EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND UNFREEZING TERRITORIALITY

The Case of the European Health Card

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Abstract: In 2004, a European health card has been introduced to cover the costs of cross-border emergency care in the European Union (EU). Facilitating EU citizens to seek healthcare outside the domestic welfare systems, the health card challenges the territorial organization of healthcare in the member states. This chapter seeks to explain when and how territory would matter more, less or differently for the organization of healthcare in the EU-area. The first and second waves of EU-studies lack explanations of changing territoriality—briefly defined as politics organized according to territory. This negligence stems from the territorial divide between theories on politics within the territorial states, and theories on politics among territorial states. The European health card is used as an illustration of how Stein Rokkan’s notions on polity (re)formation helps to transcend this territorial divide in explaining changing territoriality. Reasoning along Rokkan-Hirschmanian lines, the European health card seems to be a de-territorializing means to sustain the legitimacy of national health authorities. This rescue of the national healthcare systems coincides with a re-emergence of territoriality at a European level.

1. THE EUROPEAN CHALLENGE TO TERRITORIALITY

After 25 years of discussion, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament agreed on the introduction of a European health insurance card from 1 June 2004. This card for socially insured citizens of the European Union (EU) Member States simplifies administrative procedures to acquire healthcare within the territory of the European Economic Area (EEA). Facilitating most EU citizens to seek healthcare outside their domestic welfare systems, the adoption of the health card raises two fundamental questions about the territorial organization of the healthcare states in the EU/EEA-area. Facilitating national citizens to obtain cross-border

healthcare, questions the territorial sovereignty and control of national health authorities. Furthermore, citizens’ increasing opportunities of exiting and entry to healthcare systems may undermine the national solidarity and financial fundament of the territorially confined healthcare states. In the eyes of Klaus Offe (1998, 102, 111), this ‘Entgrenzung’ (de-bordering) and the consequent decline of ‘Anwesenheitzwang’ (coercion to stay) will lead to the ‘Entpflichtung’ (de-obligationing) in the membership of healthcare states. Thus, European integration seems to pose a serious challenge to one of the fundamental sources of the legitimacy of states and their governments: a satisfactory ‘output’ of healthcare. Uneven patterns of patient mobility within the EU/EEA area have also evoked voices for controlling the healthcare burden at a European level. As a consequence, the unfreezing of state borders may entail a far-reaching (territorial) reconfiguration of healthcare resulting in healthcare organized in a multi-level Europe.

Although territory is often mentioned as an important element in the political reconfiguration of Europe, both first-wave and second-wave EU-studies suffer from a lack in theorizing the relation between European integration and territoruality. Section 2 expounds how these EU-studies did not and could not address the implications of European integration for political territorality – shortly defined as politics organized according to territory. The section subsequently presents an explanation to explore the relation between European integration and political territorality. The explanation is based on the works by Stein Rokkan, one of the few political scientists who theorized changing territorality. The case of the European health card is used as an illustration of the European challenge to political territorality, and in section 3 Rokkan’s theory is applied to the case of the European health card. Section 4 concludes on the significance of territorality in the organization of healthcare in a multi-level Europe.

2. THEORIZING CHANGING TERRITORIALITY

2.1 Defining territorality

Theorizing changing territorality follows a recent call by Miles Kahler. In a recent state of the art overview of state theory, he argued: ‘Model[ling] the institutions of territorality, which are central in defining state and unit variation, should become a central part of the institutional research agenda on the state’ (Kahler 2002, 79). In his view, the oversimplification in debates on whether politics is going beyond ‘the’ state due to globalization and European integration will be overcome by more refined studies of one of the states’ ‘institutional variables’, territorality. A refined approach of territorality