

# **Assessing the impact of European integration on the foreign policy-making in Central and Eastern Europe: the cases of Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia**

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses how the European integration influences the domestic structures and processes of foreign policy-making in the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe, namely in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. Previous studies on Europeanization of foreign policy provide for mixed evidences with regard to the real domestic impact of the EU. The research questions addressed in this paper are: 1) to what extent does Europeanization cause institutional convergence in the new member states? 2) what role does domestic politics play as regard institutional adaptation? 3) what is the extent of internalization of EU's norms by national officials dealing with European affairs? 4) what is the role of national representatives dealing with European affairs in disseminating EU's norms within the political-administrative structures at national level? and e) does the manner in which the elite from the new member states perceives the exercise and distribution of power within the EU alter the outcomes of the Europeanization process? The main argument here is that even if the European integration has been the catalyst for institutional adaptation, the structural domestic changes have been shaped less by the Europeanization pressures than by domestic factors, such as governmental / coalition politics or bureaucratic politics. Three main factors justify the selection of Hungary, Romania and Slovakia as the three case studies. Firstly, they have different integration records. Secondly, they have different types of political regimes. The type of political regimes is assumed to have an impact on the organization of the policy-making systems. Thirdly, all three are connected by the ethnic factor, reflected in the content and conduct of their foreign policies. The data is based mainly on primary sources, specifically official documents, media reports, in-depth interviews conducted in Brussels, Bratislava, Bucharest, and Budapest, as well as participant observation of EU Council's meetings.

## 1. Introduction

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 commenced exploring the impact of European integration on candidates and later on new members from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (for a review, see Sedelmeier, 2006). This paper attempts to contribute to this burgeoning literature by examining the influence of European integration on the foreign policy-making in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia.

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 include 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 research questions are: a) to what extent does Europeanization cause institutional convergence across the candidate and new member states? b) what role does domestic politics play as regard 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? and e) does the manner in which the elite from the new member states perceives the exercise and distribution of power within the EU alter the outcomes of the Europeanization process?

This paper employs a top-down approach. I avoid using bottom-up perspectives since they overextend and make the concept of Europeanization even more confusing and difficult to use. The reason for this option is explained in the first section which discusses the peculiar status of the Europeanization approach when applied to the study of foreign policy. The second part examines the change of the institutional setting of foreign policy-making in view of European integration. The third part explores the issue of elite socialization. The concluding section summarizes the findings and discusses the limitation of the Europeanization approach with regard to the institutional adaptation and elite socialization.

## 2. Europeanization: top-down or bottom-up?

In a recent review, Reuben Wong has identified several key research questions emerging from the literature dealing with the Europeanization of foreign policy (see Wong, 2007)<sup>1</sup>, 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, which creates the risk of overstressing the concept (Radaelli, 2000). The following paragraphs contends that the conceptualization of Europeanization of foreign policy as a bottom-up process is misleading and makes the case for the use of top-down

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<sup>1</sup> 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 the issue 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.

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 historical stages of European integration (see Caporaso, 2007: 24). In the initial stage of European integration, 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 argues (2007: 24), 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 and the completion of the internal market programme. Likewise, the adoption of the Treaty of the European Union and the move towards building the political union further stressed the need to examine and explain the 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 function, who are the main actors, and how do 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, the Europeanization approach stands for 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 fields where the European Community has exclusive, shared, or support competences in relation to member states, the fundamental logic directing the research focus is from the EU towards the member states. 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).

Within this context, the study of Europeanization of foreign policy a bottom-up perspective is confusing. 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 it is about a slightly modified version of intergovernmentalism or liberal intergovernmentalism. The bottom-up approach contends that the 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. The two have similar assumptions: 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 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 the Europeanization research agenda.

From a different standpoint, either approached from a top-down or bottom-up perspective, Europeanization includes a power dimension that is usually ignored. Power is widely considered an essentially contested concept within the field of political studies. Power is controversial, having different 'faces'; for instance, power as decision-making, power as agenda-setting, or power as preference-shaping (see Hay, 2002). The power relationship can be seen as a zero-sum game, according to realist/neorealist logic. 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 exercise the influence while B suffers the influence (Dahl, 1957, in Baldwin, 2002: 177). The literature on the conditionality associated with the enlargement process might be seen in this light. For instance, Milada Vachudova (2005) explains how the EU used the passive and active leverages to secure compliance of the illiberal Romania and Slovakia during the 1990s and until 2004. The power relationship of this kind is more visible when looking at the pre-accession period. The so-called accession or negotiation talks is a misnomer, hiding the reality of the bilateral relationship's asymmetry. The candidates can hardly influence EU policy making; however, they have to adopt the EU norms in order to secure the admission (Grabbe, 2003). Likewise, as Andrew Janos pointed out, the transition from communist to Western type of capitalism and liberal democracy did not mean a shift from hierarchy to equality, but to a different form of hierarchy, described as a new hegemonic regime (Janos, 2000).

The power nature of the Europeanization has another meaning as well. In this case, it is about 'power to' or Europeanization as empowerment. The EU membership offers increased leverages to the international action of a member state. A member state might feel that its international standing is backed by the weight of the entire Union. This also relates to the problem of the way in which foreign policy elite from the new member states perceives the distribution of power within the EU. It is not about the power of the EU, but the power inside the EU. The way in which the distribution of power is perceived might well affect the socialization process of the new national representatives within the EU. The role of perception is also vital in case of foreign policy action. This time, the perception of national interest is at stake. In the case of institutional adaptation, the power dimension is reflected in different ways. On the one hand, the accession process means that institutions have to be adjusted in order to function properly in the new policy-making environment. It is the EU 'power over' the candidates to demand institutional adjustment. On the other hand, the room of manoeuvre is broad for the new member states. They have the 'power to' reshape

institution the way they wish. The domestic context might have a greater influence over the eventual outcome of the Europeanization process.

The academic debate on the nature of power is wide and complex; its object of analysis goes well beyond the aim of this paper. The aim here is limited to examining the five research questions outlined in the introduction, one of which aims to explore whether, indeed, the manner in which the perception of power relationship held by the policy elites in the three countries, affects the Europeanization process.

### **3. 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 both the ‘power over’ and ‘power to’ conceptions of power. As previously highlighted, some authors have seen the nature of the relationship between the EU and the aspirant countries from CEE as ‘power over’ or conditionality. On the other hand, it is the ‘power to’ or empowerment. The candidates, even if expected to adjust, are not constrained by any pre-existing model.

The following discusses the manner in which Europeanization pressures led to reallocation of powers and responsibilities for European coordination across institutional actors. First, I examine 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, I discuss 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.

#### **3.1. The institutional adaptation at national level**

The entering into force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 replaced the loose framework of cooperation 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. At the time of signing the Europe Agreements (EA) during early 1990s, all candidates were equally unprepared and all of them had to find ways to adjust to these demands. The integration demanded a special readiness of national administrative structures, resources and ways of interaction in order to fit into the loose ‘European administrative space’ (Lippert, Umbach, & Wessels, 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.

The first step in formalizing the political dialogue between the EC and CEE countries was the signing of the EA, which created the institutional framework of association<sup>2</sup>. The setting up of formal institutions and channels of dialogue with the EC in the associate countries was a straightforward process. However, a more difficult problem was which domestic institutional actor ought to be in charge of coordinating the European affairs of the country. Given the fact that the relations between CEE countries and the EC did fall, at least in the initial phases, within the scope of foreign policy, the actor best placed to be in charge of coordinating and managing this matter should have been the MFA. However, empirical evidences from the three countries demonstrate that this has not always been the case. There are important differences across countries as regard when and to what extent the role of the MFA increases in relation to other institutional actors.

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 policies. On the other hand, other political developments like changes of government, cabinet reshuffles, 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 has been 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.

In Hungary, the MFA did not play the main role until 1996. The European affairs were being seen from the perspective of economic component of the association agreement. Accordingly, the expertise for dealing with the trade related aspects of the EA was concentrated in two ministries, namely the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MIT) and the Ministry of International Economic Relations (MIER). Vida (2002: 59) contends that until 1996, the system of coordination of European affairs has been two-centred, the responsibilities being split between the MIT and the MFA. However, this division overlooks another important actor, which is the MIER, competing with both the MIT and MFA. In fact, when the Office of European Affairs had been created in 1990 by the then prime-minister József Antall, it was established within the MIER, and transferred to the MIT only in 1994 (MTI Econews, March 24, 1995). Moreover, when the Inter-ministerial Committee for coordinating the issues linked to the implementation of the EA had been created in April 1992, it was endowed with a bicephalous leadership structure, one of the co-chairman being the representative of the MIER<sup>3</sup>. Until the summer of 1994, the two ministries were both involved, alongside the MFA, in the process of coordination European affairs. Hence, the more the competing institutions lost powers, the stronger the role of the MFA. Several key moments marked the consolidation of the MFA as the main actor in the area of European affairs.

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<sup>2</sup> The framework of dialogue was based on the Association Council, Association Committee, Joint Parliamentary Committee, as well as a mechanism of dispute resolution

<sup>3</sup> The Committee was co-chaired. One chairman was Endre Juhasz, the head of the Office of European Affairs of the MIER and future ambassador to the EU. The other chairman was Sandor Peisch, deputy state secretary and head of the EU Department in the Foreign Ministry (MTI Econews, April 10, 1992)

The first such a moment occurred in the summer of 1994, when the MIER, including the Office of European Affairs, has been transferred to the MIT. This decision was taken by the new governmental coalition which won the parliamentary elections in May 1994<sup>4</sup> in order to rationalize the activity of the cabinet and also to reduce the number of ministries from 13 to 12 (MTI Econews, July 5, 1994)<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, if between 1990 and 1994 there were three ministries dealing with European affairs, between 1994 and 1996, the two remaining competing institutional actors in this field were the MFA and MIT.

The second instance is linked to the technically challenging moment of answering the so-called EU questionnaire in 1996. The answers to the 167 pages of the survey were supposed to provide, in three months time, a comprehensive report on the political and economic situation in Hungary. During the process of answering the questions 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 European Commission (interview, Peter Balasz, 2008). The then socialist prime-minister, Gyula Horn, resolved the situation by transferring the entire European affairs office from the MIT to the MFA (interview, Peter Balasz, 2008; also Ágh and Rózsás, 2003, Vida, 2002).

The result of the decision of unifying the diplomatic and sectoral specialisation enhanced the required expertise of the MFA, streamlined the coordination process and ensured a higher degree of synergy (Vida, 2002: 59). Furthermore, the role of the MFA has been further strengthened when the Government decided to create in April 1996, the State Secretariat for European Integration within the MFA. The main responsibility of the new body was to deal with all matters relating to the accession process (MTI Econews, April 5, 1996; European Commission, 1997). Therefore, the MFA emerged from the inter-ministerial competition in Hungary as the most important institutional actor on European affairs (see also Rupp, 1999: 98).

Following the formal accession of Hungary into the EU, the transfer of the European affairs unit to the Prime Minister Office in January 2005 has again challenged MFA. An important factor for this decision 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 Prime Minister Medgyessy and the Foreign Minister Laszlo Kovac. Another factor was the coalition politics resulting in the cabinet reshuffle, following the stepping down of the prime-minister Medgyessy in August 2004 and his replacement with Ferenc Gyurcsány. In addition, the fact that the Foreign Minister Kovac took over the post of European Commissioner for Taxation and Customs Union 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 run the Interministerial Committee for European Coordination (Kovács & Szabó, 2006).

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<sup>4</sup> The two rounds election in May 1994 marked the return to power of the socialists in Hungary. The new coalition government was invested in 15<sup>th</sup> July 1994. The two component parties, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), with 209 seats in Parliament (54%) and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), with 69 seats (17%), secured no less than two-third of the seats in the new Parliament.

<sup>5</sup> Apparently, downsizing the number of ministries also suited well the algorithm of distributing the ministerial portfolio, with 8 ministries for socialists and 4 for the free democrats.

In Romania, different from Hungary, the role of the MFA did remain limited to diplomatic and political aspects of European affairs. All aspects linked to EU's first pillar policies have been centred on the prime-minister office for most of the time. A Department of European Integration was established in 1992 within the prime-minister office. At the same time, the organizational set-up of the MFA in 1992 did not reveal a strong interest in European integration; the EC related issues are not dealt with by any dedicated unit, but they are only part of a directorate responsible of relations with CEE, AELS and NATO countries<sup>6</sup>. Such a dedicated department has been established only in 1994<sup>7</sup>.

Soon after the entry into force of the EA, the Romanian government strengthened the role of the Department of European Integration (DEI) of the Government as the main responsible of the European integration of Romania and creating the Inter-ministerial Committee for European integration. In both cases, the prime minister is in a position of power due to the direct control over the process of coordination and management of European integration. The DEI, headed by a state secretary, was directly subordinated to the prime minister. Similarly, the prime minister chairs the Inter-ministerial Committee, in which all ministries and relevant state agencies are represented at high political level. Besides, the executive president of the Committee is the head of the DEI. The unusual situation leading to the concentration of executive powers in the hands of the prime minister in a semi-presidential political regime might be explained by the political support granted by the president of the republic, Ion Iliescu, to Nicolae Văcăroiu, the head of the government between 1992 and 1996. The technocratic premier was highly dependent on the political backup of the president over the Parliament (see Verheijen, 1999: 207). From a different angle, this was a way whereby the president itself had a tighter grip over the integration process via its indirect control of the government.

Apparently, this arrangement proved convenient even after the general elections in 1996, bringing to power the Democratic Convention (DC), and its leader, Emil Constantinescu, as the new president. The DEI of the Government was being preserved and strengthened. A minister-delegate was appointed at its helm instead of the previous state secretary. The obvious reason for this change was the need to provide the head of the DEI with more political leverages in relations to other fellow ministers in the cabinet. However, the political crisis in December 1999, led to a cabinet's reshuffle. The newly appointed technocratic prime minister, Mugur Isărescu, formerly head of the Central Bank, reorganized the governmental office by moving the DIE to the MFA. This move placed for the first time the MFA in the strongest position as regard the management of the European integration. However, this arrangement was short lived. The results of the general elections in 2000, won comfortably by the Social Democrat Party of Romania, was followed by the setting up of a brand new Ministry of European Integration, having a leading role in the coordination of 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 & 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 has been achieved, the Ministry of European Integration was transformed into a

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<sup>6</sup> Governmental Decree No. 814/1992

<sup>7</sup> Governmental Decree No. 479/1994

ministry responsible for regional development, while a newly created department, once more directly subordinated to the prime minister, is responsible, jointly with the MFA, of coordinating European affairs.

In the Slovak Republic, the management and coordination of European affairs has been closely linked with the overall process of setting up a new political system and new institutions and mechanisms of foreign policy making. According to Duleba et al (1998: 11) the main challenge in this enterprise was the absence of a tradition of statehood in Slovakia, including in the conduct of foreign policy which is a fundamental attribute of any sovereign state. What Slovakia had to do, different from Hungary or Romania in this case, was to invent the institutions and processes of foreign policy.

Although a Ministry of International Relations (MIR) existed in the Slovak republic as early as 1990, its functions were mostly related to developing external cultural links and cooperation with other state's regions, but not with national governments themselves. The powers and role of the MIR were limited due to the constitutional stipulations of the federation, which provided that the federal MFA engages in international relations in the behalf of the federal state (Batora, 2003: 271, Duleba, et al., 1998). As Batora (2003: 272) explains, despite the fact that the new MFA was being built on the existing structure of the MIR, the source of inspiration came from the way in which the federal MFA of the defunct Czechoslovakia was organized. The new staff of the MFA grown rapidly during its first year of existence, from the initial 40 employees of the MIR, most of whom lacked diplomatic experience, to around 400 (plus 350 diplomats posted abroad) at the end of 1993. Most of them have been hired hastily and without too much attention being paid to their professional skills and abilities (Batora, 2003: 271-2). While some of these new staff came from the federal MFA, some other Slovak diplomats choose to carry on their activity in the newly established Czech MFA, for personal circumstances or since they were rejected in Bratislava, being seen as not loyal to the new formed Slovak state (Duleba, et al., 1998: 14).

Besides, the endeavours to build the new political and administrative institutions in the first year of Slovakia as an independent state were undermined by the political instability and the fragmentation of the ruling political parties<sup>8</sup> (Malova, 1994: 417). For instance, during 1993-4, no less than four political leaders did alternate at the MFA's helm<sup>9</sup>. In contrast to these early years, the period between 1998 and 2006, when Eduard Kukan was the foreign minister, has been a period of unprecedented stability and external successes, most notably the accession of Slovakia into the EU and NATO, in 2004.

Not only had the political instability affected the functioning of the institutions and policy-making, by the nature of the nationalistic political game and anti-democratic practices pursued by Vladimir Mečiar, the prime minister between 1993-1998<sup>10</sup>. These practices prompted numerous observers of the political transformation in CEE to include Slovakia into the group of illiberal, authoritarian states, alongside Romania and Bulgaria (Vachudova, 2005). Moreover, the political relations between Slovakia and the EU became strained,

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<sup>8</sup> It is about the HZDS (Movement of a Democratic Slovakia - Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko) and SNS (Slovak National Party - Slovenská národná strana).

<sup>9</sup> The first minister of foreign affairs, Milan Knazko, has been dismissed as a consequence of the political struggle inside the HDSZ, and replaced with Jozef Moravcik, the former foreign affairs minister of Czechoslovakia and future prime-minister of Slovakia between March and October 1994 (BBC, March 9, 1993; CTK, March 19, 1993). Following Moravcik's taking over as premier, the new foreign affairs minister, a career diplomat in the person of Eduard Kukan was appointed. Kukan's mandate was short lived, only until the parliamentary elections in the autumn of 1994, when he was replaced by the Juraj Schenk, member of the HDSZ.

<sup>10</sup> With the exception of the period between March and October 1994.

leading eventually to the non-invitation of Slovakia to opening of the accession talks for full membership along the other three members of the Visegrad Group.

The inherent problems of a new beginning have prevented the MFA from playing a key role in the management and coordination of European affairs<sup>11</sup>. Despite the international dimension of the agreement under negotiation, the role of the MFA was not different from that of any other line ministry or state agency involved in talks. In contrast with Hungary, where the role of the MFA was being challenged by other ministries, but relative similar to Romania, where the coordination is centred on the prime minister office, in Slovakia the challenger was the governmental office itself as a centre of coordination. After the signing of the association agreement, within the government has been created a Council for the implementation of the EA, led by Jozef Kalman, deputy prime-minister, in order to monitor the way in which the agreement's provisions are implemented (BBC, June 24, 1994) and to draft the strategy for Slovakia's European integration (BBC, March 16, 1995).

To a certain extent, the position of the MFA in the national system of management and coordination of European affairs changed after the legislative elections in September 1998, when the populist-nationalist coalition led by Vladimír Mečiar was replaced with a new cabinet<sup>12</sup> and premier, Mikuláš Dzurinda, the leader of the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK). Even if the position of deputy prime minister in charge of European integration has been maintained, being offered to Pavol Hamzík<sup>13</sup>, a new position of chief negotiator has been created within the MFA and occupied by Jan Figel<sup>14</sup>, state secretary in the MFA. Besides, a Ministerial Council for European Integration, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration has been created, providing the high-level political coordination.

In practical terms the role of the MFA was instrumental in the management of European affairs (interview, Slovak MFA, 2008). After 2004, even if the position of the 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, 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 has been divided after accession into two departments, one dealing with common sectoral policies and institutional affairs, the other with foreign and security policy. Therefore, the role of the MFA in the system of coordination in the Slovak Republic gradually grow stronger over the years, especially in operational terms.

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, the team involved in the negotiation of the new association agreement with the EC during the spring and summer of 1993 was not led by the MFA's representative, but by Peter Mihok, chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The MFA's representative was part of the team, including officials from the ministries of economy, agriculture, finance, as well as custom authority (CTK National News Wire, April 14, 1993) (following the division of Czechoslovakia, the two successor republics had to negotiate new association agreements with the European Community).

<sup>12</sup> Besides the SDK, the new cabinet included representatives of the other parties previously in the opposition, namely the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL'), the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK), and the newly created Party of Civil Understanding (SOP).

<sup>13</sup> Pavol Hamzík is member of the Party of Civil Understanding (SOP).

<sup>14</sup> Jan Figel is a leading member of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)

### 3.2. The changing role of national coordination at European level

Among the institutional actors that gained the most with accession is 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'. Before accession, the permanent missions in Brussels have performed rather a traditional diplomatic role of representation and channel of communication. However, during the transition period from accession to full-membership they have been experiencing 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 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, has approximately 70 diplomats in the PermRep<sup>15</sup>.

Several aspects have been 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 view of full-membership, the internal structure had to be reoriented towards the Council of Ministers' formations. Therefore, the figure of 60 diplomats of the Hungarian PermRep was considered adequate for covering all Council's formations (Interview, P. Balazs). Another challenge, originated back in 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 have to deal with Justice and Home Affairs matters. Similarly, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have responsibilities in representing the national positions in the Political Military Group or Political and Security Committee (interviews, Brussels, 2007; E. Kukan, Bratislava, 2008; P. Balazs, Budapest, 2008).

The range of functions performed by PermReps has changed as well, not only the size and internal organization. The PermReps had simultaneously to defend the national interests at EU level and to mediate between the EU and capital, in a two-level-game logic (see Putnam, 1988). They perform both upstream and downstream functions (Kassim, 2001: 34-6). Along these functions, the PermReps are exercising a great deal of influence on the national foreign policy-making. The fundamental lines of foreign policy continue to be defined in the capital, but PermReps influence the routine process of policy-making.

The function of reporting stands for informing the national capital about the developments within EU Council, how different countries are positioned in respect to specific initiatives,

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<sup>15</sup> The figures provided here cover only the diplomatic or expert staff, and not auxiliary personnel; in all three cases, the total number of staff is greater (e.g. around one hundred for Hungarian PermRep, over one hundred for Romanian PermRep)

what are the chances of proposal to be adopted. The main source of information gathering is the participation in EU 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 with 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, 2007).

The important role played by PermReps is widely accepted by experts in the capital, especially those in the MFA (interviews, Bratislava, Bucharest, Budapest, 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 interest of CEE member states is 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, 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 decision should be taken'* (interview, P. Balazs, 2008) and the decisions are taken in the capital at the highest political level of the executive.

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

Previous studies of Europeanization maintain that the emergence of procedural norms of EU foreign policy were being created and institutionalized through constant interaction, debate and trial-and error learning (Smith, 2004a). Various authors 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 Glarbo, 1999: 644; Lewis, 2000: 261; Nuttall, 1992; Smith, 2004a: 120-4, 2004b: 107-9).

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 and might lead to a change of preferences. Social learning is the mechanism whereby national policy-makers learn the

norms and rules of 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 norms entrepreneurs (see Börzel & 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 experts and diplomats from PermReps in Brussels, as well as those from the relevant European departments in the ministries of foreign affairs. 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 on the way in which foreign policy elite perceives the distribution of power within the EU. From a formal point of view, the 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, may 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 an imbalance of power relations 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 'active observer' is the status 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<sup>16</sup>. 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, P. Balazs, 2008). For some national officials, this experience recalled past memories from school, the endeavour to learn and achieve an academic degree (interview, Slovak PermRep, 2007). This view is shared, in a 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, either senior or junior diplomats.

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, P. Balazs, 2008). At the

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<sup>16</sup> Hungary and Slovakia have been observers for one year, between April 2003 and May 2004. For Romania, this was over one year and a half, between April 2005 and December 2006.

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, 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, Hungarian PermRep, 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 has been 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, has been replaced by the rule of speaking up only when one disagree or want to amend a proposal and to keep the time of intervention as short as possible (interview, Slovak MFA, 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 the common European interest (Windhoff-Heritier et al., 1996). New member states have soon been asked to give their support to an initiative or another or at least not to oppose it. It also soon became evident that except few strategic issues, there is no clear pattern of coalition formation, which are temporary and topic based. The norm of respect for other member states' *domaines réservés* is associated with a redefinition of what the national priorities are, what the official position is in respect to other countries' concerns, and how does the pursuit of national interest resonates 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, 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 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 capital 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 the capitals. 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 in their own, is not sufficiently backed by empirical evidences. Even if some diplomats or national experts show a genuine appreciation of the way 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.

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 relations with other actors has been 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, Hungarian MFA, 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 Kal Holsti's observation 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'* (Holsti, 1995: 267).

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 has been limited and the MFAs attempted to soften the national political stances coming from the executive. In Slovakia, for instance the political mandate issued by the National Council come 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, 2007; CTK, 2007; BBC 2007).

## **5. Concluding remarks**

This paper explored 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 & 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 accommodation best defines the extent of change as being modest.

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

The candidates have accommodated EU demands by adapting their existing processes, policies, and institutions without fundamentally altering them. The former permanent missions to the EU have been 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 have been augmented as well.

The sociological institutionalist assumption that socialization of national representatives causes change of collective understandings and identities is rather weak. There are strong evidences that the new national representatives have learnt new norms and rules; however, as Smith pointed out (2000: 619), it is too much to assume that national officials give up their national loyalties in favour of a common European interest. Instead, the indicators of 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 the accommodation into the new policy-making setting. In the initial stage, the national officials have learnt the rule of the game. In the second stage, they have 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 do 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 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 normative 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 processes and the recognition of the 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 did offer 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 an increased access to information, resources, and decisions than their own capabilities would allow (Jørgensen, 2004: 48-50). Besides, the EU membership 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 constituencies. This is the 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' 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, the EU membership was the first foreign policy priority of CEE candidate. Once this fundamental goal achieved, the order of priorities of the national foreign policy has changed as well.

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