line with some of the criticisms addressed to the Europeanisation literature (Carter and Pasquier 2006), provides a further argument for studying Europeanisation processes beyond a matter of compliance, since the EU hits the regions mainly through soft policy instruments and social learning. Whatever the level of analysis adopted by the contributors, in the sociological approach to Europeanisation that we endorse here, discourse is a particularly relevant factor to understand the type of impact that the EU has on domestic politics. And we argue that to some extent, the level of discourse can provide the common entry to be further investigated by scholars interested in “bringing Europeanisation into gender studies, and vice versa”.

## **2. A discursive approach to the Europeanisation of gender equality policy**

In processes of discursive contestations as those that occur in national political arenas the impact of the EU acquires a multiplicity of different meanings. The analysis of such meanings reveals cognitive and interactional mechanisms of Europeanisation that enable us to depict a more complex picture of the EU impact on policy change. Questions on discursive politics like the ones we posed in the previous section place the focus of research on how the meaning of EU norms is shaped during processes of contestation. By emphasising the impact that ideas, meanings, norms and frames have on policy change, this approach complements analyses of Europeanisation in terms of actors’ preferences, policy legacies, and institutional capacity (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004). In this section we aim at discussing theoretical and methodological aspects of our discursive approach to the Europeanisation of gender equality policy, by highlighting similarities and differences between our approach and that of other Europeanisation scholars concerning both cognitive and interactional dimensions of discourse. We will first discuss the ideational or symbolic aspects of discourse and then the interactional ones.

### ***2.1 “Making” sense of EU policies at the domestic level: meanings and contestation***

### *Discursive analyses of Europeanisation: theoretical background*

Among Europeanisation scholars, those who privilege a pluralistic approach to the issue are also the ones who argue that EU impact can be discursively created and that this should be reflected in the theory (Radaelli and Pasquier 2008; Schmidt and Radaelli 2004; Schmidt 2002). Schmidt and Radaelli (2004: 184) admit that a discursive approach to the study of policy change in Europe is ‘largely missing from explanations of European integration and Europeanisation’. The notion of discourse that Radaelli and Pasquier (in Graziano and Vink 2008: 38-39) employ refers both to an ideational or cognitive dimension (discourse as a set of ideas, a cognitive activity that enables actors both to make sense of reality and to normatively evaluate it) and to an interactive dimension of discourse (impact of discourse should be assessed in the context of interactions among policymakers, and between policymakers and public opinion). Schmidt (2002) and Schmidt and Radaelli (2004) have emphasised discourse as a key mediating factor among others that explain the impact of Europeanisation on national policy<sup>11</sup>. Their argument is that significant policy change is likely to occur when domestic discourse convincingly supports it, and discourse can increase political capacity by influencing perception of problems and legacies and actors’ preferences (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004: 186). Discourse, in the interpretation of the mentioned scholars, is mainly associated with *rhetorical* devices and efforts employed to persuade actors of the convenience of policy change in the stages of formulation, negotiation, and communication of public policies.

Scholars in gender and politics have contributed to the discursive study of Europeanisation with a particular emphasis on discourse in relation to its *meaning* and *contestation*. They have discussed the concept of gender equality as one open to continuous contestation during the struggles to achieve a more gender equal society (Bacchi 1999; Ferree et al 2002; Schmidt-Gleim and Verloo 2003; Kantola 2006; Verloo 2007). Concepts are contested in the sense that they have no fixed or essential meaning but are rather shaped by political goals and intentions (Bacchi 1996). Thus, gender equality is a contested concept in the sense that it is discursively constructed in particular ways that are not to be understood as fixed achievements, but that can rather be challenged. Gender equality acquires different meanings in different places and periods. In some contexts gender equality means equal opportunities, in others it is associated with empowerment, in others it is labelled as emancipation (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009). During processes of contestation and interpretation of its meaning, the concept of gender equality can be ‘stretched’ to incorporate new meanings (for instance when gender equality is conceived as intersecting with other inequalities), ‘shrunk’ (gender equality can be shrunk into non-discrimination in a strictly legal sense), or ‘bent’ to other goals than that of gender equality (such as economic growth) to fit into existing policy frames (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009). These changes in meaning are the result of the activities of a wide range of policy actors who try to accommodate other trends for their own purposes, in the attempt to steer the changes in their intended direction. Thus, an important contribution of gender and politics scholarship to the discursive study of Europeanisation is precisely the development of a discursive politics approach to explore processes of contestation and attribution of meanings to the concept of gender equality.

A good example is Liebert’s work on *Gendering Europeanisation* (2003), which adopts an interpretative framework that – in her words- ‘emphasises the importance of

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<sup>11</sup> The other relevant factors are policy problems that demand change, political institutional capacity, policy legacies, and policy preferences.

the meanings that European norms acquire and the varying reactions that Europeanisation provokes across different domestic contexts.’ (Liebert 2003: 256). Authors of Liebert’s collective volume start their analysis from contestation, by highlighting controversies that the transposition of EU gender directives might have created in France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Sweden and UK. This enables them to observe a variety of processes of attribution of meanings of EU gender equality policies that occur in the member states. In particular, scholars in Liebert’s (2003) book map the dominant policy frames that emerge in national policy debates and assess the extent to which frames have shifted over time by including gender ideas and norms that are attributed to the EU impact. In their view, shifts in frames (that are in line with EU gender norms) can be taken as an indicator of political elites’s learning in response to the influence of the EU. Framing dynamics vary in the authors’ accounts. In some cases the pervasive presence of traditional hegemonic discourses hindered the EU impact on the national level, and political elites proved resistant to reframe the issue so to make it fit with domestic frames. In other cases, EU norms and ideas managed to catalyse activities to promote domestic policy change. Liebert (2003) has been an important contribution to develop and legitimise in the literature the analysis of processes of frame shifting and reframing of EU gender norms that emerge in domestic controversies as relevant to understand dynamics of Europeanisation. Yet, framing is only one among many other Europeanisation factors considered in Liebert’s analysis, which means that inevitably it cannot be tackled in detail. European research on the quality of gender equality policies in Europe developed within the QUING project deepens the discursive analysis of policies and widens the case studies to cover all European member states and two candidate countries.

#### *QUING’s contribution to discursive politics: theoretical and methodological issues*

QUING has developed a discursive politics approach to analyse policy frames on gender equality and other inequality policies by elaborating a methodology of ‘critical frame analysis’ of policy documents. Since a number of contributions in this volume adopt this approach, we will discuss it seeking to distinguish its features from other scholarly works on Europeanisation as discourse. The starting point is the concept of policy frame. While Goffman (1974) originally introduced the notion of frame, the application of the concept to policy analysis was due to Rein and Schön’s work (1993, 1994) on policy framing, and the literature on social movements’ theory (Snow *et al.* 1986; Snow and Benford 1988, 1992) developed and diffused the concept to understand social movements’ dynamics. Policy frames in the QUING approach include both cognitive and normative dimensions, as they are cognitive schemata that help to make sense of reality and to assess it at the same time. A frame is, as Ferree and Merrill (2000: 456) define it, ‘a cognitive ordering that relates events to one another’ and ‘a way of talking and thinking about things that links idea elements into packages’. The different idea elements that connect to express some kind of meaning can be positions on what a particular problem or solution is. Frame analysis starts from the assumption that there are multiple interpretations of what a policy problem is, and seeks to address such implicit or explicit interpretations, by focusing on policy actors’ different representations of the problem and of the solutions. The concept of ‘policy frame’ that QUING draws from is that of Verloo (2005: 20), who defines it as: ‘an organizing principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful policy problem, in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly included’.

This definition of policy frame was inspired by Bacchi’s ‘What’s the problem?’

approach to the analysis of public policies that helped us to critically reflect on the ways in which policy problems get constructed in policymaking discourses (Bacchi 1999). The QUING team, drawing on previous research<sup>12</sup>, developed a ‘critical frame analysis’ to study the various dimensions in which policy problems and solutions can be represented (Verloo 2007). This analysis identifies policy frames by coding policy documents on the basis of a list of ‘sensitising questions’. These guide the analysis of texts along different aspects of what is the diagnosis of the problem and what is the solution that emerges in the document about a specific policy issue. Idea elements or positions considered that reveal what is the prevalent framing of an issue enable analysts to identify implicit or explicit representations of which roles are attributed to policy actors (who faces the problem? who caused it? who should solve it?), to what extent gender and intersectionality (i.e. gender intersections with other inequalities such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, ability) are related to the problem and its solution, or what mechanisms and norms are behind the reproduction of the problem and promotion of the solution, and where the problem and its solution are located in the organization of citizenship, labour or intimacy (Verloo 2007; 2005). The frame analysis is defined as ‘critical’ due to its identification of who has a *voice* in defining problems and solutions in policy documents, that enables to detect which actors are included or excluded from the possibility of framing an issue. This type of frame analysis enabled researchers to map a variety of different interpretations of what a policy problem and its solution are. One of its characteristics is the understanding that frames are not totally intentional, or at least that it is important to differentiate between the various levels of frames (see Dombos et al. 2009).

The position on ‘intentionality’ of frames distinguishes QUING’s discursive approach to the study of policy frames in Europe from that of Europeanisation scholars who do not conceive discourse as always the key factor to consider, but only when it exercises a causal influence on policy change because it redefines policy interests (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004: 184). This is because Schmidt and Radaelli (2004: 186) treat discourse as *intentional*, conscious effort to alter the perception of policy problems and to influence preferences. In this sense, their approach is close to the literature on social movements’ theory (Snow *et al.* 1986; Snow and Benford 1988, 1992; Gamson 1992; McAdam *et al.* 1996; Tarrow 1998), that has significantly developed this type of analysis to understand the emergence and disappearance, and the success or failure, of different social movements. This literature conceptualizes frames as the *intentional* intervention of actors to shape reality in a ‘conscious’ and ‘strategic’ way. This concept of ‘framing’ goes back to David Snow’s original definition of ‘conscious strategic effects by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action’ (McAdam *et al.* 1996: 6).

In the QUING approach, by contrast, *discourses* are conceived as *always relevant* because policy actors are, intentionally or unintentionally, always involved in discursive politics. That is they are constantly engaging in ‘*conceptual disputes that result in meanings attributed to the terms and concepts employed in specific contexts*’ (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009: 10). Unlike most social movement’s theory and Schmidt and Radaelli’s 2004 perspective on discourse, QUING departs from the idea that discourses are both *intentional* and *unintentional*, a notion which has been explicitly articulated in Carol Bacchi’s work (Bacchi 2009; 2005; 1999) and inspired by

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<sup>12</sup> MAGEEQ (Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Europe) Project, Fifth Framework Program of the European Commission (2003-2005) [www.mageeq.net](http://www.mageeq.net) The elaboration of critical frames analysis drew on the work of other scholars such as Rein and Schön 1993, 1994; Snow and Benford 1988, 1992; Snow *et al.* 1986; Walby 1990; Connell 1987, 1995; Verloo and Roggeband 1996.

Foucault (1997; 1979) and Giddens (1984). Foucault (1997; 1979) has discussed the power that stems from the overarching discourses of particular institutions such as prisons or hospitals that, through a series of practices, exercise control over people's behaviour and body regulation. Foucault's concept of discourse, as Walby points out, 'goes beyond a focus on the simply ideational or symbolic' as it includes 'material and practical elements and institutions' (Walby 2007, D12, p. 7). Giddens (1984) contributes to the discussion on the 'unintentionality' of discourse by establishing a link between discursive and practical consciousness. Policy frames originate in *discursive* consciousness to the extent that actors using them can explain discursively why they are using them and what they mean to do with them, but they also originate in the *practical* consciousness to the extent that they emerge from routines and rules that are commonly applied in certain contexts without an awareness that these are rules or routines (Giddens 1984 in Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009). Bacchi (2009) suggests that frames have an unconscious dimension as they reflect deep cultural and institutional meanings. She questions the extent to which policy actors can actually step outside the existing hegemonic discourses and intentionally shape frames to strategically achieve a certain goal (Bacchi 2009).

Within the theoretical framework of discourses as intentional and unintentional developed in QUING, frames have different implications according to the level at which they are observed. In discussing the QUING's discursive approach, Dombos et al. (2009: 4) put it nicely when they say that, if we consider a 'micro and meso level perspective, actors do make intentional decisions and choose between the available competing frames to pursue their goals'. In this sense they can strategically frame an issue to achieve their objective. However, if we consider the macro level perspective, broader hegemonic discourses discussed by Bacchi (2009) set the horizon in which individual frames take place and in this sense they influence what frames are available in a certain context and moment and what individual frames would more successfully resonate with existing hegemonic discourses. In Dombos et al.'s words, 'from a macro level point of view such deep cultural meanings matter more than the intentionality of the framing process by specific actors.' (Dombos et al. 2009: 4). Yet, when we look at the meso and micro level perspective of frames that considers the framing of particular policy issues and documents within specific institutional and political configurations, frames appear intentional.

From a methodological point of view, to grasp both the unintentional and intentional aspect of policy frames, QUING researchers analysed different levels of frames: issue frames, document frames, and metaframes (Dombos, Krizsan, and Zentai, 2008). The meso level is represented by issue frames, which are 'policy frames that provide a relatively coherent story/reasoning in which issue specific prognostic elements responds to issue specific diagnostic elements.' (Dombos et al 2009: 4). They express normative ideas about a specific policy issue (for instance, gender based violence policy, education policy) which are not directly linked to a particular policy text. The micro level is that of document frames, which 'describe how a particular document or actor constructs the issue at hand.' (Dombos et al 2009: 5). And the macro level is that of metaframes, that are 'overarching frames of a higher level of generality that stretch over different policy issues and can be operationalized as the normative aspects of issue frames.' (Dombos et al 2009: 5). These three different levels of frames will thus be analysed in the contributions of this volume, ranging from EU and national frames that are specific to certain policy issues to frames that spread across several issues.

## 2.2 *Bringing discourse analysis into institutional politics*

Another important aspect of discourse, apart from the ideational elements discussed so far, is its interactive dimension, which brings us to discuss the relation of discourses with the institutional context in which they are embedded. Framing – argues Ferree (2009)- is an interactive process by which actors with agendas encounter specific discursive opportunities in the form of institutionalized texts. Policy actors engage in shaping the meaning of concepts ‘by embedding them in networks of other more or less widely shared and practically relevant meanings’ which Ferree calls ‘*frameworks*’ (Ferree 2009: 89). A framework for political debate is institutionalized in ‘*authoritative texts*’ such as constitutions, laws, judicial decisions, treaties and administrative regulations.

Schmidt and Radaelli (2004: 184) in discussing discursive approaches to Europeanisation also believe that ‘discourse must be set in institutional context’. For them, ‘The institutional context is constituted by the vast range of rules, formal and informal, laws as well as social and political norms and conventions, that set actors’ common frame of reference and help shape not only actors’ perceptions and preferences but also their modes of interaction’ (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004: 197). For analysing the institutional context of Europeanisation Schmidt and Radaelli (2004) suggest to take into account issues such as political rules of conduct, political governance, industrial relations regimes, and welfare state regimes. According to the authors, rules, institutions, and cultural norms presupposed in law and institutions influence discourse by defining ‘the repertoire of acceptable (and expectable) actions’ (2004: 193). On a similar line, Ferree argues that ‘institutionalised framework[s] of connections made among people, concepts, and events –’ shape ‘the opportunities of political actors by making some sorts of connections appear inevitable and making others conspicuously uncertain and so especially inviting for debate’ (Ferree 2009: 89). Both for Schmidt and Radaelli (2004: 192) and for Ferree (2009) policy discourses, in their enabling and constraining aspects, bridge the gap between ‘agency and structure’ as they reorient the focus on the political processes through which actors have changed the structures.

QUING research also treated discourses as emerging from their own specific institutional context. Key explanatory factors considered in the QUING analysis of the institutional context are the legal framework developed in the member states on different gender equality issues, the nature of the governmental institutional machinery to formulate and implement gender equality policies, and the type of interface existing between institutions and civil society in relation to the opportunities and the resources that civil society has to engage in the development and implementation of gender equality policies (Walby 2007 D12). Apart from these, the main macro aspects considered in the explanation of gender policy frames are ‘gender regimes’<sup>13</sup>, international influences, structure of political system and political parties and institutionalised practices in relation to other complex inequalities, including class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and age (Walby 2007 D12: 35). Thus, QUING researchers developed a form of discursive institutionalism (Hall and Taylor 1996; Kohler-Koch 2000 quoted in Sauer 2007) which seeks to explain the gender equality policy frames mapped through the analysis of the aforementioned factors of the institutional context. In this respect frames are the *explanandum*, while the broader

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<sup>13</sup> ‘A gender regime is a specific system of social relations. Central to the notion is that there is an inter-relationship between the different forms of gender relations in different domains – it is this that constitutes the systemness of the gender regime.’ (Walby 2007: 32). For a definition of gender regime see Walby 2008.

institutional context is the *explanans* (Sauer 2007: 50 D12). But at the same time frames are considered as the explanatory factor as well because they contribute to ‘explaining why policy outcomes are as they are in specific institutional settings’ (Sauer 2007: 50 D12). This will emerge in the discursive analysis of Europeanisation of gender equality policy developed in the different contributions to this volume, in which the relation between institutional context and policy frames goes in both directions. Variations in frames can be accounted for in relation to the specific institutional settings from where they stem, as institutions tend to reflect deeper ‘belief systems’ (Kohler-Koch 2000: 514 quoted in Sauer 2007), and they can be understood in relation to the influence of the strategic framing of particular actors.

Exploring the interactive dimension of discourse also includes an analysis of how ideas are used in public debates. The EU is used in national discourses for different strategic aims to promote policy change in a variety of ways, to influence people’s perception of an issue, to legitimise specific political actions or discourses, or to reinforce one’s positioning in the debate (Jacquot and Woll 2003). To describe the different ways in which the EU can be used, Jacquot and Woll (2003) have elaborated a typology of ways of ‘usage’ of the EU (the aforementioned ‘political’, ‘strategic’, ‘cognitive’ and ‘legitimising’ usage), whose borders are often blurred in political reality as a cognitive usage is usually strategic and/or legitimising. In the ‘cognitive’ type of usage, that focuses on the discursive dimension, for instance, policy actors can use the EU by referring directly to it to justify particular policy reforms at the national level, as in the case of telecommunication policy in Germany and France analysed by Thatcher (2004). Or they might choose to avoid any reference to the EU and rather frame their communicative discourse only in national terms, as in the French case discussed by Geddes and Guiraudon (2004) in which national policy actors strategically framed EU immigration policy reform so to make it resonate with domestic frames. The diffusion of EU norms and the use of the EU discourse for strategic reasons can impact policy change in unpredictable ways, depending on the particular configuration of domestic political and institutional contexts. The use of the EU for different purposes can, for example, promote policy learning at the national level in terms of ‘thin learning’, that is limited to ‘coping strategies’, or it can (though more rarely identified) produce a ‘thick’ social learning, which involves the ‘change of actors’ preferences’ (Radaelli and Schmidt 2004: 371). Contributions in this volume will also discuss the Europeanisation of gender and other equality policies in terms of discursive ‘usage’ of the EU for several strategic purposes by different domestic actors, reflecting on the opportunities the EU creates for promoting transformative policy change in the national contexts.

Therefore, the discursive politics approach to the study of Europeanisation of gender equality (and other inequalities) we suggest is characterised by the following aspects. It is interested in the meaning and contestation of discourses, rather than on discourses as rhetorical devices. It considers discourses as always relevant in the analysis of policy change in Europe, and not just when they more explicitly influence policy interests, because it conceives discourses as unintentional (deep overarching cultural meanings in Bacchi’s terms) as well as intentional efforts to impact on people’s perception of reality. It has developed a methodology of critical frame analysis to map different levels of policy frames (metaframes, issue frames, and document frames) that emerge in policy documents. And it explores the cognitive and interactive dimensions of discourse by analysing policy frames, the institutional context from which they emerge, and how they are used by different policy actors.

## Conclusions

Theory of Europeanisation has proliferated in the last two decades generating a variety of conceptual definitions and methodological approaches. From a formerly dominant focus on Member States's compliance with EU norms through the analysis of transposition mechanisms, it has recently developed a broader theoretical and methodological focus that endorses more sociological and cognitive understandings of Europeanisation (among others Radaelli 2004; Jacquot and Woll 2003). This pluralistic approach to Europeanisation aims at capturing policy change through the study of the diffusion of policy paradigms, social learning, and collective mobilisation. To grasp these dimensions, the analysis of hard law measures is not sufficient, but rather needs to be complemented with the study of soft law measures. This is particularly important for exploring the Europeanisation of gender equality policies and other inequalities that we study here, since in all gender equality policy fields, apart from those strictly related to the labour market, the EU has adopted soft law instruments.

From a methodological point of view, the shift towards a more sociological approach which aims at grasping how EU norms and discourses impact the domestic levels, requires the use of constructivist, and especially discursive, methodologies. In a dialogic exchange with Europeanisation scholars who have employed discursive methods in their analyses of gender equality (Liebert 2003) and other EU policies (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004), the QUING research on gender and other equality policies has developed its own particular critical frame analysis of policy documents by institutional and civil society actors. The fruitfulness of this dialogue moves us to suggest the need of a strengthening of the relationship between Europeanisation and gender and politics scholarships, as a means to jointly contribute to enrich sociological and discursive approaches to Europeanisation which, we argue, have good potential to grasp the complexities of Europeanisation policy processes.

Constructivist and discursive approaches, we think, have something to contribute to that part of the Europeanisation literature that mainly focuses on compliance mechanisms. This contribution indeed challenges the possibility of addressing the Europeanisation of gender equality policies through clusters of countries shaped around different policy styles, institutional paths or "worlds of compliance" (Falkner and Treib 2008). The preliminary results provided by the QUING comparative frame analysis of gender equality policies, which give evidence of a variety of frames found in combination with Europeanisation in the different case studies, have shed light on the highly differentiated impact of Europe according to policy areas, political cleavages, or mobilized actors. Constructivist analyses of EU mechanisms based on social learning and financial incentives, which require the consideration of soft law measures, have offered more differentiated explanations to the Europeanisation in CEECs than those offered by studies that primarily contemplate compliance with EU norms (Krizsan 2009). Exploring the impact of EU soft law measures on domestic cognitive and interactional dynamics requires the use of discursive methodologies that are well suited to capture features and shifts in the discourses of national policy actors and could well complement analyses of EU law transposition (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005).

At the same time, whereas 'narrow' approaches to Europeanisation mechanisms are likely to be broadened once all EU member states have – at least formally – transposed EU legislation, our joint contribution might well establish a fruitful dialogue with more implementation-oriented studies. For instance, the new research profile adopted by the promoters of the "Worlds of compliance" framework, "from a narrow focus on European integration to the comparative study of European countries and their

interactions with the European Union”<sup>14</sup> seems highly compatible with a more actors- and discourse-oriented perspective, to be developed *along* an institution-centred approach.

Data from the QUING project, together with a number of scholarly works that have developed a more sociological and discursive shift in Europeanisation studies, move us to suggest that the way Europe “hits home” cannot be solely interpreted through the restrictive lenses of institutional heritages or performance in transposing/implementing EU-modelled policy arrangements. Since Europeanisation also addresses collective action and discursive patterns, we argue that a more pluralistic and discursive approach to the study of Europeanisation is needed.

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<sup>14</sup> As emphasised in the research outline of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienne, currently led by Oliver Treib. <http://www.ihs.ac.at> (Access: 06.19.2009)

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