

# Europeanization of Foreign Policy: Empirical Findings From Hungary, Romania and Slovakia

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## Abstract

This article discusses the influence of the process of European integration on the foreign policy-making in the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe, using as case-studies Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The impact of the integration process is examined from an institutionalist perspective. The paper is especially interested in the institutional change of the coordination of foreign policy-making at both national and European levels, and on the process of learning and socialization of national representatives participating and interacting with the EU system of foreign policy. The impact of European integration is contrasted with the role of domestic factors in shaping institutions and process. The limits of Europeanization of foreign policy-making are identified.

## Keywords

Europeanization; European integration; foreign policy; Hungary; Slovakia; Romania

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THE STUDY OF EUROPEANIZATION OF FOREIGN POLICY HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY popular during the last decade. Anticipating, and following, the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union (EU), several authors began to explore the impact of European integration on candidates and latterly on new members from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (for a review see Sedelmeier 2006). This article attempts to contribute to this burgeoning literature by providing evidences with regard the influence of European integration on foreign policy-making in three CEE countries, namely Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia.

The study of Europeanization of foreign policy has faced various theoretical hurdles, due to the weak formal power of the EU this field, coupled with the strong role of national governments. The Europeanization of foreign policy has been studied from different theoretical perspectives. For instance, there are studies undertaken from a public policy perspective, examining especially the process of bureaucratic reorganization or institutional adaptation. A different theoretical approach equates Europeanization with socialization of identities and interests. The basic assumption is that socialization is the result of prolonged participation in European foreign policy cooperation (see Smith 2000). These approaches examine the Europeanization of foreign policy either as the bottom up projection of national interests at European level, or as the top-down domestic impact of the EU. While the former is based on intergovernmentalist approaches, the latter is similar to the international regimes theory, which assumes that the EU foreign policy is the source of change of national foreign policy (for a review see Wong 2007).

The scope of this paper is mainly limited to institutional adaptation and elite socialization in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. However, these two dimensions of Europeanization incorporate a less visible, but nonetheless present, dimension of power. Various studies of Europeanization of foreign policy overlook the power dimension embodied in this relationship. Whether defined as bottom-up or top-down, Europeanization is a relational concept. It connects two entities, one exercising a degree of influence over the other.

The main research questions addressed by this paper are: a) to what extent does Europeanization cause institutional convergence across the candidate and new member states? b) what role does domestic politics play with regard to the institutional adaptation in view of European integration? c) what is the extent of internalization of EU's norms by national officials dealing with European affairs? d) what is the role of national representatives dealing with European affairs in disseminating the EU norms within the political-administrative structures at national level? e) does the manner in which the elite from the new member states perceive the exercise and distribution of power within the EU alter the outcomes of the Europeanization process?

This article employs a top-down approach. It avoids using bottom-up perspectives since they over-extend and make the concept of Europeanization even more confusing and difficult to use. Therefore, the first section discusses the peculiar status of the Europeanization approach when applied to the study of foreign policy and makes the case for the top-down approach.

The second part examines the change of the institutional setting of foreign policy-making in view of European integration. The institutional setting refers to institutional actors and relationships among them. The actors are those involved in the coordination of European affairs and foreign policy-making (i.e. the permanent representations to the EU, foreign affairs ministries, prime-minister offices, foreign and European affairs committees of the national parliaments).

The third part explores the issue of elite socialization. Sociological institutionalism upholds the view that the very cooperation within the EU in foreign policy matters creates the context for the socialization of individual policy-makers through the transfer of EU norms and rules. However, it is assumed in this article that not all national actors perceive the EU norms and rules in the same way. It is asked whether the national experts and diplomats, representing the country in Brussels, have different views and preferences from those in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), involved in day-to-day foreign policy-making. Do they perform the role of norm entrepreneurs in relation to political or institutional actors dealing with European affairs in the capital? This relates to the problem of the way in which foreign policy elite from the new member states perceives the exercise and distribution of power within the EU. If the perception is one of inequality, this might affect the socialization of policy makers from the new member states. The internalization of the norms of compromise and consensus seeking might be undermined if the perception of the national representatives is that the policy-making reflects an asymmetrical balance of power among the member states. The concluding section of the article summarizes the findings and discusses the limitation of the Europeanization approach with regard to the institutional adaptation and elite socialization.

A number of factors justify the selection of Hungary, Romania and Slovakia as the three case studies. First, the three countries have different integration records. Hungary was considered the frontrunner of the integration process, invited in 1998, acceding in 2004. Slovakia's invitation had been postponed in 1998, but the country was able to catch up with the Luxemburg Group and to join the EU in 2004. Romania, invited to join the EU in the second wave, alongside Slovakia, was not able or willing to become a full member

before 2007. The assumption behind the selection of cases is that the cross-national variation in the accession paths may provide useful insights for explaining differences in the organization of national systems of foreign policy. Second, all three are connected historically and geographically. The process of international socialization challenges the existing identities and interests of national officials, their conceptions of statehood, and relationships between national and supranational.

On the other hand, numerous analyses of Europeanization of foreign policy focus on single countries (see for instance Economides 2005; Miskimmon 2007; Pomorska 2007; Rieker 2006; Torreblanca 2001; Tsardanidis and Stavridis 2005; Wong 2006). Instead, a three case study approach provides a better understanding of why similar Europeanization pressures cause different responses across candidate countries. Also, the existing literature indicates that there is limited convergence of national policies of the old member states. The Eastern enlargement has further increased the diversity of actors and preferences within the EU. Thus, the study of the new member states is important insofar as it contributes to the general debate over the issue of convergence of national foreign policies and the future of the EU as a global actor speaking with a single voice.

This article uses mainly primary sources, specifically in-depth interviews conducted in Brussels, Bratislava, Bucharest, and Budapest, the study of official documents, media reports, and participant observation of Council's meetings<sup>1</sup>; also, secondary sources are used, such as national reports and similar studies covering other EU countries.

### **Europeanization: top-down or bottom-up?**

In a recent review, Wong identifies five key research questions emerging from the literature dealing with the Europeanization of foreign policy (see Wong 2007). These five research questions are as follows: a) how can the process be conceptualized?; b) what is changing and what are the mechanisms and directions of change?; c) what is the scope of its effects; d) is it producing convergence? and e) what is the significance of informal socialization as a vector of change? In fact, these five questions revolve around whether Europeanization stands for the domestic impact of the EU or the projection of national interest at European level. Other questions arising from the literature are subsumed to the debate over the manner in which Europeanization is conceptualized. For instance, the question of convergence is a possible by-product of Europeanization, seen as a top-down process. In this sense, the domestic change caused by the EU leads to the gradual rapprochement of national policies.

The most controversial issue stemming from these questions is that of multiple conceptualizations of Europeanization. The current use of the Europeanization approach contributes to the conceptual confusion over who is doing what and how, which creates the risk of overstressing the concept (Radaelli 2000). Therefore, the following paragraphs examine the conceptual confusion created by the fact that Europeanization has been used indiscriminately. It aims to demonstrate that the conceptualization of Europeanization of foreign policy, as a bottom-up process, is misleading. By consequence, it makes the case for the use of top-down approaches.

The concept of Europeanization is a late entrant into the study of European integration. The appearance of this concept can be best understood in the context of stages of European integration (see Caporaso 2007: 24). In the initial stage of European integration,

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<sup>1</sup> Internship to the Romanian Permanent Mission to the European Union in November – December 2005, at a stage when Hungary and Slovakia were already full members and Romania active observer pending the ratification of the Accession Treaty by the EU member states.

the explanatory accounts of this process were mainly of a bottom-up type. Starting with the 1950s, these approaches were concerned with explaining the flows from society and state towards regional integration. The main question in this period was what reasons European states have had for agreeing to relinquish parts of state sovereignty in favour of supranational integration. During this period, the theoretical approaches to European integration were heavily influenced by the mainstream thinking in international relations. As Caporaso (2007: 24) argues, both proponents of functionalism and intergovernmentalism (or realism) were operating within the theoretical paradigm of international relations. They were interested in describing and explaining the move from a decentralized system of balance of power of Westphalian type towards a proto-European polity.

The advancement of European integration during the 1980s shifted the theoretical focus away from bottom-up perspectives towards explaining the process of integration itself. During this stage, the process of European integration was being given a new impetus as a result of the developments leading to the adoption of the Single European Act (SEA) and the completion of the internal market programme. Likewise, the adoption of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) and the move towards building the political union further stressed the need to examine and explain supranational integration. The attention was no longer directed exclusively towards the question of why the state delegates parts of national sovereignty to regional integration, but how the regional organization functions, who the main actors are, and how they interact.

Finally, during the last two decades, the focus of enquiry turned out to be on the domestic impact of the EU, the change that the EU causes on the very states that initiated the process of regional integration decades ago. The European Union was already a mature reality changing significantly the context in which member states operate. Therefore, what the concept of Europeanization brought about was a change in the analytical focus from member states, seen as sources of power-delegation to the EU, to a reverse, top-down relationship (see Börzel and Risse 2003: 57-8; Caporaso 2007: 23-7; Smith 2000: 613; Vink and Graziano 2007: 3-7).

However, the Europeanization of foreign policy was not studied from a top-down perspective alone. As already pointed out, this fact generated conceptual confusion. If one looks at the Europeanization applied to the study of national foreign policy from a bottom-up perspective, it is hard to avoid the impression that all is about a slightly modified version of intergovernmentalism or liberal intergovernmentalism. The bottom-up approach contends that EU member states attempt to project their national ideas, preferences and models at the European supranational level. By doing so, the member states do "Europeanize their previously national priorities and strategies and create a dialectical relationship. By exporting their preferences and models onto EU institutions, they in effect generalise previously national policies onto a larger European stage" (Wong 2005: 137). The national interest is no longer only national, but the EU's interest as well.

The similarity between this version of Europeanization and the classical intergovernmentalist account of European integration is striking. Originated in the international relations theory, intergovernmentalism is closely connected with the realist tradition. Among the key assumptions are those that the nation-states are the key actors of the international system and supranational institutions or transnational actors do not have a serious influence over the way national governments conduct their foreign policy. In essence, both classical and liberal intergovernmentalist approaches assume that the European integration is a function of the willingness of the member states, national governments having the last word as regard the supranational integration. In the context of European integration theory, the intergovernmentalist version of realism in

international relations contends that the direction and speed of the integration process is a function of the decisions and actions taken by the national governments of the member states (Nugent 2003: 482).

The main flaw of Europeanization, understood from a bottom-up perspective, is that it conflates two distinct approaches, namely Europeanization itself and intergovernmentalism. In contrast, the top-down version of Europeanization of foreign policy provides for greater internal consistency with the main thrust of Europeanization research agenda. There is a broad agreement with regard to the direction in which Europeanization operates as the domestic impact of European integration on polity, politics, and policy (Börzel and Risse 2003: 60; Caporaso 2007: 27; Delanty and Rumford 2005: 6; Vink 2002). Whether one speaks about policies in the areas where the European Community has exclusive, shared, or support competences in relation to member states (for EC's competences, see Craig and De Búrca 2008), the fundamental logic directing the research focus is from the EU towards the member states. Therefore, the top-down approach is the one favoured by this article.

Not only reasons of theoretical nature justify the choice of a top-down approach. Another motive is closely connected to a practical aspect, namely the length of membership. Arguably, at this stage it is more fruitful to examine the domestic impact of the EU rather than the other way round.

### **Europeanization as institutional change**

This section examines how Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia have institutionally adapted their systems of foreign policy-making to the demands of the EU. This type of demand-compliance relationship covers two distinct conceptions of power. On the one hand, it is about "power over". In a classical conception, the power of A over B means that A can get B to do what B would not otherwise do. In this case, A is the one who exercises the influence while B suffers the influence (Dahl 1957 cited in Baldwin 2002: 177). Some authors have seen the nature of the relationship between the EU and the aspirant countries from CEE as a power relation of this type. On the other hand, it is the "power to" or Europeanization as empowerment. The candidates, even if expected to adjust, are not constrained by any pre-existing model. They have the "power to" reshape institution the way they wish.

The rest of the article discusses the manner in which the powers and responsibilities for European coordination were allocated across institutional actors. First, it examines the role of the MFA and the relationship between the Foreign Service and the prime-minister office or other state agencies responsible for coordination of European affairs. Second, it discusses the changing structure and functions of national coordination of European affairs and foreign policy at European level by looking at the Permanent Representations (henceforth PermRep) of Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia and their relationships with the capitals.

#### *The institutional adaptation at national level – the changing role of the MFA*

The entering into force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 replaced the loose framework of European Political Cooperation (EPC) characterizing the previous two decades with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Without representing a sharp break with the past, the CFSP stood for a step forward in the institutionalization of cooperation, rationalizing the policy process, establishing legally binding obligations, using authoritative decision making rules, and enhancing the autonomy of European

Community (EC) organizations (Smith 2004a: 176-190).

The development of the CFSP is the result of decades of cooperation among old member states. Thus, the institutional set-up of European cooperation in foreign policy matters was already in place at the time of accession of the CEE countries. The former socialist countries had to adopt the existing *acquis* and institutions in the field of CFSP, without having the option to project their own preferences as regard how the system should work. The candidates had to align their national positions to the EU common positions, common strategies, joint actions, and political declarations. Besides, the candidates had to refashion the administrative structure needed for taking part in the political and technical committees and working parties of the Council of Ministers. New political-expert positions such as political director or European correspondent, and new communication infrastructure for sending and receiving confidential information had to be created. The national embassies to the EU, which prior to accession performed classic diplomatic functions of information, early warning and representation, had to be updated into permanent representations, able to execute a wider and more complex range of functions in order to defend effectively the national interest (see Kassim 2001).

At the time of signing the Europe Agreements during the mid 1990s, all candidates were equally unprepared and all of them had to find ways to adjust to these demands. The accession demanded a special readiness of national administrative structures, resources and ways of interaction in order to fit into the loose "European administrative space" (Lippert *et al.* 2001: 983). The setting up of proper mechanisms for dealing with EU foreign policy is but a component of the overall conception of how the administrative capacity had to be reorganized in view of accession. Therefore, the question of what impact did Europeanization have on national foreign policy-making should be addressed in the broader context of how the coordination of European affairs had been adapted and who the most important institutional actors were. The integration process created opportunities for some actors and constraints for others.

For most of the 1990s, the European integration was treated as a top foreign policy priority by the CEE countries (Vachudova 2005) and handled accordingly by the actor best placed to deal with it, namely the MFA (Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007: 969). However, the dominant role of the MFA was challenged. At least two factors may explain why this happened. On the one hand, the accession talks involved participation and contributions from all ministries, given the technical content of individual chapters of negotiations. In turn, this fact raised the problem of hierarchy or why should the MFA be over other ministries as long as European integration is as much an external relations issue as it is about sectoral, domestic policies.

On the other hand, other political developments like changes of government, cabinet reshuffle, or coalition politics, led to the transformation of the systems of national coordination. Besides, the advancement of the integration process itself requested a constant assessment of how the coordination system responds to EU demands. The coordination of European affairs was a dynamic phenomenon. Throughout the period of accession talks and even after formal integration, the roles and responsibilities of different actors and their relationships changed occasionally.

The pre-eminence of the Hungarian MFA was challenged twice. During the first half of the 1990s, the challenger was the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Responsible for the international commercial relations of the country, the Ministry of Trade was deeply involved in the negotiations of Europe Agreement, the backbone of which was the expansion of trade and bilateral economic relations. This situation created a duality in the system (interview Hungarian MFA, Budapest, June 2008). Moreover, during the screening

process, a serious concern came up with regard to the ability and skills of the MFA's staff, used to the Cold War's generalities, to understand and answer the technical questions sent by the Commission. The then Prime Minister, Gyula Horn, resolved the situation by simply transferring the entire European affairs office from the Ministry of Trade to the MFA, enhancing the required expertise of the MFA and streamlining the coordination process (Interview, Péter Balázs<sup>2</sup>, Budapest, June 2008).

The second instance, following the formal accession of Hungary into the EU, was the transfer of the European affairs unit from the MFA to the Prime Minister Office since 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2005. An important factor was the steady competition between the economic and foreign affairs branches of the government. Besides the institutional competition, other factors played a key role as well. One aspect was the personal rivalry between the then Prime Minister, Péter Medgyessy, and the Foreign Minister, László Kovács. Another factor was the coalition politics resulting in the cabinet reshuffle, following the stepping down of Medgyessy as Prime-Minister in August 2004 and his replacement with Ferenc Gyurcsány. In addition, the fact that the Foreign Minister Kovács took over the post of European Commissioner in November 2004 meant that a key opponent to such a measure withered away. However, the management of European affairs by the Prime Minister Office was short lived. Instead of streamlining the coordination process, it resulted in an ineffective management. After the general elections in 2006, the European coordination returned to the MFA. The European Affairs Directorate of the MFA, headed by a European Director with the rank of State Secretary is the main coordinator body between the executive and the legislative. It also runs the Interministerial Committee for European Coordination (Kovács and Szabó 2006).

In Romania, the coordination of European affairs was centred on the Prime-Minister Office for most of the time. In 1992, the Department of European Integration was created within the Romanian Government. After the general elections in 1996, the role of this department was enhanced because of the appointment at its helm of a minister-delegate in charge of European integration. For a while, the European coordination moved from the Government's Department of European Integration to the MFA. This happened in 1999 against the background of tensions within the centre-right coalition cabinet headed by the then Prime Minister, Mugur Isărescu. The results of the general elections in 2000, won comfortably by the coalition built around the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (*Partidul Democrației Sociale din România*), led to the setting up of a brand new Ministry of European Integration, having a leading role in the coordination of the accession process.

The design of a completely new ministry was not a very popular option in other candidate states, though some similar arrangements came about (Dimitrova and Toshkov 2007: 975). Such a decision might be seen as an attempt of the new Romanian cabinet to demonstrate its *bona fide* credentials and determination, given the poor record of the country among other candidates (Vachudova 2005). In addition, many Western capitals and Brussels shared a gloomy image with regard to the return to power of the party responsible for the sluggish reforms in the early 1990s (European Report 2001). As soon as the objective of accession to the EU had been achieved, the Ministry of European Integration was transformed into a ministry responsible for regional development, while a newly created department, directly subordinated to the Prime Minister became responsible, jointly with the MFA, for coordinating European affairs.

The system of coordination adopted in the Slovak Republic was based throughout the

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<sup>2</sup> Péter Balázs is a former State Secretary for European Affairs in the MFA and Ambassador to the EU. He was Hungary's first appointed European Commissioner and in 2009 was given the role of Hungarian Foreign Minister under the Gordon Bajnai administration.

accession on the executive. From a formal point of view, the Council for Integration into the EU, presided by the Deputy Prime Minister, supervised the coordination process. However, in practical terms the role of the MFA was instrumental in the management of European affairs (Interview, MFA, Bratislava, April 2008). After 2004, even if the position of Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs still exists, the role of the MFA has been strengthened. This was because the coordination centred on the deputy prime minister did not work very well (Interview, Eduard Kukan<sup>3</sup>, Bratislava, May 2008). For instance, if during the 1998-9 the number of staff in the Department of European Integration within the Office of the Government was around ten, as for 2008 it is five, while the corresponding number of expert personnel in the MFA grew from ten before 1999 to around 50 as of 2008. The increase in the number of staff went along with the change of the organizational structure. The Section of European Integration established in 1999 was divided after accession into two departments, one dealing with common sectoral policies and institutional affairs, the other with foreign and security policy.

While the coordination of the policies under the first pillar and of the integration process were subjects to multiple and frequent changes, the management of foreign policy remained mainly the responsibility of the MFA in all three countries. The organization of foreign ministries changed as well through the creation of adequate structures. In the Hungarian MFA, the European Foreign and Security Policy Department, under the political guidance of a political director with a rank of state secretary, deals with the CFSP related issues. Within this department, there are three sub-units responsible for EU Association and Partnership Relations, EU External Relations and Crisis Situations, and Regional Cooperation. The responsibility for the CFSP matters within the Slovak MFA belongs to the Directorate General for Political Affairs, which includes the CFSP and Security Policy Departments, as well as territorial departments. The sub-units of the CFSP Department are CFSP, Political and Security Committee (PSC), European Correspondent, European Neighbourhood Policy, and Stabilization Instrument. The Security Policy Department deals with Euro-Atlantic security, NATO, Permanent Delegation to NATO, European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), Western European Union (WEU), and Crises Management. Within Romanian MFA, the European Union General Directorate, headed by a State Secretary, provides specific expertise for CFSP matters through the Department of External Relations (Relax) and Development Assistance.

#### *The changing role of national coordination at European level*

Among the institutional actors that gained the most with accession was the Permanent Representation to the European Union. The formal title of a diplomatic representation of a third state or candidate to the EU is "permanent mission". Once it becomes a full member, the title changes to "permanent representation" (PermRep). Before accession, the permanent missions in Brussels performed rather a traditional diplomatic role of representation and channel of communication. However, during the transition period from accession to full-membership the PermReps have experienced far-reaching transformations. For instance, measures such as the numerical augmentation of personnel, the organizational complexity and functional diversification reflect this type of change.

The setting-up of diplomatic offices to the EC by the CEE countries followed the establishment of diplomatic relations in the late 1980s-early 1990s. They began planning the transformation of diplomatic missions in the years before finalizing the accession talks. Both the problem of size and of internal organizational structure emerged. The main criteria for deciding the number of staff and internal organization were the compatibility

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<sup>3</sup> Eduard Kukan is the former minister of foreign affairs of the Slovak Republic during 1998-2006.

with the structure of Council's formations, the indicative needs of various ministries in the capital and the models offered by other member states similar in demographic terms.

For instance, the size of the Hungarian PermRep was foreseen at around 60 diplomats, in contrast to 20 personnel in 2003 and even fewer before. Even if the Slovak PermRep is smaller, having around 50 diplomats out of the total staffing, both countries have drawn inspiration from the Austrian, Finnish, and Danish models. Romania, with the seventh largest population among EU's member states, staffed approximately 70 diplomats in its PermRep.

Several aspects were taken into consideration as regard the internal organization. For instance, the internal structure of the Hungarian Mission to the EU was oriented towards the European Commission's formations, since the accession talks were conducted with the representatives of the Commission. In anticipation of full-membership, the internal structure had to be reoriented towards the Council of Ministers' formations. Therefore, the figure of 60 diplomats/100 staff of the Hungarian PermRep was considered adequate for covering all the Council's formations (Interview, Péter Balázs, June 2008). Another challenge, originated back in the national capitals this time, was the question of hierarchical subordination and payments of people coming from different ministries. For instance, both the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice had to deal with Justice and Home Affairs matters. Similarly, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had responsibilities in representing the national positions in the Political Military Group or Political and Security Committee (Interviews, Brussels, December 2007; E. Kukan, Bratislava, May 2008; Péter Balázs, Budapest, June 2008).

The range of functions performed by PermReps changed as well, not only the size and internal organization. The PermReps have, simultaneously, to defend the national interests at EU level and to mediate between the EU and their national capital, in a two-level-game logic (see Putnam 1988). They perform both upstream and downstream functions (Kassim 2001: 34-36). Along these functions, the PermReps are exercising a great deal of influence on national foreign policy-making. The fundamental lines of foreign policy continue to be defined in the national capitals, but PermReps influence the routine process of policy-making.

The function of reporting stands for informing the national capital about the developments within the EU Council, how different countries are positioned in respect to specific initiatives, what are the chances of proposal to be adopted. The main source of information gathering is the participation in Council's meetings at various levels and affiliated bodies, or in informal meetings with counterparts. A close interaction with other national representatives provides an invaluable source of complementary information. The advisory function is closely linked to that of information, because all reports and telegrams sent back home include suggestions and recommendations. The advisory function of national representatives is of particular importance in policy formulation and definition of national position. The recommendations they sent back home are taken into consideration by experts in the capital and used as foundations for formulating national mandates on specific topics. An important asset that national representatives in Brussels bring to the capital is that they have a comprehensive understanding of the EU; they interact directly with counterparts from other member states as well as European officials. In addition, national representatives know when a particular position is unsustainable. In such a case, to carry on with the national mandate received from the capital may eventually lead to isolation in the group. Therefore, they may convince colleagues in the capital that it is not realistic to go on and a change of the national position is required (interviews, Romanian and Slovak PermReps, Brussels, December 2007).

The important role played by PermReps is widely accepted by experts in the capital, especially those in the MFA (interviews, April-October 2008). According to some opinions, the recommendations from the PermReps are translated into national mandates and turn back to Brussels in most cases. However, this is mainly because numerous foreign policy issues on the EU agenda go far beyond the immediate interests of CEE countries. While the scope of EU foreign policy is global, the traditional and vital interests of CEE member states are mainly regional. In general, the adherence to EU statements or actions towards remote parts of the world is a formality, especially as long as it does not require only political endorsements and not budgetary allocations or deployment of military or civilian personnel in crisis management operations. In these cases, the role of PermReps is the most important. However, the situation changes when vital interests are at stake. Then, the PermRep "can never take over the responsibilities of a government, which is in contact with political parties, NGOs, media, so it is back home that such a decision should be taken" (interview, Péter Balázs, June 2008) and the decisions are taken in the capital at the highest political level of the executive. In the aforementioned Slovak case for instance, in sensitive issues the role of the legislature turns out to be significant as well.

### **Europeanization as socialization of identities and interests**

Previous studies of Europeanization maintain that the emergence of procedural norms of EU foreign policy were created and institutionalized through constant interaction, debate and trial and error learning (Smith 2004a). Various authors have labelled these norms and rules as diffuse reciprocity, thick trust, mutual responsiveness, consensus-reflex, confidentiality, consensus, consultation, respect for other member states' *domaines réservés*, the prohibition against hard bargaining; all of them create a "culture of compromise" (see Garbo 1999: 644; Lewis 2000: 261; Nuttall 1992; Smith 2004a: 120-124, 2004b: 107-109).

It has been argued that action within an institutional setting is driven either by a rational-choice logic of anticipated consequences and previously defined preferences, the so-called "logic of consequentiality", or by a "logic of appropriateness" and sense of identity, which uphold the view that the norms and rules of a given community are followed because they are considered right and legitimate (March and Olsen 1998: 951).

Accordingly, Europeanization stands for the change of norms leading to a change of preferences. Social learning is the mechanism whereby national policy-makers learn the norms and rules characterizing the EU foreign policy culture. In other words, their preferences and behaviour are being Europeanized. The process of transfer of norms and rules is mediated by the existence of the so-called norm entrepreneurs (see Börzel and Risse 2003: 58-59; also Sedelmeier 2006). The norm entrepreneurs are those policy-makers directly involved and the most exposed to EU norms and rules, such as the experts and diplomats from PermReps in Brussels, as well as those from the relevant European departments in the MFA. The question is whether these officials have been socialized according to the aforementioned "logic of appropriateness" or they have simply learnt the new norms and rules and behave in an instrumental, rational manner, according to the "logic of consequentiality". If the former, they may play the role of norm entrepreneurs, mediating between European and domestic levels; if the latter case, this scenario is rather unlikely.

Apart from the question of whether socialization follows an appropriation or instrumental path, another question relates to the fact that Europeanization as socialization depends to an important extent on the way in which foreign policy elite perceives the distribution of power within the EU. From a formal point of view, full EU membership grants an equal right to all members. In reality, the views from CEE, as well as from other old but small member states, highlight a different picture, one in which the large old member states are

still more influential in the political process and in the design and conduct of any given policy. The perception of inequality may well impact upon the socialization of policy makers from the new member states. The internalization of the norms of compromise and consensus seeking might very well be undermined if the perception of the national representatives is that the policy-making process reflects the balance of power among the member states. In this case, their policy preferences would mirror the instrumental view of how the power is exercised.

There is a general agreement that a process of learning characterized the first contacts between national officials and the EU. The learning process started even before the formal accession, during the period when the candidates were observers in EU institutions. The status of "active observer" is granted to the future members covering the period between the signing and ratification of the accession treaties: During this period, the national representatives were able to attend all Council's meetings and to familiarize themselves with the working methods and procedures. Hungary and Slovakia were observers for one year, between April 2003 and May 2004. For Romania, this was over one and a half years, between April 2005 and December 2006. The experience accumulated by experts from different ministries during the accession talks allowed them to grasp a good understanding of negotiations practices with representatives of the European Commission and of the *acquis communautaire* in their specific sectors of expertise. These people were the first choice for appointment by national ministries to the PermReps, because of this experience. However, since the PermRep deals mainly with the Council, they come across a completely different working style and organizational culture (interview, Péter Balázs, June 2008). For some national officials, this experience recalled past memories from school, the endeavour to learn and achieve an academic degree (interview, Slovak PermRep, Brussels, December 2007). This view is shared, in one way or another, by most people that had participated, even on a sporadic basis, in the meetings within the Council, either being from the PermRep or the MFA at either senior or junior diplomatic level.

Also there is a general positive view on the environment in the Council, described as "family", "friendly", "good company". Beside the warm reception from the old member states, another facilitating factor for the easy adaptation of the representative of the new member states was the presence of fellow negotiators from other new member states, to whom they used to be in contact during the years of accession talks (interview, Péter Balázs, June 2008). At the same time, it is not always the case that the learning of new norms and rules is associated with a positive view on the working style in the Council. Too long and unnecessary talks were perceived as completely ineffective, a waste of time which could hardly be afforded in a meeting of a national cabinet (interview, E. Kukan, May 2008). Furthermore, as a senior Hungarian diplomat summed up, "we are working every day with such small details, invisible for normal citizens ... is complicated, insane ... we are discussing such small points that have no real influence to the real world and we don't have time for philosophical discussion about the future of the European Union" (interview, Brussels, December 2007).

Even if the length of meetings is a source of criticism for some diplomats, most of them shared the view that in a Union with 27 member states, it is necessary to compromise and seek consensus. The practical use of the norms of compromise and consensus seeking was learnt by the new member states for instance in working group meetings discussing, paragraph by paragraph, various documents. The enlargement, bringing the number of participants in the Council's formations from 15 to 27, plus the representatives of Commission and General Secretariat of the Council, or some others, raised the problem of effectiveness. When and how to speak was a new informal rule that emerged in this context and the old *tour de table*, now too time-consuming and ineffective, was replaced by the rule of speaking up only when one disagrees or want to amend a proposal and to

keep the time of intervention as short as possible (interview, MFA, Bratislava, May 2008).

The policy of alliance formations was another issue to learn. It is a common feature in the Council diplomacy that member states try to secure the support of other countries and presenting their own position as an expression of common European interest (Windhoff-Heritier *et al.*, 1996). New member states were soon asked to give their support to one initiative or another, or at least not to oppose it. It also soon became evident that with the exception of a few strategic issues, there was no clear pattern of coalition formation, which tended to be temporary and topic based. The norm of respect for other member states' *domaines réservés* became associated with a redefinition of (1) what national priorities exist, (2) what the official position is in respect to other countries' concerns, and (3) how does the pursuit of national interest resonate with the common European interest. As a senior Hungarian diplomat pointed out "You always have to keep in mind that there isn't just the national position that you have to think about, but of course there is the overall position or the overall interest of the community that you are member of" (interview, Budapest, June 2008).

In the case of Hungary and Slovakia, some of the diplomats that arrived in Brussels in 2003 are already returning home. The direct experience of working within the Council's working groups and committees and interacting routinely with other national representatives is different from that of the senior or junior officials coming only occasionally from national capitals to Brussels. The fact that the staff of the PermReps have a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the developments in Brussels is widely accepted in their respective capital cities. Their return at the end of the mandate stands for a valuable transfer of knowledge, skills, and understandings back home.

The assumption that the internalization of new norms and rules follows the logic of appropriateness, namely that those EU norms are internalized by individual officials because they are good and right on their own, is not sufficiently backed by empirical evidences. Even if some diplomats or national experts show a genuine appreciation of the way the EU works, most of them have a more instrumental view of the process. There is a constant attempt to balance between constraints of defending the national position and accommodating the positions of other countries.

The norms of compromise, consensus, consultation, and mutual understanding are necessary given the very design of the EU. In order to have a functional EU foreign policy, the participants must behave according to these norms; otherwise, the entire process enters into paralysis with negative consequences for all. Moreover, in many cases, the view of the Council is that of a structure where even if the voices of all are listened, there is a great diversity of interests and some countries are more influential than others are.

Looking at both the PermReps and the MFAs, more similarities than differences can be noticed as regard the perception of EU norms. The preponderant instrumental perception of EU norms makes the PermRep and the MFA unlikely candidates for influencing other national actors to redefine their interests and identities. An instance of minimal norm entrepreneurship of the MFA in relation to other actors was highlighted by a Hungarian senior diplomat: "when we put something down on paper or when we discuss it even with political decision-makers, we try to influence them ... I think that is also our duty to give a realist picture to the decision-makers of what they can expect... and it is up to the decision-makers whether they take the risk or not (interview, Budapest, June 2008).

Hence, the role of norm entrepreneurs that the PermRep and the MFA might play in relation to other institutional actors at domestic level takes the limited form of more balanced discourse with regard to contested foreign policy issues. The role of the PermRep

and the MFA in routine foreign policy-making is dominant; only in sensitive issues, touching upon the national interest, other political actors became involved and the issue is open to wide contestation. This point confirms the observation by Kal Holsti (1995: 267) that:

...on routine and non-vital matters (...), the experts and lower officials of policy-making organizations define specific objectives in the light of their own values, needs, and traditions, often through informal alliances with bureaucrats in other countries. (...) In a crisis, where decisions of great consequences have to be made rapidly, the effect of bureaucratic processes may be reduced considerably.

This was the case with the issue of Kosovo declaration of independence in February 2008 for instance. In such a sensitive matter, the role of the PermReps in all three cases was limited and the MFAs attempted to soften the political stances coming from the national executives. In Slovakia, for instance, the political mandate issued by the National Council came to be the official position of the executive, constraining and changing the initial position of the MFA which was obliged to defend this mandate at the level of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (interviews, Brussels, December 2007; CTK 2007; BBC 2007).

### Concluding remarks

This article explores the issues of institutional adaptation and elite socialization in three EU new member states from CEE. The extent of domestic change caused by the Europeanization pressures may be assessed as absorption, accommodation, or transformation. The degree of domestic change is low for absorption, modest for accommodation, and high for transformation (Börzel and Risse 2003: 69-70). The empirical findings presented here support the idea that the participation in the EU foreign policy-making is linked with both institutional change and socialization of foreign policy elite. Also, evidences suggest that neither simple absorption, nor radical transformation, but rather accommodation, best defines the extent of change as being modest.

On the one hand, this was due to the inner nature of European foreign policy. Designed as intergovernmental cooperation, it allows member states a larger space of manoeuvre in the design of national foreign policy-making. Besides, the CFPS chapter negotiated during the accession talks did not really raise any substantial problem, the content of the *acquis politique* in this field being less demanding than other sectoral policies (Edwards 2006: 146). There was an obvious institutional misfit between existing structures and procedures of EU foreign policy and those of the candidate states, but no unique template to emulate.

On the other hand, the European integration had an ambiguous status, eventually reflected in the very design of domestic coordination of European affairs. Even if initially European integration was approached as a matter of foreign policy, it soon became synonymous with profound reform of state, economy, and society (Vachudova 2005). Therefore, other institutional actors challenged the role of foreign affairs ministries in dealing with European integration. Also, differences among political systems and political competition across countries played a key role with regard to the design of institutions and inter-institutional relationships. Hence, despite the fact that European integration provided the incentive for transformation, the structural domestic change was shaped less by Europeanization pressures than by political and inter-institutional competition and emulation of existing models in like-minded member states.

The candidates accommodated EU demands by adapting their existing processes, policies, and institutions without fundamentally altering them. The former permanent missions to

the EU were reorganized as permanent representations, mirroring the internal structure of the Council's working group, and emulating the existing models in other member states. The number of staff and the complexity of the internal organization within foreign affairs ministries were augmented as well.

The sociological institutionalist assumption that socialization of national representatives causes the change of collective understandings and identities is rather weak. There are strong evidences that the new national representatives learned novel norms and rules. However, as Smith (2000: 619) points out, it is too much to expect national officials giving up their national loyalties. Instead, the indicators of a socialization effect might be found in the fact that national elites are more and more familiar with each other's positions and preferences. In addition, national officials learn that national foreign policy is strengthened by political cooperation, not weakened (Smith 2000: 619).

The learning process is part of an acclimatisation to the new policy-making setting. In the initial stage, the national officials learned the rule of the game. In the second stage, they started playing the game, assessing the implications of a particular position in the balance between national and European interest. The collective adherence of national representatives to the procedural norms of compromise, consensus-seeking, avoidance of hard-bargaining does not obscure the instrumental way in which these norms are perceived.

Even if the national officials have a more flexible approach, this is because they know that within the EU framework, a foreign policy position is not formulated in isolation, but in consultation and cooperation with others. These norms are not necessarily seen as right on their own, but as means towards getting out of stalemate and overcoming differences of interest inherent in a Union of 27. Therefore, the role of the PermReps or MFA in the dissemination of EU's norms and rules at domestic level is limited. The highly normatively institutionalized setting of EU foreign policy-making has a constraining effect on the behaviour of national officials. Within this setting, the national representatives behave as rational actors conforming to these norms and rules in order to avoid the costs of illegitimate action while at the same time calculating when conformity is worth the cost of complying and when not (Schimmelfennig 2000).

The perception of power relations within the EU embodies both the view that the larger member states exert a greater influence in the policy process and the acceptance, as fact, that EU membership enhances the standing of a small member. There is a general agreement that different countries, large or small have competing national interests and the common European interest does not always prevail. However, the membership is perceived as allowing a country to pursue more ambitious foreign policy objectives. EU membership offered a new platform to defend national interest, backed by the political and economic weight of the EU. In this case, the power nature of the Europeanization is the "power to" or Europeanization as empowerment. The EU member states have increased access to information, resources and decisions that go beyond what their own capabilities would normally allow (Jørgensen 2004: 48-50). EU membership also offers a stronger standing on the international stage for a member state. Along this logic, a small member states from Central and Eastern Europe might benefit from EU membership more than it might lose. Either way, the agreement on the existence of a power dimension affects the process of socialization. The socialization stands for learning of new norms and rules and their instrumental use.

The primary instrumental view of the EU procedural norms and rules by the national representatives has some wider implications. One aspect is that the primary allegiance of national officials is still towards the national interest. This is most visible in situations where

vital national interests are at stake. Among other striking examples, it is enough to recall the split within the EU caused by the United States' led military intervention in Iraq in 2003, or the division of EU member states on the issue of Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. Another aspect is that the national foreign policy is more influential with accession than before (see Tocci 2004). Before accession, EU membership was the first foreign policy priority of CEE candidate. Once this fundamental goal achieved, the order of priorities of the various national foreign policies of these new states changes as well.

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