

# **THE EUROPEANIZATION OF UK GOVERNMENT: FROM QUIET REVOLUTION TO EXPLICIT STEP- CHANGE?**<sup>1</sup>

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The adaptation of UK government to European integration has been a long-term process. It can be dated back to the 1961 application by the Conservative government under Harold Macmillan to join the European Communities. The process developed in earnest after the UK's accession in 1973. However, accession was not a "big-bang" event, since adjustment had begun before accession, and the EU of today has developed massively compared to the European Communities (EC) of 1973. The process since 1973 was an incremental one characterised by a broadening of policy coverage and increasing institutional density at European level. Occasional high-profile debates, such as those at the time of the 1975 UK referendum on continued membership or during the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, highlighted the importance of the European issue. However, away from these periods of wider public attention, the impact of integration upon UK government and the policy process developed incrementally in a relatively unseen manner. The cumulative effect of these changes, however, amounted to a substantial and significant alteration in the pattern of UK government and policy-making. Thus, over time a transformation of British government took place that could be regarded as a quiet revolution.

The election of the Blair government in 1997, and its re-election with a second landslide majority in 2001, brought the process of "adapting to Europe" sharply into focus for three key reasons. First, Blair's 1997 manifesto contained a commitment to conducting a constructive policy within the European Union (EU). Blair wished to bring about a "step-change" in the UK's relationship with its EU partners. Secondly, it also included reforms to institutions in Westminster and Whitehall that would bear upon the domestic pattern of EU policy-making. Thirdly, his programme of devolving power to authorities in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London represented a major departure from the predominantly centralised machinery of government that had structured the UK's diplomatic and administrative response to EU membership theretofore. Legislation for English regional devolution has been introduced in Blair's second term, and is likely to reinforce this new direction. If these developments are not sufficient to contend with, the separate ones under way at supranational level mean that UK adaptation is taking place within a fluid EU context: ratification of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty; agreement on the

Nice Treaty; the introduction of the euro in 2002 (but not in the UK); enlargement of the EU in May 2004 to accommodate 10 new member states; and a constitutional convention (in 2002-3) designed to pave the way for a fundamental overhaul of the EU's institutions to cope with a membership of 25 or more member states.

In this paper we review - from a UK perspective - how the UK government and its policy process have adapted to European integration. Has adaptation been a quiet revolution, a step-change, or both? In exploring this puzzle we draw upon the conceptual literature of Europeanisation. We employ it to shed light on the longer-term pattern of UK adaptation as well as to put into context the domestic changes currently under way. Although commentators frequently alight upon continued non-membership of the euro as an indicator of the UK's continued incomplete adaptation to integration, we argue that there is a step-change under way in the Europeanisation of UK EU policy making, though not necessarily in its outcomes.

## THE EUROPEANIZATION OF UK GOVERNMENT

The literature on Europeanisation has been growing in recent times and is moving towards more explicit attempts both to define the concept and to set out research designs for exploring its empirical features (Börzel 1999; Risse, Cowles and Caporaso 2001; Radaelli 2000; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Knill 2001). At a general level Europeanisation concentrates on the impact of the EU upon the member states, something which might more accurately be defined as "EU-ization" (Wallace, 2001). Clearly, there are different component parts of the political system which are affected in this way: the polity, political forces, the political economy and policy content. In this paper we focus on the executive branch of government in the UK and indirectly the UK policy process.

In focusing on the Europeanisation of the polity, i.e. of domestic governance structures, it is easier to isolate the causation flowing from the EU than is the case with policy studies. In the case of the latter Europeanisation in some instances may turn out not to be an independent variable at all. It may simply be mediating underlying developments with their origins in global economic transformation or be constructed discursively in order to make globalization more palatable domestically (see Hay and Rosamond 2002). But it is still not easy to isolate causation in the Europeanisation of the polity. One of the problems is the fact that the "object" - in this case UK executive government - has not been static. Indeed, over the period of nearly half a century that we are concerned with in this paper, there have been many changes that have been quite unrelated to Europe. Individual governments have reconstructed Whitehall ministries, direct rule was introduced in Northern Ireland, new public management techniques have been introduced, and reforms under Blair such as devolution: all of these have meant that it has been a shifting UK landscape that has been subject to a Europeanisation effect.

This problem becomes particularly acute under the Blair government, since there have been three sets of development that are difficult to disentangle. First, the pace of reform and change within the EU has accelerated: so far two sets of treaty reform, another under

way, plus the largest enlargement in the history of integration. Second, the Blair government has sought to increase its engagement with partner states in the EU. Third, domestically the constitution has been subject to multiple reforms including not only devolution and decentralisation but also independence for the Bank of England; electoral reform (the use of proportional representation for certain elections, notably in devolved authorities and for the European Parliament); incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR); reform of the House of Lords; modernisation of the House of Commons; and the introduction of a Freedom of Information Act. Of these devolution resonates with the emergence of multi-level governance in the EU; the member states have been enjoined to introduce a common electoral system for European elections, Bank of England independence fulfilled a requirement for a later step to joining the euro, and the ECHR is a European construct, even if it falls under the Council of Europe in Strasbourg rather than being part of the EU itself.

How does this problem of attributing causality tie in with contemporary frameworks for the analysis of Europeanisation? There is no absolute solution to this problem. Circumspection is needed so as not to attribute all change to Europeanisation. At the same time care needs to be taken with conceptual definition. Taking definitional issues first, we adapt a definition from Bulmer and Radaelli (2004 forthcoming) and understand Europeanisation as follows:

Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, "ways of doing things" and shared beliefs and norms which are defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies.<sup>2</sup>

One view of Europeanisation associates domestic adjustment with some kind of "misfit" with the EU (see Börzel 1999; Risse, Cowles and Caporaso 2001). However, "misfit" does not represent a "necessary condition for domestic change" (Knill 2001: 13). For example, Héri-tier and Knill have found cases of domestic reforms taking place despite an absence of misfit (Héri-tier and Knill 2001). Haverland (2000) has drawn attention to the importance of institutional veto points in explaining the adjustment to adaptation pressures. According to his emphasis it is not just misfit but the presence/absence of veto points that explains the mechanisms of Europeanisation. These analytical observations suggest that Europeanisation is subtle and differentiated. Indeed, in terms of policy adaptation Bulmer and Radaelli (2004 forthcoming) have suggested that there are different "default" mechanisms of Europeanisation, depending on the mode of governance prevailing in the EU policy issue under the spotlight.

Some of the above concerns are less relevant to the Europeanisation of the national polity as opposed to national *policy*. Nevertheless, we find merit in the broad framework developed by Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001) and return to it shortly. Before doing so, we identify some analytical issues that will feature in the empirical part of the paper.

First, although we are concerned with the top-down impact of the EU upon the member state, the definition used above identifies the explicitly interactive nature of

Europeanisation. In other words, we recognise that there is an iterative process under way, not least because the adaptation of the UK governmental system is designed in part to ensure effective input into EU policy-making in Brussels. Thus we see adjustment to the EU as a process of aligning two institutional logics: that of the EU and that of UK governance. This adjustment process entails two separate steps. One is that domestic institutions must find suitable ways of processing EU business. The lowest adjustment cost is incurred by incorporating EU business into the pre-existing domestic logic of governance through some switching mechanism. As the UK joined the already established European Communities, rather than being a founder member, this was the first step sequentially. However, domestic institutions must also adapt their procedures so as to be able to make an effective contribution to those EU dynamics. For the founder members this step was taken prior to the creation of the communities.

We term these two components of institutional response to Europeanisation "reception" and "projection" (Bulmer and Burch 2000 and 2002). "Reception" involves a much larger part of UK government because so much of British policy has a European dimension. To take a concrete example, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is subject to a wide range of EU policy: on the environment, food standards, agriculture and fisheries. But whilst a large part of the ministry's organisation and officials is working within guidelines set by the EU, a rather smaller subset is engaged in the projection side, i.e. formulating UK input into proposed legislation or other decisions. Looking at the impact of the EU more broadly, it is worth drawing attention to a study conducted by Ed Page (1998). In an analysis of UK Statutory Instruments (SIs) over the period 1987-97 he found that 15.8 per cent could be traced to European legislation.<sup>3</sup> Page concluded that this figure was still a relatively modest proportion, although it displayed considerable variation; 51.3 per cent of SIs issued by the (then) Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) could be traced to EU legislation. Page was concerned with Europeanisation as "reception". We argue that "reception" is only one response to Europeanisation. A separate step is the "projection" response. "Projection" refers to the development of machinery for securing an effective voice in the formulation of policy in Brussels. It means learning the rules of the EU game, and they may be different from those in the domestic political system.

A third response to Europeanisation is to regard it as an opportunity structure for resolving domestic policy problems that are perceived not to be properly resolved within a national context, e.g. because their scale goes beyond that of the nation state. This response involves making systematic use of "projection" in order to make an imprint on the activities of the EU.

Whilst this paper is concerned with "political structures" we should note that they are bound up with other aspects of Europeanisation mentioned in the definition. The party-political sensitivity of European policy for much of the period since 1973, such as over the issue of sovereignty, has had an impact upon the ability of UK policy-makers to utilise the EU as an opportunity structure. UK discourse surrounding European integration – whether articulated in a rather sceptical print media (Wilkes and Wring

1998) or in the parliamentary arena – has scarcely helped the active engagement with the EU that is implied in the third response outlined above.

How, then, do we operationalise our understanding of Europeanisation and domestic institutional change? We set this out in Figure 1, which adapts the work of Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001). In this simple model adaptation pressure derives from the EU level and prompts adjustment of domestic institutional design. Domestic institutions, together with the cultures and norms embedded in them, are important mediators of adaptation pressure. Their stickiness in responding to change is well understood in the term "path-dependency" (Pierson 1996). Institutional veto points may inhibit change, although the UK political system is generally regarded as less subject to them than the more pluralist patterns of, say, Germany. Entrenched political beliefs and/or institutional cultures may also form barriers to adaptation. However, the importance of agency is also recognised: that is, actors responding to the domestic institutional context. These actors may as easily seize the opportunity offered by EU pressures to effect domestic structural changes. Exceptions to path-dependency do occur. In any event, the dependent variable of the model of adaptation is domestic institutional change.

(SEE FIGURE 1)

In what follows we examine how UK central government has adapted to pressures emanating from European integration in the period up to 1997. We then explore the record of adaptation under Blair, using the categories set out in Figure 1. Our explanation therefore zeroes in on the institutional mediating factors at domestic level.

- How far has European integration brought about changes in formal authority and institutional veto points?
- What new opportunity structures, notably regarding information-sharing, policy-making and decision-taking networks, have been opened up for UK government by the EU?
- Has Europeanisation led to change in the political and organisational cultures of UK government?
- How have political actors sought to exploit the new institutional environment associated with the UK's Europeanisation?

#### THE ADAPTATION OF UK GOVERNMENT - THE STORY PRIOR TO 1997

UK government commenced its response to Europeanisation ahead of accession in 1973. Indeed, the broad framework of the response emerged at the time of the negotiations for entry in 1961 (Bulmer and Burch 1998: 608-9; see also Wallace and Wallace 1973). The basic principles of the response reflected traditional ways of working in Whitehall. They comprised the following features:

- delegating detailed consideration of substantive policy to the relevant UK ministry;
- assigning diplomatic functions to the Foreign Office;
- identifying the important legal dimension to integration, and placing it under the authority of the Treasury Solicitor's Office;

- ensuring that policy was co-ordinated effectively within Whitehall through reliance on traditional cabinet mechanisms; and
- the emergence of a set of core ministries at the heart of Europeanisation, with an outer tier having more intermittent involvement.

At the time of accession the core ministries affected by substantive EU policy were MAFF, the Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the FCO and Customs and Excise. Legal advisors in the Treasury Solicitor's Department oversaw the transposition of EC legislation across Whitehall. This centralised function was designed to ensure that departments undertook their duties to transpose EC legislation. Regarded as being a branch of the Cabinet Office – complete with an official-level cabinet committee to oversee matters – this arrangement explains why adapting to Europe has involved a good UK record at transposing European legislation despite the party-political trials and tribulations associated with integration.

The co-ordination of European policy-making – i.e. "projection" of policy in Brussels – as well as a measure of general oversight was achieved through a small central secretariat in the Cabinet Office (the European Secretariat). Its three or four top personnel plus legal advisers along with key players in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the UK's Permanent Representative to the European Communities formed the hub of the government's European policy making network. These personnel, both ministerial and official, plus one or two others from the Treasury and the two Departments most consistently and substantially involved in European matters, dealing with agriculture and trade and industry, formed the inner core of the network. Formally speaking co-ordination was achieved through a tiered system of cabinet committees at both ministerial and official levels. This co-ordinating net stretched out into Brussels through the UK Permanent Representation to the EU (UKRep), and engaged, as the need, arose personnel in other domestic Departments. At first, other than those Departments already mentioned, few others were involved.

This structure and approach to handling European business was adapted over the period from 1973 largely to take into account the development of EC/EU competencies and the consequent growth of business and the spread of the network to include all central government Departments. The basic principles did not change despite the considerable expansion in EU-related activity. It was simply that new European policies, such as on the environment (see Jordan 2002), necessitated the involvement of a widening group of Whitehall officials and ministers in the putting into effect, and shaping, of European policy. The 1993 Maastricht Treaty, with its creation of a "third pillar" to co-ordinate policy on justice and home affairs, had a similar effect. The Home Office joined the group of key players even though the Conservative Government made every effort to resist the Europeanisation of these policy areas. New recruits to "the core" were a function of the development of new policy activities at EU level. Perhaps the most significant of these recruits was the prime minister who was drawn more regularly into European business following the inauguration of regular summit meetings (the European Council) in 1975. Key players at ministerial level are thus the Prime Minister and Foreign

Secretary, the latter having the lead on EU institutional matters and the chair of the cabinet's ministerial committee on European issues.

Departments outside the core group have been involved in European business in a less intensive manner. Departments responsible for policy areas such as employment, education, social security and the like have been affected by EU policy, to be sure. However, whilst they may have quite important duties to adhere to in respect of EU legislation, they are outliers in terms of "projecting" policy into the Brussels arena. Their participation in the EU policy-making machinery is very much on an "as needed" basis. The so-called territorial departments, which provided central government's presence in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, were each also gradually drawn into the European policy-making network. Their ability to play a significant role was very limited because they were too small in resource terms, too far from the centre, and sometimes neglected. However, they became increasingly active and more assertive in this area of policy from the early 1990s: the Scottish Office in particular (Smith 2001). The government offices in the English regions, set up under the Major government, also became drawn into EU policy especially as it affected economic regeneration through the application of the structural funds (see Burch and Gomez 2002; 2003).

How can we come to grips with the changes under way in Whitehall, drawing upon the Europeanisation framework that was outlined earlier? A question worth posing at the outset is whether there was any "misfit" between the structure and patterns of UK government and that of the EC/EU. Offering an answer is rather more difficult. There were certainly numerous aspects of supranational governance that did not sit well with British traditions.

- The emergent multi-levelled nature of the EU, with its characteristic sharing of power across tiers, contrasted with the UK's territorially centralised system, where the EU's gain was seen as the UK government's loss.
- The need for alliance building amongst EU governments in the Council contrasted with the majoritarian UK governing system, where the winner was accustomed to taking all (unless holding only a slender parliamentary majority).
- The supremacy of EC law and the possibilities of using qualified majority voting in the Council presented challenges to the UK parliament, with its entrenched notions of sovereignty.
- The "roman" or principle-based law of the EU differed from the English common law system.
- The legal-regulatory pattern of the EU differed from the UK's tradition of self-regulation.
- The diffuse network-based, functionally-differentiated pattern of EU governance clashed with the more co-ordinated UK cabinet system.
- The emergent tradition in the EU of having recurrent episodes of institutional reform contrasted with the UK's lack of a domestic constitution and a more pragmatic, evolutionary approach to developing structures of governance according to need rather than grand principles.

This (doubtless incomplete) list would suggest quite a measure of systemic misfit. It certainly contrasts with the greater measure of congruence between the German and EU

systems that may, along with other factors, have helped the Federal Republic to enjoy more positive experiences than the UK in its engagement with the EU.<sup>4</sup> And yet relatively few steps were undertaken to bring the UK into closer alignment with the ways of doing things in the EU. The key point here was that there was no specific *requirement* from the EU that stipulated the development of a better "fit" on the part of domestic institutions. Indeed, any such requirement would have been regarded – in the UK and other member states – as an intrusion into sovereign domestic matters.

To summarise, there was misfit between the two systems of governance but the need to align was not explicit in the way that often obtains in the Europeanisation of certain policy areas through a duty on the part of member states to transpose EU legislation. How far can this lack of domestic adaptation be attributable to institutional mediating factors at the UK level?

**Institutional veto points** go a long way to explain the very limited institutional adaptation at domestic level. The UK's centralised system of government, majoritarian rule, parliamentary sovereignty, cabinet system, different constitutional traditions and so on: all represented fundamental and well-established aspects of the political system. Why should the UK adjust these features? If suitable "switching mechanisms" could be found, whereby the adaptation pressures of the EU could simply be accommodated with existing UK governmental structures, why would domestic institutional adaptation be needed at all? In many ways this is precisely what occurred over the first two decades of UK membership. And this approach was bolstered by the recurrent arguments about European integration within and between the main political parties. This background scarcely provided a climate appropriate to reducing misfits with the EU through changes to long-standing constitutional patterns.

For quite separate domestic reasons some of the misfits were arguably reinforced. Three examples will suffice:

- The Thatcher Government abolished the metropolitan counties in England and created a more centralised system of territorial power than beforehand.<sup>5</sup>
- The Thatcher Government also strengthened the Treasury's control over public expenditure. In line with the shift from expenditure planning to an expenditure-control system (see Thain and Wright 1995) a system known as EUROPES was introduced from 1988 to ensure that Whitehall ministries could not subvert the domestic system of control by gaining additional resources from EU funds. The EUROPES system created a default situation whereby the resources obtained by a department from Brussels would simply be deducted from the domestic departmental settlement. EUROPES had the effect of getting spending ministries behind the Treasury's objective of limiting the size of the EU budget (Bulmer and Burch 1998: 618-9). Departments were given an incentive *not* to engage positively with EU policies that involved spending from the supranational budget.
- A third example relates to civil service career structures. Although a cadre of officials and diplomats with considerable experience of the EU was beginning to emerge, some home civil servants found the attractions of a posting in Brussels limited. The management de-layering that many departments underwent in the



1980s created career uncertainty and a preference to be at "headquarters" rather than face uncertain re-entry after an EU posting. In this case it was central government's embracing of changes associated with the new public management that was responsible.

In each of the above illustrations developments quite separate from Europeanisation had the effect of blocking or exacerbating institutional adaptation to the EU. However, the predominant picture is arguably less one of **veto points** blocking institutional adaptation to the EU but of small adjustments, designed to "translate" EU needs into compatibility with the existing traditions of UK central government. Thus the handling of EU policy conforms to the basic tenets of the UK state system: centralised, cabinet and cabinet committee-based and yet with considerable authority left to Departments where prime ministerial and core executive power is not asserted.

Over the period since entry, the European co-ordinating machinery for "projection" has operated as a filter on policy and if necessary a means whereby a particular Departmental line could be knocked into shape prior to business being handled in the EU. It has provided opportunities to ensure that the UK holds back or has an agreed negotiating line. This has been achieved either through the formal structure of committees or more directly through personal contacts by high ranking officials or even by the Prime Minister or Foreign Secretary at ministerial level. An example of this ability to intercede and sort things out is provided by the regular Friday meeting which takes place in the Cabinet Office under the chair of the Head of the European Secretariat, with the UK's Permanent Representative in attendance along with senior officials from the FCO and the Treasury and officials from the Departments whose business is being discussed. The Friday meeting reviews business coming up in the EU in the weeks ahead and the UK line to be pursued. It was certainly used in the early days of membership to bring errant Departments into line. Through such mechanisms the UK has tried to ensure that it is well prepared and "speaks with one voice" in EU fora.

Formally speaking it is ministers, either collectively through cabinet and its committees or individually through their own Departments, who have final authority. Accordingly a key domestic factor that has limited the development of European policy has been party politics. Indeed a central feature in the development of UK European policy is that a relatively efficient, well co-ordinated and smoothly run state machine has throughout been constrained in the actual development and delivery of policy by problems thrown up in the party political sphere. Both before and throughout membership EC/EU issues have been a source of division in and between the parties (Young 2000). This aspect has greatly constrained the activities of ministers especially when the governing party had a small parliamentary majority, as in the case of the second Major administration (1992-97).

Compared with institutional veto points and legacies, **opportunity structures** did not feature greatly. One important possibility was for the prime minister to avail him/herself of the opportunities afforded by the European Council to advocate a European policy solution to a domestic problem. In fact this channel was initially used in a negative sense:

to demand re-negotiated terms of membership or budgetary and CAP reform. One clear projection opportunity came in the mid-1980s, when Mrs Thatcher was able to get the single market programme approved by the member states as part of a wider reform package. One general consequence of Europeanisation has been to afford enhanced authority to the PM in overseeing and participating in multilateral and bilateral diplomacy.

A rather different kind of adaptation through exploiting opportunity structures came about with the UK government's decision to set up a European Staffing Unit in the Office of Public Service. The function of this Unit was to encourage the recruitment and training of young graduates into a fast-stream cadre that would take up postings in Brussels. The motivation was that it was important to have a set of able UK officials in the Commission and elsewhere – as distinct from national officials on secondments. This step was not designed to have identifiable policy consequences but, rather, to ensure that British administrative practice was well represented in EU institutions.

**Political actors** more widely have availed themselves of new opportunities, but these have typically involved circumventing the UK government to try to obtain better political outcomes. Environmentalist groups, for instance, have taken up their cases in Brussels on whether the UK government had carried out proper environmental impact assessment (Jordan 2002: 181). Local government sought to exploit opportunities in Brussels in order to by-pass Thatcherite centralisation at home (John 1994). Large firms have also taken their lobbying direct to Brussels (Fairbrass 2003). However, developments such as these did not lead to institutional adaptation on the part of UK central government.

What of **political and organisational cultures**? Here also the Europeanisation effect was limited. There was little impact from the more loosely-coupled, fluid EC/EU approach to governance. Rather, the UK approach to handling European business remained imbued with principles derived from the political and organisational cultures of Whitehall. Significant amongst these are: the notion of departmental lead on policy and light monitoring and co-ordination from the centre; an organisational culture of reciprocity and trust; and the practice of sharing information and of informing the centre (that is, in the case of Europe, the Cabinet Office European Secretariat) of matters that are likely to concern it. These practices combine central oversight with involvement of necessary participants on a "need-to-know" basis. They are backed up by norms of collective decision-making, expressed through conventions such as that of collective responsibility. The pattern, therefore, has been one of adapting existing ways of doing things rather than major change.

In summary, the adaptation of UK central government to integration over the period up to 1997 was principally one of absorbing EU business into the practices established domestically over the last decades. The British constitution, unwritten though it may be, served as a kind of veto point to any adjustment pressures emanating from Brussels. The dead-weight of history was supported by an institutional culture that was satisfied with the Whitehall/Westminster machinery. Moreover, given that UK membership had been sold by Edward Heath as having negligible impact on sovereignty, any idea that traditions

of British institutions needed alteration would have created an outcry. The fragile support for integration meant that the new institutional opportunity structures that were afforded by engagement in integration were utilised in a very limited manner. Interest groups and large corporations, however, recognised the new realities and sought direct engagement in Brussels to go alongside their established pattern of lobbying in Whitehall. In short, institutional adjustment was limited. But it was widespread. By 1997 every Department had been obliged to invest resources into the monitoring of EU activity. All had EU divisions or offices of some form. It was through these many impacts that the business of UK central government may be seen to have undergone a quiet revolution as a result of the EU's effect. But the response to Europeanisation was primarily "reception" rather than "projection". The utilisation of the EU as an opportunity structure for pursuing British policy goals was only attempted very rarely, notably in respect of the single market programme.

#### THE ADAPTATION OF UK GOVERNMENT - POST 1997

The Blair government has built on established trends in UK/EU policy handling, but it has also set up new structures and processes, which potentially shift the field on which European policy is played out at the domestic level. While these changes have not yet led to significant alterations in outcomes, they have the potential to do so. In general there has been an enhancement of the projection capabilities of UK government and an attempt to get away from a passive and reactive approach to the EU. This is a shift from the previous accretive and evolutionary pattern of adaptation. More staff and resources, especially at the core, have been devoted to European policy making. In addition there has been an attempt to change the attitude toward the benefits and potentials of the EU project and to "mainstream" Europe in the activities of all departments. There have also been important changes in the structure of the state, which have required adjustment to the ways in which European policy is made and implemented.

So far as **formal authority and institutional veto points** are concerned there has been a significant centralising of EU policy handling at the heart of the core of UK/EU policy process.

The Labour government has benefited from a more benign attitude towards Europe on the part of its parliamentary party compared to its predecessors. Labour came to terms with Europe while in Opposition, thus permitting the development of a more up-front, strategic and positive approach. In order to achieve this more resources and powers of direction have been given to the very "Centre" of government. In effect there has been a streamlining of effort at the very top through integrating more closely the work of the Cabinet Office European Secretariat (COES) and No 10. The secretariat has, as from August 2000, been substantially augmented. Its personnel have increased from 9 senior officials to 16 – with four senior staff and 12 desk officers. Its status has been raised through the appointment of Sir Stephen Wall as head of the Secretariat, with the position of Permanent Secretary, and the title of Prime Minister's Adviser on Europe and an office in No 10. This has been further complemented by closer connections between the

Secretariat and members of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit (PMPU). The effect of this enhancement of the core has been to give a more executive thrust to policy making and to open up the opportunity for a more directive approach to European policy making at the very top.

This more centralised, directive approach to EU policy-making in part reflects the style of the Blair administration, but it also reflects longer-term trend of centralisation which can be traced back to the Callaghan administration (Burch and Holliday 1996). In addition there is a direct EU-effect at work here in that there has been increasing requirement for more involvement by heads of government in EU policy making. What the Blair government has done is to build on established trends and to significantly extend them, whilst aligning UK practice with an institutional logic emanating from the regular European Council meetings and bilateral summits.

Overall European policy making is more focussed on the executive and directed from it, yet there are areas where the remit of the Centre is not so tight. A particular feature of the organisation of Whitehall since 1997 is the way that executive authority is split between the PM and his staff, on the one hand, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Treasury, on the other. This fault line is one of the central features of the Blair government (Naughtie 2001) and it has had consequences for the economic aspects of European policy. The Treasury still has a somewhat negative effect on European issues through expenditure concerns: notably EUROPEX is still in place. But it is in relation to monetary issues that the Treasury has had an impact on the adaptation of the UK to EU pressures through the development and evaluation of the five economic tests required before the government can recommend joining the euro zone. As under the Major government the Treasury has kept charge of the development of policy in relation to the European currency. This factor reflects an important division of authority within UK government. It serves as a continuing potential veto point on the pace and content of policy development and reflects a stance that has arguably grown more restrictive in the period since 1997.

Turning to changes in **institutional opportunity structures**, a characteristic feature of the Blair government's approach has been a much more significant effort to realise the potential for affecting the inter-governmental forces and interests which shape EU policies and initiatives. The aim has been to condition the climate of debate surrounding the run-up to key EU decisions through greater contact and liaison at member state level, leading to exchanges of information, alliances on policy initiatives, and long-term coalition building. This approach was enshrined in the so-called Step Change programme from which much else has followed. It grew out of a review, requested by the Prime Minister after the UK Presidency in the first half of 1998, of both the substance of UK positions on various policies and the general approach to Europe and how these might be improved. It concentrated on isolating the issues on which the UK could take the lead and the strategy and tactics to be employed. The review recognised the need for the UK to be more positive and pro-active and thus more able to shape EU agenda setting at an early stage. Closer engagement on European issues with other member states and EU personnel was seen as critical to doing this. The step change project envisaged a ten-year

programme for shifting the UK's position on Europe and other member states' perception of it. This networking offensive had two main foci for relationship-building. First, between UK ministers and officials and their counterparts in member states. Recognising that formal relations between Germany and France had, since the 1963 Elysee Treaty, been the cornerstone of the development of EC/EU, it was felt that the UK needed similarly to court closer ties with partners. This applied to all member states but especially Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands as well as the candidate states and particularly Poland as the largest and most significant of these. Initiatives under this programme included regularised Blair/Schröder and Blair/Chirac summits and large set-piece meetings to discuss an area of mutual policy interest such as the Anglo-French meeting at St Malo on European defence policy. The second focus of attention was the relationships between ministers and their party contacts on the centre left in Europe. These initiatives were complemented by a project to help shape UK public opinion by encouraging more dissemination of information on the EU, counteracting misinformation, and publicly campaigning on EU issues.

Of these initiatives, the contacts with member state personnel were seen as the most important avenue for development. To assist in this activity the Bilateral Department of the European Union Division in the FCO was created and this took over responsibility for all the member state embassies and diplomatic posts from the West European Department. Thus for the first time all things EU were brought within the same command structure. This basic structure was maintained and augmented in reorganisations in 2002 and 2004 as the FCO moved over from a Command structure to a more fluid system based on Directorates organised more around themes or tasks than geographic areas. Under these changes the Bilateral Department ceased to exist and its activities were distributed across the relevant units of the EU Directorate. The aim of this was to create closer integration between the various EU activities in the FCO and in particular to ensure that each sub-section dealt with both the bilateral and substantive aspects relating to their area of responsibility.

The objective of changing public attitudes involved giving a higher profile and larger campaigning role to the position of Minister of State Europe in the FCO and the creation of a Public Diplomacy function largely located in its EU (Internal) Department. This unit was also given the task of monitoring the bilateral contacts programme. The whole effort was overseen by an inter-departmental committee, MINECOR, chaired by the Minister of State Europe, which draws together all the Departmental ministers responsible for Europe plus the Europe ministers from the devolved administrations. The committee initially met about once every six weeks and amongst other matters examined the progress of the bilateral contacts programme. It still reports directly to the Prime Minister though now meets on a less frequent basis.

The Step Change programme did not address the issue of how best to ensure a strategic approach to Europe. Unlike its predecessors the Blair administration was not deeply divided over Europe, so overall European strategy questions could be drawn together at the ministerial level. Initially this seems to have been largely handled through *ad hoc* meetings involving the Prime Minister and his EU advisers and the Foreign Secretary and

other relevant ministers. It was not significantly developed in the Cabinet's European Policy (EP) Committee chaired by the Foreign Secretary. However, the need to prepare for an eventual decision and possible actions on UK membership of the EURO led to the creation in June 2003 of a cabinet committee on European Strategy (EUS). This is chaired by the Prime Minister and serviced by the Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat. Its remit is "to oversee the Government's European strategy, including preparations for UK entry into the single currency, progress on the inter-governmental Conference on the future of Europe and the presentation of the Government's European policy". The committee was also intended to draw policy on the EURO out of the closed confines of the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Clearly these changes in institutional opportunity structures reflected the internal dynamics and political preferences of the government. But there was a significant Europeanising dimension, namely the recognition that the UK was failing to fully exploit the opportunities available to it to shape policy at an early stage. This direct Europeanising effect was characterised by institutional changes designed to improve the projection side of the UK's approach to Europe. However, it is notable once again that these changes have been achieved by improving the "switching mechanisms", i.e. greater alignment between the two institutional systems is achieved within existing structures and trends of UK governance.

Labour's more directive, strategic and proactive approach reflected **changes in political and organisational cultures**. The most important political change was in the attitudes and values of the governing party and its leadership group. Labour was more at ease with the concept of European integration than any government since Heath's in the early 1970s. Labour's approach to Europe involved both diagnosis and prognosis. Blair's own perception of the UK in Europe over the last thirty years was one of missed opportunities, lack of understanding, a tendency to follow rather than lead, and a cautious and laggardly response to initiatives. Blair summed it up as "hesitation, alienation, incomprehension" with a tendency to "hang-back" and to become a straggler forced to "catch-up" with initiatives pushed forward by others (Blair 2000 and 2002). The outcome was that the UK was often marginalised and isolated in Europe and appeared as a reluctant partner, standing by rather than engaging at the heart of the project. In order to redress this legacy Labour aimed to take a much more active and pro-European approach especially on those issues which it was in the national interest to pursue.

Organisationally, diplomats and home civil servants had become very accustomed to dealing with EU business. However, the principle of civil service neutrality meant that the consequent organisational and cultural changes in individual Departments had not been capitalised on. Strategic thinking about the EU had been politically divisive under John Major, so for officials it was consequently taboo. With a different set of policies officials could play their part in projecting UK initiatives in the EU. By aligning the new political line – a more positive, "can-do" approach to Europe – with latent organisational resource, the Blair government had the will and wherewithal to make contributions to the EU agenda.

This shift in approach has not been uniform because the political and organisational circumstances have not been uniform. Nor, characteristically, has Tony Blair wanted to move too far ahead of public opinion, which has remained amongst the least supportive of integration in the EU. Emblematic of the lack of uniformity has been the position of the Treasury. Chancellor Gordon Brown has been notably less warm on European policy than Blair. Organisationally, the Treasury has itself embraced European integration less than other key Departments have. The Treasury arguably made greater strides towards "mainstreaming" EU business under Conservative Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke. Outside a small group of European specialists it still tends not to think European, or engage very much in Europe. This situation is partly a matter of Brown's political preferences – and Blair's writ does not extend to the Treasury – partly an organisational matter, and partly a prioritisation given to global economic institutions within the Department. Treasury initiatives have been made at EU level but have tended to be less supranational in character, for instance in employment policy where the Open Method of Coordination is designed to facilitate horizontal policy transfer between member states (Mosher and Trubek 2003).

These attempts to re-position the UK government on Europe have led to changes in the constellation of **key actors** at the core of UK European policy making. As we have seen the office of Prime Minister and the role of his advisers on Europe have been enhanced. The increase in the size of COES and the raising of the status of its leading officials and its focus on No 10 have extended the Prime Minister's ability to act on matters European. Also Blair's more executive, almost presidential style has meant that the secretariat has been able to speak with more authority to other departments – except the Treasury, where Gordon Brown holds sway. Again this is an addition of resource and clout to the already established position of Prime Minister as lead player in relation to European policy making, brought about by the creation of the European Council in 1975. Also enhanced has been the office of Minister of State Europe, but the significance of this post depends upon the qualities of the incumbent and their relationship with the Prime Minister. Not all incumbents have had good access to No 10 or have been effective in exploiting the opportunities available to them. The bilateral aspect of the Step Change initiative has encouraged cabinet ministers to undertake more regular and purposeful interaction with their European counterparts.

Given these changes in position how have these actors responded in exploiting the opportunities available to them? A number of initiatives have been launched by the British government at EU level, notably on policies such as in labour market reform, defence, and asylum. In terms of bilateral ministerial visits, they were initially skewed towards France and Germany with 70 and 88 ministerial visits respectively in the year 1999 – 2000 (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1999, 2000 and 2001). In the following year more was done to exploit contacts with Spain and Belgium (who held the EU Presidency). The Step Change, bi-lateral programme also contains some innovative features which adapt established European ways of working with an emphasis on networking and coalition building. Notably the least active core department in terms of ministerial contacts was the Treasury. So the overall picture of the actual exploitation of the opportunities envisaged in the Step Change programme has been uneven. In the

meantime, if we are to generalise, then it is fair to say that so far significant new opportunities for actors have been created and extra resources put in place. We comment on the impact of these initiatives below.

Beyond the inner core of UK European policy makers, the key changes have affected both **organisational cultures** and the distribution of **formal authority**. As far as the former is concerned, all departments and government agencies have been asked by the Prime Minister to heighten awareness of European issues across all levels and sections. This is a continuation of previous initiatives all aimed at mainstreaming Europe across central government. There is, however, still no comprehensive overall co-ordinated training and induction programme. This facility still tends to be provided in house and, given the policy area specific nature of European business, there are good reasons why it should remain so. There is much variation across departments, but overall the degree of European awareness is higher. This is in part a product of the slow "socialising" effect that increased involvement with the EU has brought into play over three decades of membership. In part also it is a product of the deliberate post-1997 effort by the Blair government to inculcate across the board more awareness of matters European. Amongst departments that have significantly enhanced their engagement has been the Home Office which has been increasingly drawn in on matters concerning immigration, asylum, and combating organised crime.

The key change in **formal authority** affecting the outer circle of UK EU policy makers has been a change in responsibility for nearly all domestic policies that have a significant EU content. Policy development in these areas has, since July 1999, had to accommodate the input of the new authorities established in the devolved territories, especially Wales and Scotland. Although relations with the EU are reserved to the UK as the member state government, responsibility for implementation of EU requirements falls upon the devolveds within their territories. This arrangement has been interpreted as requiring that the devolveds should be involved in the formulation as well as the implementation of policy. Thus the devolved executives have a privileged position in the making of national European policy compared with the English regions and regions in other large EU member states. Arguably this represents an important shift of authority from central government. In effect the basic structure of the state has been changed creating a potentially more varied interpretation of "national" European interests and objectives. The consequences of this significant re-ordering of authority are taking time to work through, but are clearly significant both in terms of the potential and actual effect.

In effect devolution marks an end of the UK unitary, centralised state. It raises a series of challenges to the centralised and contained character of the established UK/EU policy-making process. In particular, devolution raises issues about accommodating a more territorial "take" on policy and the possibility of disputes if differences are not successfully dealt with. It also raises questions about the extent to which, over time, the traditional values underpinning the UK EU process of policy making may erode both as issues become more politicised and as civil servants in Cardiff and Edinburgh are less effectively socialised into traditional practices and approaches through engagement in Whitehall.



These challenges are working their way through. They imply a substantial and significant alteration in the way the UK conducts European business. They involve shifts in authority, changed veto points and institutional opportunity space, as well as the potential to alter the organisational and political cultures underlying the development of policy. All of these changes have opened up new opportunities for the articulation and highlighting of sub-national interests and for the exercise of agency in further developing the emerging multi-level character of UK governance. Nevertheless, it remains a moot point at this early stage as to whether, how and when the opportunities created by institutional change will be exploited. The potential is there but its exact expression remains to be manifested and that depends on a number of unpredictable factors. They include changes in party control at any one of Westminster, Edinburgh and Cardiff, the emergence of new policy issues with different implications for each of the territories of the UK, and unforeseen events. The critical change centres on the point that, pre-devolution, tensions that undoubtedly existed between the territories on UK European policy matters were sorted out within the framework of collective responsibility to which all ministers were bound. Under devolved arrangements Scottish and Welsh ministers are not so bound and are under greater pressure to make public a distinctive line. In effect devolution opens up the process and introduces new points of tension and conflict (Bulmer, *et al*, 2002, chapters 1 and 9).

Devolution has also given the Welsh and Scottish authorities the opportunity to deploy resources in order to clarify, articulate and pursue in a focussed way the interests of their locality in relation to Europe. Both the Scottish and Welsh authorities have reviewed and expanded their representation in Brussels as well as maintaining involvement with and access to UKRep (see Bulmer, *et al*, 2002, chapter 6). So far as developing sub-national interests through channels to Whitehall are concerned, continuing involvement in the UK policy process offers opportunities to articulate sub-national views in policy development. Clearly the opportunities are there but the critical point remains as to how and when they will be exploited. So overall the European policy making process in the UK has become less self-contained within the central state as a result of devolution. It opens up new opportunities for territorial governments to play their hand through exploiting both extra-state and intra-state channels. And though the sources of change have been domestic, a greater alignment has emerged in regard to the pattern of governance in other EU states.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper we have argued that the period prior to 1997 was one of incremental adaptation to EU membership. After accession there was no systematic review of whether central government had made the most appropriate organisational response to handle the increasing burden of EU business. Rather, and reflecting the decisions from the pre-membership review, the process was incremental and consistent with normal patterns of business in Whitehall. However, the pervasive nature of EU business meant that, by the time of John Major's government, all ministries had established European offices. The work of a much greater set of officials was affected by EU business. The amount of European legislation was particularly large during the height of the single market programme (1986-92). By the end of the Major governments the Department of the

Environment, as it was then known, and the Home Office had become members of the core group of Departments.

We believe that this process brought with it a quiet revolution. It was quiet because the political context was more often than not divided on European integration. And when it was not divided, for instance during the Thatcher era, the general policy towards integration was one of reluctance. Thus governments had no inclination to draw attention to the changes that had occurred and were pretty reluctant to embrace new opportunities. The widening of the impact of EU policy across the breadth of central government and the territorial departments transformed the pattern of governance in the UK (Bulmer and Burch 2000). The FCO no longer monopolised diplomacy. Important parts of British policy, notably agriculture and trade, had to fit in with EU commitments. A varying proportion of developments in many policy areas were subject to an agenda that could not be controlled by British government departments or the Cabinet. Once EU policy had formally been agreed, in many policy areas that meant legally-binding commitments had to be transposed into domestic law by a specified deadline. If that were not met, then infractions proceedings might be launched, potentially culminating before the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. Almost all ministers and a sizeable proportion of officials were engaged in EU negotiations, with the resultant need to travel or otherwise communicate with their counterparts in partner governments and the EU institutions themselves. The Foreign Secretary and the Agriculture Minister were as likely to be meeting their EU counterparts as their own cabinet colleagues. Developments such as these amounted to a transformation in the conduct of UK central government and policy-making.

When it came to office the Labour Party had already embraced a constructive policy towards the EU, even if it was in part designed to capitalise on the Conservative government's internal divisions (Bulmer 2000; Stephens 2001). It was immediately thrown into the final stages of negotiating the Amsterdam Treaty (Gowland and Turner 2000, 336-40). This agreement was much more modest than the Maastricht Treaty. What have been the specific challenges associated with Europeanisation that the Blair government has had to contend with? First, it had to take over the general flow of EU business from its Conservative predecessor. Second, it had to ensure that it was well-equipped organisationally to carry out its policy of constructive engagement. Third, in 1998 it had to take on the six-month EU presidency. Fourthly, in part because of frustration at achievements thus far and in part because of a sense at needing to be more adventurous with initiatives to avoid being marginalised by other states pressing ahead with the single currency, a review was initiated leading to the Step Change. Fifthly, and illustrating the circular character of the process, it had to respond to the Europeanisation of security and defence policy: an area which the Blair government had itself pushed for as part of its constructive engagement with the EU! In short, under Labour the existing gradual and cumulative pattern of Europeanisation has been accelerated and encouraged by a steady push from the top.

Beyond the amplification of past trends we argue that there has been a step change in the handling and approach to European policy making under Labour. There are two

dimensions to this. First, Labour has been able at ministerial level and throughout government to take a more pro-active, directive and strategic approach to Europe. This has been possible because, compared with previous administrations, there have been fewer deep divisions within the leadership over Europe. Consequently strategic considerations concerning Europe have been developed at ministerial level across government without deep discord. Under the Major administration, by contrast, such matters were avoided for fear of dividing the government. This had the result that strategic thinking tended to take place either clandestinely or at official level through various *ad hoc* devices. The significant qualification to this first observation is that the Chancellor and the Treasury are a kind of *domaine réservé* in this process. This is not to say that there has not been pro-activity from this quarter, such as on employment policy. It is just that it has not come under Blair's direction, just as Gordon Brown has maintained primacy over policy on joining the EURO. The second sense in which there has been a step change relates to the structure of policy making. The creation of devolved authorities in Scotland and Wales (and intermittently in Northern Ireland) has changed the way the UK process of European policy making works and the pressures brought to bear upon it. In essence the institutional pitch has changed, as have some of the players and the rules. How this will play out in practice remains to be seen as tricky issues arise and if and when political control at the sub-national and national level diverges. Of course, this development is not attributable to the EU but to alterations in the domestic institutional arrangements which mediate Europeanisation.

An important question that arises from the changes under Blair is whether they will endure. Referring to the idea that Europeanisation brings about institutional adaptation under conditions of misfit (see Figure 1), it is clear that the Major government deliberately resisted Europeanisation because of the prevailing party-political climate. The House of Commons represented an obvious veto point and the obstructive approach to EU negotiations in the Inter-Governmental Conference that led – under Labour – to the Amsterdam Treaty was a specific consequence. Blair's parliamentary majority and his specific organisational changes were designed to bring about improved alignment with EU governance. The more directive approach facilitated enhanced "projection" capabilities in the EU. The durability of these changes is far from clear. Public support for integration remains lukewarm. A different electoral outcome might bring parliamentary veto points back into play. Separately, there is the question of whether the Conservative Party can resolve its divisions on Europe under the leadership of Michael Howard, not to mention make itself electable.

The Blair government's domestic institutional and constitutional reforms are also relevant to considering durability. Devolution and independence for the Bank of England, to take two examples, have brought UK politics in closer alignment with continental EU practice. Taken more widely, the post-1997 constitutional reforms belie the UK's traditional, evolutionary approach. Of course they have been presented as piecemeal, small-scale and pragmatic, but the totality of the changes is in reality much more in keeping with the EU approach of inter-locking and substantial institutional reform. As part of this package principled law has been introduced at the very centre of the UK system following the adoption of the European Convention on Human Rights. This has

also drawn the continental tradition of rights, as opposed to the key UK notion of liberties, into the very heart of the judicial and administrative systems. However, a judgement on durability requires the disentanglement of specific institutional reforms attributable to the Blair government's European policy from those attributable to domestic constitutional reform. This task is extremely problematic and the Risse, Cowles and Caporaso model of Europeanisation (see Figure 1) does not help with the disentanglement, since domestic institutional mediating factors are presumed as fixed. UK governance is now significantly more in keeping with EU models and approaches but this development cannot be fully understood using the causation model in Figure 1!

Finally, if the machinery and the approach to handling Europe has changed, the potential for projecting the UK in Europe is greater than ever before, personnel more aware and more engaged, and there is leadership and a strategic vision of the UK's place in Europe, *has all this made a difference?* On this aspect it is harder to identify a step change. The Step Change was presented as a ten-year project so it is quite early to judge. In any case measuring the effects of diplomacy and enhanced networking is notoriously difficult. Certainly impact on public attitudes to Europe seems to have been marginal. These still remain a significant drag on any efforts to pursue an innovative and leading approach in Brussels. Initial positive engagement with the project for a European constitution declined and by December 2003 the emphasis was on "red lines", i.e. those areas such as taxation policy, where the government would veto losses of national sovereignty. Then there is the impact of the Iraq war on all that has been done thus far so far as alliances and contacts with EU member state counterparts are concerned, while the EURO retreat of June 2003 tended to confirm the traditional perception of the UK as a reluctant partner. So, has all this amounted to a step change? In approach – yes. In outcome – at least not yet.

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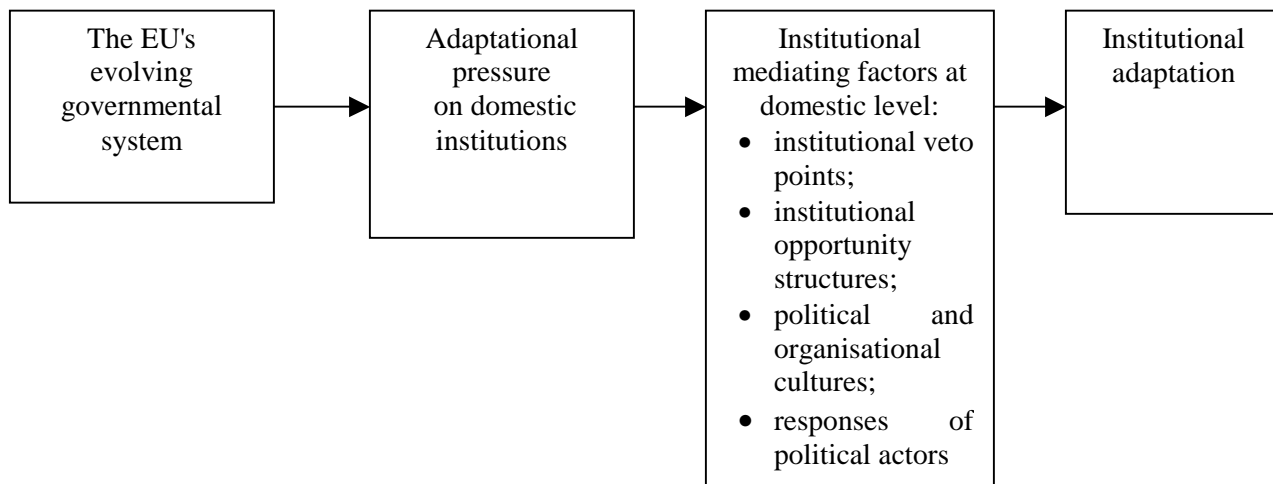


Figure 1: Europeanization and institutional adaptation

Note: this figure is modified and simplified from Figure 1.1 of Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001: 6).

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<sup>2</sup> The unadapted definition from Bulmer and Radaelli (forthcoming 2004) is more top down than the one used here. The original is below; we have removed two words as indicated in italics.

Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, "ways of doing things" and shared beliefs and norms which are *first* defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and *then* incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies.

<sup>3</sup> As Page notes, EU activity in some policy areas, notably Justice and Home Affairs or foreign policy, is not by means of legislation, so the impact in these domains is not captured in his statistics (Page 1998: 808).

<sup>4</sup> For a review of German congruence with the EU system, see Bulmer (1997). It is worth pointing out that this apparent congruence has not led to the federal government being considered an especially effective negotiator in the EU, i.e. in terms of "projection".

<sup>5</sup> Only with the creation under the Major Government of government offices for each English region was a small step taken towards the more multi-levelled system encouraged by the EU.