Debate


The Western Balkans as a Paradigmal Challenge to the Study of the Current Europeanization

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With the borders of the European Union moving south-eastwards, we have been awarded yet another real-world experiment on the domestic impact of the EU.

*Tanja A. Börzel & Thomas Risse*, *When Europeanization Meets Diffusion: Exploring New Territory*

This time there is no question about what sociologists mean when they talk about crisis. The European integration project has never since its inception been as close to a crash as it is now. Nor do we need much justification for the view that what now is needed is critique, a social science that offers views on how modern societies work, stick together and change.

*Pekka Sulkunen*, *Coming of Age*, President’s Address. *European Sociologist*, Issue 34, Summer
The year 2014 will be remembered most probably by the unprecedentedly sharp political crisis in Ukraine. It has been responsible for reshuffling the agenda of European societies since it questioned the most basic values and principles that the post-wwii development of Europe has been built on. A crisis of such magnitude makes everything else seem insignificant. This is the major reason why an extraordinarily important initiative of the EC did not receive the due attention of the European public. In early February, the Commission published a unique Anti-corruption Report providing detailed comments on the state of play in every member-state. A month later the EC announced the creation of a Framework to safeguard the rule of law in the EU, making clear that the Anti-corruption Report is actually a key component of the new political mechanism aimed at the protection of the rule of law. The latter was obviously identified as a crucial impediment to the functioning of many member-states and, hence, to the functioning of the Union itself.

The importance of the EC’s new initiative derives from the fact that up to that moment there was no legal foundation and no political instruments for intervening in this very delicate sphere of public life. This policy omission is not an arbitrary one. The entire sphere of justice and home affairs (JHA) is vaguely and unsystematically regulated in the acquis of the EU for two major reasons. First, according to the foundation documents of the EU, a well-established system of the rule of law is a precondition for any country’s claim for accession to the EU and thus a mechanism for the protection of the latter has seemed unnecessary because it concerns the civilizational, value and institutional integrity of the member-states. Second, the variety of national specifics in the particular design and concrete practices in the field of justice and home affairs is so vast and essential that any change in this field would concern the basic pillars of public life in the respective society and, hence, resistance against the eventual unification would be especially strong and successful. Yet the decades-long course of Europeanization, both through the processes of deepening integration and of parallel enlargement of the EU, proved that the sphere of JHA is of a fundamental importance for the competitiveness of the economy and the truly democratic character of the political system in any national society. This is why the reliability of the institutional order in that sphere is a premise for the rule of law and for an effective fight against corruption.