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Globalization and the Contentious Politics of Unemployment: Towards Denationalization and Convergence?

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Introduction

We are all inclined to think today that processes of globalization have a strong impact on national political structures and processes. Most commonly, we refer to a gradual transnationalization of economic, political and cultural reality at the national and local level that poses a challenge to national political institutions and public policies, political contentions and national identities. As scholarly literature in sociology and political science has argued recurrently, these processes do not necessarily threaten established nation-states as such, but undermine their political autonomy and power. The nation-state seems to lose its ability to set policy agendas and to define, formulate and implement related public policies, due to the increasing importance of international institutions and regimes on the global and European level (e.g. the United Nations, the World Trade Organization or the World Bank, or the European Union). This development entails a trend toward increasing similarities across countries in certain political fields. The former issue can be referred to as the denationalization thesis, the latter as the convergence thesis. Both issues are assumed to be aspects of a more general trend toward the transnationalization of political processes and structures at the national level.

This chapter aims to evaluate these assumptions by analyzing the impact of globalization in the field of unemployment politics in six European countries. This policy field is an interesting case because it remains strictly tied to the national welfare state and its labor market and social policies, yet it is increasingly exposed to global and European discussions about economic competitiveness, better labor market

performance, new employment strategies and related policy reforms (e.g. activation and flexibilization, employability and flexicurity, life-long learning), spearheaded among others by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 1996, 2006) and the European Union (European Commission 1993, European Council 2005). Hence, we should expect moderate, yet perceivable transnationalization effects, particularly because we center on the political dimension within the field of unemployment measures and programs. In fact, it is plausible to assume that national politics are exposed more strongly to global and European debates and reform pressures, and respond more readily to them when compared to public policies, and even more so to national politics, which should be slower to adapt or more reluctant to denationalize and converge.

We focus in particular on public debates and collective mobilizations concerning unemployment and the development of these over time. Following a neo-institutional perspective, we argue that the impact of globalization on political claim making in this field is limited by the path dependencies and the strong constraining role of domestic policy arenas and agendas. In order to support this argument, we look at the types of actors mobilized on these issues, their targets and the content of their claims. This general objective divides into two specific goals, related to the two assumptions outlined before. On the one hand, we wish to assess the denationalization thesis. This is done by measuring whether the national arena of political contentions becomes more permeable for supranational actors and thus more determined by a transnational circle of stakeholders. At the same time, we aim to verify whether public issues and policy problems are gradually reframed on a supranational level, implying shifting common societal causes and political responsibilities. On the other hand, we need to assess the possible convergence of national politics in the field of unemployment policies. We need to verify whether national public debates converge over time by strengthening certain stakeholders and mainstreaming the structure of contentious politics in this field. At the same time, we wish to ascertain whether public problems and policy issues converge across countries, for example, following the debates and pressures on the global and European level.¹

Our empirical analysis is based on the claim making data gathered in the UNEMPOL research project. One type of information is particularly important for our present purpose: the scope variables. These refer to the political, administrative and/or territorial level to which either the actor of the claim, the addressee of the claim, the issue or thematic

focus of the claim or the object of the claim refer. Our data distinguishes between the local, regional, national, European and supranational levels. These variables give us a simple but valuable indicator of the scope of claim making in the field of unemployment, thus allowing us to test the hypothesis of a loss of relevance of the national level for public debates in this field and that of an increasing convergence of such debates.

The data allows to empirically assess the impact of globalization on the contentious politics of unemployment by looking at the degree of denationalization and convergence of public debates in this field following a longitudinal and comparative research design. Undoubtedly, newspaper data have their limitations, because we are dealing with mass-mediated, publicized debates. At the same time, however, the mass media are an important arena of political debates and contentions. Therefore, quality newspapers are a good source for the coverage of news of national scope and significance (see Koopmans 1998). Moreover, we are most interested in comparing developments across time, and here we can assume that news coverage provides a consistent and thus reliable picture of discursive developments in the six countries under analysis.

Denationalization and convergence in the field of unemployment politics

As with any other large-scale social process, globalization has a number of consequences on the nature and characteristics of social relations. One of its major consequences concerns the nation state. That globalization threatens the importance and autonomy of the nation state can hardly be disputed. The historical process of state formation, which has characterized the past five or six centuries, consisted mainly in the concentration of power and resources within a bounded territory and in the consolidation of this territory. The end result of this process is an increasingly integrated population and an increasingly structured politics within the bounded territory that forms a nation. Its corollary is a strong autonomy of and divergence among the various nations. Mentioning only two studies, Rokkan's (1970) work attests to this structuring process at the national level, as much as Tilly's (1990) study of European states shows the divergent paths of state formation.

Today, in an era of increasing interconnectedness of cultural, economic and political relations between nations, the question of whether this process has come to an end is a legitimate one. The issue at stake, more specifically, is to know (1) whether and to what extent the national state has lost or is losing its power, autonomy and sovereignty

in favor of other (supranational and/or intergovernmental) political entities, and (2) whether and to what extent policy deliberations and policy making within various nation-states have converged or are in the process of converging in those areas where transnational policy agendas have developed. In other words, does globalization lead to a decline in the political sovereignty of European nation-states in regard to national policy deliberations and policy making?

Scholarly writing has been ready to concede that globalization processes have some impact on the nation state. However, positions diverge as to the extent of this impact.² They differ most notably as regards the political impact, the degree of autonomy and the identity of national states (Goldmann 2002). In general, we can distinguish three different scenarios. First, there are many scholars who argue for a significant weakening of the nation state and a notable policy convergence (Mishra 1999). Globalization processes increase the economic, social and cultural interconnectedness of societies and local communities throughout the world, constraining the nation state in various respects: they generate a growing number of common challenges, problems and risks; they promote transnational "epistemic communities" and civil societies that advocate for joint responsibilities; and they push for intergovernmental and/or supranational regimes and institutions (Held et al. 1999). Some herald a global era (Albrow 1996) with a new cosmopolitanism (Archibugi and Held 1995). The process of European integration is part and parcel of these developments, because European nation states agree to tackle global challenges and problems (e.g., competitiveness, migration, climate change etc.) jointly, by committing to an institutional order with a global "European mission" that increasingly affects national policy agendas and legislations by defining problems, setting issues, providing incentives and strengthening political constraints (Beck and Grande 2007; Delanty and Rumford 2005). This scenario stresses the growing ability of intergovernmental and supranational institutions to set policy agendas, thus weakening nation states and their autonomy in defining, formulating and implementing public policies. Hence, they assume processes of denationalization and convergence.

A second scenario follows the above-stated assumptions about the causes and processes of globalization, but comes to different conclusions. It argues that globalization does not abandon the idea of the nation state, but rather endorses it as the only universal model of organizing political entities and of addressing societal problems politically (Meyer et al. 1997). The world polity consists of international organizations and regimes, but resides ultimately on nation states.

This means that globalization might even increase the importance of nation states, because new global issues, challenges and risks call for policy interventions by nation states and for new bargains between them, hence widening the scope of their responsibility and activity. However, while this scenario denies a strong denationalization, it does not exclude the possibility of political convergence. On the contrary, in a globalized world with its international institutions, transnational epistemic communities, professional groups and civil societies we see a steadily increasing diffusion of political ideas, organizational role models, policy ideas and practices, which tend to streamline the political structures and processes across nation states (Meyer 2000; Ramirez et al. 1997). These scholars thus disapprove the denationalization thesis, but endorse fully the convergence thesis.

This scenario illustrates that denationalization and convergence are not necessarily complementary processes. On the one hand, there might be denationalization without convergence. Proponents of the concept of "multi-level governance" within the European Union (Marks et al. 1996) argue that European integration has weakened the nation-state by establishing shared competencies and responsibilities between local, regional, national and European institutions. Policy domains and the policy field are thus exposed to processes of Europeanization and regionalization at the same time, implying more supranational coordination and harmonization, but at the same time also more complexity, fragmentation and variety on the national and/or subnational level (Bache and Flinders 2004). On the other hand, we might assume that there is convergence without denationalization. This argument has been proposed by the concept of vertical and horizontal Europeanization of public policies (Radaelli 2000; Schmidt and Radaelli 2004). These scholars aim to understand processes of policy transfer and diffusion and argue for the persistent importance of the nation state (see also Jessop 2004). The nation state is actively involved in designing and diffusing European policies by vertically downloading and uploading policy ideas, regulations and practices. Convergence is even possible in policy fields where the EU has few competencies and little denationalization is to be assumed. In these cases, convergence requires regulatory competition and/or policy learning, thus involving nation-states in a "horizontal" Europeanization of policies, that is, into the cross-national diffusion of ideas, norms, rules and practices (Radaelli 2000). This process is fuelled by intergovernmental negotiations and deliberations within European institutions and policy networks, in particular by the Open Method of Coordination, which puts an emphasis on

benchmarking and policy learning and strives to increase policy coordination and convergence between the participating member states (de la Porte and Pochet 2004).

A third scenario argues for the persistent importance of nation states and their respective peculiarities and differences. This position does not ignore globalization processes, but assumes that nation states remain key players both in shaping the transnational order and in politically processing any consequences. Two quite different approaches can be mentioned in this regard. For a neo-realist school, international regimes and European institutions are the product of intergovernmental negotiations that are determined by national interests and bargains (Keohane et al. 1993; Moravcsik 1993). The construction of international institutions and the formulation of transnational policies thus require the consent of sovereign states furthering their specific interests. Moreover, supranational institutions may have a constraining impact on the nation state; however, they remain toothless as long as nation states do not adopt and implement their regulations and policies. The adoption of policy ideas, regulations and measures is thus dependant on national preferences and interests, although policy convergence is possible in case of overlapping national interests or package deals. The second, neo-institutionalist approach questions policy convergence even more, because it points to path-dependencies on both the European and national level (Pierson 1996; Pollack 2004). According to this approach, the European institutions will develop policy ideas and practices that are consistent with previous decisions, established institutional routines and needs, but that might well, however, prove incompatible with national policy agendas, administrative structures, political traditions and cultures prevalent in the various countries. Policy change and convergence is thus strongly dependent on the institutional structure at the national (and subnational) level (Jupille and Caporaso 1999; see also Radaelli 2000). Hence this position does not refute the existence of globalization processes, but denies a significant denationalization of politics and a systematic convergence of policies across countries.

These general debates are directly linked to our topic, because research in the social sciences has tried to answer the question whether a specifically European social model is emerging, as promoted by the European Commission since its White Paper on social policy (1994). Social policy is still in the hands of European nation states, but the EU has developed a legal and institutional framework that resides on a common citizenship with basic rights (e.g. the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, drafted in 2000 and in force since the Lisbon Treaty at

the end of 2009), and shared labor regulations (e.g. in the realm of anti-discrimination and freedom of movement). The Amsterdam Summit of 1997 was an important milestone in this regard because it integrated a chapter on social policy into the European Treaty, thus introducing new policy objectives. Moreover, it gave birth to the Social Dialogue between Employers' Associations and Unions and to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which were adopted as new governance instruments in order to promote cooperation and shared efforts in these fields of action (de la Porte et al. 2001). As a reaction, the European Employment Strategy (EES) was agreed upon at the Luxembourg (1997) and Lisbon (2000) summits in order to develop a more integrated approach in the realm of social and labor market policies. The EES adopted the OMC by committing member states to "bench-marking" and "management by objectives," and thus to an iterative learning process based on annual monitoring reports, national action plans, policy recommendations by EU institutions and regular evaluation processes.

Scholars have discussed the consequences of these developments and their effects on national social and labor market policies (Palier 2000). Still, disagreement prevails. We have skeptics, who stress the weakness of the European Union and see soft governance instruments merely as signs of a new political voluntarism between autonomous nation states (Streeck 1995). And we have proponents, who argue that the Social Charters and social chapters within the European Treaty created a new situation that grants a considerable political authority to the EU in the field of social policies (Pierson and Leibfried 1995). Moreover, we have disagreement in regard to the effects of globalization on the convergence of welfare regimes and social policies. We have scholars who argue for a significant convergence (e.g. Mishra 1999), speaking either about a race to the bottom (Scharpf 2000; Scharpf and Schmidt 2000) or a race to the middle (Alber and Standing 2000), and there are authors who argue that the differences between welfare regimes prevail (e.g. Castels 2004). There is thus little consensus with regard to our research question. This lack of clarity might be due to the fact that scholars focus on a rather wide field of analysis when formulating their conclusions, thus having different aspects and elements in mind. In fact, as soon as we take a closer look at specific policies and measures, the available evidence is more clear.

Research on the European Employment Strategy has replicated the above-mentioned dispute (de la Porte and Pochet 2004); however, it has provided more evidence for the skeptical view on the denationalization and convergence of national social and labor market policies. It is argued that the EES has had some impact on the European member states, when

addressing the cognitive dimension of policy goals, ideas and measures, but has had little effect on the level of legal norms and the structure of the political field (Heidenreich and Bischoff 2008; Zeitlin 2005). Moreover, nation states have adopted measures and recommendations, yet in a quite selective way, thus mirroring the specific policy agendas and political structures of each country (Preunkert and Zirra 2009). Hence, we find institutionalist arguments that stress the importance of path dependency and its constraining impact on political change (Jupille and Caporaso 1999; Palier and Bonoli 1999; Pierson 1996, 1998).

In sum, scholarly writing has developed a series of assumptions about the effects of globalization on national politics. These need to be assessed in the light of our own data. Indeed, we are able to verify whether globalization and Europeanization has promoted the denationalization and convergence of national politics in the realm of unemployment policies in Europe by looking at the political arenas and policy deliberations within a number of European states. We will be able to verify all three scenarios, because the latter combine the two indicators (i.e. denationalization and convergence) in a specific way: a first position argues for a significant denationalization and convergence of politics and policies in the field of labor market and social welfare; a second sees no marked denationalization, but a significant convergence; and a third denies that denationalization and convergence are relevant process at all, arguing for the persistence of nationally distinct policy domains and political processes. Recent research on the Europeanization of social and labor market policies tends to corroborate this third position. The following analysis will show if this conclusion is correct for the field of unemployment politics.

Actor-level analysis: Actors and addressees

We can assess the denationalization thesis by measuring the importance of foreign, intergovernmental and supranational actors within national policy debates in the six countries under analysis. Table 7.1 shows the distribution of claims on unemployment politics according to their scope and by year.³ The scope refers to the territorial extension of the organization or institution making the claim.⁴ In general, the results point to the weak presence of supranational actors in the public domain. European actors are responsible for merely 3 percent of all public interventions, and other supranational organizations have a similar share. However, more than two thirds of these latter interventions are related to multinational companies and their decisions affecting

Table 7.1 Distribution of the scope of actors over time (% figures weighted by country)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Supranational (non-EU)	3.3	2.5	2.6	3.6	5.4	5.9	4.2	3.1
European	3.0	1.8	6.1	5.0	3.8	5.3	3.3	2.5
Bilateral or multilateral	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.6
National	74.6	81.7	77.3	77.0	77.3	73.9	77.8	73.4
Regional	5.3	7.8	5.9	6.4	7.6	8.0	6.7	8.0
Local	13.5	6.0	8.0	7.9	5.2	6.4	7.7	12.4
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N (unweighted)	1026	1350	1223	1252	883	689	968	1399

unemployment at the national level (e.g. relocation, restructuring, dismissals). Very rarely do international institutions (e.g. the OECD, the International Monetary Fund, the International Labor Organization, the World Bank) make their appearance. Moreover, there are important shifts in the distribution of claims over time. Specifically, the presence in the public domain of both categories of supranational actors (European and other supranational) has gone through ebbs and flows. However, it is not possible to discern any significant trend in this respect. Overall, we perceive that European actors were more present within national debates between 1997 and 2000, thus reflecting the policy initiatives taken by the EU to combat unemployment and its negative consequences: the European Employment Strategy in 1997, the European Employment Pact in 1999 and the Lisbon Strategy of 2000.

In contrast, nationally bounded actors have largely dominated the political debates on unemployment during the period under study. National actors are, by and large, the principal claim makers in this field, displaying percentages that are on average constantly above 70 percent. The figures do not display any development over time that would indicate a denationalization. Finally, we see that subnational actors play an important, but secondary role within the national public debates. And here again, there is no evidence for a stronger participation of regional and/or local actors. These findings thus corroborate the impression of a strong persistence of national policy domains over time.

So far we have centered on the claim-maker organizations, disregarding the other side, that of the actors who are the targets or addressees of claims. This side is of importance for our analysis as well: policy debates might change in the conviction that governance levels are responsible or should take responsibility for the solution of unemployment. If the denationalization thesis is correct, then not only the presence of supranational actors in the public domain should increase at the expense of national ones—which, as we have seen, does not occur—but also, at the same time, public interventions should be increasingly addressed to actors located beyond the national borders. This development would be in line with the European initiatives mentioned above, which claim that the struggle against unemployment requires more transnational coordination and agency.

Our data allows an assessment of this thesis because it includes information on the “scope” of targets and addressees. Table 7.2 presents this information broken down by year. Addressees are those actors who are held responsible for acting with regard to the claim or at whom the claim is directly addressed as a call to act.⁵ In other words, this is the actor at

whom a demand is explicitly addressed. This is usually a state actor. The results show once again the centrality of the national level in this field. With only one exception in 2000, 80 percent to 90 percent of the claims target a national actor. All other scopes are rarely mentioned.

If we look at the distributions over time, we can see that in some years supranational addressees have played a more important role. Specifically, claims targeting European actors went up significantly between 1997 and 2000. Again, this can be attributed to the European Employment Strategy and the Luxembourg process initiated at the EU-level in this period. However, it is important to stress that European addressees lose weight after 2000, demonstrating that there is no sustained Europeanization of political responsibilities. Claims addressed to other supranational actors are even less common if we disregard the peak in 2000, which is due primarily to debates about the responsibility of transnational corporations in preventing dismissals and increased unemployment. That same year, the share of nationally addressed claims diminished significantly also due to the sudden increase in claims targeting regional and local actors and calling them to act against unemployment. In general, however, these figures endorse the findings of our previous analysis, because they demonstrate that political debates privilege the nation state as the main responsible entity in regard to the problem of unemployment. Other territorial entities are addressed only temporarily, thus reflecting specific (European, regional and local) problems and/or initiatives.

Our data thus disprove the thesis of a denationalization of unemployment politics when looking at policy actors and addressees in political claim making. But this does not exclude the possibility of a gradual convergence, as our theoretical discussion of transnationalization scenarios has illustrated. Assessing this thesis is less straightforward in regard to policy actors because scholarly writing has tended to argue that convergence is related more strongly to the potential diffusion of policy ideas and practices, and less to the structure of public debates. However, the concept of vertical and horizontal Europeanization implies that policy convergence resides on common learning processes, assuming a streamlining of national policy deliberations and a synchronization of national policy arenas. Moreover, we have seen that European (soft and multilevel) governance strives to activate social partners and the regions as important stakeholders and policy brokers. This should strengthen their role within national policy deliberations and mainstream the structure of public debates across countries. Our data allow us to ascertain these assumptions, albeit in a tentative manner.

Table 7.2 Distribution of the scope of addressees over time (% figures weighted by country)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Supranational (non-EU)	0.8	0.7	1.9	2.0	1.5	5.3	3.8	1.2
European	2.8	2.8	13.0	6.9	9.9	6.3	4.1	2.8
Bilateral or multilateral	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.9	1.4	0.3	0.3
National	89.9	91.4	81.4	80.1	82.8	72.8	83.5	85.9
Regional	1.6	2.8	0.7	3.8	3.1	6.7	3.2	2.5
Local	4.5	1.9	3.0	7.1	1.8	7.5	5.1	7.3
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N (unweighted)	397	419	489	388	311	413	407	392

Let us take a closer look at the data provided above. For this purpose, Table 7.3 replicates the findings about the scope of the claim making organizations presented in Table 7.1, but breaks them up by country. It demonstrates that there is not only a very limited and short-lived Europeanization of national public debates, but also that European and supranational actors increase their presence in the public domain in quite different years. European actors are more present in the UK, France and Sweden than in Germany, Italy or Switzerland. Moreover, their presence peaks in very different years: in 1995 they are strong in the UK and Sweden; in 1996 in Italy; in 1997 in France and Sweden; in 1998 in the UK, Italy and Sweden; in 1999 in France, Italy and Germany; in 2000 in Switzerland, France and Sweden; and in 2001 and 2002 in the UK and Italy. The public domain in the various countries seems to open itself up only temporarily to supranational and European organizations, and it does so at different times. This does not mean that there are no common policy deliberations and learning processes across countries, because our data only provide us with a quantitative and not a qualitative picture of national policy deliberations. However, we can exclude the possibility of a structurally synchronized Europeanization of national policy domains, because this would be palpable in a stronger numerical presence of European actors on the national scene in a more sustained and synchronized way. Quite on the contrary, a closer look at the various claims illustrates that interventions of supranational and European actors address most often issues and recommendations of direct relevance to the member state. Hence the presence of supranational organizations in national deliberations seems to require that their interventions resonate with ongoing policy debates and agendas at the national level.

The table provides further evidence for a weak convergence of policy domains, if we look at the importance of the regional and local level when compared to the national one. The numbers demonstrate that the structure of the polity makes a big difference. Regional and local actors are more present in national policy debates in federal systems, and less important in unitary systems. More importantly, we do not perceive any consistent changes over time, particularly no significant increase of regional and local actors within the more centralized countries. Only the Italian case seems to indicate a strengthening of regional actors from 2001 onwards. However, this might rather reflect a general pattern within national policy domains: the presence of subnational actors follows cyclical and/or temporal ups and downs, reflecting the specific grievances and initiatives of regions and localities more affected

Table 7.3 Distribution of the scope of actors by country over time (%)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Supranational (non-EU)	3.3	2.5	2.6	3.6	5.4	5.9	4.2	3.1
UK	3.9	5.9	10.6	9.5	11.1	7.4	8.6	5.4
Switzerland	2.5	0.4	0.0	0.4	2.4	5.6	3.0	1.6
France	0.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.3	6.4	0.0	1.1
Italy	0.0	1.9	3.8	3.7	3.3	5.6	0.0	1.2
Germany	11.5	6.6	1.0	4.3	3.6	12.4	6.5	10.5
Sweden	1.9	0.7	0.0	0.0	2.3	0.0	2.0	0.0
European	3.0	1.8	6.1	5.0	3.8	5.3	3.3	2.5
UK	6.9	0.0	4.3	12.6	3.1	1.8	5.0	9.1
Switzerland	0.0	0.7	0.0	1.3	1.8	5.1	3.0	0.7
France	1.1	0.0	14.4	2.3	7.5	7.5	1.1	1.1
Italy	1.4	4.6	3.0	4.7	4.4	0.0	5.2	4.2
Germany	1.7	1.6	3.4	1.6	3.7	3.1	1.5	2.2
Sweden	4.9	2.9	6.0	10.5	2.3	10.0	4.0	1.2
Bilateral or multilateral	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.6
UK	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Switzerland	0.4	0.3	0.0	0.4	0.0	2.4	0.0	0.0
France	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Italy	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Germany	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.0	2.0	0.0
Sweden	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.7	0.0	0.0	3.6
National	74.6	81.7	77.3	77.0	77.3	73.9	77.8	73.4
UK	73.5	90.2	77.7	70.5	75.9	85.2	74.1	78.2
Switzerland	58.8	57.9	56.7	57.4	51.8	49.5	58.9	52.8
France	93.8	88.2	83.3	88.5	87.5	82.8	93.6	85.4
Italy	84.1	87.0	85.6	83.2	87.9	88.9	82.8	78.7
Germany	77.0	74.9	83.2	79.3	85.4	70.9	86.2	78.9
Sweden	67.0	93.6	71.6	71.1	72.1	75.0	76.0	80.9
Regional	5.3	7.8	5.9	6.4	7.6	8.0	6.7	8.0
UK	1.0	3.9	5.3	4.2	8.0	5.6	5.8	0.0
Switzerland	17.1	18.6	20.9	20.5	21.4	20.1	15.7	18.9
France	1.0	9.6	0.0	3.5	1.3	2.2	4.2	2.3
Italy	0.0	1.9	0.0	1.5	2.2	1.8	3.4	4.1
Germany	8.2	11.9	8.2	8.5	5.3	8.5	1.9	7.9
Sweden	3.9	0.7	4.5	7.9	9.3	6.7	8.0	4.8
Local	13.5	6.0	8.0	7.9	5.2	6.4	7.7	12.4
UK	14.7	0.0	2.1	3.2	1.9	0.0	6.5	7.3
Switzerland	21.2	22.1	22.4	20.0	22.6	17.3	19.6	26.0
France	3.1	1.1	1.2	4.6	1.2	1.1	1.1	10.1
Italy	14.5	4.6	6.8	6.9	2.2	3.7	8.6	11.8
Germany	1.4	4.5	4.0	6.1	1.7	5.1	1.9	0.5
Sweden	22.3	2.1	17.9	10.5	9.3	8.3	10.0	9.5
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	1042	1375	1259	1298	900	733	989	1420

by unemployment. Hence we cannot conclude that there is a structural regionalization and/or localization of policy deliberations, in spite of the attention the EU pays to regional development and social cohesion.

Another way to verify the convergence thesis is to look at specific policy actors. According to the instruments and concepts of European soft governance, the EU puts a particular emphasis on social and civil dialogue in order to promote policy learning and coordination between countries (European Commission 1993, 1994; de la Porte et al. 2001). Moreover, scholars of transnationalization have repeatedly argued that civil societies, epistemic communities and professional groups are the main promoters of globalization and Europeanization processes, because they organize and orient themselves more transnationally (Meyer et al. 1997; Meyer 2000), thus exposing the nation state to processes of transnationalization and convergence.

The simplest way to assess these developments is to look at the presence of state actors (government, legislative, judiciary, public administration) in the public domain. Policy domains should converge in limiting the presence of the nation state, when compared with non-state actors (e.g. social partners, welfare associations, professional and epistemic groups). The centrality of state actors is measured by their relative weight in claim making on issues pertaining to unemployment politics.

Table 7.4 shows the distribution of actors in claim making on unemployment politics for each year of the period under study. A cursory look at the table suggests that convergence in this field was far from occurring between 1995 and 2002. What we observe is a series of distinct country-specific evolutions rather than a common pattern or trend. For example, while in France the share of state actors almost halves from 1997 onwards, it increases significantly during 1998 and 1999 in Sweden. More generally, while in some of the countries state actors are more important at the beginning than at the end of the period under study, in other countries the reverse is true. The share of public claims made by political parties diverges as well between the various countries: they are stronger in Sweden in 1995 and 1996, in the UK in 1996 and in Switzerland in 1995, 1997 and 2001, while being more important in 1998 and 1999 in France, from 1997 until 1998 in Italy, and in 1997 and 2002 in Germany.

Similar ups and downs apply to the other actor types of relevance here, when calculating the presence for them separately. Our data expose, for instance, that social partners were able to dominate national deliberations with a significant share of claim making at quite different times: in the UK they were particularly strong between 1998 and 1999, in

Table 7.4 Share of actor types in claim making by country over time (%)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
UK								
State actors	45.9	20.0	33.0	34.7	25.1	33.3	39.9	53.7
Parties	3.7	20.0	10.0	0.0	3.8	5.6	2.1	0.0
Social partners	26.6	43.6	23.0	60.0	51.9	44.4	46.1	31.5
Experts, think tanks	18.3	16.4	24.0	3.2	10.4	7.4	7.0	13.0
Others	5.5	0.0	10.0	2.1	8.8	9.3	4.9	1.8
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	109	55	100	95	183	54	143	54
Switzerland								
State actors	47.2	48.1	44.3	51.5	48.1	43.1	31.8	29.5
Parties	14.0	8.8	14.6	11.7	8.0	8.7	13.5	10.1
Social partners	21.4	23.2	20.9	19.0	24.1	27.4	46.4	42.6
Experts, think tanks	1.8	3.4	3.5	1.3	2.7	10.4	2.0	2.8
Others	15.6	16.5	16.7	16.5	17.1	10.4	6.3	15.0
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	271	297	287	231	187	241	252	467
France								
State actors	50.0	43.1	38.3	24.0	28.6	23.3	32.4	39.3
Parties	19.8	7.9	17.6	24.0	20.2	12.6	15.2	19.1
Social partners	16.0	29.4	29.8	21.9	34.5	44.7	34.3	33.7
Experts, think tanks	1.9	4.9	2.1	1.0	0.0	0.0	12.4	0.0
Others	12.3	14.7	12.2	29.1	16.7	19.4	5.7	7.9
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	106	102	188	96	84	103	105	89
Italy								
State actors	26.1	39.8	40.1	41.0	51.6	40.3	41.4	28.8
Parties	5.8	13.0	16.7	20.9	9.7	10.5	15.5	11.8
Social partners	50.7	38.0	31.1	31.7	35.5	43.9	36.2	51.2
Experts, think tanks	13.0	3.7	4.5	1.4	0.0	1.8	3.4	0.6
Others	4.4	5.5	7.6	5.0	3.2	3.5	3.5	7.6
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	69	108	132	278	93	57	58	170
Germany								
State actors	31.0	32.1	31.1	31.8	39.4	36.3	34.5	32.0
Parties	5.8	11.8	16.4	11.8	6.3	5.6	9.0	15.7
Social partners	54.5	46.1	39.7	40.4	41.3	44.8	47.3	39.1
Experts, think tanks	5.4	7.0	7.6	7.7	10.5	8.1	7.1	11.9
Others	3.3	3.0	5.2	8.3	2.5	5.2	2.1	1.3
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	448	713	541	601	363	270	423	613
Sweden								
State actors	45.3	43.9	47.9	81.6	70.2	63.5	54.7	54.1
Parties	21.7	17.6	7.0	0.0	10.6	4.8	15.1	10.6
Social partners	15.1	27.7	29.6	7.9	12.8	20.6	15.1	17.6
Experts, think tanks	13.2	5.4	5.6	7.9	4.3	6.3	11.3	11.8
Others	4.7	5.4	9.9	2.6	2.1	4.8	3.8	5.9
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	106	148	71	38	47	63	53	85

Notes: The two highest scores are highlighted in each row, unless the second score is less than half of the highest one. Other actors include, among others: welfare associations, churches, media, journalists and other professional groups, unemployed organizations, unorganized unemployed and other unorganized collectivities

Switzerland in 2001 and 2002, in France in 2000, in Italy in 1995 and 2002, in Germany in 1995 and 2001, and in Sweden in 1996 and 1997, where they made one out of three claims. A similar observation applies to the role of experts and think tanks: they were particularly present in the UK during 1995–7, in Switzerland in 2000, in France in 2001, in Italy in 1995, in Germany in 1999 and 2002, and in Sweden in 1995 and 2002.

In sum, we see that actor types (states, parties, social partners, experts) play a different role in each of the countries under study, when considering the differing share of these actors within public policy debates. Moreover, their appearance within the public sphere varies quite strongly between the countries. These observations suggest that the distinctive presence of policy actors does not follow common learning processes and policy deliberations across countries, but rather country-specific policy cycles (e.g. problem definition, program formulation, implementation, evaluation etc.).

Overall, the actor-level analysis casts some serious doubts on the denationalization and convergence theses, at least in the field of unemployment politics. First of all, national actors remain solidly at the center of public debates on issues pertaining to employment and unemployment politics. Secondly, no consistent shift from the national to the supranational level can be discerned. When changes do occur, they seem related to specific circumstances rather than to an impact of globalization and changes in the international context that would displace the locus of the political process in this field. Finally, the convergence thesis could not be verified, as country-specific patterns of the policy domain remain in place. Moreover, the presence of policy actors in political claim making seems to follow country-specific policy cycles rather than transnational or pan-European policy deliberations and learning processes.

Content-level analysis: Issues and objects

The findings concerning actors and addressees do not reveal any consistent pattern of denationalization and convergence in the field of unemployment politics. The question now is whether the same conclusion applies when we move from the actor-level to the level of the policy agendas, that is, the issues and objects of claims. In this respect, the denationalization thesis would suggest that, while the actors involved in claim making might remain firmly located at the national level, the very content of claims might be shifting to the supranational one.

Table 7.5 shows the distribution of claims over time according to the scope of the issues they address. This refers to the geographical and/or

political scope of the issue: it demonstrates in principle whether policy actors talk about unemployment as a local, regional, national, European or worldwide phenomenon. The results largely reflect those found for the scope of actors and addressees. The national level is, by and large, the most important one, whereas supranational issues never reach 10 percent of all claims overall. Most importantly, we do not observe any trend toward an increase in supranational issues or, conversely, a decline of national or subnational ones. The distribution of nationally-bounded claims, in particular, displays strong stability over time. Once again, claims with a European scope show the pattern observed for actors and addressees; that is, a more important role played between 1997 and 2000, as compared to the remainder of the period. One out of five claims address the topic of unemployment and unemployment policies as a regional and local reality, most often mirroring the regional disparities in regard to economic performance and exclusion from the labor market.

Very similar patterns can be observed when we look at the objects of claims on unemployment politics. While the issues refer to the thematic focus of claims (e.g. economic performance, youth unemployment, social benefits), the object refers to the constituency to which the claim is addressed. More precisely, the object is the actors or groups whose interests are at stake and are affected by the realization of the claim. Basically, most actors make claims on behalf of the unemployed (e.g. jobless in general or more specific groups, such as youth, migrants, women, elderly) or on behalf of workers and employees who are threatened with job losses. If the denationalization of public debates is true on the level of public agendas and issues, then this should also modify this aspect of claim making by privileging supranational and/or transnational objects (e.g. the workforce of a multinational company, the European labor force and jobless population) at the expense of national, regional or local ones.

Table 7.6 shows the distribution of claims according to the scope of their objects. Unsurprisingly, we find once again that national objects are most often implied by the claims, followed by subnational ones. Similarly to what we found for actors, addressees and issues, supranational objects play only a marginal, although not totally insignificant role, hence casting further doubts on the argument that globalization and Europeanization changes the scope of political processes and debates, which so far were firmly anchored in the nation state. Furthermore, the longitudinal look does not provide more support to the denationalization thesis. Once more, no trend can be discerned from the data. If any change occurred at all, this consists in an increase of European objects

Table 7.5 Distribution of the scope of issues over time (% figures weighted by country)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Supranational (non-EU)	1.2	0.8	1.0	2.0	2.7	2.4	1.3	1.9
European	4.9	4.9	9.5	6.3	8.1	5.1	2.4	2.4
Bilateral or multilateral	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.1	0.5	0.0
National	72.3	76.7	73.4	67.2	68.5	72.3	69.9	74.0
Regional	8.6	10.9	5.3	13.9	8.4	10.9	8.7	8.8
Local	12.3	6.2	10.5	10.0	11.7	9.2	17.2	12.9
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N (unweighted)	1044	1357	1231	1265	891	703	973	1413

Table 7.6 Distribution of the scope of objects over time (% figures weighted by country)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Supranational (non-EU)	1.6	1.0	0.6	0.7	0.6	2.6	1.5	1.7
European	5.0	4.7	10.0	5.9	7.1	5.0	2.5	2.6
Bilateral or multilateral	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.8	0.1	0.9	0.2
National	73.5	75.8	75.0	68.8	71.8	72.9	70.8	75.6
Regional	8.0	12.0	5.5	14.0	8.2	10.3	8.2	7.9
Local	11.4	6.0	8.6	10.3	11.5	9.1	16.1	12.0
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N (unweighted)	1037	1335	1228	1220	890	702	951	1405

from 1996 onward, but then a decrease in the last two years of the period under study that brought the share of claims with a European object back to a level even lower than in the mid 1990s. Here again, we see that the employment initiatives of the EU had only a temporary effect on national policy deliberations.

In a way similar to what was done earlier for the actor-level analysis, we can test the convergence thesis by looking at the issues raised in public debates on unemployment. Table 7.7 shows the development over time of the debates in our six countries separately for the three main issue areas: socioeconomic issues (e.g. economic performance, economic and labor market policies), welfare systems and social benefits (e.g. insurance systems, social assistance) and individual insertion into the labor market (e.g. activation, training, education). The figures do not give any hints as to a potential convergence of policy deliberations across countries. In regard to socioeconomic issues, the debates do not change within most countries and, while the debate is increasingly important in Switzerland, it is less important in Sweden toward the end of our period under analysis. In regard to the other two groups of issues, we do not perceive any rapprochement as well. For sure, there are strong ups and downs in the related public debates. However, national debates rarely devote themselves with more attention to the same issue group at the same time. Moreover, we still can differentiate between the countries by the importance they accord to passive and/or active labor market issues, for example, distinguishing Italy on the one hand, and Sweden on the other. These findings mirror the policy priorities of the welfare regimes (Esping-Anderson 1996) in these countries: the residual role of the welfare state in Italy; the proactive role of the universalistic welfare state in Sweden with its strong focus on labor market insertion; the stronger focus of the liberal welfare system on active measures in the UK; and the concern of the conservative welfare system in France for social insurances and benefits. Our data therefore illustrates that political debates follow country-specific agendas tied back to the specificities of the various welfare systems involved, rather than reflecting transnational policy deliberations and learning processes.

In sum, the findings concerning the issues and objects largely reflect those found for the actors and addresses. The results provide little support for the denationalization and convergence thesis and, more generally, to arguments that point to a substantial impact of globalization processes on national politics. Claims dealing with issues concerning the nation state dominate the public debates, whereas supranational issues are relatively marginally addressed, except in some specific and

Table 7.7 Share of issue areas in claim making by country over time (%)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Socioeconomic issues								
UK	76.7	86.3	76.6	85.4	84.0	72.5	85.6	85.2
Switzerland	68.3	70.0	60.9	63.0	71.8	85.3	87.1	77.6
France	60.8	62.6	79.3	49.4	76.9	48.9	82.4	53.4
Italy	87.0	89.8	84.6	93.0	89.0	90.7	91.4	90.5
Germany	80.7	81.4	83.7	87.1	86.2	89.1	84.4	78.8
Sweden	68.6	68.1	60.9	52.8	59.1	56.9	53.8	43.4
Welfare system and social benefits								
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
UK	24.3	11.8	14.9	11.2	8.9	13.7	5.8	14.8
Switzerland	24.1	12.5	20.7	16.0	8.6	21.3	12.0	17.6
France	26.8	27.5	10.7	57.5	16.7	50.0	13.2	36.4
Italy	4.3	0.9	10.8	1.8	4.4	11.1	1.7	5.3
Germany	11.8	9.0	6.0	7.1	7.3	8.9	12.0	15.8
Sweden	26.7	25.5	17.2	25.0	25.0	22.4	34.6	19.3
Individual insertion into the labor market								
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
UK	23.3	3.9	37.2	7.9	12.4	13.7	12.2	29.6
Switzerland	14.1	20.0	20.3	21.0	26.4	13.7	7.1	7.3
France	20.6	12.1	16.6	10.3	10.3	30.0	9.9	17.0
Italy	4.3	5.6	5.4	5.9	9.9	3.7	0.0	6.5
Germany	19.3	14.3	16.5	10.6	14.0	10.9	14.4	19.6
Sweden	27.6	17.7	18.8	16.7	31.8	20.7	25.0	30.1
N	1064	1361	1233	1267	901	708	983	1427

contingent situations. The same applies to the objects of claims, which are almost entirely located within the national boundaries. Finally, as for the actors, the issues of claim making do not mirror common policy agendas and deliberations, but rather seem to reflect the policy priorities and concerns of the various welfare regimes institutionalized in the six countries under study.

Conclusion

Our empirical assessment of the impact of globalization on the patterns of claim making on unemployment politics in six countries cast doubts on both the denationalization and the convergence theses, at least in this policy field. Globalization has not fundamentally altered the structure of contentious politics in the field of unemployment. National actors remain central as makers of claims, as targets of claims and as objects of claims. Furthermore, national issues are firmly at center stage. In contrast, supranational actors, addresses, objects and issues represent only a minority of claims in this field. Most importantly, no significant trend can be discerned in the distribution of claims according to these four scope variables. Thus, at both the actor-level and the content-level, the nation state remains the crucial frame of reference in claim making on unemployment politics.

In addition, no convergence of public debates on unemployment can be discerned. Quite on the contrary, we observe country-specific evolutions that suggest that national processes and structures remain predominant in influencing claim making in this field. Unemployment is still predominantly identified as a regional or national problem, and rarely as a shared, European and/or international phenomenon. Moreover, demands for solutions are most often addressed to the nation state, the traditional repository of policy responsibilities, and this also applies to the recommendation that nation states should participate more actively in policy learning, cooperation and coordination. Thus our study confirms the assessment made by other authors concerning European countries: "The field where the impact of globalization seems the weakest is social policies, which is less directly affected by the globalization process, than it is by internal factors" (Mach 1999: 17).

In a nutshell, supranational pressures are what national actors can make of them. Supranational actors and issues seem only to gain weight in public debates in a conjunctural way or when related to specific events at the national level that focus on supranational actors and issues. In other words, there are important situational impacts generated by supranational institutions and policy arenas on the national level,

but no structural transformation of the latter toward an increasing transnationalization or supranationalization of politics. The strongest impact of this kind was unveiled in regard to European initiatives to combat unemployment (in particular, the European Employment Strategy of 1997, the European Employment Pact of 1999 and the Lisbon Strategy of 2000). However, these initiatives had no lasting effects on the national policy agendas and arenas. Most importantly, processes of path dependency and the memory of political institutions pose important barriers to the impact of globalization on the national public debates, specifically in the political field of unemployment. In fact, European nation states have developed distinct welfare regimes with different policy agendas and arenas: they prioritize different issues and privilege different actors and priorities, and thus trigger country-specific policy debates and cycles. The latter effectively constrain transnational learning-processes with their potential effects on policy convergence and denationalization, because the participating national actors remain solidly integrated within national arenas and agendas of problem definition and solving.

To be sure, our empirical assessment of the denationalization and the convergence theses is only a partial one, limited to the ways in which political debates over unemployment are framed in the public domain. In fact, when interpreting our findings, we need to be aware of an intervening process of media selection, given the fact that we collected only statements and interventions publicized by national newspapers. This factor, however, is not an empirical limitation per se. The fact that we collected publicized claims rather than events without media attention is an advantage rather than a limitation. Here we are interested in claim making, that is, strategic interventions in the public domain on given issues and/or on behalf of given groups, and the newspapers are arguably one of the main—if not the main—arenas in which this can be seen (Koopmans et al. 2005). Moreover, there might be different media selection processes in the various countries under analysis, but since we are looking at distributions over time of claims at the aggregate level rather than comparing newspapers among each other we have no reason to think that the selection has changed in time.

Still, we need to recall that our data are unable to measure more indirect and less visible or hidden effects of globalization. In fact, the latter has an impact that goes well beyond public awareness and mass media news reporting. Concerning the potential impact of Europeanization, for example, there are several mechanisms through which it can affect the member states: institutional compliance may force a member state to adopt a model that is prescribed by the EU; the EU may be responsible

for a redistribution of resources among domestic actors that lead to a change in the opportunity structures; the EU may alter the beliefs of domestic actors and cause a change in policy framing; the legislation in a member state can be challenged through judicial review if the country fails to adopt EU legislation; and, finally, dismantling trade barriers may lead to a regulatory competition between member states over the presence of key firms (see Börzel and Risse 2000). The main point suggested by these processes with respect to our present argument is that the impact of Europeanization might be more important in an indirect way by changing the balance of power between actors within countries. Similar processes may also be at work as a more general effect of globalization. Furthermore, concerning the transformation of political opportunity structures, several scholars have stressed that globalization (e.g. Hirst and Thompson in Shin 2000) and Europeanization (e.g. Palier 2000) have an impact through the ideological, cognitive and normative harmonization of policy measures and paths in the field of economic and social policy. Evidence for these limited and indirect effects have been provided by the research on the Open Method of Coordination (Zeitlin et al. 2005; Heidenreich and Bischoff 2008), and on the horizontal Europeanization of public debates in a number of issue fields (Lahusen 2009; Seifert 2006; Trezz 2004).

As a result, we cannot exclude indirect, implicit or hidden effects of globalization processes on national unemployment policies. In fact, our data even unveiled temporary and partial impacts on national politics. However, we could exclude a structural transformation of national policy arenas and agendas, in particular a transnationalization of policy deliberations on unemployment. Our findings thus allow us to confront competing assumptions within scholarly writing in a specific field of political action. Indeed, we could not attest to a denationalization and convergence of politics toward "cosmopolitan" policy learning, coordination or formulation at the European or global level. Neither could we confirm the assumption of a multilevel governance in the realm of unemployment politics, which argues for an Europeanization and regionalization of politics at the expense of the nation state. Our data rather conform to the opinion of world culture analysts, who speak of the nation state as the continuing role model for political governance (Meyer 2000; Meyer et al. 1997). Yet we need to disagree with them when they argue for an underlying process of policy diffusion and convergence across countries. Our data seem to corroborate the neo-institutionalists' assumption that nation states still matter in regard to the governance of societal problems, and that globalization and

Europeanization processes have to count with the intervening impact of national path dependencies in regard to policy agendas and arenas, institutional structures and political processes (Pierson 1996; Palier and Bonoli 1999; Pollack 2004).

Hence, it might well be that supranational institutions play an active role in the constitution of specific opportunity structures that constrain the autonomy of national and/or local polities. However, our findings suggest that we cannot understand the political reality in the field of unemployment policies without taking a careful look at the role of the nation state, and the specific policy agendas and arenas it shelters. In this sense, we do not oppose scholarly assumptions about the globalization of politics, but wish to qualify them by grounding them in empirical evidence.

Notes

1. In the following we will refer primarily to globalization, but will relate it also to regional integration processes such as European integration. While both levels are not identical, assuming that Europeanization involves proper actors, issues, arenas and institutional frameworks, we think that there are enough interrelations in order to justify a reference to globalization as a broader category of various processes of denationalization and transnationalization. Europeanization will be used in case of an exclusive reference to processes of European integration.
2. See Lane and Ersson (1996) for a position stressing convergence and Kitschelt et al. (1999) for a position underscoring divergence. See Marks et al. (1996) for a discussion of these two approaches with respect to the European Union.
3. In this table as well as in Tables 7.2, 7.5 and 7.6, the percentages are based on figures weighted by country. This is due to the very different amount of retrieved claims in the six countries. To prevent the results being biased toward the countries in which a larger amount of claims was found and therefore distorting the general picture across countries, we weighted the figures. It should be stressed however, that the general picture does not change significantly when calculating with unweighted figures.
4. We distinguish between six levels of scope: supranational (e.g. the United Nations, global companies), European (e.g. the European Commission), bilateral or multilateral (e.g. a joint French-German organization), national (e.g. the British government), regional (e.g. a Swiss canton) and local (e.g. the city of Turin). For unorganized collectivities and groups, the level of scope refers to the scope of mobilization.
5. The figures concerning the addressees must be taken with some care, as the proportion of missing data is particularly high, as compared to the other variables. Only in one out of three cases of claim making do organizations explicitly name an addressee.

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The Contentious Politics of Unemployment in Europe

Welfare States and Political Opportunities

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similarities and differences that exist across countries in the ways public debates and policy deliberations in the unemployment political field are spelled out. To be sure, they do not have to overlook the pressures from above and the changes that the latter may bring to the field, but a careful analysis of the contentious politics of unemployment in Europe and elsewhere also requires consideration of the important impact of national opportunities and constraints. On the other hand, practitioners and policy makers alike should be aware that national states continue to be crucial points of reference to evaluate where opportunities and constraints for policy making are located. The fight against unemployment, which is among the most important policy aims across Europe today, cannot operate in abstraction from the evidence we have shown in this volume.

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