Central and Eastern Europe: Europeanization and Westernization through Accession Conditionality

Michael K Marriott, University of California - Davis

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By: Michael K. Marriott

University of California, Davis
King Hall School of Law
400 Mrak Hall Drive
Davis, CA 95616
mkmarrriott@ucdavis.edu
(619) 274-6152
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I. Introduction

The European Union exists today as a shining example of the possibilities of interstate cooperation. In a region that in the past century played host to two of the most destructive wars in all of history, former enemies have become allies in the peaceful struggle to deepen and expand liberal democratic values and politics throughout a sizeable region of the world. The EU of today began with the desire to create peaceful relations between the historic enemies of France and Germany, with the invitation extended to other European states. This was first expressed in a speech given in 1950 in which the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed the idea of the European Coal and Steel Community (Tugendhat, 1988, p. 30-31), which was solidified in the Treaty of Paris in 1951 and came into force in 1952 (Cini, 2007). Western Europe took another momentous step forward with the creation of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which became effective in 1958, giving birth to the European Economic Community (Thody, 1997, p. xii-xiii) made up of six Western European member states. Since the founding of the EEC, this community of states has evolved to its current status of the European Union comprised of 27 member states.

With 27 member states, the EU is not a body in and of itself, but rather is a central authority constituted of its member states. In order to create a reasonable level of coherence within the Union, the national politics of each member state must undergo a process of Europeanization so as to find a common ground for the members to work together. This leads to the logical question: ‘to what extent are national politics Europeanized?’ Although important to consider, this question is overly broad for the purposes of this paper. A more appropriate question, one that exists within the sphere of the original, is: ‘how and to what extent are the
national politics of Central and Eastern European countries Europeanized in the process of admission to the EU?"

This paper seeks to answer such a question by showing what is meant by the continuously evolving term ‘European,’ the disproportionate influence different actors have on this concept, and ultimately how Central and Eastern European countries are integrated into the European Union.

II. What is ‘European’?

The EU as of 2011 is comprised of 27 member states, each distinct nation with a unique and, for the most part, separate yet interlinked history. These nations maintain their own language and heritage, but for the EU to function with even a modicum of efficiency there must be a common ground for politics. As the EU has developed from the original six members of the EEC, what has come to be known as ‘European’ was formerly identified as ‘Western European’.

As the Union expands, the values and politics originally embedded into it by its founding members, “the foundations of liberal-democracy” (Shepherd, 1975, p. 1), are “downloaded” into the new member states as they join the Union, while concurrently the new states “upload” their own cultural influences back into the Union (Quaglia, Neuvonen, Miyakoshi, & Cini, 2007, p. 411). This process is represented by conceiving of the new member state and the existing EU as two poles along a line. In the process of joining the EU, the state and the EU must align their poles, which happens through the combined process of “downloading,” (Shepherd, 1975, p. 1) with the state moving toward the EU, and “uploading,” as the EU moves toward the state. This process, however, is disproportionate. The alignment of the poles is the Europeanization of
politics, which Olsen (2002) reminds us is a highly contested concept with no single definition, as each definition pertains to its usage in a particular context. The general understanding most useful in this context is that given by Börzel (2002) as cited in Quaglia et al. (p. 407), which combines ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top down’ approaches by considering both the changes at the EU level as well as the ultimate impact of these changes at the state level, thus highlighting the two-way nature of the concept. The definition best suited for and unique to this paper, however, utilizes the two-way nature illustrated by Börzel, defining Europeanization as the process of the state adopting the liberal democratic politics of the EU and the EU concurrently redefining these politics so as to incorporate the state. In this process, the state must move almost entirely towards the position of the EU, with little movement in the other direction. Through this disproportionate relationship, as the EU expands geographically, it spreads its liberal democratic values and politics while at the same time evolving according to the cultures it absorbs along the way. Thus the EU continuously defines and redefines what exactly it means for be ‘European’.

III. The Disproportionate Influence

Defining and redefining what exactly it means to be ‘European,’ the EU does in fact “upload” the cultural influences of its new member states each time there is an addition to the Union. To repeat for the sake of emphasis, as the Union expands eastward, particularly as it incorporates Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs), the Union does very little “uploading”. Rather, the process of aligning the politics of the new member states and the EU is primarily a function of the CEECs “downloading.” (Shepherd, 1975, p. 1) or changing their domestic politics to fit the European model. Viewed in this light, the “downloading” (Id.) aspect of Europeanization can also be seen as institutionalization, which Schimmelfennig and

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Sedelmeier describe as “the transposition of EU law into domestic law, the restructuring of domestic institutions according to EU rules, or the change of domestic political practices according to EU standards” (2005, p. 7). This is the process by which the poles of the EU and the new member state are brought into alignment.

Eighteen years ago, in 1992, Serfaty defined Europe as “a community in which a small but not finite number of nation-states in Western Europe have progressively relinquished much of their sovereignty, and even part of their national identity, in order to achieve an ever closer union among themselves” (p. 1). Since the writing of this statement, when the EU was comprised of 12 states, it has expanded its membership by over 100 percent. Although the physical boundaries of the EU have expanded greatly, the heart of the Union continues to beat in accordance with the liberal democratic politics and values instilled by its original Western European members. These liberal democratic politics and values form the foundation of what is Europe. It therefore follows that being European requires a state not merely to be part of Europe geographically, but also to instill into its national politics the essential liberal democratic values of modern Europe.

Geographical Europe, as opposed to modern Europe, is diverse on a number of levels, the most significant being the level of politics. After WWII, many of the CEECs were behind the Iron Curtain and developed the politics of Soviet communism; a form of politics highly opposed to the liberal democracy of the west. When the Iron Curtain fell, many years after the establishment of the EU, the CEECs were left with political systems reminiscent of Soviet communism, but a desire to join in western prosperity. This is where the EU and the CEECs meet and the CEECs become members of the EU.
The meeting and alignment of Soviet-influenced CEEC political systems and the liberal democratic EU, as stated previously, is a disproportionate relationship of give and take. Although this unequal “uploading” and “downloading” (Shepherd, 1975, p. 1) exists even in the accession of states generally aligned with EU politics, it is even more lopsided in the accession of CEECs. The disproportionality is such that CEECs, in order to become part of modern Europe and the EU, must completely revamp their domestic political systems so as to align with the EU. Thus the process of the accession of CEECs into the EU is one of “downloading” (Shepherd, 1975, p. 1) nearly void of “uploading.” Through this unequal power relationship, when the EU adds a central or eastern European post-communist nation to its list of members, the EU does not redefine what it is to be European, but merely makes the CEECs politically Western European (Grabbe, 2006).

This uneven power relationship stems from the CEEC’s need for admission to the EU being greater than the EU’s need their membership (Grabbe, 2006). As Schwellnus (2005) puts it, a “material asymmetry” (p. 52) favoring Western Europe is combined with a lack of alternatives on behalf of the CEECs. In fact, according to Schimmelfennig, Engert and Knobel (2005), “the incentive for membership [is] so strong that it [overrides] any concerns and criticisms the candidate countries might have had with the appropriateness of EU conditions” (p. 32). Many of these countries are still racked by poverty, unemployment, corruption and general backwardness, and incorporation into the EU is for many their best prospect for modernization and domestic improvement. The CEEC’s adoption of EU politics, which are really Western European politics, entails the implicit assumption as to the superiority of liberal democratic Western European politics over Central and Eastern European Soviet-era politics. For these
countries, admission to the EU demarcates a “‘return to Europe’” which “has been their most important postcommunist [sic] foreign policy orientation” (Schimmelfennig et al., p. 34).

IV. The Integration and Europeanization of CEECs

Europeanization, as defined above, involves the integration of CEECs through accession conditionality. Barnes and Barnes describe this process of conditionality as “the process of laying down and monitoring the conditions for new states to become members of the EU” (2007, p. 431). Essentially this means that the EU sets the terms that must be met by candidate countries in order to gain membership. These terms and conditions consist of both political and economic norms, as well as the adoption of the existing body of EU law known as acquis communautaire (Quaglia, Neuvonen, Miyakoshi and Cini, 2007). Only when these conditions are met will a state be considered for membership.

Quaglia, Neuvonen, Miyakoshi and Cini (2007, p. 409) place the forms of integration into two main categories: positive integration and negative integration. In their work, positive and negative integration refer to “market-shaping” and “market-making” measures. In this paper, however, the scope of the terms is widened to encompass all levels of integration rather than restrict the discussion merely to the market. Thus redefined in this context, positive integration requires an applicant state to adopt a certain institution or form of behavior, and negative integration forbids a behavior or action. It is these forms of integration through which the EU Europeanizes the CEECs.

In the process of Europeanizing the CEECs, issues concerning the market are important to the EU, but are not the foremost concern. The foremost concern is the establishment of
political conditions conducive to liberal democracy. Such political conditions are a prerequisite for the EU to even open accession negotiations with applicant countries (Schimmelfennig, Engert & Knobel, 2005, p. 33). As legitimate democratic rule is founded on the consent of those governed, the most important aspect of political conditions for liberal democracy are the rights of the people, particularly those of minorities, which have classically been overlooked by many of the CEECs. It should be noted, however, that the states which became members before the beginning of accession negotiations with the CEECs were not held to any official standard concerning the protection of minorities (Schwellnus, 2005) beyond basic human rights. This is primarily a technical matter as the protection of minorities is an integral part of the liberal democratic practices generally embodied in the domestic political systems of the Western European countries. The examples of positive and negative integration that follow are therefore measures concerning the rights of minorities in CEEC applicants.

a. Positive Integration

An example of positive integration concerning minority rights as a form of EU accession conditionality exists within the Baltic States, particularly Latvia. When Latvia gained its independence from the Soviet Union, 30 percent of its domestic population was of Russian descent. After the fall of the Soviet Union, these Russians were left without a state (Hanne, 1996). This population came into Latvia as part of the process of “Russification” under the Soviet Union (Haab, 1998), thus fostering resentment among the ethnic Latvians whose desire to maintain their native language and culture after gaining independence took precedence over the minority rights of the Russian-speaking population (Pabriks, 1999; Wälzholz, 1998) as cited in Schimmelfennig, Engert & Knobel (2005, p. 47). In this case the Latvian government did not
actively persecute the Russian-speaking population, but rather “its policy toward the non-Latvian population did not meet the standards of European organizations on minority rights” (Schimmelfennig et al., p. 45). Essentially this means that Latvia was not nearly on the level of a human rights abuser, but rather the government created laws tying the knowledge of the Latvian language to rights of citizenship, thereby discriminating against the non-Latvian population (Pabriks).

In this case, the national politics of Latvia were Europeanized in the process of admission to the EU through accession conditionality as “the EU linked rule adoption with membership” (Schimmelfennig et al, p. 45). In sum, the EU would not admit Latvia as a member state unless it met the conditions laid out by the Commission stating that “Latvia needs to take measures to accelerate naturalization procedures to enable the Russian speaking non-citizens to become better integrated into Latvian society” (Commission, 1997). In this example, the accession conditionality is a form of positive integration as defined above in that it requires the applicant state, in this case Latvia, to adopt a certain institution or form of behavior, which is in this case taking “measures to accelerate naturalization procedures” for its Russian-speaking minority so as to better integrate them into Latvian society.

The result of the EU’s accession conditionality is that the Latvian government, which had systematically ignored similar demands from the High Commissioner on National Minorities who had nothing tangible to offer, accepted the demands when they were linked to EU membership (Schimmelfennig et al., p. 48). In this way the EU successfully used accession conditionality to make the domestic politics of Latvia more liberally democratic. In so doing the EU did not redefine what it meant to be European, but instead made the domestic politics of Latvia more Western European.
b. Negative integration

As for negative integration concerning minority rights as a form of EU accession conditionality, Turkey serves as a strong example. Although the question of whether or not Turkey is actually European is a point of continual debate, it was given candidate status at the Helsinki summit in 1999 and is therefore subject to the same accession conditionalities as the CEECs (Schimmelfennig, Engert & Knobel, 2005). There are numerous problems with Turkey’s domestic political structure and treatment of minorities. The main problem cited is that “the Kurdish minority has suffered from violent repression and lacked minority rights and protection” (Schimmelfennig et al., p. 41). Unlike the previous example of Latvia, where minority rights violations are merely the denial of citizenship status, Turkey’s violations entail violent human rights abuses.

Recognizing the systematic and violent human rights abuses of the Kurdish minority at the hands of the Turkish state, the EU has taken measures with the Europeanization of Turkey through accession conditionality to curtail these abuses. As Schimmelfennig et al. notes, the list of concessions that must be made by Turkey to gain member status are extensive, and include significant reforms based on minority rights, including the establishment of Kurdish education programs as well as Kurdish language media broadcasts. Additionally, Turkey was required to sign Protocol 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights, effectively outlawing the death penalty (Schimmelfennig et al., 2005). In this example, the accession conditionality is a form of negative integration as defined above in that it forbids the applicant state, in this case Turkey, from a certain behavior or action. In this case, the behaviors and actions forbidden are those concerning the violent repression the government has used as a means of dealing with the Kurdish minority.
The result of the EU’s accession conditionality is that the Turkish government has finally begun to reform its politics and “to solve the long-lasting bitter Kurdish problem by peaceful means” (Schimmelfennig et al., p. 44). In this way, “the Turkish case strongly supports the conditionality model of Europeanization” (Id. at p. 44), and thus the EU successfully used accession conditionality to make the domestic politics of Turkey more liberally democratic. In a Muslim and arguably Middle Eastern country, this is a tremendous feat for the EU. Through this process, the EU did not redefine what it meant to be European, but rather made the politics of Turkey more Western European.

V. Conclusion

In response to the question, ‘how and to what extent are the national politics of Central and Eastern European countries Europeanized in the process of admission to the EU?’, the ‘how’ is shown in the examples of Europeanization through the positive and negative integration of Latvia and Turkey. As for the question ‘to what extent,’ the answer is that the national politics of the CEECs are Europeanized to the point that they reflect Western European politics, specifically those of the liberal democracies, more than the Soviet-influenced politics classic to the region. That this is the objective of the EU is evidence of the Union’s belief in the superiority of liberal democratic Western European politics over those classic to the CEECs. If the politics of Western Europe are indeed more advanced and in fact superior to those of Central and Eastern Europe, then “downloading” (Shepherd, 1975, p. 1) these politics serves as a means to advance the CEECs. Thus the process of Europeanization through accession conditionality, although
virtually guaranteed to cause at least temporary turbulence in the CEECs, is in the long run a beneficial demarcation of their “return to Europe.”
References


