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Norm advocacy networks: Nordic and Like-minded countries in EU development aid policy

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Introduction

European development aid policies are converging as EU and Member-State policies are becoming increasingly similar (Olsen 2013; Zemanová 2012). This trend has been explained as an instance of Europeanization. This phenomenon has, however, two different forms (de Flers and Müller 2011): “Europeanization from above”, where policies are transferred from the EU level to Member-States, and “Europeanization from below”, where certain Member-States spread their cherished values to other members and to the EU. It is the latter type of Europeanization that I address in this paper.

The focus is on the informal groupings – networks – of Member States that are claimed to be the drivers of EU policy change. The Nordic countries have a long and solid reputation as generous and progressive donors, and have been presumed to influence EU policies in this direction (Odén 2011; Selbervik with Nygaard 2006). In recent years, however, it has been argued that other Member States have adopted similar, or even more progressive, policies, expanding to a circle of Like-Minded Countries (LMCs) that push EU policies forward (Bué 2010). These claims are anecdotic, however, and no research seems to have been done on the characteristics of these networks.

One aim of the paper is to analyse the roles of the Nordic and the Like-Minded groupings today and - relying on network theory - to pinpoint and categorize the characteristics of these groupings. A second aim is to investigate what modes of influence these networks and their members utilize when trying to promote their values and policies. In this part, I use ideas from the literature on socialization and from norm diffusion-theory to construct an analytical framework. The answers to this research question will cast light

on the ways in which norm advocates pursue their values in a situation where coercion and conditionality are largely absent and where actors instead have to rely on various persuasive instruments. The empirical focus is on gender and development-policy, a key element in EU development policy. The gender equality norm holds a prominent position in the EU's normative framework. This makes gender and development a good case to explore the role of networks in internal EU norm negotiations. My findings build on existing research but are mainly based on interviews with officials in charge of this policy area at the Permanent Representations of seven Member-States, but also with a representative of the EEAS and a former official at the Commission (a list of all 11 interviewees is provided in the bibliography).

Our results demonstrate that both the Nordics and the LMCs are highly informal networks with frequent interaction. The Like-Minded group has expanded, though marginally, over the years. The Nordic countries still form the core of the LMCs, but it is a fluid core: all three Nordics are not always driving forces behind new initiatives. Normally, the norm advocates on a certain issue consist of a smaller circle of Like-Minded states, including one or two of the Nordic countries. The LMCs primarily rely on traditional diplomatic initiatives to diffuse their norms: consulting, probing, taking action to lead decisions forward, and forming coalitions. They also engage in normative tactics, including framing and the use of appropriateness arguments, at times also in social pressure tactics. Their expertise and long experience of gender and development-policies are claimed to be important assets. These findings increase our understanding of the role and characteristics of informal Member-State groupings in EU external policy, thereby providing a substantial empirical contribution to an understudied research area.

The paper starts with a brief overview of the traditional roles of the Nordic Member-States in development policy and gender policy, discussing the alleged change towards a wider circle of Like-Minded Countries. In the following section, I introduce key concepts and ideas from network theory and from the literature on norm advocacy and socialization, resulting in an original analytical framework to guide the empirical analysis. Next I apply my framework to EU development and gender-policy, in order to

illuminate network characteristics and typical modes of influence. In the Conclusions, I summarize my main findings and discuss future research avenues.

Nordic exceptionalism: in decline?

The Nordic EU Member-States –Denmark, Finland and Sweden - have traditionally been praised for their generous and advanced development policies. Nordic experts on development policy agree on the existence in the 1970s to the 1990s of a ‘Nordic model’ (Odén 2011: 20; Development Today 2010) and of a ‘Nordic exceptionalism’ (Olsen 2013; Selbervik with Nygaard 2006). The Nordic countries stood out as generous donors, driven by solidarity and moral and humanitarian concerns rather than by material interests. While there were certainly differences between the countries – with Finland often seen as the ‘odd man out’ in terms of less generosity – they were in Europe generally referred to as ‘the Nordics’.

The Nordic states have for decades provided more assistance than the OECD average to developing countries. Their aid levels have generally been above 0,7% of GNI while the OECD average has been between 0,2 and 0,4% (Selbervik with Nygaard 2006: 11). Moreover, the assistance has been mainly given as grants and has had a strong focus on low income countries, particularly in Africa, making credible the expressed objective of poverty eradication, based on solidarity and moral concerns. In the 1990s, Sweden and Denmark allocated on average 50% or more of their bilateral aid to sub-Saharan Africa (Selbervik with Nygaard 2006: 22). They have demonstrated a stronger support for multilateralism, and not least for the UN aid system, than other donors (Odén 2011: 20). Denmark, for example, for many years had a policy indicating a 50-50 split between bilateral and multilateral aid (Selbervik with Nygaard 2006: 20). The Nordic countries have favoured a distinction between aid and export funding (Odén 2011: 20). In principle, if not always in practice, there has been a strong emphasis on recipient co-influence, on ownership and on development relations as partnership (Odén and Wohlgemuth 2006: 19).

Nordic development assistance has traditionally featured a strong poverty orientation and a focus on social infrastructure and welfare. Much aid has thus been distributed to

health, education, water and sanitation. Another strong focus has been on good governance, especially since the 1990s, and on women's rights (Development Today 2010; Selbervik with Nygaard 2006: 24-6). In the provision of aid to these sectors and areas, the Nordic donors have considered themselves as frontrunners and as breaking new ground.

The Nordic uniqueness in development policy should be seen in the light of a broader discourse on the Nordics as value-driven 'norm entrepreneurs' (Ingebritsen 2002; Olsen 2013: 410; cf. Lawler 1997; 2007). It has been argued that the Nordic states have tried to spread the norms they cherish to other actors, by persuasion and by acting as role models. Foreign assistance is usually considered a key instrument in these efforts, but references are also made to, for example, environmental policy and conflict resolution.

This raises the question of a potential Nordification of EU policies. Christopher Browning (2007: 44) argues that internationalist and solidarist elements of Nordic foreign policy have become part of the EU's international profile and sees this as a 'success for Nordic ideals and the Nordic model'. In official documents on foreign aid, Nordic authorities have stressed the importance, and the possibility, of influencing EU policies, for example towards Africa (Odén 2011: 39). Nordic aid practitioners tend to strongly emphasize the positive effects of their EU membership on European aid policy and practices (SwB, SwM). Gender equality, increased transparency and a stronger focus on poverty eradication are often cited examples of Nordic ideational influence (SwB, SwM, EEAS). Other examples include the linking of human rights and democracy concerns to budget aid allocation (SwB, SwM). Gorm Rye Olsen has investigated the existence of Nordification in a recent article, with a focus on the EU's Africa policy (Olsen 2013). Based on an analysis of five separate cases involving policies towards Africa, Olsen finds that the case of policies towards Zimbabwe 'may show it is possible for small Nordic countries to influence the Africa policy of the European Union' (Olsen 2013: 415). Likewise, the 2005 EU consensus on development assistance 'may be interpreted as an illustration of Nordification', as the Nordics initiated the debate on European aid harmonization and coherence and suggested the content of the policies that ensued (ibid. p. 420; cf. Odén 2011: 30). The Nordic countries have thus arguably demonstrated agenda-setting power in some instances.

In recent years, the picture of the Nordics as being at the forefront of development aid has been challenged. It has been claimed that the Nordic model has faded: that the Nordic donors have become more similar to other European donors but also that their development policies have taken off in different directions, at least to a certain extent. According to Olsen (2013: 421), 'the traditional Nordic aid cooperation has faltered somewhat ... cooperation with the other Nordics is no longer a priority'.

Within the EU, references to 'Like-Minded Countries' or to 'Nordic plus' became increasingly frequent in the 1990s and early 2000s (interviews). The Nordic countries were now often seen as part of a larger group of Member States with similar ideas and preferences regarding development policy. According to Olsen, 'Denmark, Sweden and Norway have close and positive working relationships with the UK, the Netherlands and Ireland on the issues of aid harmonization and in particular on the improvement of the delivery of development aid' (Olsen 2013: 420). This indicates a spread of Nordic aid ideology to a wider circle of countries – thereby increasing its political weight considerably. In development circles in Brussels as well as in the field, references are today much more frequently made to the like-minded countries than to 'the Nordics' (SwM, SwJ). Still, no structured theory-based investigation into the contemporary roles, characteristics and activities of neither the Nordic group nor the Like-Minded Countries have been carried out. This is what I now turn to.

Norm advocacy in development policy networks: a conceptual framework

The types of informal coordination and cooperation structures that are in focus of this paper can be described in terms of networks. A *policy network* includes a relatively stable set of individual or organizational actors, linked through communication and the exchange of information, expertise and other policy resources (Elgström and Jönsson 2000: 695). Network analysis directs our attention to relational data: to contacts, ties and connections. Networks are usually associated with lack of hierarchy and informality, though the degree of informality may vary over time and across issues. Donald Chisholm (1989) emphasizes some positive aspects of informal networks: they adapt easily, generate trust and facilitate a free exchange of information (cf. Jönsson and Strömvik 2005: 16). A network approach also implies assigning more significance to individuals

than a traditional state-centric model. While individual network participants represent organizations, in this case state actors, 'it is also a crucial feature of networks that interorganizational relations are strengthened by interpersonal links' (Jönsson and Strömvik 2005: 15).

Policy networks may be characterized according to a number of dimensions: insularity, density, intensity and degree of institutionalization (cf. Elgström and Jönsson 2000). Insularity has to do with the openness of the network. A network that is not welcoming new members is insular, in contrast to the open, fluid network that may vary in its composition of members. Density refers to the interconnectedness of the network. A network can be symmetric, in the sense that information-sharing is equally spread across the network or have a nucleus of more centrally placed and more important actors. Intensity denotes the frequency of meetings within the network. Frequent interaction is claimed to facilitate member socialization (de Flers and Müller 2011: 26). Finally, institutionalization concerns for example the existence of agendas and minutes, if meetings are scheduled and the degree of informality and openness, in terms of a climate that encourages a free debate. In the empirical part of this paper, I will characterize the Nordic development policy network and the group of Like-Minded States in terms of these dimensions and discuss how these characteristics may influence their functions, roles and effectiveness.

My second focus is on *modes of influence*: on how norm entrepreneurs try to spread their values and norms to other Member States. While much of the literature on Europeanization tries to decipher how values are spread to new Member States, its emphasis is primarily on the nature of such processes, often in terms of conditionality, socialization or learning (Chekel 2005; de Flers and Müller 2011; Horký 2010; Lightfoot and Szent-Iványi 2014; Sedelmeier 2011). The main interest is in how the 'targets' of influence campaigns acquire new, European norms. A distinction is often made between instrumentally motivated adaptation and argument-based internalization of values. Dan Thomas, in his effort to explain how the EU can agree on strong common foreign policies (2011), also ends up in a categorization of influence processes: entrapment, cooperative or competitive bargaining, policy learning or normative suasion.

My interest is different: I investigate how networks or network participants try to promote their preferred policies and norms in a context where conditionality and coercive instruments are ordinarily out of the question. Norm promotion may concern influencing less progressive Member States outside the network, but at times also less dedicated states within the network itself. Thus, actors have to rely on various kinds of persuasive tools, ordinarily associated with traditional or public diplomacy. Taking cues from the literature described above and from discourses on norm advocacy (Björkdahl 2007; 2008; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Florini 1996; Keck and Sikkink 1998), I propose a framework consisting of the following modes of influence:

- Using own resources: expertise, being well-prepared, setting good examples, information sharing ('teaching').
- Being diplomatically active: taking initiatives (agenda-setting), consultations ('probing'), coalition-building.
- Using normative tactics: framing, using normatively based arguments ('preaching')
- Using social tactics: social pressure, reminding, repeating ('nudging').

Among the resources that may be used for influence, expertise (both 'know how' and 'know who') is perhaps the most widely acknowledged (Broman 2008). If possession of superior knowledge is combined with being well-prepared, the chance for policy diffusion increases. The well-prepared and well-informed actor is more apt to produce written input as a basis for discussions and negotiations. Acting as a role model, setting a good example, is another venue. In this case, the hope is that others will learn from your experiences and follow your example by adopting your successful practices, policies or methods. Information is shared with the aim of teaching others how they should behave (Keck and Sikkink 1998; cf. de Flers and Müller 2011: 29).

An actor can try to actively shape the agenda, inserting and emphasizing its own values and policies, by taking initiatives, unilaterally or together with others (Björkdahl 2008: 141-3; Keck and Sikkink 1998; on agenda shaping, see Tallberg 2003). You may author non-papers or letters in which you suggest policy proposals. In order to learn about your chance for success, it is necessary to consult with other Member States, both potential

supporters and probable adversaries (Björkdahl 2008). In this way, you probe what is possible and learn about others' best alternatives and bottom-lines (Hopmann 1996), thereby giving you a potential advantage in negotiations. Such information may also be utilized to build alliances. Being part of a coalition is often a precondition for influence in the EU context.

In the literature on norm advocacy, there is unsurprisingly an emphasis on normatively based tactics. Key values may be communicated in speeches and rhetorical statements (Björkdahl 2007). Meetings are used to articulate your values and norms and to persuade others that these are appropriate and should be adopted. In these efforts, framing is an essential tool. Frames are definitions of problems or solutions that provide a specific interpretation of a particular problem and suggest a general line of appropriate action (Björkdahl 2008; Snow and Benford 1992; Thomas 2011: 16). Framing may, for example, entail associating a policy proposal with an issue of great common concern, or by linking it to overarching norms that are generally considered appropriate to follow. It can also involve references to previous commitments or to the policies of respected role models.

Finally, recourse may be taken to social pressure. You may hint at negative social consequences if a policy is not adopted. 'Naming and shaming' is one of the less subtle methods available. Generally, Member States don't like belonging to a small minority. Majorities can thus try to isolate actors with few allies. Playing along with norm-consistent policy may carry with it social rewards as you feel you become a 'member of the club'. Social pressures may increase if a norm advocate consistently repeats key normative arguments and reminds others about the disadvantages of not adhering to these norms, more or less gently nudging them to take on favoured norms.

Norm advocacy in practice: Nordic and Like-Minded development policy networks

The Nordic group still exists. Today, however, this is partly as a reminder of a glorious past: their tradition as generous, altruistic and progressive donors and, more specifically, as vanguards in introducing gender and development into development policy as a key ingredient is often referred to in my interviews. The Nordics are associated with high moral grounds (Be) and are still claimed to promote common

objectives and practices and to be at the forefront of the development debate. The Nordics are 'highly visible' and are claimed to still have a 'powerful voice' in gender policy debates (Fi and UK), infusing novel ideas into EU discussions (Fr). Historically, they have been perceived as a 'driving force' in EU development policy in general and in gender policy specifically (Com, Fr, Fi, SwJ). In this sense, a Nordification of EU development policy has clearly taken place.

Distinctions are sometimes made regarding what roles the individual Nordic states play. Sweden is usually considered the most active and historically most influential country, not least in the gender and development field. Finland is, on the other hand described as the least active among the Nordics while Denmark is, like Sweden, perceived as influential, especially regarding gender policy (EEAS, Dk, UK, Fr). Sweden was for many years seen as a somewhat reluctant European, very keen on keeping its own identity as a progressive donor (Com): this attitude has, however, gradually changed and Swedish officials in Brussels today clearly consider themselves as forming part of a larger group of countries sharing similar values and principles (SwJ, SwM).

In general, the Nordic countries are today ordinarily seen as part of a larger group of Like-Minded Countries (LMCs). Some interviewees place them at the core of this grouping (Fr, UK) but also acknowledge that all three of them are not always included among the group of leading countries when it comes to handling specific issues. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, officials in Brussels often talked about the 'Nordic +', including also the UK and the Netherlands – and sometimes Ireland – instead of 'Like-Minded Countries' (SwM). This is not the case any more. The group of countries that are usually counted as LMCs has expanded and today includes around 10-12 Member States, depending on the issue at hand and on whom you talk to. This indicates that many more Member States are now considered to share the values and norms formerly associated with only the Nordic countries, a development that may be interpreted as a sign of Nordification (cf. Elgström and Delputte 2015). A distinction can also be made between more loose references to Like-Minded Countries as a phenomenon and the existence of an informal network of like-minded Member States; it is the latter that I will consider below.

In the area of foreign aid expenditure we find another constellation of 'vanguard countries'. Here we find the 'gang of four' that coordinates some of their activities; these are the states that allocate more than 0,7 per cent of BNI to official development assistance (Denmark, Sweden, Luxembourg and the UK), with the Netherlands (a former member of this exclusive group) knocking on the door (Dk, Be, UK, SwM).

Interestingly, all the Big Three (that is, France, Germany and the UK) are today usually considered Like-Minded Countries. This has made the LMC as a group more influential in the cases where it can present a common front (Dk, Fr). Especially France is claimed to have demonstrated an increasingly active and progressive role in recent years (SwM). The fact that all the major members are often found in the same camp is also important for the Commission, in the sense that this facilitates the decision-making process (Dk, Fr). It is easier to pursue a new policy line if you know that you have the support of the most powerful actors – and if they are all against a proposal it is doomed to fail. The Commission itself is increasingly seen as a like-minded actor (SwM, Fr), although it does not form part of the like-minded network that I will describe below.

Generally speaking, the Like-Minded Countries are seen as agenda-setters and as a driving force (interviews). They promote the values they cherish within the Union and try to persuade other Member States to adopt their policies and practices. The gradual increase in the number of Like-Minded Countries speaks of an ongoing 'like-mindization' of the EU. Still, this general 'success' is patchy and uneven: there are still huge differences between Member States, and much more progress has been made on the policy level than on how development policy is implemented on the ground. As formulated by an NGO observer: 'Implementation of the EU's Gender Action Plan (GAP) has been "extremely slow". Obstacles include differing levels of attention accorded by EU institutions and Member States ... and feeble commitment and support from Heads of EU Delegations' (O'Connell 2014: 6; cf. Allwood 2013; Debusscher 2011).

Network characteristics

The Nordic network in Brussels is extremely informal. Nordic development policy officials are in very frequent, almost daily, contact by phone or e-mail, but very seldom meet eye-to-eye as a separate group (Dk; Fi; Sw]; SwM). If a question arises that needs to

be discussed, the first instinct is to contact one of the 'Nordic friends' to clarify and discuss. There thus seems to exist a 'consultation reflex' between the three. The network is dense and symmetric in the sense that contacts between the three are in principle equally common, although contacts between Denmark and Sweden seem to be somewhat more frequent than between these countries and Finland. The Nordic network is for natural geographic reasons insular, but it is interesting to note that informal meetings also take place between the Nordics and the Baltic states ('the NB6-group'). These meetings are rather infrequent, however, taking place about once every year (Fi, Lt, SwM). This co-operation was, however, somewhat more active in connection with the Lithuanian and Latvian Council Presidencies (Dk, SwM).

There also exist Nordic networks on the level of the capitals. Their Ministers of Development, including Norway's and Iceland's, meet regularly though infrequently, often in association with the Nordic Council meetings. Officials from the ministries are in frequent contact (SwM) and Nordic gender experts meet once or twice annually (Fi). There is also Nordic development policy co-operation at the United Nations in New York (SwM).

Turning to the Brussels-based Like-Minded Countries network, this is also a highly informal grouping. It is based on perceived similarities between the values and norms as expressed by officials in Brussels. This means that it to a certain extent reflects the personal engagement of individual officials. Home governments may differ in their commitment to gender mainstreaming but their representatives may still be part of the Like-Minded Network as they are perceived to share the like-minded norms.

The LMC network has existed for many years, although the number of participants has increased since the early 2000s. In this sense, the network has been fluid (accepting new 'members') while still being rather stable. Interestingly, some participants – notably France – have become increasingly active over the years. In general, the network is relatively dense – meaning that activity is relatively high among all members – but there are obviously some countries that are more often at the forefront, while others tend to act as supporters (Fr). The core, the most active countries, includes the Nordic states, though they are, as noted above, not always among the leaders in all cases. The UK and

the Netherlands are often mentioned as other key network actors. Network participants meet regularly but ad hoc. The network is informal: there is no agenda and no minutes (interviews).

The possibility to interact informally over lunch or a cup of coffee with officials that share the same general values is the very basis of the network. The working group meetings in the Council on development policy (CODEV) are formal meetings between officials representing all Member States, thus involving a large number of participants. The official working group discussions are often considered quite formalistic and not very efficient (as an 'unproductive talking shop', as one interviewee expressed it). In this kind of situation, there is a perceived need for a space where like-minded countries can openly discuss current issues and exchange information (Dk, SwJ, UK). The network was thus described as an 'informal gathering of friends' by one respondent, and as a context where officials can speak freely, testing and probing ideas (interviews). The network produces trust, at the same time as it is based on the existence of general trust between the participants, allowing them to speak freely (Dk, Fr, SwJ). Importantly, those of my interviewees that form part of the network were uniformly very careful to underline that the purpose of the like-minded network is not to gang-up against others, or to deliberately exclude others. It is not directed towards 'outsiders', but rather constitutes an informal meeting-place for officials with similar values and ideas. It is considered an efficient way of acquiring information and advice (interviews).

A Like-Minded network also exists on the level of capitals. An earlier attempt to create such a network was made at the turn of the century, consisting of six to seven Member States. Capital-based officials met together with development policy experts from Brussels once every half-year before EU ministerial meetings in order to coordinate a Like-Minded position (SwM). This network ceased to exist after half a dozen years, but has been recently revived in a new constellation, but with a similar number of participants and with similar aims (SwM).

Consideration should also be given to the existence of specialized ad hoc-groups, led by the Commission and/or the External Action Service (EEAS). These are created in order to prepare for specific important documents or meetings and are thus limited in their

duration. A recent example is the Gender Task Force, a body chaired by the Commission with the assignment to develop a new Gender Action Plan for 2015-20 (Be, Dk, Fr, SwJ, UK). It includes officials from the Commission, eight volunteering Member States and the EEAS. This is a semi-formal, ad hoc network with a limited and fixed number of participants. There is also the so-called '1325 Task Force' under the EEAS, with a focus on gender, peace and security (SwJ).

Network modes of influence

When discussing the ways in which Nordic or Like-Minded countries try to exert influence, there is in my interview material a heavy emphasis on the use of what I would call *traditional diplomatic instruments*. This might be seen as surprising, given the attention in norm diffusion literature – not to speak about the discourse on the EU as a forum for deliberation – to norm-based argumentation and framing, not least in a setting like the EU where all actors are supposed to share the same general values. These kinds of normative tactics are indeed utilized, as we will see below, but much more emphasis is by my respondents given to the taking of initiatives, to consultations and to alliance-building, that is, to activities that we usually associate with traditional diplomacy.

Individual Like-Minded Countries are often described as 'taking the lead' and as 'being driving forces' in gender and development issues (Fr, Lt, SwM, UK). One recent illustration of this is the initiative taken by Sweden, together with some other countries, to include gender as a stand-alone objective among the Sustainable Development Goals that are to supersede the Millennium Goals. Such initiatives are many times a result of prior consultations within the Like-Minded network, or in more limited circles of such countries, where a certain country is assigned the role as leader, while others are prepared to support. Sometimes different Like-Minded states take turns in promoting a common standpoint. The lead country, alone or together with others, takes initiatives, comes up with proposals and takes the floor when the issue is debated. This happens in the Working Group as well as in expert committees.

When a Like-Minded Country wants to initiate a proposal it consults other like-minded representatives in order to 'float the idea' and 'test the ground' (Dk, UK). This can be done in a restricted group of core states or within the Like-Minded network. In this way,

coalitions are built around proposals that are acceptable to a larger group of states. At times, special attention is made to try to include the major Member States in such alliances, as their support is often seen as necessary for later success (Dk, Fr). For the same reason, consultations are often initiated with the Commission and the current Council Presidency (Fi, Fr, Lt, SwJ). When you know in advance that there are some Member States that will oppose a certain proposal, consultations may be made with these to probe what their room of manoeuvre is (what they can accept) or to 'test language' (Be, Dk, UK). Like-Minded Countries also engage in producing non-papers and writing letters (Be, Dk, Fi, Fr, SwM). First drafts are ordinarily produced by a small group of state representatives that then distributes this text to a wider circle of Like-Minded Countries, thus working in concentric circles to shape an alliance. One recent example is a letter to High Representative Mogherini on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR; see more below), initially drafted by France, with the support of Belgium and Sweden.

Although less often mentioned, *normative tactics* are certainly included in the toolbox of the Like-Minded Countries. Normatively based arguments are of course used in Working Group debates. Still, the state representatives that brought up this topic were somewhat cautious about the effect of 'good arguments'. One interviewee described the following reaction of other representatives, 'we listen and we are interested in what you say – but we have our instruction' (Be). Another official explained, 'you can preach until you are blue in your face, but to no avail if you can't frame your argument in a convincing way' (SwJ). That said, one example was also given of an instance where good arguments actually had an effect. In that case, this positive outcome was attributed to widespread ignorance about the issue at hand. This lack of knowledge initially led to others following the policy line of some prominent Member States, but when the problematic was explained to them they adopted a much more nuanced approach (Be).

Framing is generally considered a key element in the persuasive efforts of the Like-Minded. Defining a problem in a way that is persuasive and that refers to shared values is essential. To give one example, consider 'selling' the idea that women's participation in social and political life is a central aspect of development policy. References only to the value of gender equality may not be enough. You could then instead argue that the

economic cost of not allowing women to participate is immense: this might be an argument that, if convincingly made, could also persuade politicians that are generally reluctant to introduce gender equality measures (SwJ; cf. O'Connell 2014). Another example concerns 'sexual and reproductive health and rights', an issue in EU development policy that has been extremely conflictual for many years. In brief, a dividing line goes between states (mainly the Like-Minded) that support using foreign aid to promote 'equal opportunities, rights and conditions of all people to have a safe and satisfying sexual life, and to be able to decide over their own bodies without coercion, violence or discrimination' and to prevent abuse of women in conflict situations (Swedish Government Website on Human Rights) and those who associate such policies with support for abortions and sexual promiscuity (primarily Malta, Hungary and Poland). The Like-Minded Countries are trying to persuade their opponents to allow a stronger policy language, without the many exceptions that are included in existing texts. They do this by underlining their respect for these opposing countries' positions and by stressing that they are absolutely not asked to change their own domestic laws and policies, but also by emphasizing the catastrophic situation for raped women in for example Congo – that is, by delinking policies directed towards conflict victims in Africa from the domestic concerns in some Member States (Be, Dk, Fr). As it may be difficult to argue in a way that could be considered being indifferent to such blatant human rights abuses, this might be a powerful frame.

Social tactics are also referred to in my interviews. In the early years of Swedish gender policy promotion, its representatives were well known for taking all existing opportunities to raise gender aspects (Elgström 2000; Com). This deliberate 'nagging' is not used today, but Sweden – and other core members of the Like-Minded network – is still a very frequent speaker in gender and development discussions, one of the 'usual suspects to ask for the floor', as one interviewee put it. Repeating a message to gradually undermine resistance seems to be a frequently utilized tactics (Fr, SwJ).

Making references to previously adopted documents or joint statements is another social tactics that is used to get others on board (Com; SwJ). This can be interpreted as a type of entrapment (Thomas 2011): it may be considered socially unacceptable not to agree to a declaration if it can be shown that you have already on a previous occasion

subscribed to the norm embodied in the document. Therefore, you may feel entrapped by existing norm statements. For this reason, it is considered important to have written documents that you can point to in debates. The introduction of Gender Action Plans was mentioned as one example (SwJ).

'Shaming', that is naming certain countries as laggards or in a negative context, is seen as contra-productive, though it has been known to occur (Dk). Finally, attempts can also be made to isolate members of fragile minority coalitions. The broader the support for a proposal, and the smaller the opposing coalition, the harder it is to withstand pressure.

The fourth category of influence modes is the *use of own resources*, such as knowledge and expertise. Expertise can refer to both institutional knowledge and to individual knowledge. Both may be linked to experience – for countries to have a long history as a major donor and for individuals to have been in the development business for many years (Dk, Fr). Expertise is also associated with having substantial organizational resources (Fr, Lt). The bigger Member States obviously have an advantage here (Fr), but also smaller states that have prioritized development aid policy over the years can rely on a well-organized and efficient bureaucratic machinery. Sweden comes to mind as a good example. It is generally considered a major advantage to come well prepared to the negotiation table, and this is of course linked to organizational clout and knowledge (SwM). Active participation in expert groups is seen as one important way to exert influence based on expertise (SwJ, SwM). One interviewee also emphasized the advantages of using inputs from the field, that is, to have close contacts with officials working in recipient countries (in embassies or equivalent) and to utilize their experiences in your argumentation (SwM). Positive long-term results can also ensue from being a role model and to act as an example (Fi). Being able to show that you actually have implemented the policies you propagate in your own country increases your credibility, especially if you have invested resources into such projects.

Conclusion

In this paper, both a Nordic and a Like-Minded network in EU gender and development policy have been identified and characterized. Historically, the Nordic Member States, primarily Sweden and Denmark in that order, were the main drivers of gender

mainstreaming. At that time, there is evidence of a Nordification of EU development policy. Today, ordinarily a limited number of countries, supported by a wider circle of Like-Minded Countries, take the lead in pushing the EU forward. Among the 28 EU Member States we thus find leaders and followers in development policy, but also members that are happy with the status quo, and even states that actively resist policy change. The issue of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights is an example where all these subgroups are visible. The Nordics are usually at the core of the Like-Minded group. This network tries to shape EU, and other Member States, policies in a like-minded direction. The number of Like-Minded Countries has increased since the early 2000s, showing that the core values of the Nordics have spread. This strongly indicates an ongoing Like-Mindization of EU development policy.

The identified networks are very informal, rather dense and are frequently in contact. The Nordic network members seldom meet face-to-face outside the Like-Minded framework but continuously consult each other. The Like-Minded network constitutes an information-sharing hub where policy coordination and informal testing of ideas take place. The level of trust among the participants is high. Network members rely primarily on traditional diplomatic instruments to spread their policy ideas. They take policy initiatives, consult potential supporters but also probable adversaries and are active participants in debates where they argue in favour of their ideas. 'Teaching' (sharing ideas and best practices) is combined with 'preaching' (trying to convince others of the normative superiority of their proposals). Framing – defining a problem and its solution in appealing terms - is a central normative tactic. At times, the like-minded also resort to social pressure, referring to previous commitments and to social acceptability. The active gender and development policy stance is combined with core network members' considerable experience and expertise.

This paper makes original contributions to three types of literature. First, to the discourse on 'Europeanization from below' by demonstrating how progressive Member States act to infuse their ideas into EU policy within a specific policy area, gender and development. Second, to a recently initiated scholarly discussion about the role of informal groupings in EU foreign policy making (section in UACES). In this paper, I have demonstrated how a network of Like-Minded Countries has pushed, and continues to

push, policy forward in the area of development policy. Third, to the literature on modes of influence within EU decision making. Using a novel conceptual framework, this paper analyses what policy instruments are used in situations with a high degree of normative coherence, a strong consensus norm and where coercive measures are largely out of question (in contrast to the 'Europeanization from above'-literature). It has emphasized the multi-faceted nature of norm-diffusion efforts and the reliance on traditional diplomatic initiatives, as well as normative and social tactics.

Future research should investigate the existence of Like-Minded networks in other policy areas and compare findings from such cases with my results. Do we find the same members in progressive networks in other policy areas (as was suggested by several of my interviewees)? Are networks elsewhere equally informal or are they more institutionalized? Is the mix of modes of influence similar in other areas?

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LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

SwB = Marina Berg, Head of Section, Coordination of EU Development Policy, European Union Department, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 3 July 2014

EEAS = Ola Sohlström, Seconded Expert from Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Development Cooperation Coordination Division, European External Action Service, 7 August 2014

SwM = Maria Sargren, Minister Councillor, Development Policy, Permanent Representation of Sweden to the EU, Brussels, 2 October 2014 and 25 March 2015

Com = Tim Clarke, former Head of Commission Missions to Ethiopia and Tanzania, 12 March 2015 (Skype interview)

SwJ = Jenny Lennung Malmqvist, Swedish Permanent Representation, 23 March 2015

UK = David Lloyd, Councillor, United Kingdom Permanent Representation, 25 March 2015

Fi = Rae Verkkoranta,, Councillor, Finnish Permanent Representation, 25 March 2015

Be = Dirk Brems, Councillor, Belgian Permanent Representation, 25 March 2015

Dk = Jørgen Maersk Pedersen, Councillor, Danish Permanent Representation, 24 March 2015

Lt = Liga Andersone, Councillor, Latvian Permanent Representation, 24 March 2015

Fr = Mustafa Soykurt, Councillor, French Permanent Representation, 24 March 2015

