

DOMESTIC RECONCILIATION POLICIES AND THE USAGES OF EUROPE

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Abstract

In recent years, European institutions have promoted the development of reconciliation policies in an overall context where most European countries are saying 'farewell to maternalism' (Orloff 2006) and are now implementing policies aimed at helping individuals (especially women) to combine paid work and family responsibilities. Is it possible to consider that these changes in national reconciliation policies have been due to EU actions in this policy field and, if so, what are the mechanisms of possible EU influence? In section one, we review the Europeanisation literature in order to situate our own perspective. In the second section, we present our approach in terms of 'national usages of Europe'. In section three, we come back to the policy content to be analysed, presenting the EU definitions of reconciliation policies, and reviewing the tools we have used to situate each national case of care regimes and reconciliation policies. In the fourth section, we introduce our common hypotheses and the analytical framework that is used in all the articles of this special issue. Finally, in section five, we summarise our main findings.

Keywords: care regimes; Europeanisation; policy implementation; reconciliation policies; usages of Europe

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

Most European countries are saying ‘farewell to maternalism’ (Orloff 2006) and are now implementing policies aimed at helping individuals (especially women) to combine paid work and family responsibilities. In recent years, European institutions have promoted the development of reconciliation policies. Is it possible to consider that national changes in these reconciliation policies have been due to EU actions in this policy field? What is indeed the function of EU policies? How does European integration influence national social policies?

In order to address these questions, this special issue focuses on the relationship between European integration and the development of national welfare state reforms. Recent literature shows that the EU has played an important role in shaping recent welfare state reforms, but the precise ways in which it has done so are still relatively unclear. We aim here at exploring and specifying the political mechanisms through which the EU plays a role in domestic social policy changes. Taking reconciliation policies (i.e. the reconciliation between paid work and private life policies) as an empirical terrain, our comparative research aims to take forward both the Europeanisation and welfare state literatures.

Reconciliation policies are particularly interesting both because several changes have recently occurred in this field in European countries (Lewis 2009, Orloff 2006), and because this issue has undergone considerable EU action (see the next article in

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this issue). In fact, the EU has increasingly intervened on reconciliation policy issues, through both ‘hard law’ (such as regulations and directives) and ‘soft law’ (such as the European Employment Strategy followed by the Open Method of Coordination, and various recommendations and communications).

But what effects did these various EU initiatives have at the national level? In our view, the best way to understand how the EU can influence domestic politics is not to start from the European level and then to ask how the various countries applied EU instruments, but instead to concentrate on the national level, and to look at the way national actors have made and are making use of EU resources and constraints. The rationale of our approach is to consider the national level as the relevant one for understanding reconciliation policy reforms, and then to analyse whether (and how) the EU has been a possible trigger of change, how it has been mobilised by some national actors during the reform process, and how the EU itself has constituted a target for national actors’ political action. The main goal is, therefore, to fully grasp the political games through which European resources and constraints have become political opportunities for national actors by testing some basic research hypothesis derived primarily from the Europeanisation literature.

In section two, we review the Europeanisation literature in order to situate our own perspective. In the third section, we present our approach in terms of ‘national usages of Europe’. In section four, we come back to the policy content to be analysed, presenting the EU definitions of reconciliation policies, and reviewing the tools we have used to situate each national case of care regimes and reconciliation policies. In the fifth section, we introduce our common hypotheses and the analytical framework that is used in all the articles of this special issue. Finally, in section six, we summarise our main findings.

2. NATIONAL WELFARE REFORMS AND THE RELEVANCE OF EUROPE

2.1. DOES THE EU MATTER? TRADITIONAL ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL WELFARE STATE REFORMS

At the turn of the 21st Century, various books on welfare state reforms were published, analysing the ‘retrenchment’, ‘transition’ or ‘survival’ of the welfare state in Europe (Daniel and Palier, 2001, Esping-Andersen 1996, Ferrera and Rhodes 2000, Huber and Stephens 2001, Leibfried 2001, Pierson 2001, Scharpf and Schmidt 2000, Swank, 2002, Sykes, Palier and Prior 2001, Taylor-Gooby 2001, Wilensky 2002). Although this literature emphasises the pressures of international constraints on the development of welfare systems, very few contributions analyse in detail the role played by the EU.

When assessing the causes or the content of reforms, the EU is almost always absent from the traditional analyses. Concerning the ‘welfare state crisis’ in European

countries, some authors have privileged international factors such as ‘globalisation’ (e.g. Mishra 1999) and/or the new international economic context (e.g. Scharpf and Schmidt 2000); others authors have studied primarily domestic factors, including changes in labour market organisation (such as the passage from an industrial to a service economy, the mass entry of women into the labour market), and/or demographic ageing and changes in the family structure (e.g. Pierson 2001). In this framework, the possible role and influence of the process of European integration as such is scarcely taken into account as an autonomous factor of change (Falkner 2007, Jacquot 2008, Palier 2000).

Furthermore, when it comes to the analysis of the content of recent welfare state reforms in European countries, few strong references to the EU have been made in the literature. Thus, the role of the European level tends to be considered as negligible or redundant. Analyses of the reforms have focused on institutional constraints and underlined the remarkable continuity and remaining diversity of the European welfare states (see Castles 2004, Clasen 2005, [Palier and Martin 2008](#)). The literature agrees on the existence of, at least, three worlds of welfare reforms, each ‘world of welfare’ following its own path of reform: re-commodification in the liberal welfare states; rationalising recalibration in the Nordic welfare states; updating recalibration in the Continental welfare systems (Pierson 2001). Current reforms are seen as reinforcing the logic of each model. There is little or no evidence of convergence in the solutions adopted by each welfare state ([Ferrera and Rhodes 2000](#), Jacquot 2008).

A most subtle reading suggests that, if Europe had any influence on national welfare reforms, there would be some convergence in the welfare systems of the Member states. This position is also supported by institutional elements, by the predominance of the principle of subsidiarity in social matters, and by the fact that the European Union has no direct competencies at the heart of social protection but merely ‘subsidiary competence provisions’ under which intervention is possible only if considered functional to market integration ([Hantrais 2007](#)). Following the studies mentioned above which demonstrated that convergence has been very limited and that the impact of Europe, if any, has been a differential one, the European influence needs to be conceptualised and framed as part of a broader process which takes place primarily at the national level. If we want to understand the recent welfare state responses to new challenges, it therefore seems to be more useful to refer to national institutional specificities. Keeping this in mind, we still believe that the EU level should be better integrated into the analysis of recent European welfare state transformations.

2.2. INCLUDING THE EU IN THE PICTURE: A BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF EUROPEANISATION

Recently, an increasing number of authors have pleaded for including the European Union in the picture (for a review, see Jacquot 2008). According to them, in order to grasp every aspect of welfare state transformation, the relationships between

European integration, European and national policies must be fully addressed. Traditional analyses of welfare state changes tend to take the national level as the relevant one and, despite the fact that, in the European context, welfare states have become 'semi-sovereign' do not pay sufficient attention to the interactions between European policies and national ones ([Leibfried and Pierson 1995](#)).

Four major contributions stand out as particularly relevant to the impact of Europe on national social policies: Falkner and others (2005); Zeitlin and Pochet (2005) and, more recently, Kvist and Saari (2007) and Heidenreich and Zeitlin (2009).

The first of these contributions is a very accurate analysis of the implementation of a limited number of directives in the 15 member states, and is primarily concerned with examining the transposition of EU policies (i.e. directives) at the national level. It elaborated a typology of the way EU directives are (or are not) implemented, describing three 'worlds of compliance' (e.g. a 'world of law observance', a 'world of domestic politics' and a 'world of neglect'). The authors also added a fourth one which refers to the Central and Eastern European countries (a 'world of dead letters'). The second contribution is a very useful piece of comparative research that provides information on the impact of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on national policies in the fields of employment and social exclusion. The third contribution consists of an analysis of the developments of national social policies in light of emerging EU social protection policies (economic and employment policies and the social policy agenda) in numerous European countries. The most recent contribution develops the comparative analysis of the impact of the OMC on national policies in the fields of employment and social exclusion, but is primarily focused on the influence of one Europeanisation instrument (the OMC) on domestic reforms and it is only marginally interested in the domestic political determinants of policy change. Although all these contributions are of great value, they consider Europeanisation primarily as a top-down process and hence they limit their analyses to the impact of European Union policies on national ones, and provide limited information on domestic mechanisms and on different patterns of change that have occurred at the national level.

It is clear that, in the last 10 years, the national and the European levels have become increasingly 'interwoven' in the field of social protection (Kvist and Saari 2007). In this sense, the process of national welfare state reform can be thought of as being affected by Europeanisation. Put differently, if one cannot account for a convergence of welfare state models – different worlds of welfare remain, as well as worlds of welfare transformations – this does not mean that European integration has had no impact. The fact that it has an influence but has not resulted in convergence is only an apparent paradox: Europeanisation does not equal convergence, but the absence of convergence does not imply an absence of Europeanisation. Europeanisation leaves the issue of diversity and overall convergence open ([Radaelli 2003](#)). Consequently, the question that has to be tackled needs to be reformulated: Europe matters, but how does it matter? Focusing on the 'how' question, it is important to investigate the diversity of mechanisms of European influence and to include actors and interests

that are often overlooked, or, rather, are considered as passive intermediary variables in a literature that is mainly focused on institutions (Jacquot 2008).

3. HOW DOES EU MATTER? THE USAGES OF EUROPE AND THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN DOMESTIC AND EU LEVELS

As such, the question of the influence of the EU on national policy changes is an insolvable puzzle for the social sciences. Causality is too diffused and mixed for variables to be easily correlated. Nevertheless, thanks to an in-depth process-tracing methodology, it is possible to understand the interplay between domestic and exogenous variables. Therefore, our aim here is to focus on the analysis of the mechanisms at work in the interaction process between the EU and the domestic level.

In order not to reproduce previous analyses of EU influence on social policy, which all started by focusing on the EU level and concluded that the EU's influence was weak, we start from the national level and ask whether, at that level, when, where and how the EU has been mobilised by national actors during the reform process. We also check whether the EU itself has constituted a target for national actors' political action both in the policy formulation and in the policy implementation phase. Thus, we analyse what 'usages of Europe' have been performed by national actors (Jacquot and Woll 2003, Woll and Jacquot 2010).

The recent literature on Europeanisation, and, in particular, on the Open Method of Coordination has indeed shown that national actors are crucial in implementing reforms supported by European institutions (Graziano 2007 and 2011, Radaelli 2003, Zeitlin and Pochet 2005). In order to demonstrate the nature and content of the influence of the EU on national reforms in the articles included in this special issue, we propose to see where, when and how national actors use the instruments and resources offered by the process of European integration (formal or informal, binding or non-binding) to help them in the national reforms they are engaged in.

In order to do this, we start by comparing policies and reforms at the national and European level. This allows us to highlight the concordances and discordances (i.e. the degree of fit and misfit) between the two levels in the various dimensions of change (timing and policy goals, domains and instruments). In particular, this allows us to better understand the possible adaptational pressures coming from Europe in those cases where EU policies are substantially different from national ones. Second, through data provided by official policy documents, through a review of policy debates (for instance in Parliament) and through semi-directive interviews, we analyse more precisely the specific 'usages' different national actors have made of Europe when trying to influence the national reform process in the field of reconciliation policies.

This approach has several advantages. First, it does not take for granted that the EU pressures all lead to the same kind of pressures in various national welfare states. Looking specifically at the national level makes it easier to capture the specificity of each national case and see if, where, when and how EU policies have entered into the national policy agenda. Second, it does not assume *a priori* that Europe has had an effect (whatever this may have been) on national welfare states since this occurs only if some national actors have seized the constraints or opportunities that Europe offers. This research design leaves the space for various options open to empirical study which may show that European resources and constraints should be included with the many other resources and constraints that are available at the national level.

3.1. STUDYING THE POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE EU: THE USAGES OF EUROPE

The analysis of Europeanisation cannot be limited to the comparison of different processes of transposition and implementation of European regulations (Graziano and Vink 2007). In order to capture the possible processes of transformation linked to European integration, it is necessary to study the national political construction of the impact of the EU, and the interactions between the two levels.

To understand and analyse the meaning of a reform, an essential element is the political work of actors within a normative system imposing its constraints. Domestic actors are at the same time 'filters and users of European norms and rules' (Pasquier and Radaelli 2006). Some authors have underlined the importance of a 'leverage effect' (Erhel, [Mandin and Palier 2005](#), [Zeitlin and Pochet 2005](#)). Others have conceptualised the ability of actors as a specific form of 'two-level game', concerning not only grand intergovernmental bargaining but also the more day-to-day policy-making process ([Börzel 2003](#), [Büchs 2008](#)).

We insist that domestic actors and bureaucracies (especially in the social policy field; see [Kroeger 2007](#)) may be creative ([Heidenreich and Zeitlin 2009](#)) in their relation to Europe. National actors can use European resources as an opportunity in the absence of integration pressures, re-appropriating and re-defining them to advance their own agenda, to legitimate their political preferences, to frame public problems, to gain support and power in coalition building and bargaining situation, to enlarge their room for manoeuvre, to engage in blame-avoidance or credit-claiming strategies ([Jacquot and Woll 2003](#), [Woll and Jacquot 2010](#)). In other terms, in order to detect the role of Europe in cases of domestic policy reform, it is primarily important to analyse the 'usages of Europe', that is not only the relationship between the EU and domestic policies but also the development of national political games and preferences, and the ways in which European ideas, norms, opportunities, constraints and rules have been used by national actors for their own power enhancement purposes ([Jacquot 2008](#)).

The notion of ‘usages of Europe’ (Jacquot and [Woll 2003](#), [Woll and Jacquot 2010](#)) makes it possible to re-equilibrate the strong focus in the literature on institutional dynamics, which has led to an underestimation of the discretion and role of political actors in the processes of adaptation. The objective of this new perspective is to focus on the role of actors in the domestic translation of European integration pressures and the patterns and triggers of action that can be identified.

Paying attention to the role of actors implies studying the mechanisms of appropriation, re-appropriation, engagement and disengagement of domestic actors in the process of European integration. More precisely, the term ‘usage’ covers practices and political interactions, which redefine themselves by conceiving of the European Union as a set of opportunities – whether they are institutional, ideological, political or organisational. These practices and political interactions happen as the actors go back and forth between the European level and the level on which they act (or wish to act), creating a context of interaction and reciprocal influence. The aim is to analyse the changes at the national level, which result from the use of the process of European integration by many and diverse actors (Jacquot and Woll 2003, Woll and Jacquot 2010).

3.2. ELEMENTS OF INTERACTION: EU RESOURCES AND EU ROLES

In order to study the ‘usages’ developed by national actors, it is necessary to articulate their political work with the resources provided by the EU, along with the role played by EU institutions in providing new opportunities and/or constraints to the national actors. This is relevant because it specifies the ways in which Europe becomes a possible actor in the process of domestic policy change.

Most of the time in the literature, Europe is perceived as a specific constraint which leads to negative integration, limiting national governments room for manoeuvre or sovereignty (Leibfried and Pierson 1995, Scharpf 1999). But the EU has not only provided national actors and welfare systems with new constraints, it has also created new opportunities: ECJ cases, directives, EC communications, the EES or the OMC are full of new resources that national actors may have taken up, translated and shaped in order to follow their own national strategy.

Five main types of EU resources can be listed (see the next article – by Jacquot, Ledoux and Palier – in this issue):

1. *legal resources* (primary legislation, secondary legislation, case law etc.);
2. *financial resources* (both budgetary constraints and new funding opportunities);
3. *cognitive resources* (communications, ideas etc.);
4. *political resources* (argumentation, ‘blame avoidance’ mechanisms, multi-level games etc.);
5. *institutional resources* (committees, agencies, networks etc.).

This large range of resources highlights the fact that studying the ‘usages’ of resources is not synonymous with discourse analysis. Implementing EU regulations or directives, using EU funds is also part of the ‘usage’ of European resources. European opportunities and constraints provided by the EU have to be transformed into specific national resources by actors (even the transposition of directives cannot be reduced to a cut-and-paste process), which implies political work and hence involves power, transaction, framing, conflict, etc.

One of the aims of this special issue is to better qualify the influence of the EU by analysing the various ‘usages’ that EU resources can lead to. Whether perceived as constraints or opportunities, EU resources are analysed through their ‘usage’ by various domestic political actors. We also need to understand the role played by Europe in providing specific new opportunities and/or constraints for national actors. In general, European institutions may play eight different roles (see Sotiropoulos 2008):

1. No role for EU in employment-friendly reforms (a possibility to be taken into account);
2. EU as a scapegoat for defence of reforms (a source of legitimating arguments for domestic policy changes);
3. EU as a reform-enforcement agent (in the framework of the OMC);
4. EU as a reform-coordinator, or reform-coach (a rather neutral role linked to supervising the implementation of the procedures of coordination instruments like the OMC);
5. EU as a reform-catalyst, reform-supporter (with respect to pensions or inclusion policies, for instance, the European institutions played a more subtle role in providing guidelines which were in line with some of the reforms already implemented in some EU countries);
6. EU as a reform-broker (key role in coordination towards agreement on common vision of the problems and solutions);
7. EU as a reform-innovator/initiator, agenda-setter (with respect to regional funds and employment policy);
8. EU as a reform-taker (with respect to the Growth and Stability Pact, EU institutions had to partially change the ‘rules’ since both France and Germany between 2004 and 2005 were not able to fully respect the Pact and therefore managed to produce a new, less binding Pact which could provide fewer constraints than the previous one).

The articles in this special issue investigate what kind of roles European institutions have played with respect to the national policy debates and/or decision-making systems in order to better understand how Europe has mattered.

3.3. THE USAGES OF EUROPE: A CLASSIFICATION

Finally, by articulating EU resources that are mobilised at the national level and the specific role played by European institutions in each reform, one of the aims of the research presented here is to elaborate a list, as complete as possible, of the possible usages of EU at the national level.

When defining the notion of ‘usage’, Sophie Jacquot and Cornelia Woll have categorised usages according to their specific function and distinguished three main types: *Cognitive usage* refers to the understanding and interpretation of a political question and is most common when issues are being defined or need to be discussed, so that ideas serve to provide diagnostic solutions and persuasion mechanisms. *Strategic usage* refers to the pursuit of clearly defined goals by trying to influence policy decisions or one’s room for manoeuvre, helping to aggregate interests and to build coalitions of heterogeneous actors – be it by increasing access to the policy process or the number of available political instruments. It is the most common of all types and occurs typically in the middle of the policy-making process, once all stakes have been clearly defined. *Legitimizing usage* occurs when political decisions need to be communicated and justified. Actors rely on the image of ‘Europe’ to communicate implicit content or employ related discursive figures such as ‘the European interest’, ‘European constraint’, ‘the application of the Maastricht criteria’ to legitimate political choices. Cognitive usages are generally mobilised during the framing phase of a reform (problem definition, elaboration of policy alternatives), strategic usages are more concerned with the policy and decision making phase, while legitimizing usages are linked with the general public and can take place up and downstream of the policy process – framing the diagnosis and solutions and justifying the reform (Jacquot and Woll 2003, Woll and Jacquot 2010).

Table 1. Characteristics of the different types of usage

Type of usage	Resources used
Cognitive usage	Cognitive resources (ideas, data, expertise)
Strategic usage	Legal, financial and institutional resources
Legitimizing usage	Political resources

Source: adapted from Jacquot and Woll (2003)

The motivations behind these different types of usage can be of three kinds. The first is a *logic of influence*: actors try to shape the content or the orientation of national or supranational stakes. The second is a *positioning logic*: here the goal is to improve one’s institutional position in the policy process. The third is a *justification logic*, where actors try to obtain the support of other actors or the general public for decisions that are already taken (Jacquot and Woll 2003).

4. ANALYSING RECONCILIATION POLICIES IN EUROPE: EUROPEAN ORIENTATIONS AND NATIONAL REGIMES

The field of reconciliation between paid work and private life is a pertinent test-case for analysing the linkages between national welfare reforms and the EU's possible inputs and influence. At the same time, it is completely entrenched within national gender and welfare state regimes and subjected to intense European action (legislation, case law, soft law, intergovernmental coordination, discourses and norms).

4.1. THE EU AND RECONCILIATION POLICIES

In order to analyse the interrelations between the EU and the national level in the field of reconciliation between paid work and private life, it is important, first, to have a clear view of the emergence and transformation of the multiple elements of a European reconciliation policy (Knijn and Smit 2009), and, second, to understand the meaning given to this notion at this level – and its evolution. This is what the next article, by Ledoux, Jacquot and Palier, does. This article helps to identify the evolving meaning of 'reconciliation policies' at the EU level. The issue of reconciliation first appeared at the EU level in the 1974 social action programme, referring to the articulation between 'family responsibilities' and 'job aspirations'. In the 1989 Charter on the fundamental social rights of workers, reconciliation is framed as a means of reconciling 'family life and occupation' and the Commission programme that followed shows that family life means having children. In these initial usages of the concept, the main domain associated with reconciliation was childcare and the instruments related to it were the different forms of parental leave and childcare facilities. During the 1990s, the domains concerned were extended. The 1998 employment guidelines took into account caring practices for the elderly as belonging to the work/family reconciliation dilemma, as well as working time and the duration of the contracts.

As shown by Jacquot, Ledoux and Palier, European resources relating to reconciliation policies have been incrementally developed and transformed. Three main phases of this process can be distinguished in the progressive institutionalisation and evolution of this field of action at the EU level. At first, the reconciliation issue appeared on the European agenda as a spill over interpretation of 'equal treatment'. It then acquired greater autonomy, becoming an equal opportunity policy, leading to the development of various (legal, financial, cognitive and political) instruments around the objectives of improving work/family balance and the division of labour between women and men. Finally, the field was converted into an economic employment policy field aimed at modernising welfare systems and guaranteeing budgetary sustainability through increases in fertility rates and, most importantly, female employment rates. However, this has come at the expense of the initial gender equality goals.

In their conclusion, Jacquot, Ledoux and Palier underline the diverse and evolving meanings of the ‘reconciliation’ issue and its orientation. This diversity in meanings and orientations allows greater room for manoeuvre at the domestic level and even more diverse patterns of national ‘usages’ of Europe, as is shown in the rest of this special issue.

4.2. NATIONAL RECONCILIATION REGIMES AND THEIR EVOLUTION

The common question of the collective research presented in this special issue is whether and how the EU has contributed to change in national reconciliation regimes. As will be shown in the various case studies, all countries changed their reconciliation policies in the period studied (the last twenty to thirty years). All (with the exception of the Czech Republic in recent years) have developed in the direction of facilitating the conciliation between work and family life, hence all have developed in the EU direction. But they all started from a different point of departure. The eight European countries that are compared in this special issue (Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey) were chosen on the basis of their broad representativeness in terms of welfare and care regimes. They represent the different situation of countries that have not fully adopted the EU model (a de-familialising model of care regime). Consequently they all present a certain degree of ‘misfit’² between the traditional care model and the general European orientation. These countries are thus representative of distinct families of care and welfare regimes that were present in the EU before important reforms occurred.

In order to situate each country’s specific care regime before analysing the main reforms, the authors of the special issue articles refer to Leitner’s classification (Leitner 2003). Depending on whether policies do strongly or weakly ‘familialise’ or ‘de-familialise’ caring functions, Leitner distinguishes four types of care regimes, characterised by:

1. *explicit familialism*,
2. *optional familialism*,
3. *implicit familialism*, and
4. *de-familialism*.

Leitner also analyses the extent of gender (in)equalities in the various forms of care policy regimes: ‘gendered’ regimes are those which implicitly or explicitly place the care burden on women, while ‘de-gendered’ regimes do not do so.

As Leitner (2003: 358–359) puts it:

² On the notion of ‘misfit’, see our hypothesis below.

'The *explicit familialism* not only strengthens the family in caring for children, the handicapped and the elderly through familialistic policies. It also lacks the provision of any alternative to family care. This lack in public and market driven care provision together with strong familialisation explicitly enforces the caring function of the family... Within *optional familialism* services, supportive care policies are provided. Thus, the caring family is strengthened but is also given the option to be (partly) unburdened from caring responsibilities... The *implicit familialism* neither offers de-familialisation nor actively supports the caring function of the family through any kind of familialistic policy. Nevertheless, the family will be the primary caretaker in these welfare regimes since there are no alternatives at hand. This type, therefore, relies implicitly upon the family when it comes to care issues... Finally, *de-familialism* would be characterised by strong de-familialisation due to the state or market provision of care services and weak familialisation. Thus, family carers are (partly) unburdened but the family's right to care is not honoured.'

The EU model of reconciliation policies can be considered to be close to the de-familialism model (or at least to optional familialism), and has for a period aimed to become de-gendered (see the next article, by Jacquot, Ledoux and Palier, in this issue). Before the reforms analysed in the following articles, **France** was considered to combine gendered optional familialism in childcare and explicit familialism in elderly care (the ambiguities of the French model lead us to speak of '*midfit*' since it only partially fits the EU orientation); **Finland** was considered to have adopted a relatively de-gendered optional familialism (this country is probably the closest to the EU orientation); **Italy** was considered as belonging to the implicit familialism group for elderly care, and gendered explicit familialism type of childcare regime; **Portugal** and **Spain** were categorised as having adopted implicit familialism in both types of care regimes (Portugal being relatively close to the EU orientation in terms of childcare). Even though Leitner herself did not classify these countries, we consider that **Hungary** as well as the **Czech Republic** and **Turkey** belong to the strongly gendered familialism categories of care regimes, more or less explicitly/implicitly, depending on the family policy field (see specific articles for detailed analyses). As shown in the various articles, all countries have moved away from their traditional models of care, and our question, again, is whether and how the EU has contributed to this evolution.

These eight countries have also been chosen on the basis of their broad representativeness in terms of time of accession to the EU (thus they include 'old' member states, 'newcomers' and 'candidate' countries). These two characteristics are central since they are at the heart of our research hypotheses, which inform our analysis.

5. A COMMON FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS: THREE RESEARCH HYPOTHESES, A SIMILAR DESIGN FOR THE CASE STUDIES

In order to guarantee the consistency and comparability of our various case studies, we have elaborated three overarching hypotheses regarding the main mechanisms of interaction between the EU and national reforms. All authors in their article test these research hypotheses. The authors of the country case studies have used the same research design and adopted a similar outline for their article.

These hypotheses, which rely on the literature on Europeanisation and welfare state transformation, are as follows:

- *EU Membership – research hypothesis 1*: the more ‘under scrutiny’ by the EU the countries are (for example, because they are applicant states), the more probable it is for European Union policies and institutions to be considered seriously and therefore to be a primary motivation of and/or point of reference for the political behaviour of national actors. In other terms, we would expect national actors to make frequent references to Europe if they operate in applicant states and few, limited or even no reference in ‘old’ EU member states. Put differently, the idea is to test what we may label as a ‘joining the club’ effect: EU pressure is strongest when a given state is about to become a member of the club (EU, EMU...) or to be seriously threatened with exclusion from it. The policy change implication is that we expect more change to occur in case of states that are under scrutiny with respect to their acceptance in the EU or in EU-based political projects (such as the EMU).
- *Relationship to Europe – research hypothesis 2*: the specific usages of the EU for national welfare reform depend on the general relationship of each country to Europe. This relationship, and its evolution, includes two sets of elements: the national élites’ attitudes towards Europe and public opinion towards Europe. Here, the underlying assumptions are as follows: if élites and public opinion are in favour of Europe, then usages will be both positive and explicit (i.e. reference to Europe in the reform process will be common) and we can expect major changes in the examined social policy field; if both élites and public opinion are Eurosceptic, then there is either no usage or a denial of the usage. The policy change implication is that in this case we can expect limited or no ‘EU-driven’ change in the examined social policy fields. There is of course a continuum of mixed combinations in-between these two ends.
- *Fit/misfit of the care and welfare regime – research hypothesis 3*: our first two research hypotheses should be read as complements to the basic hypothesis that can be derived from the mainstream literature on Europeanisation. This is based on the

theory of 'goodness of fit', discussed at length in the Europeanisation literature (Boerzel and Risse 2003, Falkner *et al.*, 2005, Falkner and Treib 2008, Graziano 2007, Thoskov 2007, Thompson 2009). The basic idea is that the interaction between the EU and the national level depends on the gap between what the EU is proposing and what the country is used to doing. According to the traditional Europeanisation literature, the more distant a national model from the EU is, the more 'adaptative pressure' there should be, and the more Europeanisation of national policies one should discover (Boerzel and Risse 2003). It is therefore hypothesised that, according to the degree of 'policy structure' misfit between the EU orientation towards welfare reform and the national care regime, the nature of the European usages made by national political actors in national reform process will range from positive to negative, from using Europe as a legitimating reference to blaming and rejecting it or denying its influence.

If there is a perfect fit, then there is no pressure from Europe, and no usage or claim that the EU has inspired the national orientation of reforms. If there is a small misfit, then there is a probably (limited) EU influence and usage. If misfit is significant, then we can expect full usage of the EU – especially in those cases where the social costs of reform are high (the so called 'blame avoidance' phenomenon – see Weaver 1986). Of course, the fit/misfit situation of each country depends on the nature of the national welfare regime (we assume the liberal regime to be adequate for economic requirements made since the mid-1990s, the Nordic regime to have become adequate, and the Bismarckian regime to be the least adequate). One should also consider the care and gender regime: a 'male breadwinner' model will be far from the EU approach when a 'dual earner country' will be close (Lewis 1992). In our sample, in terms of care regimes, since we have no pure 'de-familialising' cases, the national countries belonging to the Leitner's 'optional familialism' are likely to be the closest to the EU orientation and are thus expected to display limited European usages. On the contrary, the closer to 'explicit familialism' a country is, the more usages of European resources there should be. As far as gender issues are concerned, we see that, since the EU itself has moved its own position on gender equality (from being explicitly egalitarian to being less and less so since the mid 1990s), the national fit/misfit of the gender regime and gender preoccupation may also vary over time.

A policy sector dimension has been included in the qualification of the degree of the fit/misfit between the national model (and/or national institutional arrangements) and the model promoted at the EU level. In order to better situate our cases with the EU model, we propose to rely on three rather than two categories. There are indeed cases that almost but not entirely fit the EU orientation (France in our sample), and therefore we propose the category of 'midfit'.

5.1. A COMMON RESEARCH DESIGN, SIMILAR ARTICLE OUTLINES

The main ambition of this special issue is to connect (EU-induced) policy-change analysis with a better understanding of the usages of Europe at the national level. In order to do so, each national case study follows a similar outline.

Each article starts with an attempt to situate the country under study in relation to EU membership (is it an old or a recent EU member, or a candidate member?), to its relations with the EU in general (is the country considered to be Euro-sceptic or a Euro supporter? Do élites and citizens hold the same views on the EU? To which ‘world of compliance’ (Falkner *et al.* 2005) and to which welfare and care regimes does the country belong? (which world of welfare and which care regime is the country closest to?).

The articles compare national developments in reconciliation policies with the EU’s development in this domain (as analysed in the next article by Jacquot, Ledoux and Palier, which looks at concordance and discordance both in terms of timing and content between the EU and the national developments).

Finally, the articles analyse in greater detail some of the national actors’ usages of EU resources. In conclusion, each article discusses the three main research hypotheses and their relevance for the case under study.

Table 2 summarises the research framework that has been used in the various articles included in this special issue.

Table 2. The research framework

Institutional settings	National usages of Europe (black-box)	Europeanisation policy outcomes
DRPW >	EU resources + EU roles → EU usages	> Policy adaptation (continuity, limited change, extensive change)

DRPW = Domestic Reconciliation Policy World (characterised by a specific overall country accession status – ‘old’ member states, ‘newcomers’ and ‘applicant states’ – and by a specific care regime expressed here in terms of a specific configuration of policy goals, domains and instruments that can be assessed in terms of ‘fit/misfit’ to Europe and by a specific form of Euro-enthusiasm/scepticism).

6. CONCLUSION: THE COMPARATIVE FINDINGS

In this introduction we do not wish to unveil all the detailed and interesting case study-based findings from the articles that follow, but we think that some summary tables may help to take a broader look at the overall research results with respect both to EU-induced policy change and Europeanisation, and to the ‘usages’ of Europe.

6.1. EUROPEANISATION AND POLICY CHANGE

First, as shown in Table 3, EU-induced policy change has been relevant in all the cases analysed (even if in a contradictory way in the Czech Republic). In order to understand the degree of change, one has, however, to take into account various dimensions, as our research hypotheses make clear.

First of all, when reading the various articles in this special issue, one will see that the traditional 'goodness of fit' hypothesis, so much discussed in the Europeanisation literature, remains a good predictor of change (especially if we further distinguish 'midfit' from 'misfit', as in the case of France). Our case studies generally confirm the fit/misfit hypothesis, i.e. high policy misfit leads to high pressures for change at the domestic level. However, this does not always lead to policy change in the EU direction – especially in cases where the EU model is not only far from, but opposite to, the national model defended by the dominant political actors, and when Euro-scepticism is on the rise (as in the case of the Czech Republic and Turkey). The results presented here confirm that EU-induced policy change occurs mainly when domestic actors are in favour of it and use Europe in order to make their preferences even stronger (Graziano and Vink 2007).

Our case studies confirm that the general relationship of the country with Europe has to be taken into account in order to understand the usages and degree of change associated with EU policies. In our case studies, it is clear that the relationship with Europe, especially at the élite level, has considerable explanatory potential with respect to adaptation, in cases of misfit. If the attitude of the élite is positive towards Europe in one country (even if not fully supported by its citizens), then multiple usages and references to Europe are domestically developed.

Finally, our cases confirm that the more under scrutiny a country is, the greater usage of Europe will occur and the more likely policy change will be.

These are, of course, general findings that confirm both the relevance of our hypotheses and the necessity of combining these three dimensions (goodness of fit, relationship with Europe and degree of scrutiny) in order to understand the degree of policy change. Thus, our research does not contradict the classic research on Europeanisation that underlines the importance of the 'goodness of fit' hypothesis, but it also underlines the necessity of adding some other dimensions to the picture, such as the relationship with Europe and degree of scrutiny. The various contributions to this special issue confirm that Europe exercises differential forms of pressures which lead to domestic policy change, whose intensity depends on the nature of the links with the EU (for example, 'old' member states vs. 'newcomers'), on the degree of élite support for the European Union and on the presence of a specific policy structure and its fit/misfit with respect to the EU. Within this process, the role played by creative actors is a key variable in understanding the channels and mechanisms of influence of Europe.

Table 3 summarises our findings with respect to Europeanisation and policy change.

Table 3. Europeanisation and policy change

Degree of policy change	Accession status			EU relationship*		Degree of fit		
	'Old' member states	'Newcomers'	Applicant states	EU supporters	EU sceptics	Fit	Midfit	Misfit
Continuity		CZ			CZ			CZ
Limited change	FR, FI, PTa		TR	FI, TR, PTa	FR	FI, PTa	FR	TR
Extensive change	IT, PTb**, SP	HU		IT, HU, PTb**, SP				IT, HU, PTb** SP

* Élite support only.

** PTa all welfare state policies analysed except childcare coverage; PTb childcare coverage.

6.2. THE USAGES OF EUROPE

Our research goes even further in revealing the diversity of domestic usages of Europe: Table 4 summarises the various types of usage which can be found in the various cases studied.

The first general result is of course that, when taking our 'usages of Europe' perspective, one sees that there is no such thing as one single European influence on domestic politics. The situation can vary from no influence (because there is no domestic usage of Europe) to rejection of any European orientation, through a variety of cognitive, strategic and legitimating usages of European resources and constraints. Thus, the changes at the national level, which can partly be associated to EU ideas and instruments, result from the use of the process of European integration by many and diverse actors in many and diverse ways. The different usages of the many European resources vary according to the type and interest of the actors that seize these EU resources. Hence, the different worlds of usages that emerge from our study are only partially aligned with welfare regimes (see PT and FI in Table 4) and cannot be immediately linked to the goodness of fit between the EU and national orientations.

For instance, if there is no public support or limited public support (in terms of elite views and/or public opinion) with respect to the EU, then, in cases of significant misfit, we may witness no usage of Europe which could also be labelled as 'rejection' or 'resistance'; under the same conditions, if public support (in terms of elite views

and/or public opinion) is high, then we would expect full positive usage of Europe (as in the Spanish case).

Throughout our various cases, as Table 4 shows, we mainly see four types of usages of Europe. There are cases where the EU processes are used as a means to legitimate national reforms (legitimizing usages are limited in Finland but much stronger in the cases of Italy and Spain). We also see positive strategic usage of Europe, where EU resources are used significantly and EU instruments are positively applied by some national actors in pursuit of their own political agenda (Portugal and Hungary). It is only in the case of Turkey (the only case of a 'candidate' country) that the EU model serves as a substantive guideline for framing national reforms, and that EU orientations seem to have informed the content of the policies through a cognitive usage of EU resources (some arguments and policy instruments appear to have been inspired by EU orientation, even though the implementation did not follow). Finally, we also see some negative usages of Europe: EU communications and/or recommendations being used as a negative reference, in case of misfit and Euro-scepticism (as in the case of the Czech Republic and partly of France). France is also a case of a so-called 'uploading' movement, since French actors prefer to pretend that they inspired the EU orientation rather than admit that they have been influenced by it.

Table 4. The prevailing usages of Europe

	EU supporters		Euro-sceptics	
	Old members	Newcomers	Old members	Newcomers
Fit	Strategic positive (PTa), Legitimizing (limited, FI)	–		–
Midfit			Strategic denial – boasting (FR)	
Misfit	Legitimizing (IT), Strategic positive (PTb), Legitimizing (SP)	Cognitive (TR), Strategic positive (HU)		Strategic negative – rejection (CZ)

From this list of European usages, it can be seen that Europe has contributed to change in national reconciliation regimes. It has done so, however, not by imposing its view on national governments, but by providing diverse national actors with resources which could (or could not) take advantage of them in order to help them advance their own interest and agenda. By using EU resources (even negatively), they have incorporated within their national debates and policy-making processes ideas and orientations designed at the EU level, hence contributing to the Europeanisation of national welfare reforms.

Beyond the precise analysis of the mechanisms of Europeanisation, this special issue provides the reader with the possibility of following in detail the development of reconciliation policy in eight European countries. It shows how, following different paths and at different speeds, (almost) all European countries are implementing more conciliation policies, allowing and accompanying women into the labour market – systematically in order to increase employment rates of women, but not always to improve equality between women and men...

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