



The political organization of Europe: Differentiation and unification

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Prologue

It is a privilege to give the Stein Rokkan Memorial Lecture. I met Rokkan (and visited Bergen) for the first time in 1965, the year before he became professor at the University of Bergen. The occasion was that I, as a former journalist and a student of political science in Oslo, interviewed him for *Aftenposten*. This was one of the relatively few interviews he gave, and he accepted only after I hinted that I knew something about the “smaller democracies” project he was involved in (Olsen 1965). I moved to Bergen in 1969 and stayed here for 24 years. I belonged to a different research tradition and never became part of Rokkan’s inner circle. Yet I was close enough to benefit from his enormous generosity and knowledge: dinner parties to discuss with world stars of the social sciences and a steady stream of papers, contacts and information about research projects under way. A theory seminar led by Stein Rokkan, Gudmund Hernes and me also gave an opportunity to discuss basic theoretical issues and imagining alternative approaches to political and social life.

The dynamics of territorial political orders

Students of political development try to understand how territorial systems of government arise and disintegrate. They ask how political order and unity is fostered, maintained and lost and under what conditions political community, stable boundaries and legitimate institutions are possible among component units (individuals, groups, organizations, states) that are different in many respects.¹

What kinds of unity are there? What basic principles of boundary-drawing, organization and modes of governance tie the component units together? What are considered legitimate issues for binding decisions and for political conflict? How and why do humans constitute themselves as a political community? Through what processes are actors with diverging ideals, interests and resources transformed into a politically organized cooperative with common purposes, rules and relatively enduring collective commitments to avoid disorder, violence and capricious rule? Which factors structure political

life and what are the determinants of political unity or disunity? How significant are deliberate decisions and intentional designs?

Most of the time, integration into a larger organized system competes with the desire for autonomy among the system's components.² It is difficult to find and maintain a legitimate balance between system integration and sub-unit autonomy. System coordination and coherence tend to foster efforts to protect the identity and distinctive character of the components. Likewise, differentiation of sub-systems and integration of each component, are likely to generate demands for system coordination and control, coherence and consistency. Hence, all systems face the questions of how much and what forms of unity the components can tolerate and how much and what forms of diversity the system can tolerate. Political projects of unification may aim at reducing the diversity or perceived diversity among the component units. They may also aim at strengthening the system's ability to manage and live with enduring heterogeneity and pluralism and create unity in diversity (Olsen 2003a, 2004, 2005).

Three standard interpretations see non-coercive political integration as respectively an outcome of calculated utility, an expression of socio-cultural community, and commitment to specific constitutive political principles. *First*, a commonplace answer to why actors become part of a larger system is that they organize because they together can solve some problem better, or with less effort and expense, than they can each for themselves. *Second*, political integration is the expression of a socio-cultural community with a distinctive collective identity that differentiates clearly between members and non-members. Members are unified by territory, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, life-styles, habitual modes of thought or a common history. *Third*, a

polity is founded upon commitment to constitutive political principles, proper institutions and rules of political cooperation and association.

The three interpretations and their standards of assessment co-exist in contemporary democracies. Actors are motivated by instrumental concerns as well as by constitutive identities, principles and rules and both agents of unification and their opponents are likely to appeal to utility calculations, to cultural values and identities and to political principles. Political institutions are tools for achieving substantive benefits as well as carriers of values, identities and principles (March and Olsen 1998, 2006a,b). Institutions of government are organized ways of dealing with diversity, making joint decisions while maintaining social cohesion and democratic institutions is a specific type of normative order that legitimize socio-cultural diversity, as well as political opposition and conflict. Legitimate conflict is a precondition for political unity and peaceful co-existence.

Students of political development divide over the explanatory power of societal environments, identifiable decision makers and institutional properties. A society-centered strand (contextualism) assumes that politics is subordinated to exogenous forces. Change in political orders is driven by environments, e.g. economic and technological change, mass migration and demographic and cultural change. An actor-centered strand (reductionism) presumes that political orders are shaped by intentional choice and design. Political organization is purposeful and its design is stemming directly from the intentions of political actors. Without denying the importance of the social context of politics and the motives of individual actors, an institution-centered strand is a theoretical style that assigns a more autonomous explanatory role to political institutions.³ Political institutions mediate

between diversity and unity. They are not only affected by societal developments and individual actions but also affect society, form actors and define and defend interests and identities (March and Olsen 1984, 1989, 1995, 2006b).

The paper explores how studies of political unification and differentiation in Europe may contribute to a better general understanding of the dynamics of territorial organization and governance and the balancing of unity and diversity. Two theoretical perspectives are discussed. The *first* is Stein Rokkan's studies of the historical development of the modern state - a European institutional invention and a process of modernization that generated national unification and European differentiation. The *second* is a neo-institutional approach to processes of European unification over the last fifty years; processes that have been interpreted to generate nation-state convergence, empowerment, transformation, fragmentation and a withering of the state and the Westphalian state-based order.⁴ The two approaches differ in their problem definitions and in their theoretical and conceptual foundations, time perspectives and the historical situations and processes they try to understand. Nevertheless, they are supplementary, not exclusive, and together they shed some light over the dynamics of political development.

Understanding European differentiation

Stein Rokkan was fascinated with the comparative analysis of macro-sociological historical change and the institutionalization and deinstitutionalization of political authority over the European territory and population. He observed the breakdown of an old order, i.e. the disintegration of the Western Roman Empire; the development of a multiplicity of petty powers and competing jurisdictions; and the rise of the

modern territorial state as the dominant political institution and actor. Focus was upon the *differentiation* across Europe, in developmental paths as well as outcomes, but he also saw European developments in a larger comparative context:

“I have tried, in a variety of contexts, to work out schemes for the exploration of the extraordinary contrasts confronting us when we compare political systems across the world: Why are some large, others very small? Why are some highly centralized, others studded with a variety of centers, fulfilling different functions in the total territory? Why are some highly homogeneous in language and religion, others built up of several distinctive cultural communities? Why do some of them allow extensive traffic of people, commodities, and messages across their borders while others impose stricter measures of economic and/or cultural autarky (Rokkan 1973: 73)?

The formation of the modern state represented a nationalization of politics, where unity was achieved and the importance of (internal) territorial cleavages was reduced or replaced by functional cleavages (Caramani 2004). Rokkan suggested that variations in polity-building, political unification through the development of a territorial system of government could be described along four dimensions (Eisenstadt and Rokkan 1973, Rokkan 1975, 1999, Flora 1999):

- (1) *State-building*: Boundary- and center-building with an institutionalized, legally based, capacity to act; to penetrate a territory and regulate internal disputes, extract resources and defend external borders.
- (2) *Nation-building*: Group formation through cultural standardization and homogenization; socialization of citizens and the development of a shared identity in terms of loyalty to the territory, nation and culture.
- (3) *Democratization*: The extension of political citizenship through mass participation and representation, legitimization of public debate, criticism and organized opposition and making leaders accountable to the electorate.

(4) *Redistribution*: Developing socio-economic citizenship, social protection, redistribution of resources and a welfare state, along with the taming of class-conflict and the institutionalization of class compromises in corporate arrangements.

The modern European state is a polity with considerable overlap between territorial, political, legal, administrative, economic, social and cultural boundaries. Attempts to reduce diversity came together with attempts to improve the ability to live with diversity. The concept of citizenship gradually merged with a territorial identity (Rokkan et al. 1987: 19) and the most developed states combine a capacity to control their territory and boundaries with nation-feeling, democracy and social solidarity.

Nevertheless, the correspondence has never been perfect. The disintegration of political, military, economic and cultural boundaries in the West Roman Empire was non-simultaneous and incomplete. There was political-administrative-military collapse but considerable continuity in economic and cultural infra-structure, law, (elite) language and religion (Rokkan 1973: 77). The coincidence of boundaries has also varied across modern states and over time. Institutions achieved different degrees of consolidation, autonomy and permanence and they did so via different trajectories. For Rokkan the challenge was to map and account for variation in the time-sequencing, trajectories and outcomes of the four processes of territorial state integration. What were the conditions for, and the consequences of, different sequences, i.e. that some states had the time to build institutions and cope with one challenge or crisis before the next arrived, while other states faced an accumulation of challenges and crises? How did external boundary-drawing

influence internal structuration (Rokkan 1975, 1999: 130, 143, Flora 1999: 14)?

How, then, is national unification and European differentiation accounted for? Rokkan has been seen to reconcile a structural and an institutional approach, emphasizing the relationship between social structure and political institutions as a two-way process (Allardt and Valen 1981: 25, Berntzen and Selle 1992). Nevertheless, Rokkan interprets the modern state primarily as the product of centuries-long societal developments (Eisenstadt and Rokkan 1973, Rokkan 1975, Tilly 1984, Flora 1999). While the language of state- and nation-*building* suggests an actor-focused perspective, identifiable actors do not play a key role.

In brief: Variations in political borders, unity, cohesion and order are derived from structurally rooted economic, social and cultural cleavages and long historical developments where structural tensions are translated into groups, boundaries and institutions. The “initial conditions” go back to the fall of the Western Roman Empire (Rokkan 1975). The “master variables” are secular-religious differentiation, linguistic distinctiveness and unification, differentiation and independence of city networks and concentration/dispersal of landholdings (Rokkan 1973: 89-90). For example, the alphabet and the city are seen to decide the fate of Europe and *Völkerwanderung* in the middle Ages produced very different conditions for linguistic unification in the territories of Europe (Rokkan 1973: 80, 83).

Political institutions are, however, seen to have some autonomy against large-scale transformations in society. Cleavages are not automatically translated into politics and they have not become politicized to the same extent in all

countries (Flora 1999: 45). Institutionalization happens at historical junctures when foundational ideas, institutions and boundaries are challenged and new ones emerge and are possibly “frozen”, for example into party systems.⁵ An implication of the partly autonomous role of political institutions is that one has to take into account the institutional heritage of the various polities. Change is path dependent and has to be seen in the light of the preceding phases in the development of the European political order. For example, continuity was observed between medieval forms of representation and modern parliamentary government. “The stronger the inherited traditions of representative rule, the greater the chances of early legitimating of opposition and the slower, and the less likely to be reversed, the process of enfranchise and equalization” (Rokkan 1970: 82-3). The old city- and trade-belt generated more positive attitudes towards federal solutions, while the strongest unitary states emerged in the periphery of the Empire (Rokkan 1973: 79, Flora 1999: 57, 80).

State- and nation-building, democratization and redistribution are potential sources of tensions and political struggle as well as unity. There is, for example, counter-mobilization of the periphery to defend economic interests and cultural loyalties and to preserve local character and autonomy against penetration from the centre:

“The centre-periphery relationship in each element is reciprocal. For each process of centralization there is a corresponding effort of boundary accentuation, of attempting to preserve peripheral distinctiveness: juxtaposing the process of cultural standardization, for instance, is the peripheral concern for maintaining a separate identity” (Rokkan and Urwin 1983: 14).

How do political actors cope with disputes and what is the explanatory power of the motives, resources and performance of identifiable actors? In contrast to

efforts to understand change in political orders as a result of consequential action and deliberate design, Rokkan's focus on the *longue durée* has been seen "to guard against overestimating the significance of actors involved in the long-term development of political systems" (Flora 1999: 16). Rokkan also observed that "the Western emphasis on the supremacy of the political dimension of human life was alien to much of mankind" (Rokkan 1969: 97).

Rokkan takes interest in the unification strategies and alliances of state- and nation-builders and institutional variation is partly seen as a result of choices and strategies far back in time. Rational actors are assumed to fight for positions, interests and identities when socio-economic and cultural structures change. Yet it is primarily societal dynamics that create actors, interests and resources. Constellations of competing forces in society and institutional arrangements generate spaces of opportunities available to different groups of actors, but political action and the content of politics recede into the background. The conditions under which motivated and capable actors are available to perform the acts demanded of them by changing structures are not specified. Rokkan does not say who the state- and nation-builders are and why they want to build different kinds of states and nations (Tilly 1984: 141, Berntzen and Selle 1990: 140, 146, 1992: 293, 302-3, Flora 1999: 34, 81).

As argued by Berntzen and Selle (1990, 1992) there is a need to disentangle when and why an action is possible and under what conditions, how and why available opportunities are actually exploited. Preferences and behavior are neither self-evident nor do they emanate directly from structure. They must be explained. Furthermore, when actors are studied, emphasis is upon mass politics and voters: how different social groups are brought into politics and how the organization of electoral systems, party systems and access to

government impact politics. Less attention is given to how elected representatives, bureaucrats and experts use governmental authority and power and how political life is affected by the organization of government and public administration.

Berntzen and Selle also suggest that Rokkan's focus upon explaining structural variations, a retrospective style of analysis and a structural-functional and modernization perspective may presume evolution and competitive selection and therefore drive political action and the substance of politics into the background (Berntzen and Selle 1990: 139). Rokkan, however, rejected determinism. He provided complex historical explanations involving a large number of variables with explanatory power (Tilly 1984: 129-143). The political structuring of Europe was the product of a multitude of processes and it was not the characteristics of a single institution that was important, but the configuration and interaction of institutions (Flora 1999: 90).⁶

Rokkan, for example, rejected the idea that the location of a territorial unit within a larger system determined its structural features and his work has been seen as "a bastion for all those skeptical of overestimating the role of "global systems" in the development of individual nations" (Flora 1999: 12, 13, 27). Rokkan has, however, also been criticized for paying insufficient attention to the international context and the crystallization of a system of states; for treating each case in isolation, neglecting links between national histories, the interactions among contenders for power and the role of wars and war settlements as the shapers of Europe's political organization (Tilly 1984: 132, 138, 143).⁷

How relevant are Rokkan's questions, approach and answers for understanding general conditions for change in the territorial organization of government? Is Peter Flora right when he claims that Rokkan's framework "offers a key to understanding the latest development in Europe" (Flora 1999: 91, also Ferrera 2003, 2005, 2004, Bartolini 2005)?

Understanding European unification

The Westphalian state order assumes a distinction between domestic political spheres characterized by institutional density, hierarchical relationships, shared interests, and strong collective identities, and an international political sphere characterized by a lack of strong institutions, few rules, conflicting interests, and conflicting identities. The state imposes unity and coherence on domestic society, a coherence based on a national identity that suppresses or subordinates competing identities and belongings and on an elaborate set of rules, laws and institutions. National identity and other political identities are fundamental to structuring behavior, and rules of appropriate behavior and institutions associated with those identities both infuse the state with shared meaning and expectations and provide political legitimacy that facilitates mobilization of resources from society. International political life, on the other hand, is seen as much less institutionalized, much more anarchical. Although some understandings are common within the international community and some rules are recognized, norms and institutions are weaker, less widely shared, and less taken for granted than they are within individual states. International institutions are generally seen as requiring explicit rationalization in terms of the current interests of current states in order to secure their force and effectiveness (March and Olsen 1998: 944-5).

While it was not uncommon during the 1960s to assume that the modern state was an end-state of an inherent and inevitable political development, Bendix argued that “a historically delimited term like the “state” implies not only a transition in the early modern period but sooner or later a transition to new and as yet unrealized or unrecognized institutional patterns in the future” (Bendix 1968: 9). Since then state autonomy and sovereignty have increasingly been compromised in fundamental areas such as security, capital regulation, migration, ecology, health, culture and language. Institutional barriers to interaction across nation state boundaries have been weakened or removed and there has been considerable increase in the number and importance of international institutions, regimes, laws, organizations, and networks. The Westphalian principle of non-intervention in internal affairs has been eroded by interventions in the name of dispute resolution, economic stability, and human rights (March and Olsen 1998: 946). Interestingly, the challenge has been strongest in Europe, the birthplace of the modern state and the Westphalian order.

The development involves two puzzles. The *first* is that the European Union is the most extensive example of supranational political integration based on voluntary cooperation in the world, in spite of the fact that Europe for a long time period has been characterized by a strong differentiation among political entities with different histories and traditions. The *second* is that widening and deepening in the EU and its forerunners have come together. While continuous enlargements have increased the diversity of the Union, unification has taken place in terms of both an expanded agenda and a stronger institutional capacity for joint policy making.

The answer to the two puzzles is not that integration has eliminated diversity and conflict. Comprehending European integration presupposes understanding “its irreducible political character” and how the future is shaped by debates and struggles over how to organize political life (Hooghe and Marks 2001: 141). The Convention drafting the *Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe* (European Union 2005) also illustrated that the Union has to cope with a variety of unresolved conflicts. Some disputes are territorial (e.g. between big and small, rich and poor countries) others are non-territorial. Europeans, and not only states, divide over attitudes to integration. Some hold a federative vision of unity. Others hold an intergovernmental vision or they are outright negative to integration. Europeans disagree about the proper role of democratic politics in the economy and society, including social rights and economic redistribution. They have different attitudes towards modernity and the role of Christianity, and towards the United States and the war in Iraq.

There is disagreement not only over political projects of integration but also over how the European polity can best be described and understood. Are we observing only minor modifications of a European order based on sovereign states? Or, are we witnessing a major transformation of the constitutive principles and practices of European political life; a new phase in the development of the European state and the beginnings of a new form of political order and governance? Are we observing the victory of the market or the return of politics? Is there an ongoing de-differentiation of the territorial structuring of the state that creates internal tensions and divisions, challenges its unity and disjoins its coinciding borders (Bartolini 2005)?

Like other political systems, the European Union is struggling to reconcile unity and diversity, the whole and the parts, coordination and autonomy.

European countries are aware of their interdependencies and limited capabilities to control their destiny and they know that cooperation can provide mutual benefits. They are, however, also aware of their diversity and they are concerned that cooperation and integration can jeopardize their autonomy, national interest and identity. It is contested how much unity and diversity there is and how much unity and diversity the Union can live with.

Scholars in the Rokkan tradition have asked what kinds of political order can develop out of the EU configuration of boundaries (Bartolini 2005: 318) and it has been argued that Europe is so heterogeneous that she “can probably tolerate only a highly decentralized constitution” (Flora 1999: 91).⁸ The belief that there is a negative correlation between diversity among the component units and integration in the relations between them is based upon the idea that the kind of government and the degree of unity a system can achieve is determined by the kind of society there is. The argument, that the more heterogeneity and pluralism, the less likely there will be a strong political center and common institutions, has merit. This view, nevertheless, underestimates that political institutions are partly autonomous and that unity-diversity relations are shaped and reshaped in processes of co-evolving polities and societies. Political unity depends not only upon what kind of society there is, but also what kind of society there can be. What are the possibilities of politically transformative action? To what degree do political actors and institutions unite member states and their inhabitants into a political community? Can the puzzles be understood in terms of how institutions of government mediate between diversity and unity? Is there now a typical European way of organizing, managing and changing the relations between the whole and the parts? If so, what are the key characteristics?

The EU is a large-scale, heterogeneous, multi-level and multi-centered polity. Boundaries are still open and the Union is an “open institutional construction site” (Trenz 2002) with a complex and fluid institutional power-balance (Craig 1999). The distribution of authority and power is unsettled and there is a constant struggle to achieve unity in diversity in each policy field (Kohler-Koch 2005: 14). Nevertheless, for all the arguments there are elements of consent. Economic integration embedded in the internal market is well-developed. The same is true for legal integration, civil rights and in particular producer and consumer rights, embedded in courts of law and the doctrine of the primacy of EU law and the doctrine of direct effect. While networks organized around specific policies have flourished, center-building has been held at bay. Relatively small staffs and budgets make the Union dependent upon member states and constrain the capacity to govern and administer.

Institutions for cultural integration and identity-building are less strongly developed than economic institutions and the Union has few means to influence socialization and cultural affairs. No shared European identity with a strong emotional foundation has developed, even if minorities of Europeans carry multiple identities (Hooghe and Marks 2001: 66, Risse 2004, Checkel 2005). As the Union’s agenda has grown, democratic concerns have increasingly challenged existing arrangements based on functional legitimacy or indirect democratic legitimacy derived from the member states. The impact, nevertheless, has been stronger upon the EU’s rhetoric than upon its structures. The EU is not a political community with strong popular commitments, participation, a vivid civil society and a public communicative sphere. A budget just above 1 % of the BNI of the member states also limits the possibilities for redistribution of resources and social sharing, with the Common Agricultural Policy and regional policies as the exceptions.

Through what kinds of mechanisms have this uneven integration, with different structural arrangements and mixes of system unity and component autonomy in different policy sectors, taken place? Integration has happened in a context of voluntary cooperation and norms prescribing unanimity and compromises rather than through majority decisions and winners-take-all. Contested and competing claims have been worked out in every-day-politics as well as in constitutional contexts; based upon appeals to practical results, to a common cultural heritage and shared political principles and supported by criss-crossing cleavages and increasingly strong common institutions.⁹

The EU may still be seen as a “union of deep diversity”, accepting and institutionally protecting a plurality of ways of belonging (Fossum 2004). The Union has shown ability to live with an open-ended process and enduring tensions and inconsistencies, not only in terms of policies but also institutional arrangements. Unity has not been based on a shared political philosophy. There has been no shared vision of what kind of polity the EU is becoming or should become, and how tasks, authority and power should be shared between levels of government, between government institutions at the same level, and between government and society. Even the roles of the Council, the Parliament and the Court of Justice have to a large extent developed incrementally. It has happened with different time-scripts and rhythms, on the basis of experience, and often outside the context of Treaty-reforms and the explicit choices of “founders”. There have been specified procedures and time-tables and gradual shifts in meaning rather than clear-cut goals and desired end-states (Kohler-Koch 2005).

The uneven and flexible integration, the principle that some member states can cooperate more closely than others, opt-out arrangements, the pillar system, the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the many and complex procedures in use, and the different time-scripts and rhythms of change, can all be seen as ways of balancing unity and diversity in a polity with limited community and shared purpose. The Union has also, partly as a consequence of increased diversity and experiences with legal integration, been seen to rely less on law and take an interest in how policy coordination and desired effects can be achieved through non-legal, flexible and “soft” instruments such as the Open Method of Coordination (Héritier 2003). These are methods that may accommodate competing claims of system unity and member state diversity and autonomy better than obligatory “hard law”. Their use may therefore reflect attempts to reconcile claims of national autonomy and power, with Union ambitions to coordinate and control, while lacking adequate authority and resources to issue and enforce binding legal rules.

Learning and adaptation have happened in a variety of institutional settings.¹⁰ There has been a confluence of internal developments and external influences in a variety of co-evolving transnational, intergovernmental and supranational settings. The extensive repertoire of change processes in use can, for example, be illustrated by the attempts to reconcile linguistic unity and diversity. Huge sums of money have been spent in order to keep all national languages official EU languages. In this way the ability to live with linguistic diversity has been enhanced. Efforts to increase citizens’ proficiency in foreign languages also improve this ability, while support to minority languages within each state contributes to maintain diversity, also within the individual state.¹¹ While the Commission claims that the diversity in language and culture is to be protected, it also argues that the diversity requires a minimum of European

coordination. The EU aloofness in this policy-area is partly a result of experience. Most member states have been more concerned about protecting their language than their currency, and interventions in cultural and identity-related matters have tended to focus attention on national distinctiveness and create conflict (Schlesinger 1993). Furthermore, EU-policies have not prevented a trend towards an “English-Only Europe” (Phillipson 2003) – a linguistic unification which to a large extent is governed by forces outside the reach of EU-policies.

Learning has taken place on the background of historical tragedies and glorified moments; through series of Treaty-reforms and experiences with everyday cooperation, problem-solving and compromising. Collective memory has been mobilized around the *never again*-lesson: the need to avoid the tragedies and bitter experiences of rivalry, genocide, wars, nationalism, nazism, fascism, communism, and the inability of international organizations, such as the League of Nations, to prevent the atrocities. Collective memory has also been mobilized around the *recapturing of former glory*-lesson: the need to counteract the loss of international status and power and generally strengthen Europe politically, economically and culturally on the international scene. Arguably, both lessons have contributed to a belief in the need for peaceful cooperation and a willingness to compromise.

In 15 years the Union’s basic Treaties have been revised four times and there have been attempts to reduce diversity as well as to improve the ability to manage diversity. The series of Treaty revisions show that “historical moments” have not been that rare. It has also been difficult to agree at such occasions. There have been “leftovers” in terms of unresolved problems and there have been problems of ratification. Sometimes Treaties have primarily

codified decisions made elsewhere or changed practices. Like earlier reforms, the drafting of the *Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe* was an explicit attempt to (re)define unity-diversity relations in the Union. The Convention used an institutional-engineering language, arguing what would be the best institutional tools for common purposes and how the Union could be made more effective. Discussions, nevertheless, also involved cultural values and identities as well as political principles.¹² The Dutch and French “no”, however, has made its future impact uncertain.

Have the member states’ sovereignty, autonomy and identity been threatened, or lost, as a consequence of the European-style of integration? A tentative observation is that there have been changes but so far no radical transformation or disintegration of the component units of the Union. While both change and continuity are observed, policy convergence, standardization and homogenization have been more prominent than change in institutions and identities. Domestic politics and policies have been influenced by European-level institutions, decisions and events, but national institutions and identities have shown considerable resilience in spite of the single market, common laws and a high degree of interaction among elites.¹³

There has, however, been a weakening of national boundaries and, consistent with Rokkan’s observation of the interrelations between external boundary building and internal structuring, the weakening of external boundaries have affected the structuring of national politics and the action capacities of European states (Flora 1999: 8-9, Ferrera 2003, 2005, Bartolini 2005). In particular, the quasi-constitutional status of competition policy and the free movement of capital, goods, services and people have reduced the states’ capacity for self-governance (Scharpf 1999). It has opened for judicial

activism, with consequences for other policy sectors far beyond what has traditionally been the domain of competition policy in Europe. Mobile persons and resources have achieved better protection against national regulations and more influence upon European regulations. The less mobile have not achieved these opportunities to the same degree and therefore power balances have changed (Bartolini 2005).

In the long run there may be a de-nationalization of European politics, as ideological (e.g. the left-right) cleavages replace territorial cleavages (Marks and Steenberger 2004); similar to what happened during the nationalization period (Caramani 2004).¹⁴ Likewise, common institutions and the integration of *parts* of national public administration, central banks and courts of law may contribute to converting a political order dominated by states and cleavages between states, into an order that also involves a variety of non-territorial cleavages and patterns of cooperation. An example is networked administrative structures where agencies are part of a European as well as national hierarchies. Agencies interact directly with the Commission in enforcing EU law and at the same time perform traditional tasks as agents of national ministries (Egeberg 2001, 2005). Nevertheless, a preliminary conclusion is that states are still key political actors and frameworks, even if they are deprived of parts of their governing capacity and nations are capable of arousing powerful expressions of belonging (Smith 1995, Delanty 2003).

Consider the following hypothesis: An answer to the two puzzles may be that a politically organized cooperative community has been achieved *because* there has been no agreed-upon political philosophy; no clear, consistent and stable purposes and strategies. Integration has succeeded *because* it has been consensus-oriented and has taken place on the basis of a fluid and loosely

coupled order with weak rules of coordination, consistency and coherence. European-style integration has flourished with ambiguity, local rationality, sequential attention and incremental adaptation even in foundational questions (Olsen 2005).¹⁵ What have been seen as useful, legally prescribed, culturally appropriate, and politically feasible, have each been independent constraints on available options. Economic, legal, democratic and cultural concerns have generated change in some periods and constrained change in other periods. Together they have defined a space of viable unity-diversity balances. Disputes have been worked out through political processes in an organized context of political ideologies, cleavages, historical battles and compromises, political parties, voluntary associations, mass media, and institutions of government. The context reflects lessons of past attempts to cope with unity and diversity and an important part of the lessons is that piecemeal change based on partly competing principles and logics of action makes it possible for democracies to accommodate diversity and maintain political community and authority. Corollary, grand constitutional designs, where all issues and cleavages are aired simultaneously, are likely to overload democracies (Olsen 2003a). Furthermore, the better developed the day-to-day ability to learn and adapt, the less the need for major constitutional design and reform, and the less likely there will be crises that open for “constitutional moments” (Olsen 1997).

Supplementary, not exclusive approaches

The two approaches to the dynamics of the territorial organization of government in Europe differ in many respects. Nevertheless, the approaches are supplementary, not exclusive. Both observe that balancing unity and diversity, coordination and autonomy, is problematic and that political integration is a matter of degree and vulnerable to conflict. Some orders are

more integrated than others and integration is uneven among institutional spheres. Territorial political orders, as well as economic, linguistic, religious etc. systems arise and fall apart and not necessarily in a synchronized way. They are all based on a mix of utility concerns, shared cultural identity, and commitment to political principles, but the mixes are different and shifting.

The dimensions Rokkan used to describe processes of state integration (center-building, nation-building, democratization and redistribution) seem relevant to understanding change in territorial organization and governance in general, including the kinds of unity that can currently be achieved in Europe. While Rokkan's main focus was upon processes of *differentiation* in territorial systems, there was also another and less developed theme. Rokkan viewed Western Europe as a unit, a specific region with a unique development and experience. It could be treated as a specific context and a system with fixed boundaries vis-à-vis the outside world because the countries had much in common (Berntzen and Selle 1992: 298).

An important part of today's integration involves discovering or constructing what ideas and institutions European countries actually have in common and what unity and diversity the Union can live with. What kind of center- and institution-building is likely (Kohler-Koch 2005)? Can a common culture be constructed on the basis of universalism, tolerance and accommodation of differences and what can a post-national democracy look like (Eriksen and Fossum 2000, Eriksen 2005)? What kind of welfare system is viable in instrumental terms and as an expression of moral concepts and values (Kildal and Kuhnle 2005)?

Institutions and history matter. Both approaches conceive the fit between social structures and political institutions as a matter of degree and they follow Max Weber in assuming that the configurations and interactions of political, economic and cultural institutions make a difference. Change takes place through a variety of processes. Political outcomes can not be traced back to a single institutional sphere or group of actors. Causal arrows can go more than one way. Politics, economics, religion, science etc. can be both movers and be moved and developmental patterns and variations have to be explained (Weber 1978).

There is path dependency. The political order of today has in part to be accounted for in terms of the history of how it arrived there, and the order of tomorrow has in part to be understood in terms of current arrangements. Well-entrenched institutions and identities such as the modern state and nationality change slowly and comprehending non-coercive radical change in the territorial organization of government requires an extended time perspective.

The two approaches also agree that political institutions have limited capacities for problem solving and conflict resolution. Rokkan observed that polities have problems when they have to cope with several cleavages and crises simultaneously, rather than in a sequence (Rokkan 1975, 1999). Likewise historical moments, when a multitude of issues are aired simultaneously, in comparison with incremental change in separated institutional spheres with different time-tables, tend to create overload (Olsen 2003a). An implication is that a focus solely on historical junctures and constitutional moments may underestimate change and how incremental steps

with a consistent direction can produce transformative results (Streeck and Thelen 2005).

So far center-building in the European Union has primarily taken place in the name of common problem solving and the promotion of shared goals such as peace and prosperity. The Union has been an elite project and Majone (2005: 5) argues that “integration by stealth” has come to be regarded as the only feasible strategy. In this perspective an increased emphasis upon democratization, cultural identity and welfare issues may represent an accumulation of tensions that put more stress on EU institutions and complicate their decision making. Because federal solutions have limited approval among governments, and even less so among citizens, building support will be increasingly important; in turn making public debates and political struggles more crucial as engines of development in the Union.

Neither of the two approaches portrays political actors as heroes. For Rokkan political leadership reflects society and its cleavages more than transcending socio-economic and cultural processes. The neo-institutional approach sees political actors as purposeful yet with limited understanding and control. Political leaders are gardeners more than engineers and architects of a new political order. Decision making processes are occasions for interpretation and for developing meaning and vocabularies as much as making substantive decisions (Olsen 2000).¹⁶ A neo-institutional approach, furthermore, supplements Rokkan’s concern with citizens’ participation in political life, the decline in participation and increased mass apathy about public affairs (Rokkan 1970) by suggesting that democracies need not only institutions facilitating citizens’ participation but also institutions of government that work

with competence and integrity and make continuous participation redundant (Olsen 2003b).

Rokkan's key concern was how structural societal change affects the space for political action. It is likely that he would have taken an interest in how current processes of unification can be understood in terms of large-scale processes of economic and commercial expansion and increasing interdependencies, new technologies facilitating communication, the growing hegemony of the English language, mass migration and cultural collisions, individualization and the breakdown of social collectivities. He would certainly have studied the consequences of weakened national boundaries; the crises of legitimacy and the modest interest in European elections; the mobilization of the periphery against European center-building; and the possible emergence of non-territorial European political parties.

Neo-institutionalists are more explicitly concerned about when, how and why decision-makers are motivated and capable to exploit existing options. Focus is in particular on how actors authorized to govern a territory make decisions, handle disputes and learn from experience. Lessons from experience go beyond learning about available opportunities, incentives and strategies. They may also involve forming people and modifying their preferences, identities and belongings. Democratic politics has a larger transformative potential when it is seen to impact peoples' conceptions of themselves and others than when politics is conceived as the aggregation of predetermined preferences, beliefs and resources (March and Olsen 1986). There is, therefore, a need to account for how roles and identities are learnt, for example, in what institutional contexts are actors socialized into understanding their identity and unity in terms of expected utility, socio-cultural belonging, or democratic political

principles? How do multiple loyalties and identities combine and confront each other and how do they become institutionalized?

Finally, consider Rokkan's efforts to combine generalization and a concern for the specific historical and territorial contexts of different systems of government. The more international dependencies and interactions and the more the key institutions of individual territorial states are nested in cooperative arrangements, the more problematic it becomes to treat each state as sovereign and autonomous. Current political developments therefore challenge approaches that assume that the nation-state is a basic concept and unit of analysis and comparison (Ferrera 2003: 61, Schmitter 2005). They question the idea that government and politics can be fully understood by studying single states in isolation, by comparing states or by studying their interaction.

Epilogue: We need to know more ...

For Stein Rokkan research was a never-ending-story. It has been said that he did not finish his work. The idea of "finishing" or "final conclusions", however, was alien to his intellectual endeavors. There was great consistency in research themes, yet he held a hypothetical attitude towards his own conclusions. He was always open for new theoretical ideas and data and always willing to revise his analytical schemes. A key phrase was: We need to know more about ... (Torsvik 1981). Without doubt, Rokkan would have been in the midst of current theoretical and empirical efforts to understand European struggles to recombine unity and diversity. Without doubt, the study of the dynamics of territorial political organization and governance in general would have benefited from his contributions. It would have been fun to repeat the seminars of the 1970s in an effort to synthesize historical and current lessons of European unification and differentiation. Indeed, a challenge for today's young lions with theoretical aspirations, in Bergen and elsewhere.

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Endnotes

1 I thank John Erik Fossum and Per Selle for valuable comments to an earlier draft.

2 Integration is a process which turn previously separated units into components of a relatively coherent and consistent system. Integration as a condition consists in some measure of the density and intensity (number, kinds and strength) of relations among the constituent units: their interdependence, consistency and structural connectedness (March 1999: 134-135). Integration as *political institutionalization* refers to: (a) Structures, rules, roles and practices specifying legitimate authority relations and codes of appropriate behavior. (b) Shared purposes, identities, traditions of interpretation and principles of legitimacy that explain and justify practices and provide a basis for activating moral and emotional commitments and solidarity. (c) Common resources which create capability and capacity to act in a coordinated way.

3 Students of the dynamics of political action and structures are divided over the question of historical efficiency. On the one side are those who see history as following a course that leads inexorably and relatively quickly to a unique equilibrium dictated by exogenously determined interests and resources. On the other side are those who see history as inefficient, as following a meandering path affected by multiple equilibria and endogenous transformations of interests and resources.

For those who see history as efficient, the primary postulated mechanism is competition for survival and the outcomes of politics, including the dynamics of political order, are implicit in environmental constraints. Different environments dictate different orders. Because optimality is required for survival, predicting the equilibrium order does not depend on any specific knowledge about the actors beyond the initial interests and resources that are imposed on them by the environment. The presumption is that political bargains adjust quickly and in a necessary way to exogenous changes, and changes in orders are explained as stemming from exogenous changes in interests and resources. As a consequence, there is little independent role for institutions. Institutions are simply products of a history that is exogenously determined.

Those who see history as inefficient emphasize the slow pace of historical adaptation relative to the rate of environmental change, thus the low likelihood of reaching an equilibrium. The match between political institutions and their environments is not automatic, continuous, and precise. The pressures of survival are sporadic rather than constant, crude rather than precise, and environments vary in the extent to which they dictate outcomes. Institutions and identities sometimes endure in the face of apparent inconsistency with their environments, sometimes collapsing without obvious external cause. In short, neither competitive pressures nor current conditions uniquely determine institutional options or outcomes. In such a world, institutional development depends not only on satisfying current environmental and political conditions but also on an institution's origin, history, and internal dynamics (March and Olsen 1989, 1998, 2006).

4 The paper certainly does not aspire to cover all current approaches to the study of European cooperation and integration. Over the last quarter of a century the field has grown and diversified and students of European political development divide over what are the proper units and levels of analysis and whether the prime determinants are to be located at the environmental, actor or institutional level.

5 Lipset and Rokkan (1967) focused on how political parties in Western Europe emerged and stabilized around basic social cleavages. They viewed social alignments as responses to major social transformations such as the National and the Industrial revolution. While the structure of the cleavages is considered to be relatively fixed, the political salience of the various cleavages and the patterns of party coalitions may fluctuate in reaction to contemporary events (Lipset 2001: 6-7). Mair argues that the freezing hypothesis is ambiguous and that interpretations of the freezing from the early 1920s and the unfreezing in the late 1960s sometimes assume a freezing of cleavage structures, sometimes of party structures and voter alignments (Mair 2001, also Karvonen and Kuhnle 2001, Carimani 2004).

6 Like many leading figures of the “behavioral revolution”, Rokkan was skeptical towards the formal-legal interpretation of politics emphasizing constitutions, laws and formal-legal institutions. He was concerned with how the impacts of formal-legal rules were modified by the resources and interest of societal groups and he concluded that votes and formal arrangements count but resources decide (Rokkan 1966: 105). Political science was seen to be concerned primarily with central decision-making processes, while sociology was seen as concerned with the interaction between different institutions, norms and roles in society. Rokkan had a preference for the latter and aimed at placing politics in a wider setting (Rokkan 1958: 5-6)

7 In the introduction to the edited volume, “The Formation of National States in Western Europe”, Tilly aired such issues as general concerns (Tilly 1975: 44-45). Yet he wrote: “Rokkan calls attention more directly than any of our other authors to the interaction and interdependence of the changing European states, to the sense in which they formed an operating system” (ibid. p. 68).

8 Scharpf also emphasizes existing constraints but he opens for the possibility of long-term change: “The Union is not now, and will not soon be a unified democratic polity, and it would undermine the bases of its own legitimacy if highly salient political preferences of its member states could simply be overruled by majority votes in the Council and the European Parliament”. Common and uniform European solutions cannot be adopted in consensus in the face of the existing “legitimate diversity” of national preferences (Scharpf 2003: 103, also Scharpf 1999). Eriksen and Fossum, on the other hand, argue that the lack of a single apex of authority, a shared culture and demos can be compensated through extensive processes of deliberation (Eriksen and Fossum 2000, Eriksen 2005)

9 The European Union defines itself both in terms of geography, utility, socio-cultural values and constitutive political principles. Cooperation and integration are justified functionally and culturally as well as democratically. Justification of unification has primarily been functional and a-political - an efficient way to achieve peace and prosperity. The claim has been that integration creates only winners and legitimacy has primarily been based on practical results, voluntary cooperation, consensus-seeking, expertise, and indirect democracy derived from the member states. Others have argued that in order to function as a viable and vital polity, the EU needs a firmer foundation than expediency. The old forces of cohesion, the desire for peace and prosperity and external threats are losing their effectiveness. The forces of unity and cohesion are to be found in the common culture; in the values, morals, customs and expectations of Europeans (Biedenkopf, Geremek and Michalski 2004: 5-8). The (Maastricht) Treaty on European Union (1992) for the first time explicitly said that the Union was to be founded on the principles of democracy and fundamental human rights. It was observed that there was a felt need to counteract the image of an elite project with limited popular information, debate and involvement (European Commission 1992).

10 The basic logic of a learning model is that there are efforts to protect and repeat successes by encoding the experiences of glorious moments into rules and institutions. Likewise, there are efforts to avoid repeating failures and traumatic events and the rules and institutional arrangements that are seen to have caused them. Institutions influence experiential learning by the way they promote or hinder interaction and communication; by their emphasis on exploitation of established routines or exploration of new options, with exposure to and search for new information; and by their impact upon interpretation, memory-building, retrieval of information, and adaptation (March 1991, March, Schulz and Zhou 2000).

11 Toggenburg argues that the EU is primarily concerned about diversity amongst member states and protecting national identities against excessive integration and that the Union is less concerned about diversity within each member state (Toggenburg 2004).

12 The text, for example, balances between expressing the will to protect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, praising the common cultural heritage, and aspiring to transcend existing differences. Nevertheless, cultural identity and Europe's Christian heritage turned out to be divisive and the draft Constitution does not privilege Christianity. It only says that the Union will draw "inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe.

13 Cowles, Caporaso and Risse 2001, Olsen 2003c, Wessels, Maurer and Mittag 2003, Kohler-Koch 2005.

14 EU-party families are, however, deeply divided on EU constitutive issues and attempts to take a clear stand on these problems would tear them apart (Bartolini 2005: 285). National parties derive their historical cohesion from conflicts other than those constituting the EU. Often their leaders, members and voters have different European preferences. If these differences are pronounced, they may jeopardize the internal party

unity and generate new anti-EU parties. Opposition lines that were historically bridged and integrated successfully at the national level by party organizations may become the source of internal problems in relation to the integration process (Bartolini 2005: 253, 265).

15 The hypothesis is consistent with the observations that ambiguity is a decisive part of organizational decision making (March and Olsen 1976); that several buffering mechanisms such as sequential attention, local rationality and slack resources enhance the ability to live with diversity and conflict (Cyert and March 1963); and that contemporary democracies thrive with tensions and collisions between principles and institutions (Orren and Skowronek 2004).

16 Tilly (1984: 141-142) argues that state structures took shape and grew largely as unintended by-products of other activities, such as war-making, tax collection and capital accumulation. Thus, actors may be purposeful but their concerns are not necessarily building states and nations.