

**EUROPEANIZATION OF THE CORE EXECUTIVE IN THE TRANSITION FROM
CIRCUMSTANCES OF EU ACCESSION TO FULL EU MEMBERSHIP**

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Danica Fink-Hafner

Address for correspondence:

Danica Fink-Hafner

Faculty of Social Sciences

Kardeljeva ploscad 5

1000-Ljubljana

SLOVENIA

danica.fink-hafner@quest.arnes.si

ABSTRACT

Only recently have the direct and indirect 'European' impacts (of political outcomes at the European level) on domestic political systems started to be studied (i.e. Spanou, 1998; Bulmer and Burch, 1998 and 2001; Kassim, Peters and Wright, eds. 2000; Goetz and Hix, eds. 2001; Knill, 2001; Schneider and Aspinwall, eds. 2001; Goetz, ed., 2001; Laffan, 2001b). For the purpose of our paper, we understand Europeanization processes as the impacts of EU integration on specific countries' political institution-building and institutional adjustments including constitutional and administrative law, as well as on how the political system is organized and operated.

This paper focuses on one of the three alternative perspectives of the 'top-down' approach to studying the processes of Europeanization as defined by Goetz (2001), namely the linkage perspective. Obviously, for recent new EU member states it is the national administrative adjustments for negotiating accession with the EU that have so far prevailed over national administrative adjustments made in the circumstances of (very recent) full EU membership.

Our comparative research of three EU accession states/recent new EU member states, in line with a dynamic view, include Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia. While taking some key common features of the selected countries into account, the countries' idiosyncrasies including variations in the institutional adaptation of their core executives relying on research findings in the framework of the European project 'Organizing for Enlargement' are investigated. Preliminary comparative research findings and tentative conclusions on variables that may cause variations in the adaptation of national administrations to the European integration challenges in the three (otherwise in some respects) relatively similar countries are presented.

1 INTRODUCTION¹

1.1 Research problem

In this paper we focus on the 'European' impacts (of political outcomes at the European level) on domestic political systems. Europeanization processes are understood as the impacts of EU integration on specific countries' political institution-building and institutional adjustments including constitutional and administrative law, as well as on how the political system is organized and operated. In our paper we focus on one of the three alternative perspectives of the 'top-down' approach to studying Europeanization processes as defined by Goetz (2001), namely the linkage perspective.

The key findings in the existing literature on executive adaptation point to: a) a stagist approach to adaptation as a rule; and b) the continuing diversity of domestic responses to EU engagement (e.g. Kassim, 2000; Knill, 2001; Bulmer and Burch, 2001; Olsen, 2002; Laffan, 2001b and 2003). When looking at the member states of the time, Harmsen (1999) stressed that their administrations had also predominately retained their distinctive structures and operating procedures when dealing with European matters. Bulmer and Burch (1998) also found no strong evidence in the case of the UK of the expectation that the national administrative structures of member states necessarily change substantially due to Europeanization. Spanou (1998) clearly stressed that the Greek politico-administrative system could only follow pre-established paths and features when adjusting to European integration. On the basis of research by Hix and Goetz (2002) and Dimitrakopolous,² Page (2003) expresses doubts that the impact of the EU (Europeanization) is sufficiently powerful to bring about similarities between national coordinating mechanisms.

While these and other authors reveal that in practice Europeanization means the adaptation of national structures, processes and actors and not the replacement of the 'old' national ones with one that is 'European-modeled' in the case of 'Western European' member states, it is still possible to find opposite and quite stereotyped views when looking at accession/new member states. Goetz (2001: 218) is one of the (still relatively rare) authors who warn about the simplistic approach to adapting 'post-Communist executives' to 'the European Administrative space'. In the paper we argue that there are some common features among

¹ This paper is based on research results of the European project 'Organizing for Enlargement: A Challenge for Member States and Candidate Countries' (HPSE-CT-2001-00083), the EU's Fifth Framework Programme (<http://www.oeue.net>).

² Page quotes Dimitrakopolous' Ph.D. thesis (1997) *Beyond Transposition: A Comparative Inquiry into the Implementation of European Public Policy*, University of Hull.

states (societies) which experienced communist party rule, but there are still important variations between them which should be regarded as relevant variables (idiosyncrasies). Without taking these variations into account, variations in how different nations adapt to managing EU matters in these countries cannot be explained.

Following this starting point we believe it is of great value to compare national adaptation to the management of EU affairs where experience with communist rule is just one (a cluster of) variable(s) taken into account. Even here some similarities and patterns in the ways core executives adapt organizationally and procedurally to the challenges of managing EU matters can be found. For example, Laffan (2003) discovered that two variables stand out when explaining variation across six investigated states (three member states of Ireland, Greece, Finland and three newcomer states of Hungary, Slovenia and Estonia) when looking at the level of institutionalization and the relationship between formal and informal processes. Still, the EU newcomer states (Estonia, Slovenia and Hungary) do not fall into the same state clusters when specific characteristics of the institutional adaptation of the executive, procedures and agents for dealing with EU matters are investigated. Despite some already discovered patterns, which factors determine the mode of a national administration's response including structures, actors and processes still need to be thoroughly examined.

The aim of our paper is a preliminary overview of possible variables that cause variations between the three EU new(coming) states in managing EU affairs: Slovenia, Hungary and Estonia. In the *first* part of the paper we describe some key common features of these countries in order to be aware of the (at least to some extent) controlled variables. The *second* part sums up countries' idiosyncrasies including variations in institutional adaptation of their core executives relying on research findings in the framework of the European project 'Organizing for Enlargement'. In the *third* part we examine the role of selected variables we expect to influence the modes and ways of national adaptation in (otherwise in some respects) relatively similar countries. The preliminary comparative research findings and tentative conclusions on the variables that seem to cause variations in how national administrations adapt to European integration challenges are presented.

1.2 Some common features of the institutional adaptation of post-socialist EU-newcomer countries

Europeanization processes are not only limited to EU member states but also embrace states closely connected with the EU. This is especially the case of countries negotiating full EU membership (Goetz, 2001; Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2003; Ágh, 2003). Democratization of

former socialist countries, the collapse of the military-political division of Europe and cleavages between politically defined 'blocs' and economic borders during the Cold War created pressure on the EU to open itself up to new members. In the past fifteen years, most post-socialist countries have been confronted with two main political-institutional challenges, although some have even encountered three major challenges:

- a) building the institutions and practices of a democratic political system and a market economy;
- b) institutional adaptation to Europeanization processes; and
- c) building an independent state including the establishment of institutions previously set up in political centers of the former multinational states to which they used to belong (such as Slovenia and Estonia).

Like older member states, the newcomers have also passed through several stages of 'EU Europeanization' (Lippert, Umbach and Wesseles, 2001). Even in the early stages, the integration of post-socialist countries with the EU started to interfere with the national political systems of these countries. The EU indirectly influenced national political systems and their practices by evaluating and estimating the level of democracy achieved (first in applicant countries and later in candidate countries). Direct institutional adaptation as a result of the co-ordination of EU affairs and implementing of its policies can partly be described as an outcome of EU demands made during the negotiating process and partly as an expression of the economic, political and security interests of those states seeking full EU membership.

While old(er) members of the emerging supranational state were involved in its creation in terms of its polity and policies, the latest newcomers (such as Slovenia, Estonia and Hungary) had to incorporate its policies and institutionally adapt **before** having a say in the formation of the EU. As a result, 'foreign affairs' (relative to the EU) had in fact (in a way) been made 'domestic' before formal EU membership. The impacts of Europeanization processes were already largely reflected in individual states' negotiations on EU integration when candidate states started by gradually building up their institutional relations with the EU. This area is not a novelty in the history of EU enlargement.³

³ Bulmer and Burch (1998a) in their longitudinal research on British institutional adaptation to the EU, for example, ascertained that the most radical changes were accepted in 1960-1961, thus well before the third and successful application of Great Britain to join the EU. Actual integration with the EU at Great Britain's national level triggered 'merely' the (*ad hoc*) adaptation of structures and procedures, which were already developed during the negotiations, to the broader needs of membership but did not trigger any (new) radical institutional changes.

The most obvious need for institutional adaptation at the national level is the *inter-ministerial* co-ordination of EU affairs. This is necessary in the circumstances of full EU membership negotiations and in the conditions of full EU membership. For candidate countries, the need for co-ordination mechanisms derives especially from the inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary nature of EU membership negotiations. Only effective co-ordination at the national level of a candidate state supports successful, qualitative and prompt adaptations to the EU's legislation and adoption of the *acquis communautaire* and, at the same time, partly increases the negotiating strength of individual candidate countries. However, full membership in the supranational structure *sui generis* brings some additional demands for the effective co-ordination of EU affairs at the national level. Namely, due to the specific structure of decision-making procedures in EU institutions the ability of member states to assert their interests in decision-making at the EU level depend on prompt and substantively adequate co-ordination. Therefore, it is very important that all national (governmental) representatives act strategically and coherently at all levels of EU decision-making. However, this is only possible when inter-ministerial national co-ordination is efficient.

From the democratic process and legitimacy points of view, it is important to also look at the bigger picture: not only how the national executive is efficient in managing EU affairs but also to what extent is its decision-making made in relation to other national policy-making institutions and (governmental and non-governmental) actors.

1.3 Common characteristics of Slovenia, Hungary and Estonia

All three countries may be regarded as 'happy and success stories' in several respects (successful transition to democracy, only a minor or no involvement in war, good economic development, in the case of Slovenia and Estonia also the international recognition of new independent states together with their inclusion in various international integrations including European integration processes).

An evaluation of accession states and their achievements relative to various criteria set by the EU had been taking place, but with a variety of results. Slovenia, Hungary and Estonia were among EU accession countries forming a group with relatively favorable socio-economic conditions (Table 1).

Table 1: Selected indicative data on the three states' readiness for EU accession

Candidate state	Population (in mill.) ¹	Size in 1000 km ²	GDP per capita by purchasing power 1997 ³ and 2001 ⁴ (in USD)	% GNP pc from agriculture in 1995 ⁵	Inflation in 1997 ⁶ and 2001 ⁴ (in %)	Country's contribution to EU budget (in 1000 million ECU) ⁷	Country's net receipts from the EU ⁷	EU budget costs (in billion ECU) ⁷
Slovenia	2.0	20	12,755 / 16,000	4.8	9.2 / 8.4	85	124	0.2
Estonia	1.5	45	N/A / 10,000	7.1	10.8 / 5.8	64	364	0.6
Hungary	10.2	93	7,318 / 12,000	7.0	18.2 / 9.2	48	223	2.3

N/A - not available

¹ Agenda 2000, p. 66.

² Agenda 2000, p. 66.

³ Slovenian Economic Mirror 7/98, sources of data reported: OECD, WIIW, IMAD.

⁴ Delo, 13 December 2002, sources of data reported: CIA, Infobase Europe, European Union.

⁵ Transition, World Bank, April 1998, p. 12.

⁶ Inflation (private consumption deflator) in 1997, European Dialogue, No. 1, Jan-Feb. 1998.

⁷ Mencinger, 1995: 37 (source: Brussels, 1994).

In Agenda 2000 it was concluded for all three countries that they had fulfilled the political and economic criteria but needed to do more in both the process of implementing the *acquis* and public administration reform (Table 2).

Table 2: Brief presentation of applicant states' evaluations in *Agenda 2000* (rough estimates of achievements and capacities – in the *Agenda 2000* text accompanied by criticisms and suggestions)

Candidate state	Political criteria	Economic criteria	Aquis	Administrative reform	Final proposal
Slovenia	fulfilled	fulfilled	needs effort	indispensable	positive
Hungary	fulfilled	fulfilled	needs effort	indispensable	positive
Estonia	fulfilled	fulfilled	needs effort	indispensable	positive
Czech Republic	fulfilled	fulfilled	needs effort	indispensable	positive
Poland	fulfilled	fulfilled	needs effort	indispensable	positive
Bulgaria	on the way to fulfilling	limited	uncertain	substantial reform needed	negative
Latvia	satisfactory, but the Russian-speaking part to be better integrated	serious difficulties	with considerable effort should be able	indispensable	negative
Lithuania	fulfilled	serious difficulties	with considerable effort should be able	indispensable	negative
Romania	on the way to satisfying	serious difficulties	uncertain	substantial reform needed	negative
Slovakia	does not satisfy	satisfactory, but needs progress	needs effort	reform is taking place	negative

Source: Fink-Hafner (1999: 791).

2 VARIATIONS IN INSTITUTIONAL AND PROCEDURAL ADAPTATION FOR MANAGING EU AFFAIRS

2.1 Differences between Slovenia, Hungary and Estonia

Despite many similarities between the investigated countries, at least to some extent certain variables can probably help explain the important variations seen in the institutional and procedural adaptation of domestic political systems (primarily executives) to the managing of EU affairs. Kassim (2000) explains very different systems of co-ordination in member states by five characteristics of the domestic polity: policy style; policy ambition; conception of co-ordination; the nature of the political opportunity structure; and the administrative opportunity structure. Bulmer and Burch (2001) - comparing UK and Germany - stress the impact of national traditions of government. Goetz and Wollmann (2001) mention some other possible variables, such as: characteristics of the constitutional system (especially the role and position of the Prime Minister relative to other political institutions), politicization of the public administration, personnel policy (professionalization of staff), hierarchies within government, political constellations and progress in democratic consolidations. Brusis and Dimitrov (2001) added the configuration of core executive institutions (particularly the positions of the prime minister and finance minister). We *hypothesize* that relevant variables include administrative traditions (such as a tradition of a formalized public administration), political culture – especially the (non)existence of consultative politics (including corporatist traditions), frequency of political changes in government and recent historical experience with managing political and policy issues in the framework of a multinational (con)federal state.

Recent experiences within multinational states and membership in international integrations

The investigated countries have relatively different experiences with their recent historical involvement in multinational state functioning. While Hungary has been an independent state, although closely linked to the Soviet Union for an important period of time, Estonia was part of the Soviet Union with quite different relations between its territorial political units than was seen in former Yugoslavia. Since the 1970s Slovenia (like other former Yugoslav republics) were involved in a federal political system as units with specific, constitutionally defined and guaranteed autonomies⁴ (such as a whole range of public policies created and

⁴ The adopting of separate constitutions together with the federal one in 1974, bringing about an important expansion of the republics' autonomy, is often seen by researchers and politicians as an act of establishing the confederal character of the socialist Yugoslav system.

implemented under the republics' jurisdiction and their functioning as confederal units in many respects). The practical autonomy of the federal units, their gradually intensified special political subjectivity, which evolved into the establishment of several political systems within Yugoslavia (e.g. early transition to democracy in Slovenia at a time the federal system was still socialist) made Slovenia learn to behave as a (quasi) state creating negotiating positions for its delegates who were politically struggling and negotiating within federal political institutions across many policy areas especially during the 1980s.

Slovenia (as both part of former Yugoslavia and a non-member of the Eastern bloc) held a special status and relations with the EC earlier than any other socialist country. Economic and social interactions with the EC and its member states were part of Slovenian life even in socialist times, particularly when Yugoslavia signed a special agreement with the EC in 1970. When Slovenia became an independent state in 1991 it continued its economic relations with the EC on the basis of agreements signed by former Yugoslavia. Soon after the EC formally and politically recognized Slovenia (in 1992) the Slovenian project of European integration gained momentum.

In 1991, Estonia regained its independence from the Soviet Union and from that point on it left behind the pattern of relationships established between the Soviet Union and its biggest successors on one hand, and the EC/EU on the other. Due to the idiosyncrasies of the Soviet Union we expect that Estonia's learning process as a relatively autonomous actor within that multinational state cannot be regarded as being similar to Slovenia's.

Hungary is a special case combining: a) characteristics of a state with its own formally established and internationally recognized political-territorial borders; and b) simultaneously its close relations with the Soviet Union (membership in Comecon and the Cold War politically/militarily defined Soviet bloc) disintegrated during the last wave of democratization in Europe.

Table 3: Membership in international integrations

Country	Member of Comecon?	Past membership in world divisions	Splits (S)/rebellions (R) against Soviet dominance	CEFTA member?	Accepted for first wave of NATO enlargement?	Accepted for second wave of NATO enlargement (2004)?
Slovenia - Yugoslavia	no	Non-aligned movement	S 1948	yes	no	yes
Hungary	yes	Soviet bloc	R 1956	yes	yes	/
Czech Republic	yes	Soviet bloc	R 1968	yes	yes	/
Poland	yes	Soviet bloc	R 1956 R 1980	yes	yes	/
Estonia - Soviet Union	yes	Soviet bloc	N/A	no	no	yes

* In 1995 all Baltic states sought CEFTA membership. But an OECD Report published in 1999 noted that Estonia and Latvia were no longer seeking CEFTA membership, while Lithuania intended to join CEFTA once it met the preconditions namely, that the country has concluded an EU Association Agreement, it is a member of the World Trade Organization and it has bilateral trade agreements with all CEFTA members (see <http://www.cefta.org/cefta/invite.htm>, 19.3.2005).

Administrative traditions and political cultural traditions

Comparisons in this area are still difficult to draw in the current stage of research. Research findings available to the author at the time of writing allow some space for a tentative thesis that the administrative traditions in the investigated countries differ enough to consider them as involving a significant variety. While in Slovenia Germanic-influenced traditions persist despite the transition's challenges to democracy and some attempts to introduce culture and more stable patterns of co-ordination and new public management approaches, it seems that in Hungary the continental type of public administration involving institutionalization and formalization lost momentum during the transition to a democracy and the early stage of democratic consolidation to start reappearing in the later stage of consolidation (Ágh and Rózsás, 2003: 36). Drechsler (2004) stresses that the Estonian public administration is still significantly in the stage of establishing itself as a fully professional and functioning public administration.

Also when looking at the political culture of individual countries many differences can be identified. It is especially indicative to look at the (non)existence of consultative politics – including corporatist traditions. Here Slovenia stands out as a case of quite a strong and old tradition of consultative, particularly corporatist traditions.⁵ Already in the mid-1990s Ágh (1996: 245) described the new Slovenian situation as being 'closest to the Austrian' one in the Central and Eastern European region. Hungary has had many active NGOs which have

⁵ These traditions are closely linked to Slovenia's historical interlinking with the Germanic world – especially long-term living under Austrian rule.

not been fully incorporated into consultative politics. Attempts at establishing a 'corporatist' way of making and implementation policies have been made, but under the various governments it seems this has not developed in a way comparable to the Slovenian example. Estonia is usually cited as an example of a post-socialist country with few civil initiatives, NGOs as well as weak democratic traditions in that sense (e.g. Kaldor and Vejvoda, 1999: 19-20; Ruutsoo, 1996: 101).

Frequency of political changes in government

Slovenia's and Hungary's modes of transition to a democracy are often regarded as a combination of pressure from the bottom (replacement) and adaptation from the top (transformation), meaning transplacement. Although Estonia similarly experienced oppositional movements and oppositional proto parties during the last years of the 1980s as well as the reforming of the old elite under such pressure, the special feature of its 'singing revolution' was the outstanding struggle to regain the status of an independent state (Ruus, 1999; Mikkel, 2004) and the persistent ethnic cleavage in politics involving the relationship between the Estonian state and the relatively large Russian minority. Slovenia's prime struggle for economic and political change interfered with the struggle for an independent state only when the required changes could not gain enough political consensus between the republic's political elites and the federal elite within the federal state (former Yugoslavia).

While the transitions to democracy were not extremely different in the three countries (they were all gradual and non-violent), the political dynamics seen after their first elections have not been as comparably similar. On the surface this is reflected in differences in the dynamics of changes in government. Probably the special features of the political systems involved, including the electoral system, do play a role in this but for the purposes of our paper we will only look at changes in government.

While Slovenia had the same centre-party led coalition governments in the 1992-2004 period with just a six-month break in 2000, Estonia only experienced an intermezzo of a government of experts (March 1997-March 1999) in otherwise the same Prime Minister-led right governments (October 1992-November 1994 and March 1999-January 2002).⁶ Hungary is an exception here with its clear ideological shifts in governments.

⁶ In Slovenia the leading party Liberal Democracy of Slovenia had been gaining more and more support by the 2000 parliamentary elections (it then won 36.2% of the votes), but it lost the 2004 parliamentary elections (Fink-Hafner, 2002; Fink-Hafner, 2004; Ramet and Fink-Hafner, eds., in print). In Estonia right parties have kept gaining increasing electoral support since the first free elections,

Table 4: Selected key characteristics of constitutional and political developments in the transition to a democracy in Slovenia, Estonia and Hungary

Country	Mode of transition to democracy	Constitutional system	Creating a new independent state?	Change in government during the process of EU integration
Slovenia (Yugoslavia)	transplacement	parliamentary	yes	no significant change by the end of 2004
Hungary	transplacement	parliamentary	no	shifts in government
Estonia (Soviet Union)	transplacement (elements of "ruptura")	parliamentary	yes	intermediate government of experts within a longer period of the same PM-led governments

2.2 Models of executive adaptation

Key models

The primary distinction between centralized and decentralized models of managing EU affairs is: a) the presence/absence of one (strong) central co-ordination unit with responsibility for co-ordinating the work of all sectoral departments; and b) the presence/absence of several co-ordination units across the national administrative system, which are mutually intertwined. The third, federal model of co-ordinating EU issues at the national level is peculiar since it expresses the complex structure of states with federal arrangements⁷ that demand specific adaptations.

On this basis, EU member states can be seen as belonging to three models with regard to the co-ordination of EU affairs at the national level: *centralized, decentralized and federal models*. A variety of decentralized and centralized models can be found along the continuum from the relative or even complete autonomy of particular ministries (the lead ministry principle) to the focal role of a central governmental department (office) for co-ordinating EU issues. The centralized model reflects its key concept that the organization and co-ordination of inter-sectoral negotiations and harmonization within a member state and managing of negotiations at all levels in Brussels are conducted by one department (office), independent or directly subordinate to the Prime Minister, and which ensures congruency in the work of individual ministries. On the contrary, the decentralized model of co-ordinating EU affairs is based on the principle of the autonomy of individual ministries and absence of any central governmental department as the only body responsible for inter-sectoral co-ordination within a member state or for preparing common national positions to be advocated in EU

winning as much as 49.8% of the votes at the 2003 parliamentary elections (Ruus, 1999; Mikkel, 2004).

⁷ In those states political decisions and implementation responsibilities are divided between regional units and the federal level.

institutions on behalf of its representatives. Hence, in the decentralized model each ministry is responsible for co-ordination within its own policy field.

Prime Minister versus Minister for Foreign Affairs centrality in the three countries

Slovenia

The co-ordination of European affairs in Slovenia developed in response to needs emerging in the integration process. In the beginning of the process each department worked on its own field while some attempts to coordinate the management of EU business remained ineffective. A relatively dispersed and decentralized system needed to be adapted in circumstances of the greater intensity and deepening of European integration. In December 1997 a special independent office was established – the Government Office for European Affairs, which was led by a Minister without portfolio. New Office took over the personnel, tasks and main facilities of the former Office for European Affairs located within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Government Office for European Affairs⁸ took on responsibility for managing and co-coordinating the entire process of Slovenia's accession to the EU. When the Office was established (December 1997) it started operating with 17 employees, but by spring 2002 it expanded already to a total of 117 employees. Parallel to that Office, the Negotiating team of the Republic of Slovenia for Accession to the European Union was formed, as were 31 Working Groups for preparing negotiation positions. At the end of 1997 and start of 1998 therefore a key, radical change brought about a shift towards a centralized system of "EU" co-ordination, as well as the outset of tendencies toward systemic *internalization* of European business.

The line ministers remained the "lead ministers" in articulation of national positions on particular EU issues ministers. Different departments have established various forms of internal coordination, but they all emphasized informal contacts as well. The newly established Government Office for European Affairs became a focal point on the EU gained responsibility to ensure the effective co-operation and circulation of information among individual departments (horizontal co-ordination), as well as coherence and consistency on different EU policy issues.

⁸ Within the Office, among other units, also a special Department for Negotiations was established.

The Europeanization process has not caused any substantial changes to the administrative structure of the Prime Minister's role, nor the role of his Office.⁹ "European duties" were simply added to PM's and Council of Ministers' functions. Within the PM's Office no special EU department was established. During the negotiating process, the Prime Minister represented the top of the 'co-ordination pyramid' on European business. He did not pay much attention to day-to-day issues and questions of organizational capacity. He mostly focused on strategic issues and therefore did not go into the details of EU matters.¹⁰ The Prime Minister generally left the daily co-ordination of European business to the Minister of European Affairs. Notwithstanding this, because of the high complexity and intensity of Europeanization processes he maintained constant links with the key people, i.e. particularly with ministers (and to a smaller extent also with state secretaries) from other relevant departments.¹¹

The Mission of the Republic of Slovenia to the EU, formally accredited to EU in 1993, was adapted and set up in 1998 in the sense of preparing for accession negotiations. As a specific, atypical diplomatic representation it became the central node of Slovenia's administration in Brussels taking care of effective (formal and informal) communication and the circulation of information between Ljubljana and Brussels. By 2003 it had grown considerably and transformed into the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia to the EU.

Some elements of polycentrism in the institutional practice produced various institutional interests and ideas during the accession period about the future development of the 'Slovenian model' of co-ordinating EU affairs (despite the elaborated co-ordinating mechanisms), which to some extent complicated the political decision on the reform needed. These alternative ideas were mostly reflected in different preferences conditional on specific

⁹ The Slovenian Prime Minister leads, directs and co-ordinates the work and is responsible for whole government's functioning.

¹⁰ The Prime Minister's main responsibility in co-ordinating EU business at the national level was therefore mostly to resolve any inter-ministerial conflicts and to interpose himself between ministries where there were different positions on specific EU issues. In this context, whenever the pre-accession or negotiation process required inter-ministerial co-ordination the so-called European meeting (collegiate body) of the government was convened for all ministers in question. This European collegiate body was regarded as a political co-ordination of the Prime Minister, which only dealt with strategic issues of Slovenia's accession to the EU and directed the preparations for negotiations. It was convened as required and comprised the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, European Minister, Finance Minister and a member of the Negotiating Team. Any other members attending the meeting were invited in accordance with a particular emphasis on current or prospective issues on the agenda.

¹¹ The most important departments here were the Government Office for European Affairs, the Negotiating Team of the Republic of Slovenia for Accession to the EU, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance.

interests, as well as on external pressures. Four main alternatives of adaptation in the circumstances of full EU membership were articulated by spring 2002, but they were not all formalized by way of elaborated alternative solutions. These alternatives were as follows:

- establishment of a central co-ordination unit, either independent or directly subordinate to the Prime Minister (a kind of reformed Government Office for European Affairs);
- establishment of a special department or sector within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- establishment of a special department or sector within another ministry (for example finance); or
- shifting the central co-ordination role to the jurisdiction of the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Slovenia to the EU.

While the government led by the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) decided to institutionalize the central co-coordinating unit (the reformed Government Office for European Affairs) in February 2003 and to maintain a Minister without portfolio, the change in government at the end of 2004 brought about the abolition of this ministerial position as well as the Government Office for European Affairs despite the serious criticism of this made by the LDS. The State Secretary responsible for European affairs became a member of the Prime Minister's Cabinet.¹²

Hungary

Unlike Slovenia, which experienced gradual institutionalization and procedural adaptation of the management of European affairs predominantly to answer the challenges of specific stages in the European integration process in a climate of a broad political consensus, in Hungary the politicization of European matters contributed to institutional and procedural shifts under several governments. While the dominant role of the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* significantly characterized the management process, Ágh and Rózsás (2003: 22) stressed that in the early 1990s the management of EU business was 'two centered' involving the Office of European Affairs in the Ministry of Industry and Trade as well as the European Union Department of the Foreign Ministry. The division of labor was defined by the responsibility of the Office of European Affairs for European issues related to trade, economics, legislation and assistance programs and the Foreign Ministry's care of diplomatic

¹² Marcel Koprol, former diplomatic Head of the Mission of the Republic of Slovenia in Brussels, was named Head of the Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for European Affairs within the Prime Minister's cabinet on 14 December 2004 (http://www.gov.si/svez/1_predstavitev/0_sekretar_slo.php, accessed on 22 December 2004).

and political relations with the EU. Due to growing rivalry between the two institutions the management of EU business was not optimum.¹³

When a detailed Commission questionnaire had to be answered the domestic system had to adapt to the need of supplying and collation of the information required from all ministries. In this situation the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became the key co-ordinator although the Ministry of Trade and Industry remained in the inner circle of the executive's involvement in managing EU affairs. In February 1996 the European Integration Agreement Cabinet, composed of the ministers of Foreign Affairs, Interior, Justice, Economy and Finance, chaired by the Prime Minister, was established. A Strategic Task Force on Integration in the framework of the Prime Minister's Office was established to give advice to the Integration Cabinet. Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the State Secretariat for Integration (SSI) was established in 1996. While the European Integration Cabinet briefed Prime Minister Horn on EU issues which could not be solved at lower levels, the State Secretariat for Integration took care of the central administrative and co-ordinating functions (formerly dealt with by the former Office of European Affairs and the European Union Department (Ágh and Rózsás, 2003: 23). For cross-sectoral policy co-ordination the Interministerial Committee for European Integration (ICEI) was established. These structures were later altered by the Orbán and Medgyessy governments.

Changes in Hungarian governments (beside the changing circumstances and challenges of specific stages in the European integration process) brought about variations in: a) involvement by the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister in managing European Affairs; b) government policy on Europe; and, at least recently c) in the level of politization of European matters.

Under the *Horn* government (1994-1998) the State Secretariat for Integration in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs played the principle co-ordinating role. At the same time, the Integration Cabinet of the Prime Minister facilitated the significant involvement of the Prime Minister and a select set of governmental institutions and cadre.

The *Orbán* government (1998-2002) abolished both the Integration Cabinet and Task Force and established a Department of European Integration in the Prime Minister's Office together with a special new section in the PM's Office (headed by a minister without portfolio). Ágh and Rózsás (2003: 31) stressed that the Orbán government's majoritarian approach created

¹³ Estimation by Ágh and Rózsás (2003: 22) on the basis of research by Krisztina Vida (published in 2002).

an administrative institutional dualism between the Centre of Government and the State Secretariat for Integration. The authors also estimated that, due to the absence of the Integration Cabinet during Orbán's term, the government's role in taking the final EU policy decision was only limited to the Prime Minister's decisions in exceptional circumstances.

In order to acquire a more direct role in managing the EU process, the Medgyessy government (2002-) *enhanced the role of the Prime Minister and his office*. In that way the political and administrative dualism seen in the Orbán times was abolished. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Secretariat for Integration and External Economic Relations are still involved in the core process of managing EU affairs, albeit not exclusively.

The late stage of the accession process (the period after 2002) brought about new demands in the management of EU business. Structures and processes need to be adapted to full EU membership.

Estonia

In 1995 when Estonia became the first post-communist country with the status of associate member without any transition period, a special EU unit (the Group of the European Union) was established at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of European Affairs without portfolio was created. Due to 'the growing pressures on legal harmonization and problems in the functioning of the co-ordination structure' (Drechsler et al., 2003: 3) it was the Prime Minister who took over managing EU matters. The Estonian Negotiation Delegation involved representatives of each ministry (except the Ministry of Defense), the Office for European Integration, the Prime Minister's Office and the Estonian Mission to the EU (based in Brussels). Thirty-three negotiation working groups prepared analyses which formed the basis for shaping the negotiating positions of the main delegation. It was the Minister of Foreign Affairs (the Chief Negotiator) who presented negotiating positions to the government and later also consulted the Parliament.

Since the dual internal structures in preparations for joining the EU and for negotiations with the EU occasionally created difficulties these had to be resolved. On the basis of empirical research, Drechsler et al. (2003: 8) estimate there has been a clear shift towards a co-ordination model centered on the Prime Minister since 2002 (starting with the new Kallas government in the same year). The 2003 government reform identified the Prime Minister as the centre of co-ordination while maintaining the decentralized system of individual ministries.

2.4 Public Administration Styles

Slovenia

One of the most useful indicators of EU demands on particular domestic departments for the candidate countries was the contents of separate (each and every one of 31) negotiating chapters, which reflected the salience of the EU in a particular policy area. In Slovenia, the government appointed 31 working groups in line with the various negotiating chapters, comprising representatives of individual ministries and other relevant institutions. The working groups were responsible, together with the negotiating team and if necessary external experts and independent institutions, for preparing negotiating positions and other platforms for negotiations on a particular chapter. The head of a working group was usually a higher official (i.e. state secretary) of a ministry or other government institution that was responsible for the chapter in question.¹⁴

¹⁴ The preparation of a negotiating position started within the relevant Working Group. The Working Group first prepared a *draft negotiating position* based on the results of multilateral and bilateral screenings and the current situation in an individual negotiating chapter. Even in this initial phase of preparation, external experts and institutions were invited to take part in preparing the draft negotiating position by providing their opinions and positions on a particular substantive area. Because the main responsibility for preparing a negotiating position remained with the line ministries, the minister responsible for an individual area confirmed the draft negotiating position. After that confirmation, pressure groups also became involved in shaping the negotiating position by submitting their opinions and proposals.

On the proposal of the relevant minister, the draft negotiating position was then submitted to the Negotiating Team. Representatives of the relevant Working Group and the Negotiating Team then prepared the *proposed negotiating position* together based on several working meetings and other (including informal) forms of co-operation (usually about five meetings and several discussions, depending on the chapter's complexity). The Head of the Negotiating Team, a member of the Negotiating Team responsible for the given chapter, and the editing group of the Department for Negotiations within the Government Office for European Affairs participated in editing the negotiating position. External experts from individual fields were again invited to co-operate in this phase. If the drafting of a proposed negotiating position required inter-ministerial co-ordination, the Prime Minister mediated and convened a 'European Meeting' of the Government for all ministers concerned. At this point, the Mission of the Republic of Slovenia made another important contribution to the negotiating position by providing substantive as well as editorial comments on the negotiating position.

The proposed negotiating position was then discussed by two government committees: the Committee for Economic Affairs and the Committee for State Administration and Public Affairs. After being adopted by the Government, the negotiating positions were presented to non-governmental organizations and trade union representatives. After this, the Government submitted the negotiating position to the National Assembly where it was discussed by the relevant working bodies and eventually approved by the Committee on Foreign Policy. This verification only followed the translation of the negotiating position into English, prepared within the Department for Negotiations or the Translation Unit of the Government Office for European Affairs. Therefore, the negotiating positions were packed and prepared for their 'journey' to Brussels. The Negotiating Team and the Government Office for European Affairs then submitted through the Slovenian Mission in Brussels the English version of the negotiating positions to the Council.

The composition of individual working groups reflected the complexity of the Europeanization process. It is true that some working groups were more or less completely sectorally composed, but in fact they were mainly inter-sectoral. Moreover, in some of them almost all ministries were included. The analysis of the composition of these working groups shows that besides the national 'core-core' and 'first inner core' executive the greatest levels of Europeanization can also be found in the so-called 'second inner core' executive, namely: 1) the Ministry of the Economy; 2) the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food; and 3) the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning.

So as to intensify the efficiency of intra-departmental co-ordination, in October 1995 the Government of the Republic of Slovenia obliged all ministries and other governmental institutions to establish special units within particular departments for handling European business. As a result, some ministries established new so-called 'EU Units', while others just added some additional duties to units already existing within their departments. These 'EU Units' differ essentially by status, name, size and responsibilities. While some have altogether merely technical or co-ordination functions, others also have quite substantive functions. Some thus have the status of a full and completely independent directorate, whereas others merely have some small divisions or even only one employed official for co-ordinating EU matters. In some departments they even recently abolished such 'EU Units'. Therefore, today in Slovenia not all ministries have special units for handling EU matters.

In the complicated web of institutions and roles, the *informal* contacts in vertical and horizontal communications have significantly rectified the (somewhat) rigid and inefficient formal channels and ways of communicating. Due to the challenge of managing European matters new ways of work in the public administration have developed – more co-ordination and team-work. Due to a strategy of adding European business to the existing tasks of officials the 'internalization' of EU affairs has prevailed over the creation of a special EU-knowledgeable elite.

Hungary

It is interesting that the administrative structures established in 1996 for managing EU business in Hungary have largely remained stable, although their operation has been influenced by both the various steps in the accession process which demanded ever more comprehensive institutional structures during the 1990s and by the styles of the various governments (Ágh and Rózsás, 2003: 21). The critical junction was the European Agreement which stimulated the establishment of three institutions (the Association Council, the

Association Committee and the Joint Parliamentary Committee).¹⁵ During implementation of the Europe Agreement a variety of working bodies was set up in line with specific chapters and obligations in the Agreement.

The formal engagement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been unique in comparison to other segments of the Hungarian public administration. Despite the fact that Hungary's public administration is based on a continental tradition involving institutionalization and formalization, the EU part of the administration has developed processes and procedures which differ from a general national administration pattern (Ágh and Rózsás, 2003: 36).¹⁶

In the central public administration 'an EU elite' of civil servants was created. This was possible in circumstances where no radical change in the government brought about changes in the group of civil servants working on EU issues or among diplomatic staff in Hungary's Mission to the European Union, including the Mission's head. In addition, the ministerial attachés were assigned to their posts for longer than six years – contrary to the normal diplomatic service of four- to five-year posts. The EU managing elite developed into an island of (better paid) expertise, continuity and well developed personal contacts in circumstances of frequent changes in government. The EU part of the public administration became so specific that Nunberg (quoted by Ágh and Rózsás, 2003: 40) described that split as a 'deep fragmentation' of the Hungarian public administration.

Negotiations mostly took place in informal meetings with the European Commission's Services, ambassadors and staff members of the permanent representations of member states. The Chief Negotiator prepared proposals for the government (additionally informed via his personal contacts with his counterparts in Brussels) on the basis of his assessment of the specific situation (Ágh and Rózsás, 2003: 36).

¹⁵ The Association Council, the Association Committee and the Joint Parliamentary Committee (Ágh and Rózsás, 2003: 21–2)

¹⁶ The authors stress that the continental tradition was weakened during the transition to a democracy and market economy but there is some evidence of its re-emergence in a later (more stable) period. Vass (2000: 230) warns that far too rigid hierarchy and the organization of Hungarian public administration must be eased and that it should also be aware of dangers when introducing new public management approaches. Vass (2000: 228) quotes the OECD newsletter (The Public Management Forum) "the introduction of public management innovations based on new public management theory, applied in particular in English speaking OECD countries, has led to a decrease in levels of coordination".

Estonia

The key characteristics of the Estonian public administration (a newly evolving public administration of a small state) have been its limited size, the personalization of roles and information pathways (Drechsler et al., 2003: 13, 17). Researchers do not agree on whether this is simply a transitional feature of a developing state or whether it is to remain a permanent characteristic of the small state. Still, general decentralization seems to remain an important feature of the Estonian public administration after the March 2003 reform.¹⁷

According to the quoted research (Drechsler et al., 2003: 12) European issues are often handled in Estonia in line with the regular order and usual hierarchies as established in the ministries. Even when taking into account difficulties in broad horizontal co-ordination among ministries the opinion so far prevails that there is no need for the further formalization of procedures. What has instead been discovered is that the accession process helped better introduce a *co-ordination culture* into the Estonian civil service. Still the organization's problem of significant unrecorded information loss remains due to the personalization of the predominantly informal process.

After 1996 Estonian domestic structures started their institutional adaptation. Since co-ordinating functions were divided between the State Chancellery (involving the Office of European Integration, the Council of Senior Civil Servants, the European Union Information Secretariat) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (involving the Under-Secretary for European Integration, the Department of European Integration, the Estonian Mission to the EU) a dual structure for managing EU matters evolved.

Since nearly all ministries took part in the negotiating process in some way, almost all civil servants in every central government institution (ministries, agencies, boards, inspectorates etc.) were involved in EU matters to a certain extent. For the intermediation and exchange of information between ministers, the Council of Senior Civil Servants (CSCS) was established in 1996 and developed into the main forum for the horizontal management of EU issues – on 1 March 2003 it was officially renamed the Interministerial Co-ordination Council.

During the negotiating stage the management of EU affairs involving strong ministries responsible for harmonization of the law led to extensive decentralization (Drechsler et al.,

¹⁷ Viks and Randma-Liiv 2003 (quoted by Drechsler et al., 2003: 15–6) even stress that 'currently there is no centre competence for the civil service which would have the capacity for disseminating know-how and developing the general rules and guidelines needed in a decentralized system'.

2003: 5). On the basis of a 1996 Government order all ministries were obliged to establish special units or indicate a special person responsible for EU business. Only recently (in 2001 and 2002 according to interview findings presented in Drechsler et al., 2003: 11) has it been recognized at the ministerial level that EU matters should be part of the everyday work of most ministerial officials.

On the whole, Estonia has combined a *decentralized and elitist* approach to managing EU business. While it has avoided the potentially problematic emergence of 'islands of excellence' dealing with the EU it is still possible to recognize the positions of a group of key personnel within EU-related co-ordination structures, which have been surprisingly stable – a phenomenon *atypical* for Estonia (according to research by Viks and Randma-Liiv, 2003, as quoted by Drechsler et al., 2003: 14). In addition, Estonia still faces the problem of strategic planning within ministries and a lack of co-ordination (Drechsler et al., 2003: 11 quoting the 2003 SIGMA report on Estonia). This last shortfall has even been described as the main problem of the Estonian civil service by both the European Commission and the OECD (Drechsler et al., 2003: 15–6).

2.5 Transparency: the roles of parliament and civil society

Slovenia

One of Slovenia's distinctive features is its commitment to the principle of full transparency in integration with the EU. The publication of all negotiating positions, the important role of the Parliament and participation of civil society characterized Slovenia's negotiating style. It is a commonly accepted belief¹⁸ and overall assessment that the Slovenian national management of EU business was not only extremely transparent but also relatively effective.

Slovenia is quite special compared to other candidate states with its stress on Parliament's role in managing EU affairs. Namely, the new Slovenian political system based on a parliamentary constitutional spirit also remained crucial in the otherwise pragmatic institutional adaptation to Europeanization. The discussion and approval of negotiating positions by the National Assembly also made the process transparent in terms of the control and (co)decisions of legislative power in relation to the executive.

¹⁸ Perception held by interviewees (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2003).

As a result of the political elite's broad consensus,¹⁹ to some extent the process of Europeanization has also provided Slovenia's political system with a completely new value: the excellent circulation of information and overall relationship with regard to EU accession between the executive and the National Assembly's working bodies. These assessments only involve co-ordination matters and not contents (for example, the quality of bills proposed by the government). But this is still a real curiosity for the Slovenian system since relationships and especially information flows between the National Assembly and executive have often otherwise been described as unsatisfactory.

Although the Europeanization process can be seen as elite-led (involving co-operation between parties in government and oppositional parties) in Slovenia it also involved civil society. Even in the negotiating structures, the Slovenian corporatist tradition is visible.²⁰ Besides the presence of experts and representatives of employers and employees in 31 working groups, we can talk about the practical role of civil society in preparing the negotiating positions. This was also possible due to public presentations of the negotiating positions (special presentations to specific interested publics, target groups – such as non-governmental organizations and full presentations on the Internet), which opened up extra opportunities for civil society activities.

Hungary

Even though Hungary was the first Central European post-socialist country to establish a Parliamentary Committee on European Community Affairs in 1992 (Ágh and Rózsás, 2003: 40) this symbolic political move did not evolve into an important practical role for the Hungarian parliament in managing EU affairs. Due to the broad support of parliamentary parties for integration with the EU, EU matters were mainly discussed in a 'technical' and apolitical way.²¹ Ágh (1999: 840) estimated that government proposals passed through parliament with relative ease.

¹⁹ Besides that, integration with the EU has been seen as a common political (governmental and oppositional) task of elites. In these circumstances, the Slovenian government recognized the relatively great importance of involving the National Assembly in European affairs. This is why the Slovenian parliament has had a *unique* and very important role in European affairs compared to other parliaments in candidate countries. It follows EU business closely and exerts quite a large influence on the Slovenian government.

²⁰ The corporatist tradition in Slovenian territory has long roots, starting already in the times of the Habsburg Empire. It even persisted in institutional arrangements of »the political system of self-managing socialism« and was revived in the political system established on the basis of the 1991 Constitution.

²¹ Ágh and Rózsás (2003: 42–3) warn that recent opposition (Orbán's) criticism of the EU and negative consequences of EU membership could put pressure on the Medgyessy government (with its small majority in parliament) to develop a more consensual approach in order to ensure enough

The second parliament (after the 1994 elections) replaced the Parliamentary Committee on European Community Affairs with the Committee on European Integration Affairs which examined Hungary's relations with the EU and monitored implementation of the Association Agreement as well as preparations for full membership. Ágh and Rózsás (2003: 40) revealed that even the special parliamentary Committee on European Integration Affairs lacked the interest, expertise, language knowledge and financial resources for an effective role. Further, it was also one of the least influential standing committees in the parliament (Ágh, 1999).

Written negotiating positions were approved by the government. Since the Orbán government was eager to complete the accession negotiations as quickly as possible, requests for derogations were kept to a minimum. Despite the fact that EU accession was broadly publicly supported (including sectoral interests) there was criticism of the absence of representation of the various interests and territorial actors in the process of managing EU issues. By 2001 criticism of the results of negotiations also emerged. The limited role of parliament added to the problematic lack of communication channels for organized interests (Ágh, 1999). Although the second parliament (1998-2002) allowed co-operation with civil society and opened the possibility for other MPs and party leaders to participate in the Committee for European Integration Affairs, this practice has not developed due to a lack of formal rules on participation. It was not before 2002 that the parliament succeeded in achieving a consensus to establish the Grand Committee on European Integration composed of the leaders of all parliamentary parties, the chairs of relevant parliamentary committees and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ágh and Rózsás, 2003: 41). The division of labor between the Grand Committee and the Committee for European Integration Affairs lies in splitting strategic decisions on EU matters (the Grand Committee) from the monitoring and implementation of the European Agreement and harmonization of legislation.

Estonia

Like in Hungary the Estonian parliament (*Riigikogu*) mostly only accepted and 'rubberstamped' the accession policy defined by the government (Drechsler et al., 2003: 8). Among the Riigikogu's adaptations of Estonian integration with the EU the creation of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the European Union is also mentioned together with the parliamentary European Affairs Committee. Some influence was exerted by the

parliamentary support for certain remaining legislation, which can only be passed by a two-thirds majority. In this way EU matters have become more politicized since the 2002 change in government.

parliamentary Rural Affairs Committee and the Finance Committee on certain opinions of the European Affairs Committee.

In the end it was the government which, after *informing* the parliament, decided on the nation's negotiating position. A more recent adaptation of the executive has reinforced the concentration of power in the ministries, which not only produces more difficulties in horizontal co-ordination but has also further weakened the already very weak role of the parliament (Drechsler et al., 2003: 17).

The managing of European matters has not been very transparent in Estonia. Drechsler et al. (2003: 13) stressed that quite often the public was not even informed of negotiating positions until the closing of specific negotiating chapters. In fact, official information on the negotiating positions was *confidential!* Like in Hungary, in Estonia the strong concentration of the management of EU matters in the executive also exacerbated the weaknesses of the democratic process.

Official Estonian prioritisation of EU matters within the core executive was also not matched by the widespread engagement of non-governmental organizations in Estonia (Drechsler et al., 2003: 14). Even after the establishment of a special consultative body (the Foreign Minister's Consultative Committee) in November 1999 for interest groups' and citizens' participation their involvement in preparations for EU integration did not increase significantly. With the exception of some interest groups which recognized their interests and had both the resources and opportunities to influence the decision-making process, other interest groups and the wider public remained disengaged. Drechsler et al. (2003: 15) warn that in the post-membership period this cannot be sustained because 'successful engagement with the EU relies not only on core-executive management but also on the ability of domestic economies and societies to live with the EU following membership'. Still, the problem of civil society's engagement in managing EU affairs is not peculiar to just these issues. Viks and Randma-Liiv, 2003 (quoted in Drechsler et al., 2003: 16–7) stress that there is almost no tradition in the democratic process.

3 COMPARISONS AND TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

3.1 The importance of an interdisciplinary and dynamic approach to the research

Our preliminary research has tried to combine political science approaches with some insight into the public administration aspects of political systems. The first impression is that this

combination of research approaches may be fruitful for research on political system adaptations to the challenges of external Europeanization pressures.

As we have shown, the institutional and procedural adaptations to the Europeanization processes in the three investigated countries have so far differed significantly although a tendency of a Prime Minister-led model is obvious in all of them. Research into these systemic adaptations obviously cannot ignore the viable dynamism in the area of research. Institutional and administrative structures created in the process of the accession negotiations are now the starting points for the adaptation of new member states to full EU-membership – a shift from policy-taking to policy-making.

Despite the many similarities between the three investigated EU newcomer/new member states' characteristics of their national administrations, these adaptations vary to an important extent. Such variations cannot be explained by simply taking into account the general experience of transition to a democracy which has quite often been described by a stereotyped socialist past and simultaneous reforms in many social sub-systems. So what are the dissimilarities and possible explanations of the very different paths taken in adaptation of the national core executive and administrations (given the similarities between the three countries sharing multiple transitions, parliamentary constitutional choice, a relatively high level of wealth, very similar and mostly positive evaluations by the Commission when assessing satisfaction of the accession criteria as well as recent claims that they have become consolidated democracies)?

3.2 The role of national administration traditions and cultures

According to the preliminary research findings it seems there is some correlation between a public administration tradition on one hand and the public administration adaptation mode as well as European co-ordination style in individual countries on the other (Table 5). Both of these also seem to correlate with the (non)existence of a special, relatively isolated EU-elite within the national public administration.

Table 5: Consultation and co-ordination processes when dealing with EU matters

	Public administration tradition	Public administration adaptation	Creation of EU-elite within PA	Co-ordination style (Laffan, 2004)
Slovenia	continental (Germanic influences)	general internalization of European affairs	dispersion of expertise and communication	growing centralization/ formalization combined with socialization
Hungary	weakened continental	fragmentation (island of excellence)	elite group of EU officials	centralization/ socialization
Estonia	small size decentralized	segmentation (strong ministries) lacking horizontal coordination	person-centered expertise and communication	decentralization/ socialization

Although it seems that the special features of national administration traditions and cultures do influence institutional adaptation (institutional organization, procedures and agents), they do not fully explain the adaptation to Europeanization processes. For example, Drechsler et al. (2004) stress that dealing with European issues as a political priority obtained a very special status and characteristics in Estonia. Atypically for Estonia, the positions of key personnel within the EU-related co-ordination structures have been surprisingly stable while the accession process has no doubt helped to introduce more of a co-ordination culture into the Estonian civil service (ibidem, p. 14). Similarly, political consensus on European integration in Slovenia depoliticized the area of dealing with European matters – unlike other fields of administration and politics/policies (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2003). Still, only in Hungary was an island of EU experts created in circumstances where, for all three countries, European integration was a national political priority.

3.3 The role of recent historical experience of managing political and policy issues in the framework of a multinational (con)federal state

We believe that the recent historical experience of managing political and policy issues in the framework of a multinational (con)federal state may provide a know-how basis for possible use within the European supranational political system. Unfortunately, at this stage of our research we are unable to more closely empirically test the hypothesis that Slovenia's idiosyncratic experiences of pursuing national interests within the confederal socialist Yugoslavia (especially experiences from the 1980s) helped it in its comparatively quick and integral adaptation of the executive and public administration to new European challenges.

3.4 Political shifts in governments as an explanatory variable

In addition to national administrative and political cultural traditions perhaps the political shifts seen in the various governments also reflect specific ways of adapting to new challenges

when managing EU matters. Hungary is an interesting case in point. It has developed an 'island' of a special, politically 'untouchable' elite within the executive and public administration pursuing the national priority of quick accession to the EU. In the two other countries the relative stability of ideologically similar and for nearly all the time the same PM-led governments seem to have allowed more clear-cut expressions of public administration traditions when managing EU affairs.

Table 6: Political changes in governments and selected characteristics of managing EU affairs in Slovenia, Estonia and Hungary

	Political-elite change	Core management of EU affairs*	Mode of co-ordination	New institutionalization versus new administrative culture
Slovenia	long-term, centre-left-led coalition governments	Prime Minister-led	centralization	general development of co-ordination procedures and culture
Hungary	left/right change in government	Foreign Ministry-led with a recent tendency to Prime Minister-led	concentration into an island of Europeanization	predominant development of isolated coordination culture
Estonia	long-term, centre-right coalition governments	Prime Minister-led	maintaining a decentralized mode	development of segmented co-ordination culture

* based on a typology by Laffan (2003: 8–9) and country reports within the European project Organizing for Enlargement

3.5 Political cultural traditions matter

Political culture traditions seem to be quite an important factor in political elites' decisions on opening up EU negotiating and accession matters for public discussion. When looking at the selected countries it is especially corporatist traditions (which in Slovenia survived even within the 'political system of socialist self-management') that appear to make an important difference.

Table 7: Consultation and co-ordination processes in dealing with EU matters

	Tradition of consultative politics	Civil society Engagement?	Formally and practically recognized role of Parliament?	Publicly available information?	Mode of co-ordination	Co-ordination style
Slovenia	relatively strong	yes	yes	yes	horizontal and vertical coordination	formalization/ amended by informal communication
Hungary	relatively weak	no	no	no	fragmentation (island of excellence)	centralization/ socialization within the island of excellence
Estonia	relatively weak	no	no	no	vertical centralization, lack of horizontal coordination	decentralization/ socialization

* based on a typology by Laffan (2003) and country reports within the European project Organizing for Enlargement

3.6 How to explain variations in the roles of parliaments?

There is no clear evidence that constitutional choice leads to the development of similar institutional solutions and practices in managing European matters. This is true even when looking at the role of parliament in all three countries otherwise defined as parliamentary democracies. Only Slovenia has so far provided an exception to the pattern of the weak roles of national parliaments. Grabbe (2002: 1017) warns that although the lack of debate in most CEE legislatures reflects a consensus on accession, it also shows a lack of awareness of the details of the legislation being passed by parliamentarians – indirectly she sees this phenomenon as a danger of exporting aspects of the EU's own democratic deficit to CEE through the accession process.

Based on our preliminary research we are unable to move beyond the description and offer some viable explanations of the cases included in the research. Especially when we note that Slovenia looked at the models of Scandinavian countries (in order to adapt to its full EU membership Slovenia recently legally adopted a model which is very close to the Finnish one) and Estonia's divergence from these despite its geographical closeness and many social links to that area, we find it very difficult to explain the differences between countries at this stage of the research.

3.7 Some concluding remarks

It seems that Estonia, Hungary and Slovenia have developed into 'multi-level players' of several kinds and with various resources for an efficient policy-making (instead of 'policy-taking') role.

Currently, they are all facing the same stage of adaptation – involvement in day-to-day participation in common European policy-making. Slovenia seems to be sticking to its gradualist mode of adaptation. It remains to be seen whether all three countries will maintain this strategy or whether any will opt for a more radical one. The latter alternative is particularly interesting for Hungary which has so far only adapted islands of its executive and public administration to any important extent. Due to constant problems of horizontal co-ordination, Estonia might also reconsider its model in line with its interests to efficiently participate in European policy-making.

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