

PhD Thesis review

Simon Stroß: One goal, many paths. The promotion of Policy Coherence for Development in EU policy formulation.

Charles University in Prague (Faculty of Social Sciences) and University of Cologne (Faculty of Management, Economics, and Social Sciences)

by

Hanna Ojanen

Jean Monnet Professor

University of Tampere, School of Management

26.4.2014

Simon Stroß' thesis is a thorough and particularly well-designed study of the promotion of policy coherence for development in EU policy formulation. By focussing on policy coherence, he tackles an issue that is a very difficult one and central for the actual functioning and credibility of the European Union. At the same time, it is a question that is theoretically and conceptually challenging. What do we mean by policy coherence, how can policy coherence be measured or assessed? Having first compiled an impressive set of concepts and classifications of policy coherence and consistency, Stroß operationalises this complex set of issues in an easily accessible and understandable way that, moreover, is presented in a manner that undoubtedly enables other researchers to follow suit and continue with the study of other cases to further complement the picture of policy coherence promotion in the phase of policy formulation.

The thesis considerably increases our understanding of policy processes within the different EU institutions and sheds light on some crucial differences between these, as well as the implications of such differences for EU policies. Its contribution to the understanding of the evolving EEAS – that is not only a recent addendum in the Union's external relations but also different in nature from the actual institutions in that it is not an institution but an autonomous service – is very welcome. The thesis also increases our understanding of the differences and similarities between different policy fields in the EU: interestingly, it argues that differences between them are not necessarily as salient as could be assumed when looking at, for instance, the different degrees of communitarisation.

The choice of concentrating on policy formulation or policy planning is an excellent and well-argued one. The concept itself might not, however, be thoroughly problematised. The title of the thesis speaks about 'policy formulation'; policy-making and policy planning, or simply planning, are used in the thesis. More could have been written on the policy-making process as a whole, putting policy-planning in as a particular phase with its own characteristics, and linking this eventually with other studies on policy-planning. Planning is a fundamental and delicate phase of policy-making and gets a special meaning in a field such as security policy where the issue of planning, planning capacity and the very right for autonomous planning has been a point of contention, visible in particular in EU-NATO relations where for some, the EU's access

to NATO's planning capacities constitutes the backbone of the relations yet is for others an obstacle to the EU's developing a capacity that it needs to have itself in order to succeed in its crisis management operations.

The thesis' focus on processes – formal and informal – is well-developed and the process-tracing methodology is put into good and well-argued use. In part, the processes in question are given in the sense that they are predefined and standardised. In part, however, the process-tracing seems to help to trace processes as they actually or really are, or point out characteristics and phases of processes that are particularly relevant for the outcome of the process. Sometimes, however, the central definitions might have benefitted from some simplification, as for instance on pp. 44-45 where the 'process dimension' is defined as a degree to which something happens during a process.

The use of the concept of 'regime' is particularly fitting as a framework. The thesis itself contributes to the understanding of differences between different regimes – something that could have been taken up in greater detail and further problematised in the conclusions. Regime interaction could have been interesting and useful to take up in that there is a lot of literature on that. The concept of 'governance' remains somewhat underdefined which, however, is not too problematical in this context where 'regimes' are seen as 'governance regimes'. The list of the 20 governance regimes found in the EU (p. 97) is interesting as such. One of the possibly central differences between the three regimes chosen could have been looked at more in detail, namely the difference in time horizons, if and when there is any. In the case of the security regime, and in particular when looked at through the crisis management operations, time could be seen to become a crucial factor: the impact of time pressure on decisions and procedures stemming from the (political) need to react quickly to an unforeseen event could set this regime aside from the others.

The thesis remains relatively silent on the problem of conflicting goals of consistency, even though it does bring up the relation between environment and development. The overall theme of coherence in EU external relations would have merited more discussion.

The concept of 'development actor' is sometimes regrettably elusive. Whether that is a given category (whereby who the development actors are would be clear and clearly limited) or whether one might posit a possibility of *ad hoc* or occasional opt-in development actors is a question that comes to the reader's mind. The same applies to the concept of 'drivers'. Looking closer or in a more systematic way at the non-EU actors involved, perhaps in a context of also of lobbying in the EU, might have been interesting. The role of the member states comes up in an interesting way in the thesis. These questions are also linked to the question of driving forces in general. If coherence is a general goal but not a necessity for any actor, will it be pursued less intensively than in a situation where an actor needs it? Are there particular needs and necessities in addition to the general (negative and positive) justifications listed in the thesis in favour of increasing coherence? Coming back in the conclusions to the statement on p. 37 on the need for a clear division of competences and mandates in order to make progress on policy coherence would have been welcome, too.

The thesis does not profoundly challenge theoretical notions nor dramatically contribute to theory building. It stays within the sphere of confirming and qualifying existing views and demonstrating the applicability of theoretical frameworks. This, however, is not to be taken as a sign of lacking ambition or missed goals, but rather as a sign of confidence and clarity in posing research questions that can be answered and a sign of really mastering the research process. The thesis is very pedagogical in its clarity, sometimes up to a degree of repetitiveness. The exceptionally well-governed analysis includes notably the choice of the case studies

that, while being by definition all different, are all analysed following the same procedure which makes the cases also talk to one another, leaving the reader with an enriched view on policy formulation across different policy fields. That the case studies are presented in a way that makes them very pleasant reading is an additional success of the study. Only with the case concerning Morocco there is a problem in that the discussion on Western Sahara quite clearly changes the nature of the case and how it is approached by the different actors.

The use of the sources is excellent in particular when it comes to the interviews, clearly not only essential but also very successful, in all likelihood important even for the interviewees themselves (for instance, as an instigation of a learning process). In addition, the thesis also very usefully discusses issues of availability and existence of sources, something that is as such a central element in understanding the policy processes that are under scrutiny, but also sheds light on still further aspects of the EU's credibility and legitimacy, such as transparency.

The conclusions usefully enter into the field of policy recommendations, looking again back at the goal of policy coherence as such and its importance on the effectiveness of the EU's policies overall. The nature of DG DEVCO, particularly the signs that come up here and there of a certain disinterest in having impact, is particularly intriguing. Having pointed out at the start (p. 5) the consequences of lack of coherence – loss of not only efficiency and effectiveness but also of credibility – more could have been said on the credibility side. Whether learning might occur as a result of this study remains to be seen.