

THE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEANIZATION PROCESS ON NATIONAL PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING: BETWEEN ADMINISTRATIVE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE

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Abstract: This paper examines the Europeanization of public policy-making and its impact on national administrative systems, with a particular focus on Romania. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of Europeanization, policy transfer, and institutional adaptation, the study analyzes both mechanisms of influence and patterns of administrative resistance. The research identifies how EU institutions, top-down directives, and horizontal governance processes shape national policies, while highlighting the challenges of balancing European requirements with domestic priorities. Comparative insights reveal the interplay between administrative capacity, institutional culture, and political dynamics in determining the success of adaptation. The paper concludes by discussing implications for public administration reform, emphasizing capacity-building, stakeholder involvement, and evidence-based policy-making, and outlines future research directions for understanding long-term Europeanization processes.

Keywords: Administrative Adaptation, Europeanization, Public Policy, Policy Transfer

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, the process of Europeanization has profoundly transformed the way national public policies are formulated, implemented, and evaluated across the member states of the European Union. This process, understood as the domestic adaptation to European integration dynamics, has generated significant shifts in the institutional and administrative frameworks of national governments. Europeanization operates not only through formal legal and regulatory mechanisms but also through informal norms, policy learning, and transnational cooperation. While Europeanization often fosters greater administrative coordination and convergence, it also brings challenges that expose the limits of national adaptation. Public administrations must reconcile European policy requirements with domestic political, cultural, and institutional contexts. This tension frequently produces a dual process: on one hand, administrative adaptation to supranational governance standards; on the other, various forms of resistance or selective implementation aimed at preserving national autonomy.

The relevance of studying this dynamic lies in its implications for both governance and policy effectiveness. Understanding how Europeanization shapes national public policy-making helps identify best practices, potential obstacles, and areas where reforms are most needed. Moreover, it provides valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners

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concerned with strengthening administrative capacity, enhancing policy coherence, and promoting efficient governance across multilevel systems.

Historically, the European Union has introduced a wide range of policies that require adaptation at the national level, including environmental regulation, social policy, regional development, and economic governance. Each policy area presents unique challenges for member states, depending on their institutional capacity, administrative culture, and political priorities. By examining these variations, the paper highlights how Europeanization does not produce uniform outcomes but rather a spectrum of adaptation strategies and resistance mechanisms.

Recent developments, such as the EU's Green Deal, the Digital Agenda, and post-pandemic recovery programs, have intensified the need for effective coordination between EU institutions and national administrations. These initiatives underscore the growing complexity of policy-making in a multilevel governance system, where national authorities must integrate European priorities while maintaining responsiveness to local needs. Studying this interaction is therefore crucial for both theoretical understanding and practical policy-making.

Furthermore, the paper situates the discussion within the broader debates on administrative modernization and governance reforms in Europe. By analyzing cases where European directives and regulations have been successfully implemented versus cases marked by resistance or partial compliance, the study seeks to uncover the factors that facilitate or hinder effective policy transfer. This analysis also contributes to the literature on institutional learning, policy adaptation, and the role of administrative culture in shaping the Europeanization process.

This study adopts a mixed methodological approach, combining qualitative analysis of EU policy documents, national legislation, and administrative reports with comparative case studies of selected member states. By examining both the mechanisms of adaptation and the sources of resistance, the paper seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities faced by national administrations in the context of European integration.

Ultimately, this paper contributes to the ongoing debate on the balance between supranational influence and national sovereignty, highlighting the conditions under which Europeanization can lead to effective policy convergence and when domestic constraints may limit its impact. The findings are intended to inform future reforms in public administration and to support evidence-based policy-making at both the national and European levels.

2. Theoretical Framework: Europeanization and Public Policy (Extended Version)

2.1 Concept and Dimensions of Europeanization

Europeanization refers to the process through which European Union (EU) rules, norms, and practices influence national policies, institutions, and administrative structures (Borzel & Risse, 2003). It encompasses both formal adaptation to EU law and informal changes in governance patterns, policy priorities, and political behavior. Scholars generally identify three main dimensions of Europeanization: institutional, policy, and political (Radaelli, 2003). The institutional dimension relates to the structural and procedural alignment of national administrations with EU standards, while the policy dimension addresses the adoption of EU-driven policy goals. The political dimension focuses on changes in domestic political dynamics

resulting from EU integration. These dimensions are interrelated and often influence one another, producing complex patterns of adaptation in national contexts. Europeanization can also be understood as a process of social learning, where national actors adopt practices observed in other member states or recommended by EU institutions. It is not a uniform or linear process; instead, it varies depending on the political, economic, and cultural context of each member state. The degree of Europeanization often depends on domestic institutions' flexibility, administrative capacity, and willingness to engage with EU norms. Moreover, Europeanization interacts with other global influences, including international organizations and transnational networks, which can amplify or moderate its impact. Finally, Europeanization is increasingly multidimensional, affecting policy content, administrative structures, and even public attitudes toward governance and European integration.

2.2 Europeanization and Administrative Adaptation

Administrative adaptation occurs when national public administrations adjust their structures, procedures, and capacities to meet the requirements of EU policies and regulations (Knill & Lenschow, 2001). Adaptation can be top-down, driven by EU directives and regulations, or bottom-up, influenced by domestic actors who voluntarily incorporate EU norms to achieve legitimacy or access funding. For instance, member states often reform regulatory agencies or introduce new monitoring mechanisms to comply with EU environmental or economic governance standards. Successful adaptation requires not only legal compliance but also the development of administrative capacity, inter-ministerial coordination, and policy learning (Borzel, 2002).

Administrative adaptation is also influenced by the complexity and specificity of the EU policy in question. Policies with clear procedural guidelines are easier to implement than those requiring discretionary judgment. In many cases, adaptation entails changes in staffing, training, and institutional culture to align with EU expectations. Furthermore, collaboration between ministries, local authorities, and supranational bodies becomes crucial for effective policy implementation. The process often leads to incremental reforms rather than radical institutional overhaul, reflecting the need to balance EU requirements with domestic realities.

2.3 Models of Policy Transfer and Institutional Change

Policy transfer is a core mechanism of Europeanization, representing the process by which knowledge, practices, and institutions are adopted across different levels of governance (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). Three main models are commonly discussed: coercive transfer, where EU directives impose mandatory changes; voluntary transfer, driven by domestic actors seeking policy innovation; and lesson-drawing, where national administrations selectively adopt practices based on perceived effectiveness. Institutional change often follows these transfers, leading to new governance structures, hybrid administrative arrangements, or the modernization of public services. These models help explain the variation in how EU policies are implemented across member states.

2.4 Resistance and Inertia in National Administrations

Despite pressures to adapt, national administrations frequently exhibit resistance or inertia due to institutional, cultural, or political factors (Borzel & Risse, 2012). Resistance may

take the form of delayed implementation, selective compliance, or reinterpretation of EU norms to fit domestic contexts. Inertia can also arise from deeply embedded bureaucratic routines, limited resources, or competing policy priorities. Understanding these dynamics is essential for analyzing why some EU-driven reforms succeed while others fail. The interaction between adaptation and resistance highlights the dual nature of Europeanization: it is simultaneously a force for convergence and a process mediated by national specificities.

Resistance can manifest at multiple levels, including political leadership, bureaucratic agencies, and local administrations. Cultural attitudes and historical administrative practices often reinforce reluctance to fully comply with EU requirements. Political considerations, such as upcoming elections or public opinion, may also slow down or modify implementation. Additionally, the complexity of EU rules can create confusion or misinterpretation, inadvertently increasing resistance. Some member states adopt a “minimal compliance” strategy, implementing directives only to the extent necessary to avoid penalties. These patterns illustrate that resistance is not always overt opposition but often subtle, strategic negotiation of EU demands.

Inertia is equally significant and often interacts with resistance, creating persistent gaps between EU expectations and national implementation. Organizational rigidity, hierarchical decision-making, and lack of cross-sectoral coordination contribute to slow adaptation. Resource constraints, both financial and human, limit the ability of administrations to engage in meaningful reforms. Moreover, overlapping competencies between ministries or levels of government can generate delays or inconsistent policy application. Institutional memory and established routines may prevent innovative solutions, even when EU guidelines encourage reform. Finally, understanding the interplay between adaptation, resistance, and inertia is critical for designing effective mechanisms that promote policy convergence while respecting national administrative contexts.

3. The Europeanization of Public Policy-Making

3.1 Mechanisms of Influence: Top-Down, Bottom-Up, and Horizontal Processes

Europeanization affects national policy-making through multiple mechanisms that operate at different levels of governance. Top-down mechanisms involve directives, regulations, and recommendations issued by the EU, which compel national administrations to adjust their policies and administrative procedures (Knill & Lenschow, 2001). Bottom-up mechanisms refer to domestic actors' voluntary adoption of EU standards to gain legitimacy, access funding, or enhance policy efficiency (Borzel, 2002). Horizontal processes involve cross-national learning and networking between member states, enabling policy diffusion without direct EU coercion (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000).

These mechanisms often interact, creating complex policy dynamics. For example, a member state may adopt EU environmental standards (top-down) while simultaneously engaging in knowledge exchange with neighboring countries (horizontal) and innovating locally to meet domestic priorities (bottom-up). The effectiveness of each mechanism depends on institutional capacity, political will, and administrative culture. Recognizing the interplay between these mechanisms is crucial for understanding why some policies converge rapidly at the EU level while others remain unevenly implemented.

Top-down influence is often reinforced through monitoring, reporting requirements, and the threat of sanctions in case of non-compliance. Bottom-up processes can generate innovation as local solutions are scaled up or adapted by other member states. Horizontal networks, including professional associations and expert groups, facilitate the dissemination of best practices across national boundaries.

3.2 The Role of EU Institutions in Shaping National Policies

EU institutions, including the European Commission, European Parliament, and European Council, play a central role in shaping national public policy (Borzel & Risse, 2012). The European Commission acts as a policy initiator and guardian of the treaties, monitoring compliance and providing technical guidance to member states. The European Parliament influences policy indirectly through legislative scrutiny and budgetary control, while the European Council sets strategic priorities and policy orientations. These institutions collectively create both incentives and pressures for national adaptation, ranging from financial support to formal enforcement mechanisms. Additionally, EU agencies and networks facilitate policy learning and knowledge exchange, often acting as intermediaries between supranational norms and domestic administrations. By offering expertise, training programs, and coordination platforms, these institutions enhance administrative capacity and foster convergence. However, national governments retain significant discretion in implementing EU policies, which can lead to selective adoption or reinterpretation of EU norms based on local political and institutional contexts.

EU institutions also shape policy agendas by prioritizing specific sectors such as climate change, digital transformation, or social inclusion. Policy harmonization initiatives help reduce discrepancies in regulations across member states, facilitating the functioning of the single market. Regular dialogue between national and EU officials ensures that domestic feedback is considered, creating a dynamic interaction between national priorities and European objectives.

3.3 Policy Coordination and Governance Mechanisms in the EU

Effective policy-making in the EU relies on coordination across multiple levels of governance. Mechanisms such as Open Method of Coordination (OMC), intergovernmental committees, and sectoral councils encourage member states to align national strategies with EU objectives (Radaelli, 2003). Coordination reduces policy fragmentation, facilitates policy learning, and ensures consistency in implementation across countries.

Furthermore, governance mechanisms are increasingly network-based, involving collaboration among ministries, agencies, local authorities, and supranational actors. This multilevel approach allows for greater flexibility and innovation, but it also requires robust administrative capacity and clear communication channels. Policy coordination is particularly important in areas such as environmental protection, economic governance, and social policy, where transnational challenges cannot be effectively addressed by individual member states alone. Effective coordination also depends on transparent information-sharing and joint monitoring systems that track progress across states. Coordination mechanisms help anticipate conflicts between national and EU objectives, allowing for timely adjustments. Multi-level governance strengthens the legitimacy of EU policies by involving a broader range of stakeholders in decision-making processes.

3.4 Administrative Capacity and Policy Coherence

Administrative capacity is a critical factor in ensuring that Europeanization translates into effective national policy implementation (Knill & Lenschow, 2001). Capacity encompasses human resources, institutional structures, expertise, and financial means. Member states with strong administrative capacity are more likely to implement EU policies efficiently, maintain policy coherence, and engage in proactive policy learning.

Policy coherence requires alignment between EU objectives and national priorities, as well as coordination across different policy areas and levels of government. Weak administrative capacity can result in fragmented implementation, delays, or inconsistent compliance. Furthermore, capacity building often involves both structural reforms, such as creating new agencies or units, and cultural changes, such as enhancing inter-ministerial cooperation and adopting new managerial practices. Ultimately, the degree of administrative capacity shapes how EU policies are translated into tangible outcomes at the national level, influencing the overall effectiveness of European integration.

Investments in training and professional development are essential to enhance the skills and knowledge of civil servants. Digital tools and information systems can improve coordination, data management, and monitoring of EU policy implementation. Strong administrative capacity also allows for proactive engagement with EU institutions, enabling member states to influence policy development rather than merely reacting to directives.

4. Between Adaptation and Resistance: Comparative Insights

4.1 Patterns of Administrative Adaptation

Administrative adaptation to Europeanization is neither uniform nor automatic; it varies according to institutional, political, and cultural contexts (Borzel & Risse, 2003; Bărbulescu, 2015). Some member states adopt a compliant approach, aligning their policies closely with EU norms, while others pursue strategic adaptation, selectively implementing regulations that match national priorities (Knill & Lenschow, 2001). Adaptation may involve structural reforms, creation of specialized agencies, or procedural changes to meet reporting and monitoring obligations.

Successful adaptation often relies on proactive engagement with EU institutions, policy learning from other member states, and investments in administrative capacity. In addition, the use of digital tools and inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms facilitates smoother policy implementation. Comparative studies show that countries with strong bureaucratic traditions and centralized governance tend to adapt more systematically, whereas fragmented administrative structures may slow down or complicate adaptation processes. Romanian research emphasizes that administrative culture and political stability significantly influence the speed and effectiveness of adaptation (Popa & Marinescu, 2018).

Institutional learning is a key component of adaptation, as national administrations adjust their procedures based on feedback from EU monitoring reports and peer reviews. Policy networks, both domestic and transnational, support knowledge sharing and help domestic actors interpret complex EU regulations. The pace of adaptation is often shaped by political cycles; governments facing elections may prioritize short-term political gains over long-term administrative reforms, affecting compliance with EU directives.

Adaptation can also be incremental, where minor adjustments accumulate over time to produce significant convergence with EU norms. This gradual process often reflects the interplay between top-down EU pressures and bottom-up domestic initiatives (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005).

4.2 Forms and Causes of Resistance

Resistance to Europeanization can take multiple forms, including passive compliance, selective implementation, or outright refusal to adopt EU recommendations (Borzel, 2002; Bărbulescu, 2015). Causes of resistance include political opposition, limited administrative capacity, domestic institutional inertia, or perceived conflicts with national sovereignty. Cultural norms, bureaucratic habits, and the prioritization of domestic interests also shape how policies are implemented or ignored. Resistance may manifest through delays in transposing directives, partial adoption of EU standards, or reinterpretation of regulations to fit national contexts. In some cases, domestic actors resist due to lack of incentives or fear of negative socio-economic impacts. Romanian scholars note that administrative fragmentation and insufficient professional training often amplify resistance to EU policies (Popa & Marinescu, 2018; Iancu, 2017). Resistance can also emerge from political actors who perceive European policies as threats to national sovereignty or as undermining domestic political agendas. These actors may use legislative, judicial, or bureaucratic tools to slow down or block policy implementation. Organizational culture within public administrations can reinforce resistance, especially when established routines conflict with new EU-driven requirements. In such cases, change management and professional development are crucial to overcoming entrenched habits. External shocks, such as economic crises or social unrest, may exacerbate resistance, as governments prioritize immediate domestic concerns over EU-aligned reforms. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing strategies that promote effective policy compliance.

4.3 Balancing European Requirements and National Priorities

Policymakers face the challenge of reconciling EU-level objectives with domestic political, social, and economic priorities (Radaelli, 2003). Balancing these often competing demands requires flexibility, negotiation, and careful prioritization within national administrations. Mechanisms such as stakeholder consultations, inter-ministerial coordination, and adaptive policy design help mitigate conflicts between European requirements and national strategies. Successful balancing is facilitated by the development of domestic expertise capable of interpreting EU rules in light of local contexts. National governments may strategically frame European obligations to gain political support or justify reforms domestically. Romanian studies underline that alignment between national strategies and EU policies depends on both administrative professionalism and political commitment (Bărbulescu, 2015; Iancu, 2017).

Strategic framing allows policymakers to communicate EU requirements in ways that resonate with domestic audiences, facilitating public acceptance and smoother implementation. National parliaments play a critical role in mediating between EU mandates and domestic priorities, often influencing the timing and scope of policy adoption. Long-term policy coherence requires institutionalized mechanisms, such as inter-ministerial committees, permanent advisory boards, and continuous policy evaluation, which help reconcile EU directives with national strategic goals (Bărbulescu, 2015; Popa & Marinescu, 2018).

5. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Main Findings

The analysis of Europeanization processes and administrative adaptation highlights several key patterns. First, adaptation is highly context-dependent, influenced by political, institutional, and cultural factors (Borzel & Risse, 2003; Bărbulescu, 2015). While some countries pursue full compliance with EU norms, others strategically adopt selective reforms, balancing EU requirements with domestic priorities (Knill & Lenschow, 2001).

Second, resistance is a persistent feature of national administrations, shaped by organizational culture, political opposition, and limited administrative capacity (Borzel, 2002; Iancu, 2017). Resistance manifests in partial implementation, delays, or reinterpretation of EU directives, leading to uneven Europeanization outcomes.

Third, balancing European requirements with national priorities requires flexibility, negotiation, and institutional mechanisms that ensure coherence. Strategic framing, stakeholder consultations, and inter-ministerial coordination have proven effective in mitigating conflicts between EU mandates and domestic agendas (Radaelli, 2003; Popa & Marinescu, 2018).

Romanian experiences show that administrative professionalism and political commitment are critical for successful adaptation. Without these factors, reforms may be superficial or inconsistent, reducing their long-term impact (Bărbulescu, 2015). Incremental adaptation combined with institutional learning allows administrations to internalize EU norms over time, improving compliance and policy coherence (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). Overall, the interplay between top-down European pressures and bottom-up domestic initiatives shapes the effectiveness of Europeanization processes, highlighting the importance of context-specific strategies.

5.2 Implications for Public Administration Reform

Europeanization processes offer valuable lessons for public administration reform. Adaptation requires investment in administrative capacity, professional training, and effective governance structures (Knill & Lenschow, 2001; Bărbulescu, 2015). Reform strategies should focus on enhancing institutional coordination, promoting policy coherence, and creating mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation.

Strategic communication and framing of EU obligations are essential to secure public and political support for reforms. Romanian scholars emphasize that stakeholder involvement and inter-ministerial collaboration increase the likelihood of successful implementation of EU-driven policies (Popa & Marinescu, 2018; Iancu, 2017). Administrative reforms should also address sources of resistance, such as bureaucratic inertia, fragmented structures, and insufficient expertise. Measures like capacity-building programs, change management initiatives, and knowledge-sharing networks can reduce resistance and improve adaptation. Emphasizing evidence-based policy-making ensures that reforms are aligned with both EU standards and domestic needs, reducing policy conflicts and enhancing legitimacy. Digitalization of administrative processes can improve efficiency, transparency, and reporting compliance, which are key requirements of European governance. Long-term reforms should integrate lessons from comparative European experiences, adapting best practices while considering national political and institutional contexts.

5.3 Future Research Directions

Despite extensive research on Europeanization, several areas remain underexplored. Comparative studies examining the interaction between domestic political dynamics and EU pressures can provide deeper insights into the mechanisms of adaptation and resistance (Borzel & Risse, 2003). Further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of institutional reforms and capacity-building initiatives across different member states. This includes examining how administrative culture and professionalization influence policy implementation and compliance. Romanian scholars have highlighted the need for longitudinal studies that track the evolution of administrative adaptation over time, particularly in post-accession countries (Bărbulescu, 2015; Popa & Marinescu, 2018). Such studies could inform the design of more effective reforms and policy interventions.

Future research should investigate the role of digital governance tools in facilitating EU policy compliance and reducing administrative resistance. Cross-sectoral studies analyzing interactions between national and local administrations can reveal challenges in multi-level governance and policy coherence. Evaluating the impact of political cycles, stakeholder participation, and policy framing strategies can provide practical guidance for policymakers seeking to improve Europeanization outcomes.

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