

The EU's Policy on the Integration of Migrants: A Case of Soft-Europeanisation?

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By Pierre Georges Van Wolleghem

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As part of the series '*Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics*', this book represents a comprehensive examination of a number of issues in the field of migration, especially in the light of the current political scene in the European Union (EU). The book offers a compelling in-depth critical analysis of the EU's policy on the integration of migrants. Only a few books have examined the development of the integration policy at the EU level so far. The main contribution of this book is its attempt to fill the gap in this field and help policy makers and specialists understand potential consequences of the current refugee integration process in a timely manner. The question at the core of the present research is: *Can there be Europeanisation without an EU competence?* Van Wolleghem, the author of the book, uses both qualitative and quantitative methods in explaining the development of the EU integration policy (p. 20). Although the author states that the key limitation of this book is the emphasis on the EU policy only from an EU perspective (p. 194), rather than including other member states' perspectives for the sake of comparative purposes, this still does not minimise the valuable contribution of this book. Especially considering that the issues it discusses have a great potential to continue to be ignored by majority of the EU policy makers.

As the author explains, migration is currently among the crucial issues for the EU, one that is likely to become even more dominant on the global political agenda. Immigration to European countries has increased dramatically during the last decade. The economic impact of migration is studied intensively, and it has been confirmed that migration has positive economic effects. But immigration also poses social and budgetary challenges to the societies that accept migrants because "migrants' contribution to the EU labor market and its economy in general is by no means immediate" (p. 1). Failure

of the EU member states to participate successfully in the development and implementation of an integration policy produces negative consequences for European economies and their labour markets. The immigration philosophy based on the *Gasterbeiter* policy (guest worker policy) is outdated. The workforce does not stay in a country of employment only for a limited period of time any more, and a new way of managing immigration should be in the interest of all member states. Furthermore, the author draws readers' attention by addressing integration-related matters, such as: Why integration? Who is integrating? How to integrate? Who has the competence to integrate? And integrating into what? His answers to these questions can help those with limited knowledge in migration studies and the current European standpoint on immigration policy. All of these answers can be found in the introductory part of this book.

This book is divided into five main chapters. *Chapter 2* deals with the development of immigration policy and the failed competence of the EU regarding the integration of nationals of third countries. Van Wolleggem describes the gradual development of immigration policy at the EU level since the adoption of the Schengen Convention in the 1980s, including all the challenges that followed its adoption. The transfer of competences from the state to EU level was a particularly difficult issue and as the author explains "there were many bumps on that road, one of them being sovereignty" (p. 32). Clearly, the member states were in a bargaining situation in which they tried to pursue their interests. For this reason, the author applies the actor-centred institutionalist (ACI) theoretical framework by Frits Scharpf as the most suitable approach to explore immigration-related policies. The ACI standpoint is that social phenomena should be explained as the outcome of interactions among intentional actors. Van Wolleggem considers that actors make choices in accordance with their diverging preferences, and with different resources, strategies, as well as different chances of success.

Chapter 3 describes the features of a specific context favourable to creating a European policy for the integration of third-country nationals. In addition, this chapter is concerned with the process of Europeanisation. The author formulates and formalises the causal mechanism that explains the passage of the policy from national agenda to the EU agenda (p. 61). The

European policy for the integration of third-country nationals was adopted with a significant delay. The Europeanised common immigration policy was developed in a climate of security concerns. The first step of adopting the common integration policy “took place at a time when there were 15 member states” (p. 64). The author argues that the emergence of an integration policy at the EU level is a result of three combined conditions: one that is referred to as a ‘necessary’ condition, a second ‘sufficient’ condition, and an ‘intervening’ factor. Firstly, a necessary condition proceeds through soft laws that derive from the institutional context and increase the acceptability of EU instruments for joint action. In this context, soft law can be understood as a set of non-binding provisions meant to guide the behaviour of member states. Upon this necessary condition, the sufficient condition is based upon the member states’ preferences and the role of the Presidency of the EU, and their readiness to place these preferences on the EU agenda. In the case of migrant integration, member states are key actors to place their concerns onto the EU agenda. Finally, an intervening factor is built upon the Commission’s ability to play policy entrepreneur, without ever infringing on member states’ exclusive competence. The Commission has managed to retain its proposals and policies within the boundaries of acceptability established by the member states (pp. 69-73).

Chapter 4 analyses EU initiatives that facilitated the adoption of the European Fund for the Integration (EIF) of third country nationals (covering the period of 2007-2013) by the Council. This chapter discusses the key characteristics and principles of the EIF – which is considered a soft law. The EIF is a delicate matter as it operates on the principle of co-financing and programming. All EU member states except Denmark participate in the EIF. Since the responsibility for integration policies lies with member states and as the EU had no formal competence in the domain, the Council “did not provide for a clear European approach to integration, but proposed to support national policies leaning onto European-defined principles” (p. 102). This is mostly due to the principle of subsidiarity claimed by member states. The fund must be agreed by unanimity which may prove to be difficult (p. 111), but the author shows that the EIF enables member states to use it with considerable discretion. Also, this chapter identifies some of the main disputes over the EIF and policy-making processes by focusing on questions such as “Who gets what, when and how”. Van Wolleghem makes a compelling

case that the EIF has little effect on member states' integration policy.

Chapter 5 discusses the mechanisms that govern the implementation of the EIF's soft law provisions across EU member states, while also focusing on the top-down Europeanisation process. This chapter aims to identify the factors determining the implementation of soft law provisions across member states. The chapter seeks to answer the question: Why do member states implement (the soft law provisions) without a legal obligation to do so? Van Wolleghem considers "actors likely to affect implementation in order to explain why member states implement or 'resist' soft law instruments" (p. 137). The author argues in this chapter that when it comes to the implementation of the EU integration policy, the policy instruments matter. Two instruments form the core of the EU integration policy are its Common Basic Principles (CBPs) and the European Integration Fund (EIF). Van Wolleghem argues that instruments determine "the influential actors that in turn may affect the implementation of outcomes" (p. 154). Additionally, in the context of migration policies, Van Wolleghem investigates the role of public opinion and civil society organisations (CSOs) in the decision-making process. He argues that when governments' preferences are not challenged by the Commission, they may be constrained by public opinion and/or CSOs. If policy-makers are interested in remaining in office, they must pay attention to the issues that the public cares about and the issues on which CSOs may exert pressure.

Finally, *Chapter 6* focuses not only on the implementation of the EIF, but also on the actual use of the fund. Understanding its actual implementation is important because the EU has taken further steps by introducing a new fund on Asylum, Migration, and Integration for 2014-2020. The question at the core of this chapter is: Once programmes are drafted and adopted, what determines the actual use of the fund at the national level? (p. 163). At the end of the implementation period, about 18% of the fund remained unused. In addition, Van Wolleghem points out disparities of usage between member states, ranging on average from 42% for Malta to 100% for Finland. Why do some member states not use the money they have available for their integration policies? (p. 164). EU funds might be too demanding as they require administrative and organisational structures, as well as budgetary capacity. The EIF's characteristics are very

similar to the structural fund regarding the co-financing principle. As a rule, the EU is co-financing 50% (or up to 75%) of integration projects. Member states are required to finance 25-50% of the integration projects. On the other hand, the EIF was not based on economic solidarity, and therefore does not consider financial imbalances among member states. Additionally, member states were receiving funds that were proportional to the number of migrants they granted residence to.

Van Wolleghem concludes the book by saying that “there is no EU integration policy. There is a consistent set of policy instruments that together form a policy relating to integration, but talking of an EU integration policy as of yet is hardly valid” (p. 190). Despite the commitment by member states to reach a more vigorous integration policy, disagreements emerged when it came to implementation. Without a strong foothold in integration matters and with a voting rule that requires unanimous decision-making, the adoption of an effective integration policy is unlikely. Importantly, the EU has no formal competence on integration, at the EU level the matter is vested with the member states, thus it exhibits intergovernmental features. Member states should realise that the movement of people is not an issue in itself and as such it should not be the subject of dispute. They should instead realise that the integration of refugees and migrants is a highly contentious topic, which in itself should be a trigger in reaching more effective integration policies.

Lastly, *The EU's Policy on the Integration of Migrants* is an excellent resource for students and educators interested in the EU and migration studies. Immersing yourself in this book gives you insight on the present EU migration crisis. It offers a significant contribution to the literature on migration by providing an in-depth analysis and overview of EU policy making, integration policy, the EU's capacity to absorb funds, the implementation of EU outputs, as well as Europeanisation.

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