

Time and Differentiated Integration*

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Comments most welcome!

Abstract

What is the status of time in accounts of differentiated integration? What do theories of integration and Europeanisation have to say about time both as a property of differentiated integration and, in particular, as part of their explanatory accounts? Time as a property of differentiated integration is not too difficult to grasp, but the status of time as part of an explanation of differentiated integration is more amorphous. What matters here, in particular, are arguments relating (i) to the impact of the passage of time; (ii) time budgets and time horizons; and (iii) time rules, notably those relating to timing, sequence, speed and duration. The paper sets out how such temporal-causal categories have informed theorizing on integration and Europeanization and how they might help to account for differentiated integration. It also highlights the pluritemporality that characterises the EU timescape and notes how this facilitates and encourages recourse to differentiated integration. In sum, paying attention to its temporality helps advance our understanding of differentiated integration within the context of EU deepening and widening.

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I. Why Time Matters¹

Political and academic debate surrounding the phenomenon of differentiated integration is replete with time-centred images and metaphors.² In Stubb's (1996) categorization, time is one of the three main variables of differentiated integration, the other being "space" and "matter" and more recent contributions employ similar distinctions (de Neve 2007; Andersen and Sitter 2006). Notions frequently employed in discussions of temporal differentiation include, for example, multi-speed Europe, vanguards or laggards. Following Stubb, major examples of such temporal differentiation include transition periods, temporary derogations or the temporal structuring of EMU and of the adoption of the single currency (see also Dyson 2009). Temporal differentiation, understood in this way, differs from "variable geometry" and an *à la carte* approach in that it does not question common objectives, but rather allows for "a core group of Member States which are both able and willing to pursue some policy areas further, the assumption being that the others will follow later" (Stubb 1996: 287).

Differentiated integration is, thus, intimately connected to time. If we try to think systematically about the nature of the linkages involved, there are at least two dimensions to be explored: the temporal properties of differentiated integration; and time as part of an explanatory account of differentiated integration.

Time as a property of differentiated integration: the basic, although very broad, question here is in what ways differentiated integration is about temporality. Sequencing – notably the order in which member states assume new policy commitments and integrate into EU-wide institutional arrangements – is of central importance here, but there are other temporal categories to consider, including, in particular, timing, speed and duration (see below). As regards duration, it is important to ask whether temporal differentiation is inherently a transitional phenomenon, as suggested by Stubb – different states moving at different times, different speeds and, perhaps, in different policy sequences but ultimately arriving, "in their own good time" at a common goal – or involves open-ended, (semi-)permanent differences. The latter prospect is, e. g., raised by Příbáň (2009) who suggests in the context of his discussion of legal integration that flexibility clauses, whilst they may initially have been understood as temporary measures, have changed in character: "the indefinite design and persistence of some clauses, such as the Irish and UK opt-outs from the Schengen Zone or the UK opt-outs from the Union's protection of social rights, have

¹ The present paper has been written as a draft contribution to an edited volume on differentiated integration by K. Dyson and A. Sepos (eds.) *Whose Europe? The Politics of Differentiated Integration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, forthcoming). It forms part of the theoretical introduction to the edited volume and stands next to two chapters on differentiated integration and territory and function (sectors) by Michael Keating (2009) and Alkuin Koelliker (2009) respectively. The authors of these three chapters have been asked by the editors to highlight how time, territory and function may help to shed light on the phenomenon of differentiated integration.

² There is, by now, a fairly extensive literature that defines differentiated integration, documents the practice and accounts for its apparent rise. See Dyson and Sepos 2008 and de Neve (2007) for two recent surveys of the field. Major attempts to provide theoretically informed explanations for the rise of the phenomenon include Stubb (1996; 2002), Warleigh (2002) and Koelliker (2004; 2006).

gradually weakened the original idea of flexibility as a transitional measure and made it an intrinsic feature of European legal integration”.

Next to analysing *patterns of temporal differentiation*, appreciating the potential of, and limitations to, differentiated integration as a political strategy (Dyson and Sepos 2008) also requires us to consider *temporal patterns of differentiation*. For example, *when* have “flexible” arrangements been introduced and terminated? Has this been a cyclical or a more linear process? Are there distinct *sequences* that can be identified, e.g., between formal treaty reforms and a prior or subsequent spread of differentiated arrangements? What can we say about the *speed* with which such arrangements have been introduced or abolished? Answering the latter question helps us to judge whether differentiation is a short-term expediency or part of longer-term institutional design. And what do we know about the *duration* of differentiated institutional, decision-making and policy arrangements? For example, if one compares different enlargement rounds, has there been a lengthening or a shortening of transitional arrangements and temporary derogations? If this were to be the case, it might indicate that full integration is becoming ever more difficult to achieve.

Time as part of the explanation of differentiated integration: To ask how time may promote, facilitate or impede differentiated integration raises a broad range of issues. In the present context, I want to tackle this question from two main perspectives. First, what do integration theory and Europeanisation theories have to say on time and (differentiated) integration? What is the analytical status of time in these accounts? The answer I am able to give is far from exhaustive. However, I want to illustrate that time is often accorded a central role by briefly commenting on Schmitter’s (1970, 2004) notion of initiation, priming and transformative cycles in integration; Pierson’s arguments about the importance of short-term time horizons and long-term consequences in explaining the trajectory of integration; and Moravscik’s emphasis on the importance of credible commitments in explaining decisions on the pooling and delegation of sovereignty. I also look at work that seeks to explain patterns of Europeanisation - notably “clustered Europeanisation” (Goetz 2006, 2007) – that are related to the institutional and policy effects typically associated with differentiated integration.

Second, what follows from the specificities of the EU timescape (Meyer-Sahling and Goetz 2009, Goetz 2009), i.e. the configuration of political time in the EU at the levels of institutions, decision-making procedures and public policies? The argument to be explored here is that the pluritemporality of the EU provides a fertile ground for differentiated integration. Not only is there no dominant time-setter in the EU; it also has only limited time-setting powers *vis-à-vis* its member states and hence its ability to restrict *de facto* temporal differentiation is quite closely circumscribed.

The remainder of this paper explores the questions and arguments just outlined in some more depth. It first considers different ways in which time features in political science accounts, including work that stresses the importance of the passage of time; time budgets and time horizons; and timing, sequence, speed and duration. Next, the paper discusses temporal properties of differentiated integration, distinguishing between *patterns of temporal differentiation* and *temporal patterns of differentiation*. The next sections then ask how time affects differentiated integration. In this context, I highlight, in particular, the explanatory status of time in integration theory and

accounts of clustered Europeanization; and note the implications of the EU timescape for differentiation. The paper concludes by highlighting the advantages of time-sensitive analyses of EU integration.

II. How Time Matters

Enquiring into time and differentiated integration means to engage with a broad, but also quite diverse, literature on political time in political science. Although most political scientists would readily agree that the manner in which political time is configured is vital to understanding how a political system works, the link between time and politics is rarely systematically explored. There is no ‘received wisdom’ about the key questions to be asked and the theoretical lenses to be adopted and little by way of an empirical ‘state of the art’. As Schedler and Santiso (1998) noted in their “invitation” from the late 1990s to concentrate research on “political time”, “[t]ime in its manifold manifestations represents a pervasive factor in political life”, but “as a rule, reflections on politics and time have remained unsystematic, implicit, and disperse, and our theoretical insights, conceptual tools, and empirical knowledge have remained severely limited” (ibid.: 5).

In their “invitation”, Schedler and Santiso suggest that two broad perspectives may be adopted: time as a horizon and time as a resource. The first is concerned with the time horizons within which political systems operate, “their past, their present, their future” (ibid.: 6). The latter probes the implications of the scarcity of time in democratic politics. Under this rubric, political scientists have studied, in particular, time rules, i.e., “rules that define the temporal structures or the timetables of democratic politics, its time budgets, its points of initiation and termination, its pace, its sequences, and its cycles” (ibid.: 8); time strategies, i.e., strategies of how to manage temporal constraints; time discourses, i.e., political controversies about the “rights” and “wrongs” of temporal decisions (ibid.: 12f); and “time traces”, i.e., the manner in which the “*passage of time* leaves its own imprint on certain structures and processes” (ibid.: 13, emphasis in the original).

More recently, with explicit reference to political time in the EU, Goetz and Meyer-Sahling (2009) have suggested to concentrate research efforts on the polity dimension of political time, which they equate with (the length of) mandates, time budgets and time horizons; the politics dimension, which is about rules relating to timing, sequencing, speed and duration in political decision-making; and the policy dimension, which concerns temporal policy features, such as the intertemporal distribution of costs and benefits in major EU policies.

In line with the focus of the present discussion, three of these takes on time deserve brief elaboration. In each case, we can distinguish further between temporal properties – time as part of the ‘dependent variable’ – and time as an explanation – i.e. time as part of the ‘independent variable’. First, there is the *passage of time*, which is, perhaps, the most basic way in which time matters; it is closely associated with the interest in specific historical-temporal constellations. Where time is treated as a ‘dependent variable’, this perspective is, in particular, concerned with identifying phases, stages, eras, epochs or cycles of political development, i.e. it tries to bring order to the seemingly incessant flow of time by ‘parcelling up’ historical time, as

when, e.g., analysts seek to distinguish between ‘peaks’ and ‘troughs’ in the history of European integration. Where time is treated as independent variable, the argument is essentially about the ‘weight of history’, i.e. the impact of the past upon the present and the future. Such arguments come in many guises, as, e.g., in historical-institutionalist analyses, with their emphasis on long-term processes and associated “slow-moving causal processes”, such as cumulative causes, threshold effects, causal chains, cumulative outcomes, structural effects or path dependencies and feedback loops (Pierson 2004: 79ff); constructivist accounts that emphasise the importance of ‘time-consuming’ processes underlying political change, such as learning, socialisation or routinization; or rationalist explanations of decision-taking that highlight the importance of reiteration. Closely associated with such an agenda is the search for specific historical moments (or temporal locations in time) that hold explanatory power, such as ‘critical junctures’.

Second, (*the length of*) mandates, the time budgets of actors and the time horizons of individuals and organisations matter and differ markedly across political systems. As a dependent variable, mandates, time budgets and time horizons are fundamental to the characterisation of political system. After all, as Linz (1998) has reminded us, government *pro tempore* – i.e. mandates limited in time – is a – or perhaps *the* – defining feature of democracies: “The pro-tempore character of democratic government makes it essential that elections take place with reasonable frequency” (ibid.: 21). The limited time budget resulting from regular elections makes time a “scarce resource” (ibid.: 22) in democratic politics and democratic politicians, in particular, an “harried elite” (ibid.: 29). Following Linz, this inbuilt restriction of democratic time has a profound impact on the temporal ordering of the activities of governments and parliaments and the electoral cycle is widely recognised to constitute the basic rhythm of a democratic political system, as it reflects recurring patterns of political processes, marked by a clear beginning and an end.

But lengths of mandates, time budgets and time horizons are also frequently employed in explanatory accounts of political developments. In this connection, one thinks, e.g., of work on political business cycles, which has noted the link between electoral rules, resultant time budgets and time horizons of political decision-makers, on the one hand, and the ‘opportunistic’ timing of economic policy tools, on the other (for a review of much this work see Drazen 2001); on time pressures and political negotiations (reviewed in Conceição-Heldt 2009); or the explanatory value given to differences in the time horizons of actors in historical-institutionalist accounts of integration (Pierson 1996; 2004; see below).

Thirdly, timing – when something happens; sequence – in what order things happen; speed – how fast things happen; and duration – for how long things happen – matter. They provide both important points of reference in describing political phenomena and, in particular, in explanations of politics. As regards the latter, political time is often understood as a resource and a constraint in decision-making. What matters critically in this respect is the malleability and manipulability of time. As Schmitter and Santiso (1998: 71) have noted in relation to democratisation, decision-makers “learn how to manipulate time, that is, to turn it from an inexorably limited, linear and perishable constraint into something that could be scheduled, anticipated, delayed, accelerated, deadlined, circumvented, prolonged, deferred, compressed, parcelled out, standardized, diversified, staged, staggered, and even wasted – but never ignored”.

Analyses that examine the impact of temporal rules direct attention to how political actors may seek to influence temporal structures both within and between institutions. Such time rights include the power to initiate and thus to influence the timing for the start of the political processes; they refer to sequences in decision-making – a prominent concern in both rationalist and historical institutionalist analyses – and they are interested in possibilities to accelerate or delay. Time rules provide opportunities for some and create constraints for others. From this perspective, time is fundamentally about the discretion to make choices in order to gain an advantage in political processes.

As the following sections will show, time rules are of special relevance to the characterisation of the temporal properties of differentiated integration, whilst all three of the temporal categories just introduced feature in accounts of integration and Europeanisation.

III. The Temporal Properties of Differentiated Integration

After this brief survey of why time matters and how it matters, let us now turn to the temporal patterns of differentiated integration. To what extent is differentiated integration about temporal differentiation? This general question may be broken down into two more specific concerns with *patterns of temporal differentiation* and *temporal patterns of differentiation*. As regards the former, the policy dimension is the one most frequently discussed. Its practical importance has lately been underlined in the context of the EU enlargements of 2005 and 2007. As part of the enlargement negotiations, a host of temporary derogations of varying lengths were agreed; these covered chapters such as the free movement of goods, the freedom of movement of persons, the freedom of movement of services, and agriculture. They formed part of the Accession Treaties. There were also provisions regarding the phasing in of policy measures, notably as regards the phasing in of EU agricultural direct payments between 2004 and 2013; and transitional arrangements such as the “transition facility”, i.e. post-accession financial assistance to the new member states that could not benefit from the Structural Funds for the period of 2004-2006.

As in previous enlargements, demands for temporary derogations did not just emerge from the applicant countries. Thus, existing member states were allowed to restrict full access from the new member states to their labour markets for a period of up to seven years, and Austria and Germany were given the right to adopt additional flanking measures. It is also worth remembering in this respect that a derogation does not necessarily equal the temporary acceptance of less stringent national regulations. For example, prior to Austria, Finland and Sweden joining the EU, “accession negotiations had been troubled by the insistence of all three newcomers that they be allowed to apply environmental standards that were stricter than many EU standards. This sticking point was resolved by allowing the applicants to apply tougher legislation for up to four years, during which they clearly hoped to encourage a ratcheting up of EU-wide standards” (Peterson and Bomberg 1998).

Policy differentiation through temporary derogations, the adoption of transitional measures, and phasing in arrangements that apply unequally to different member

states is at the heart of temporal differentiation, but the latter can also be observed at the level of institutions and decision-making procedures. A major example are the decision-making structures for dossiers relating to EMU and the Euro. Thus, member states whose currency is the Euro meet in the informal, but highly influential, body of the Eurogroup to deal with issues relating to EMU (Puetter 2006). The countries that have not secured a permanent opt-out (unlike Denmark and the UK), are, in principle, only temporarily excluded from this club. When the Ecofin Council, in which, of course, all member states are represented, deals with EMU and Euro dossiers, the temporary non-members and, of course, the permanent opt-outs do not take part in the vote. Temporally differentiated policy is, thus, associated with differentiation in institutions and decision-making.

Next to *patterns of temporal differentiation*, we also need to pay attention to *temporal patterns of differentiation* and how these have evolved over time, especially if we wish to get a better understanding of how differentiated integration has been used as a political strategy within the context of EU widening and deepening. The following questions seem especially relevant: *When* have “flexible” arrangements been introduced, prolonged, shortened or terminated? This question concerns, e.g., the timing of differentiated arrangements in relation to stages and phases of the integration process; relative to treaty reforms, enlargements and major extensions of the *acquis*; or relative to major socio-economic developments. Second, are there distinct *sequences* in the introduction or termination of differentiated arrangements that can be identified? Such sequences relate, e.g., to chains that may lead from policy to decision-making to organisational differentiation; or sectoral or instrumental sequences.

A third temporal consideration relates to the *speed* with which such arrangements have been introduced or abolished. Here, it is especially interesting to ask whether we can identify phases of acceleration or slowing down in the introduction of differentiating measures and whether decisions on differentiation are taken in an *ad hoc* manner or are the product of long-term deliberations? In other words, are they employed tactically or strategically? Finally, what do we know about the *duration* of differentiated institutional, decision-making and policy arrangements? Is there really a gradual shift towards open-ended differentiation, so that what used to be seen as a temporary exception to the rule becomes a long-term norm, making an eventual move towards uniformity in institutions, procedures and policies increasingly less likely?

It is clear that questions of this kind ultimately aim at situating the temporal patterns of differentiation within the broader development of integration and Europeanisation. To arrive at a theoretically satisfying account, we need to turn to integration and Europeanisation theory.

IV. How Time Shapes Differentiated Integration

How does time shape differentiated integration? Whilst the previous section has drawn attention to time as part of the ‘dependent variable’ of differentiated integration, this section turns to the status of time in accounting for differentiated integration, which, in this section, is not restricted to temporal differentiation, but also

encompasses, in Stubb's (1996) categorisation, differentiation in space (variable geometry) and matter (*à la carte*).

The general question of how time may promote, facilitate or impede differentiated integration raises a broad range of issues and the tentative answers suggested here are far from exhaustive. Two preliminary remarks help to frame the present discussion. *First*, in trying to understand how 'time matters', we need to engage with all three of the dimensions introduced in Section II, namely the impact of the passage of time; the impact of time budgets and time horizons; and, thirdly, time rules. For example, the passage of time plays a critical role in neo-functionalist accounts of integration with their emphasis on spill-overs; time horizons of actors are central to both historical institutionalist explanations of integration and liberal intergovernmentalist accounts with their stress on uncertainty about the future and credible commitments; and time rules are relevant in explaining the dynamics of EU treaty negotiations and their outcomes.

Second, when we discuss the status of time in explanations of differentiated integration, we ought to consider both integration and Europeanisation theory. The former has a long pedigree, is aimed at a fairly clear explanandum and can be characterised with reference to several widely recognised schools of thought. The latter is of more recent origin, its explanandum is very widely defined as change and continuity in the political systems of EU member state and countries seeking EU accession in response to (the prospect of) membership; and existing theoretical accounts are arguably less developed, so that "there remains plenty of mileage in theorizing Europeanization" (Bulmer 2007: 57). Yet, both complement each other when it comes to explaining the developmental dynamics of differentiated integration and the specific forms - geographical, substantive and temporal - that it takes.

IV. 1. Time in Integration Theory

At first sight, theories of European integration may appear to give little consideration to role of time in integration, let alone *differentiated* integration. The lengthy subject indexes of major textbooks on integration theory do not contain entries on "time" (Rosamond 2000; Wiener and Diez 2004,), nor do collections of readings on the subject (Nelsen and Stubb 1998; O'Neill 1996). Judging by its index alone, the encyclopaedic *Handbook of European Union Politics* (Jørgensen et al. 2006), whose Part I is devoted to "theorising European integration", would also appear to be silent on the subject. One might, therefore, be tempted to conclude that integration theory has little more to say on time and integration than that the latter is a historical process which takes place *over time* and that time is needed whether it is for functional and political spillovers to occur (as in neo-functionalism); lock-ins and path dependencies to unfold (as in historical institutionalism); or norm diffusion, socialisation and identity-building to develop (as stressed by constructivists).

However, such an easy dismissal would be fundamentally misplaced, for a more attentive reading offers potentially fruitful insights. Let us first consider neo-functionalism and "neo-neofunctionalism" (Schmitter 2004). Both passage of time and time rules feature in its explanatory account. Passage of time matters in at least two ways. Neo-neofunctionalism is a "transformative theory", which assumes that

“both actors and the ‘games they play’ will change significantly in the course of the integration process” (Schmitter 2004: 47). Second, and perhaps more importantly, Schmitter (2004), building on work first published more than thirty years previously, has sought to elucidate the temporal logic that underlies functional spill-overs in economic-social integration and the spill-over of the latter into political integration. In so doing, he has put emphasis on the fundamental importance of cycles, including “initiation cycles”, “priming cycles” and “transforming cycles”. Whilst initiation cycles constitute the start of the integration process, priming cycles are about changes that “define the context of a crisis that is compelling actors to change their strategies” (ibid.: 61), including differences in relative size and power of states; in rates of transaction; in member internal pluralism; in elite value complementarity; and in extra-regional dependence (ibid.). During a “transformative cycle”, a qualitative transformation takes place: the member states “will have exhausted the potentialities inherent in functionally integrating their economies and dedicate more and more of their efforts to functionally integrating their polities” (ibid.: 65-66). Writing in 2004, Schmitter suggested that it was “debatable” whether the EU had yet entered such a transformative cycle.

In the context of our present interest in differentiated integration, it is especially relevant to note that the idea of a cyclical development is closely linked to notions of asynchronic change in the key variables that drive actors to change their strategies, i.e. issues of timing, sequence, speed and duration. Thus, Schmitter hypothesises that during priming cycles, asynchrony “in rates of change at the national level sets up – due to their differing marginal impacts – asynchrony in rates of regional change. This, in turn, enhances the probability that less convergent, and possibly divergent, actor strategies will be promoted and this makes the adoption of a joint policy vector more and more difficult”(64).

Several implications flow from these suggestions. First, if it makes sense to think of European integration not as a linear but as a cyclical process, then it might also be instructive to explore evidence for differentiated integration as a cyclical phenomenon and to try to define the main stages in such cycles. Second, in thinking about such stages, it might be useful to refer to the idea of “interstitial institutional change”, as developed by Farrell and Héritier (2007). The decisive point here is to understand the dynamics of informal differentiation, on the one hand, and formal differentiation, on the other. A “cycle of differentiation” could be expected to come to an end, when the possibilities for informal differentiation within a given Treaty framework are exhausted and Treaty revisions are required to either consolidate differentiation or move towards uniform integration. Third, the notion of asynchronic development in national conditions that shape integration – both within and across states – might help to understand the emergence of demands for differentiation and the durability or transience of the latter.³

³ Cycles are also accorded central analytical status in Wessels’s (1997) influential “fusion thesis”. Here cycles stand essentially for up-swings and down-swings within a process of linear growth. Progressive integration is assessed on the basis of “the output of binding decisions, the scope of public policies, transfer of competencies, institutional and procedural patterns as well as the involvement and influence by intermediary groups” (275). Temporary down-swings are, in this analysis, part and parcel of the integration process as are temporary upswings. Yet, “in each of these upswings a ratchet effect can be witnessed”, i.e. the ‘*acquis*’ of the EC/EU is lifted to a higher plateau” (285, italics in the original). The notion of

Time is, of course, also of central theoretical status in historical institutionalism. The *locus classicus* is Pierson's (1996) historical institutionalist analysis of the "path to European integration", but others, notably Bulmer (1998) and Armstrong and Bulmer (1998) have also applied insights from this approach to explaining "different dimensions of EU governance", including its "political and legal character; the different types of change which are characteristic of a comparatively fragile system of governance like the EU, the embedding of policy-level governance structures within an overarching, systemic structure (the EU); and the normative dimensions of governance" (Bulmer 1998). As Pollack (2004) notes in the context of his discussion of the 'new institutionalism' and European integration, there is an emphasis on '*inertia*, or *lock-ins*, whereby existing institutions may remain in equilibrium for extended periods of despite considerable political change; *a critical role for timing and sequencing*, in which relatively small and contingent events that occur at *critical junctures* early in a sequence shape (that is, provide the institutional context for) events that occur later; and *path-dependence*, in which early choices provide incentives for actors to perpetuate institutional and policy choices inherited from the past' (ibid.: 140, emphases in the original).

The central substantive argument put forward by Pierson is that the historical development of European integration is characterised by the recurrent opening up of gaps in member state control "over the evolution of European institutions and policies"; during those gaps, actors other than the member states, in particular the supranational actors, gain in influence. This is a process that the member states find very difficult to reverse, because supranational actors will try to fight any such reversal; because of institutional barriers to reforms that would reassert control; and because of sunk costs and the rising price of exit (Pierson 1996). When "European integration is examined over time, the gaps in member-state control appear far more prominent than they do in intergovernmentalist accounts". Crucial to the opening up of these gaps is that domestic political decision-makers tend to have short time horizons: "long-term institutional consequences are often the by-products of actions taken for short-term political reasons" (ibid.).

Pierson's account can be read to imply distinct patterns of differentiated integration: we would expect differentiated integration to flourish during phases of strong member state control, but become less prominent during "gaps", when supranational actors may assert themselves. Moreover, the historical institutionalist account provides a potential explanation for *why* we can expect such a patterning *over* time, which is itself grounded in temporal considerations, namely the differences between short-term time horizons of state actors and the long-term, often unintended consequences of their actions.

upswings and downswings again draws our attention to the question of whether differentiated integration is to be regarded as an up-swing phenomenon (differentiation as a step towards full integration) or a more closely associated with periods of down-swing in the integration process (i.e. a sign of disintegration). A key question would then be to what extent the cycles that Wessels's identifies are linked to changes in patterns of differentiated integration.

Turning to liberal intergovernmentalism it may at first appear largely insensitive to time in its explanatory account of the integration trajectory. Liberal intergovernmentalism, as exemplified by Moravcsik's (1998) work, treats time as the specific historical circumstances in which intergovernmental negotiations take place. EU integration can, therefore, "best be explained as a series of rational choices made by national leaders" (ibid.: 18). These choices are thought to respond to "constraints and opportunities stemming from economic interests of powerful domestic constituents, the relative power of each state in the international system, and the role of international institutions in bolstering the credibility of interstate commitments" (ibid.: 18). Clearly, all of these three factors can change *over time*, but, as critics of liberal intergovernmentalism have pointed out, liberal intergovernmentalism in its ontology is reproductive "since the key assumptions are that dominant actors remain sovereign national states pursuing their unitary national interests and controlling the pace and outcomes through periodic revisions of their mutual treaty obligations" (Schmitter 2004: 47).

However, liberal intergovernmentalism is time-sensitive in another respect: whilst the passage of time may not transform the game being played, and time rules are not central to its analysis of interstate bargaining processes, it is crucial in explaining decisions on 'institutional choice', i.e. pooling and delegation of sovereignty, insofar as these decisions are motivated by a desire for 'credible commitments'. Thus, the theory of credible commitments posits that delegation and pooling are "designed to precommit governments to a stream of future decisions by removing them from unilateral control of individual governments (...) Governments are likely to accept pooling or delegation as a means to assure that other governments will accept agreed legislation and enforcement, to signal their own credibility, or to lock in future decisions against domestic opposition" (ibid.: 73).

Credible commitments as a way to 'control' the future are, thus, central to Moravcsik's account of the trajectory of European integration and differentiated integration – in addition to reflecting economic interests and the power of member states – needs to be understood as a result of calculations about the future. Temporal differentiation ("multi-speed Europe"), geographical differentiation ("variable geometry") and sectoral differentiation (*à la carte*) could be seen, in particular, to reflect differences amongst the member states in the willingness or capacity both to signal credibility and to lock in future decisions. As Moravcsik himself highlights, "the credibility explanation predicts that delegation and pooling will vary by issue and by country" (75).

IV.2. Time in Europeanisation Theory

Compared to integration theory, theoretical accounts of Europeanisation are of more recent origins. Bulmer (2007) has pointed out that they are principally grounded in different variants of the new institutionalism - rational choice, historical and sociological – but, although all three are, in principle, suited to incorporate time in their explanatory accounts of processes and patterns of Europeanisation, temporal categories have not featured prominently in the leading accounts. In his discussion of "key problems" in the theorization of Europeanisation, Bulmer (ibid: 53) highlights

the “under-representation of the classic HI [historical institutionalist] themes of time, timing and tempo”. Similarly, Goetz and Meyer-Sahling (2008), in a recent detailed review of studies on the Europeanisation of national parliaments and executives, have highlighted that foregrounding time in causal accounts of Europeanization may help to make sense of cross-temporal, cross-sectoral and cross-country patterns that may otherwise remain difficult to explain.

One attempt to engage with this challenge is Goetz’s (2006, 2007) analysis of cross-country patterns of ‘clustered Europeanization’, which employs time as a ‘distant variable’. Many of the policy aspects of differentiated integration – such as derogations, transitional arrangements or opt-outs – can be understood as part of distinct Europeanisation patterns, although the above-noted analyses of clustering did not examine this aspect explicitly.

Non-convergence amongst the EU member states, despite a wide range of integration effects, has come to be accepted as conventional wisdom in the Europeanization debate. This literature follows in the footsteps of the work by Héritier et al. (2001), who highlighted “differential responses to European policies” and tried to solve the puzzle why ‘members states’ policies (...) respond so differently to identical European policy demands and similar external and internal conditions’ (p. 257). Goetz (2006, 2007) questions this predominant stress on non-convergence and makes a case for ‘clustered Europeanization’, i.e. the existence of multi-country groupings that are characterized by high levels of intra-regional commonality and inter-regional differences in both the substance and modes of Europeanization. This clustering is said to have been promoted by the interaction of two ‘distant’ variables: territory and temporality. Territory influences Europeanization primarily through ‘families of nation’ and center-periphery structures in an expanding European political space (Goetz 2007). Temporality matters in at least three ways: the timing of accession in relation to domestic political and economic development; timing in relation to the phase of European integration; and speed and duration of the accession process. In combination, territory and temporality sustain and even promote intra-regional commonalities in Europeanization-related domestic variables and inter-regional differences in the integration experience. To be sure: territory and temporality are not alternatives to the dominant domestic and integration-related explanations of Europeanization. Rather, once territory and temporality are considered systematically, it becomes clear that they promote clustering in the more proximate domestic variables and integration patterns. This clustering of proximate explanatory variables, in turn, promotes clustered Europeanization.

The basic proposition advanced is simple: successive enlargements have followed a fairly clear regional pattern, integrating groups of countries that already shared many important political and socio-economic characteristics. Their Europeanization experience is likely to have reinforced this distinctness for three main reasons. First, whilst Europeanization interacted strongly with democratization and socio-economic modernization in some cases, it did not do so in others. Put differently, whilst in some cases democratic political consolidation and socio-economic modernisation preceded integration (Nordic enlargement is a case in point), in the Southern and CEE enlargements integration coincided with democratisation and modernisation. Second, regionally-based, multi-country groupings joined the EU at distinct phases of European integration. Third, the speed and duration of the accession process and

negotiation processes differed from one enlargement to the other, which is likely to have had an impact on the demand for temporal differentiation, in particular.

The 'relative time of accession' has received special attention in the case of the Southern European enlargement of the 1980s (for references see Goetz 2007). Accounts of the Southern Europeanization experience routinely note the interaction between integration, post-authoritarian democratization and socio-economic modernization, which has been present in the Greek, Portuguese and Spanish cases. In Central and Eastern Europe, these processes are likewise closely entangled. This coincidence, or, conversely, its absence, has ambiguous consequences. Countries emerging from authoritarian dictatorship face a greater adaptive challenge on their paths towards the EU than consolidated democracies; where democratization goes hand in hand with a transformation of the economy, as has been the case in Central and Eastern Europe, adaptive pressures will be further heightened. The likelihood of 'misfits' has increased over time, as 'democratic conditionality' has moved centre stage and the political and economic *acquis* of the EU has expanded and deepened. The hurdles to accession have been raised considerably between the Southern enlargements of the 1980s and the CEE enlargements of the 2000s, as has been the insistence of existing member states to impose major costs of adaptation on prospective new members *prior* to accession. Countries in which Europeanization, democratization and economic liberalization closely interact, are also more likely find themselves in the position of policy takers rather than policy shapers, not least because they lack the strong domestic institutional foundations of consolidated democracies. This is also one of the reasons why the participation of organized interests and civil society in the shaping of European policy is limited.

Adaptive pressures and a strong orientation towards 'policy-taking' take place in the context of still malleable domestic institutions. Put differently, the European project does not encounter a set of historically validated and deeply entrenched domestic political institutions. Under these circumstances, 'Europe' can become a decisive ideational reference point both for domestic reform and in the quest for the legitimation of the newly established domestic institutions. This contribution is critical in shifting the balance between the costs and benefits of Europeanization decisively in favour of the later.

Where integration does not coincide with democratisation and liberalisation, the pressures for adaptation are likely to be much lower, but domestic institutional and policy inertia will be higher. Mature liberal democracies with developed market economies have no problems meeting the EU's democracy criteria and will face only moderate 'misfit' in EU regulatory policies. Joining the EU with a consolidated set of domestic institutions, countries such as Denmark, Sweden or the UK were well-placed to take on the role of policy-shapers, further reducing misfit pressures. Moreover, building on a national traditions of the participation of interest and civil society groups in public policy-making, domestic EU policy-making is set to follow a more pluralist pattern. At the same time, however, gains from EU membership in terms of democracy are absent and Europe as an ideational reference point in domestic political discourse features less prominently. In the absence of a contribution of EU membership to democracy, any cost-benefit calculation is skewed towards the regulatory dimension.

These brief remarks already underline that there is a second key aspect to the ‘relative time’ of accession, which concerns the phase of integration during which groups of countries join. That length of membership matters both in terms of substantive effects - their configuration and their depth - and in modes and processes of Europeanization - strategic adaptation versus socialization and learning (Börzel/Risse 2003) - seems uncontroversial. The point to be emphasized here is that early Europeanization effects, reflecting, in part, the nature of the EU at the time of joining, are likely to result in path dependencies that influence Europeanization trajectories over time. For example, countries that joined the EU at a time when ‘integration through law’ was the predominant form of EU policy-making, might find it more difficult to reorient their domestic arrangements towards new governance instruments than those that have had to confront a more diverse policy repertoire from the beginning. Similarly, countries that joined the EU at a time when the domestic costs of integration could be cushioned by large transfer payments are likely to develop different patterns of domestic mobilization than those in which early adaptational costs remain largely uncompensated.

Finally, there are good reasons to assume that the speed and duration of the accession process overall, and of the accession negotiations, in particular, matter. Thus, it has been suggested that in the CEE enlargement of 2005, the long-drawn out process of the “return to Europe”, the uses of time as part of the Commission’s enlargement strategy (Avery 2009) and conditionality combined to ensure that many of the costs of adaptation to the *acquis* accrued prior to accession.

Several implications flow from these remarks. First, the ‘relative time of accession’ is likely to matter when it comes to pressures for, and resistance, against institutional, decision-making and policy arrangements that imply territorial, functional and temporal differentiation. Where democracy and market economy precede the quest for accession, demands for transitional arrangements, temporary derogations and the phasing in of policies are likely to be much less pressing than where they coincide. But to the extent that demands for differentiation are made by consolidated democracies, they are likely to favour permanence – in the sense of opt-outs - rather than temporary measures, since “misfits” will be more deeply embedded in their institutional and policy traditions than is the case in “transitional” political systems.

Second, open-ended “temporary” arrangements – i.e. those which are regarded as temporary in principle, but without a fixed end-date - are likely to be increasingly difficult to abolish as time goes on and national interest coalitions form around them. This observation applies, in particular, in the case of fully consolidated democracies.

Third, insistence on the full adoption of the *acquis* at the time of accession in the case of non-consolidated democracies may come at the cost of “shallow institutionalisation” that follows a “logic of reversibility” (Goetz 2005; Dimitrov, Goetz and Wollmann 2006). Thus, post-accession gaps in institutional arrangements and policy practices are more likely to open up where the instruments of temporal differentiation have not been used.

V. The EU Timescape, Pluritemporality and Differentiated Integration

Another fruitful way to think about the impact of time on differentiated integration may be opened up by paying attention to the specificities of the EU timescape (Meyer-Sahling and Goetz 2009) and how these might promote functional, territorial and also temporal differentiation.⁴ A timescape has been defined by Barbara Adam (2004: 143) as “a cluster of temporal features, each implicated in all the others, but not necessarily of equal importance in each instance”. Political timescapes reflect the manner in which time is institutionalised in a political system along the polity, politics and policy dimensions. They are concerned, in particular, with the term lengths of political and senior administrative officeholders, their time budgets and time horizons; the formal and informal rules that govern the timing, sequence, speed and duration of political decision-making processes: and the temporal properties of public policy.

There are several features of the EU timescape that deserve attention in the present context (for an extended discussion see Goetz 2009; Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2009; Meyer-Sahling and Goetz 2009). First, there is no dominant political time-setter in the EU and no dominant institutional and policy cycle. In national politics, the electoral cycle mobilises actors and synchronises them at the same time. The absence of a similarly dominant cycle at EU level makes both mobilisation and synchronisation, as key regulatory and steering functions of political time, especially arduous. Second, EU political time often has a decidedly linear character; where institutional and policy cycles exist, they tend to be extended and their discontinuous effects attenuated. There is a strong element on linearity and ongoingness to the EU’s workings, and the Commission, in particular, can often afford to take “the long view”.

Third, the EU’s *Eigenzeit* is fragile and sensitive to external influences, the most important of which are the political and, in particular, electoral calendars of the major member states. Temporal autonomy becomes more difficult to establish and maintain, the greater the number of member states and, probably more importantly, the more EU level decisions become subject to partisan and electoral competition within the member states. Fourth, there is intense intra-institutional and interinstitutional bargaining over institutional and policy timetables; the latter, especially with long time horizons and fixed dates and sequences, assume a crucial role as commitment and compliance tools, as the example of enlargement governance highlights (Avery 2009). By structuring the future, they seek to bind future entrants in decision-making. Governing by timetable is, thus, a key feature of the EU policy process.

Finally, despite frequent recourse to governing by timetable, the ability of the EU to realise its temporal preferences *vis-à-vis* the member states is limited as is its ability to restrict *de facto* temporal differentiation – e.g., in moving towards the goals of the Lisbon agenda, the reduction in national public debt, or compliance with transposition deadlines.

⁴ I am aware of the potential for confusion and circularity in argument that may arise from the presence of time both in the ‘independent variable’ – here: the specific character of the EU timescape – and the ‘dependent variable’ – here: differentiated integration, which includes, but is not, of course, restricted to, temporal differentiation. However, the key characteristics of the EU timescape I wish to highlight are different from the temporal properties of differentiated integration.

These features of the EU timescape are likely to have important consequences for functional, territorial and also temporal differentiation. To begin with, the absence of a dominant time setter and of a dominant institutional and policy cycle means that the EU timescape is able to accommodate a considerable degree of functional and also temporal differentiation. Whilst in domestic contexts, elections largely set a common clock for national policy-makers, in the EU key institutions run on different clocks and different policy areas develop distinct *Eigenzeiten* (see Dyson 2008, 2009). This makes mobilisation and synchronisation often difficult; but it also reduces the need for inter-sectoral co-ordination and the need to fit institutional development, decision-making and policy development within a strongly cyclical political calendar. The manner in which political time is institutionalised in the EU is, therefore, better equipped to tolerate pluritemporality, i.e. the co-existence of multiple political times in its institutions, decision-making procedures and in policy development than most domestic political systems with a dominant electoral clock.

Linear political time tends to increase the time budgets of key actors – notably the Commission and the EP – and, by implication, their time horizons. It is precisely this ability to “take the long view” which promotes the acceptance of “provisional” solutions in the form of *à la carte* participation or differences in the timing, speed and sequences that member states follow in the pursuit of common goals (temporal differentiation). In a political system in which time horizons are extended, it is more acceptable to wait for “eventual participation” than where the time budgets and time horizons of the key actors are strongly bounded by elections (see Koelliker 2006, who discusses the calculations surrounding ‘eventual participation’).

It is also worth noting that although EU political time reaches deeply into the institutional timetables of the member states, notably of executives (Ekengren 2002), the EU is as much a “time-taker” from the member states as it is a “time-setter”. For example, despite a highly developed system of surveillance of the member states’ budgets and a very elaborate system of time rules designed to ensure compliance with the Stability and Growth Pact, national political calendars have repeatedly proved more powerful than the clocks of the Pact (Dyson 2009). Cross-country differences in compliance with transposition deadlines and, in particular, questions over timely substantive implementation also underline the limitations to EU control over political time in the member states. For example, in their work on labour law directives in both old and new member states, Falkner et al. (2005) identified three “worlds of compliance”, consisting of a “world of law observance”, a “world of domestic politics”, and a “world of neglect”. In their most recent work, they add a fourth “world of dead letters” (2008). What these and many other findings on transposition and implementation indicate is that there is a great deal of *de facto* differentiation that the Commission is either unable or unwilling to contain.

VI. Conclusion: Taking Time Seriously

Why is it important to focus on time in discussions of differentiated integration? This paper has suggested three main answers to this question. First, time is an important property of differentiated integration, taking the form of patterns of temporal differentiation and temporal patterns of differentiation. Second, time is a critical ‘independent variable’ in accounts of integration and has also featured in analyses of

Europeanisation. Its full implications for differentiated integration certainly need to be worked out in more detail than has been possible here; but its potential explanatory power should have become apparent. Third, the EU timescape – at the level of institutions, decision-making procedures and policies – offers a favourable environment for asynchronous integration. Put differently: the manner in which ‘the EU ticks’ (Goetz 2009) makes differentiated integration an attractive option.

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