

NATIONAL INTERESTS IN THE EU EASTERN ENLARGEMENT – KEY LAPSE IN THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE

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In February this year, the European Commission presented a *Strategy for reliable perspective of enlargement and enhanced engagement of the EU to the countries of the Western Balkans*. In this way, the European Commission (EC) formalized the inclusion of the topic of enlargement in the Union's agenda, which was not foreseen at the beginning of its mandate. From the content of the strategy, it becomes clear that for some of the countries from the Western Balkans, the progress on the path to EU membership depends not only on the implementation of the pre-accession conditionality, but also by the emergence of favorable circumstances. Kosovo has the opportunity ... to accelerate its progress on the way to the EU, when objective circumstances are present. This formulation was the logical result of the resistance on the part of EU countries which do not recognize Kosovo's independence and therefore the inclusion of the country in the perspective of enlargement. The unequivocal refusal of Greece to agree to the name of Macedonia, which for a long time predetermines the impossibility of opening membership talks with Skopje, illustrates the fact that the emergence of favorable circumstances is of critical importance for the European prospect not only of Kosovo. In both cases, the positions of the EU Member States in question are determined by the specific national interests. In short, the European perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans highly depends on the national perspectives of the EU countries, both regarding the degree of prioritization on the agenda of the Union, as well as the formulation and implementation of the specific strategic approach.

At the same time, to date, some of the expected positive effects of the previous Eastern enlargement could be questioned. In two of the countries,

qualified in the 90's as excellent performers in their pre-accession preparation – Hungary and Poland – sharing the common European values is subject to serious doubt. In April 2017 the EC undertook a monitoring procedure against Hungary because of a change in the law on higher education. On 20th December the same year, 2017, the EC launched an unprecedented procedure against Poland, proposing to the EU Council to decide for a clear risk of a serious breach of the fundamental values of the Union by a Member State.

Although these processes seem like surprising and “unprecedented”, they did not actually appear out of nowhere. A growing volume of scholarly literature explores the post-accession crisis in the relations between the EU and the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), putting forward arguments for the relationship between the influence of the EU in the pre-accession preparation process and the deterioration of the quality of governance in the newly-accessed countries (Dimitrov, 2016). More than a decade after the end of the Big-Bang Enlargement (as was the inclusion of the CEEC into the EU called), the interest in it is not waning, but it is growing. Because not only the result is ambiguous but also because the very nature of the process that led to this result remains largely unexplained.

In the context of the facts pointed out until now, the question arises – whether and to what extent the impact of the national interests of the countries of the EU on the process of enlargement have been the subject of research interest in the literature of the Eastern enlargement. This text sets itself the task to answer this question through presenting the results of the analytical review of the research perspectives, objectives and results in two main directions, in this separate field in the academic literature of European integration – Europeanization through conditionality and dynamics of the enlargement process.

The results presented are based on an analytical review of over 200 titles (monographs, studies, working papers, articles) on the subject. Due to the limitations of this format, however, in the subsequent exposé are presented just a few of the most frequently quoted authors (Велева-Ефтимова, 2018).

The literature on the Eastern enlargement is shaped as a relatively independent and intensively growing subfield of the studies of European integration over the last twenty years (Sedelmeier, 2011). This academic tradition, however, is not homogeneous, rather, in it there are recognized significantly different conceptual and methodological orientations, as the number of alternative directions and prioritized highlights increases with the advancement of the enlargement process.

The validation of the policy of conditionality as the main instrument for pre-accession preparation of CEEC in the second half of the 1990's, it turns out to be also the main trend in the research of Europeanization, which puts this process in a predominantly positivistic paradigm. According to the representatives of this research perspective the policy of conditionality has been a successful instrument for the Europeanization of the candidates, but the extent of this success may vary (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005; Ekiert, 2008; Sedelmeier, 2011; Toshkov, 2012 Gateva, 2015).

Explaining these variations is the problem that Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier et al. are trying to resolve, so as to formulate a theoretical framework for the research of the methods which would lead to “an effective transfer of norms” in the CEEC. Beginning from the starting position that the Union, which represents a monolithic whole, has “an unprecedented influence on the restructuring of the internal institutions and the whole set of public policies” because of the strong desire of the CEEC for membership, and the power asymmetry that has emerged as a result of this – these researchers assume that the influence of the EU is not the same in different policy areas and different national cases. They set themselves a task to find out what are the factors that influence the effectiveness of Europeanization. The policy of conditionality has been set as a major instrument for the Europeanization. Through a comparative analysis of a range of different national cases and different policy areas, the authors conclude that the impact of the EU or the success of Europeanization critically depends on the specifics of the relevant national society in which it must be implemented (Schimmelfennig Sedelmeier, 2005). In other words, the characteristics of the object of Europeanization – may set incidental restrictions on otherwise guaranteed positive effects of conditionality as a universally applicable and non-alternative policy for Europeanization.

In the light of the assumptions discussed above, regarding the process of Europeanization of the EU and the countries with which it interacts, this research paradigm contains several problematic starting assumptions. On the one hand, these assumptions significantly reduce the complexity of the process of Europeanization. First, according to its most common definition, Europeanization is quite broad and multi-dimensional process, but not only a transfer of European legislation. Moreover, the subject of Europeanization is countries in transition, which is unprecedented, and concerns all aspects of public life and its political system (Offe and Adler, 2004). Second, Europeanization is not seen as a process of interaction with the candidate countries, but as a

process flowing top-down, that is, dictated by the EU through the European Commission, because of the undoubted power asymmetry of figuratively speaking “Club members” against “the applicants for membership”. The strong unilateral desire for membership (that this asymmetry originates from), however, is without any argumentation, but is only declared.”

On the other hand, the output assumptions reduce the complexity of the decision-making process in the EU also. The Union is seen as a monolithic political body, but its constituent units, the Member States, have strongly divergent positions on the content of the integration process in general and in relation to the strategy for Eastern enlargement in particular and, moreover, they are not willing to provide full management of the enlargement process to the EC (Mc Allister, R. 1998; Milword, 2000; Dinan, 2010). These contradictions have the potential to affect the formulation of the policy of conditionality, as well as on its implementation by the EC, so that it does not produce the intended effect.

Proving the planned success, however, is critically important for the realization of the policy of conditionality, which is becoming a vital tool for the Europeanization of the candidates. This strategic imperative supports the sustainability of the positivistic research paradigm in relation to the process of Eastern Enlargement. A series of authors based on the basic assumption that conditionality has a guaranteed positive effect, but it is limited by a variety of local factors – focus on justifying the peculiarities of the political systems of the candidates during the transition and the mentality models inherited as an obstacle to the success of Europeanization of the CEEC (Ivanov, 2010; Papadimitirou and Gateva, 2012; Börzel, 2011).

Starting from the same underlying assumptions, as Schimelfennig, Sedelmaier et al., Heather Grabbe significantly changes the direction of the research focus to the conditionality. She tries to answer the question – why do the candidates accept membership conditions that are not in their best interest? She is looking for the answer to the question – what allows the passing of Europeanization of the CEEC in practice? According to her, the possibility of export of Europeanization is defined by “the colossal” potential for impact from the Union to the public policies in the CEEC due to the apparent power asymmetry, accelerated by the attractiveness of the membership for the governments of the candidates. Despite the efforts to adhere to the positivistic paradigm, however, under the weight of the empirical facts of the real ongoing processes Grabbe actually turns upside down her primary baseline assumption of the huge conversion potential of the EU. She proves that the EU has failed

to realize its full potential – due to diffusion and uncertainty of *its impact* on CEEC, embodied in the main pre-accession instrument of the Union – the policy of conditionality (Grabbe, 2006).

Identifying a series of flaws in the formulation and implementation of the policy of conditionality, Grabbe proves that this policy is not a non-alternative policy, so that only local obstacles, as Schimelfennig and Sedelmaier et al. assert, determine the extent of its efficiency. The EU is also responsible for the degree of success. Grabbe indicates that the policy of conditionality is actually shaped and adapted in the course of the process of enlargement and acquires the role precisely because of the peculiarity of the relation between the EU and the candidates, which, however, remains ambiguous in this research – in terms of prerequisites, content and specific challenges that Europeanization should overcome. She sticks to the limited interpretation of the EU as a homogeneous and, therefore, coherently acting player. Therefore, the analysis of the flaws directions in the application of conditionality is also based on the declared assumption that this policy should, in principle, deliver security, i.e. is purposefully created by the EU to act in this way. So the main question that her research opens up remains unsolved. What are the objective socio-political reasons justifying the deficits in the application of the conditionality by the EU?

Unlike Grabbe, whose criticism of the policy of conditionality is unintentionally developed, in the course of the study under pressure of collected facts, James Hughes and his co-others Gwendoline Sassy and Claire Gordon intentionally subjected to criticism the basic assumptions on the basis of which conditionality has been explored up to this moment (Hughes et al. 2005). They aim to verify the validity of the assertion that conditionality has any potential for transformation, based on the power asymmetry and irresistible desire for EU membership. Rejecting the analysis of conditionality through the dominant positivistic paradigm that examines the factors influencing it relatively statically – they approach the matter differently. The essence of this difference is basically in two things: a) both the EU and the candidate countries are seen as complex, multipart entities with multi-level interactions, and b) both sides in the interaction are changing in the course of its implementation.

Through the case with application of conditionality in the CEEC in the field of regional policy, Hughes et al. identify the presence of two types of norms at the time of the Eastern enlargement – formal and informal norms. The limited and contradictory nature of the norms within this sector policy

increases the use of informal rules. The authors prove that informal rules carry a great weight in the relationship with post-communist societies, for the transformation of which no formal rules exist, so that their empirical argument rebuts the notion about the way of carrying out the enlargement policy under the leadership of the EC (acting as the “locomotive of enlargement”).

Proving the deficits in the activities of the EC on the implementation of the policy of conditionality – the analysis of Hughes et al. made a significant step forward for its understanding. On the basis of the research result, the authors conclude that the EU policy of conditionality is in its main content “a declarative policy”, which could be politically used depending on the specific circumstances. From the study it becomes clear that the effectiveness of the policy of conditionality depends not only on local barriers or the formulation and its application, but also – on the way it is used by the EC.

At the same time, while criticizing the positivist paradigm, in which analyzing the policy of conditionality is set, Hughes and co-authors also allowed by default, that the policy of conditionality has the potential for effective action, which, however, is not used properly by the EC. That is why, while they pay attention to the fact that this policy is highly determined by the interests of the Member States and the interaction between these interests – this statement remains away from the basic research focus. However, it is precisely this that poses the question whether, in fact, only the application of the policy of conditionality by the EC shapes the enlargement process.

The deployment of the critical perspective regarding the policy of conditionality goes hand in hand with the finalization of the enlargement process, when the flaws of this policy become more clearly identifiable, but at the same time, it is no less clear that it is precisely this that has ensured the success of the process. From this point, the critical line of Grabbe and Hughes et al. has been developed further by a series of authors, who justify the assumption that the policy of conditionality produces limited Europeanization of CEEC and accordingly different from the expected effects. This group of authors criticizes the manner in which the criteria for membership and/or their application are formulated, but they do not question the pre-assumption that the policy of conditionality was established to Europeanize (Maniokas, 2004; Kochenov, 2014; Mendelski, 2012).

The general research approach examined here focused on the policy of enlargement through conditionality and its problems has indisputable achievements in identifying the real socio-political complexity, volatility and changeability of enlargement, including – outlining a number of

“drawbacks” of this policy. At the same time, this approach contains an important omission in the analysis of Eastern enlargement. Conditionality is considered relatively “sterile”, as an independently existing object, taken out of the context of the overall enlargement process, which in turn is part of the integration process. And from there, focusing on the particularities of its impact or on what needs to be the output, not on what parameters are set in the “programing” phase of that policy as an input, in order to search for the corresponding results. In other words, this approach misses the underlying prerequisites on which the policy of conditionality occupies a basic place in the Eastern enlargement, so as to establish itself as a key instrument of the enlargement policy as a consequence. One of the important but neglected prerequisites in the examined tradition here is the impact of the Member States on the process. This impact is not denied, quite on the contrary, it is recognized. However, it is not explored in depth, nor is explained its substantial national specificity.

At the same time, the impact of the Member States on the course of the enlargement is analyzed by another major research group. The authors of this group put the process in a more extensive explanatory framework compared to the study of the policy of conditionality as an independent entity. They track the main strategic decisions, justifying their connection to the European and/or inter-institutional political context accompanying them. In other words, these studies have concentrated on the “tracing” of the road of enlargement.

Similarly to the previous group, also in this case, parallel to the unfolding of the process itself, a positivistic paradigm is developing. It corresponds to the strategic interests of the EU to present to the CEEC acceptance of the prospect of enlargement as a selfless decision on the part of EU-15, dictated primarily by the moral arguments. Building on this idea, it supports the understanding of the power asymmetry, which as noted above, is critically necessary for the Union's influence in regard to the CEEC through the policy of conditionality. In this context, a number of authors justify the assertion that the EU countries ignore their private national interests and adopt the Eastern enlargement because of shared European norms (values), identity and/or moral imperatives (Friis, 1998; Schimmelfennig, 1999; Sedelmeier, 2005; Sijrsen, 2006; Lasas, 2010).

For example, Sedelmaier aims to explain the paradoxical situation in his opinion whereby although gains from enlargement are smaller than the losses to some of the EU Member States, none of them vetoes the process. In order to accomplish this objective, he tries to answer two research questions. First,

why the EU has decided to enlarge with the CEEC. Second, why the interests of the CEEC are reflected in sectoral policies as part of the enlargement policy of the EU. According to the author, the answers to these two questions will contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of the enlargement process.

Sedelmaier tries to back with arguments the thesis that the Member States, notwithstanding the possibility to impose veto and despite the high cost of enlargement, are forced to ignore their interests for the sake of the collective European identity, which is a major factor in the formulation of an EU policy on Eastern Enlargement. Since the end of the 80's, the main political actors in the Union have constructed discursively its specific role in the relations to post-communist countries. According to this role, the EU has a "special responsibility" – to support their transitions and European integration. It is this specific collective identity that has a constitutive and regulatory effect in the decision-making process (Sedelmeier, 2005).

The presented research results, however, are inconclusive – because of the unjustified starting assumptions. First, the emergence of the specific identity of the EU, which is the result of a "discursively constructed concept", seems hassle-free to the author, although there are studies that identify internal tensions between the reconciliation of the identity of the EU and the accession of the CEEC (De Angelis, 2011). Moreover, the author analyzes the fundamental decisions on the enlargement before the creation of the EU (in 1992), when according to him, tracing the path to enlargement has begun. From this point of view, the question arises: How is identity constructed within only a few years, if the elites of the countries that joined the EU in 1995 are not involved in the construction process?

Second, according to the author, employees of the EC advocate in favor of enlargement due to the fact it reflects the identity of the EU. However, the presence of this sole reason is not proved by comparison with other possibilities, but is declaratively stated. At the same time, the behavior of the staff of the EC may be explained also by institutional ambitions, party or national bias (O'Brennan, 2006; Hughes et al. 2005). The specifics in the grading of different motivations, however, does not seem to be relevant for Sedelmaier, provided that the degree of influence of the identity of EU representatives on Member States is not as great as that on the employees of the EC. The question remains open – how much exactly is the critical amount of influence of identity, for it to work for the benefit of the Eastern Enlargement?

Third, the initial assumption that the Member States are divided statically and dichotomously to absolute supporters and opponents of enlargement, so

that the latter are willing to impose a veto on the process, but the identity restrains them – is not well-founded. The dichotomous presentation of values and interests as contradictory is also not well-founded. From this perspective, it is not surprising that, on the one hand, the author aims to follow “the tracing” of the path to enlargement, which is a historical, large-scale process. But on the other hand, he came to the conclusion that this tracing process ends with the decisions of Madrid 1995. The next important decisions about enlargement – in Luxembourg 1997, Berlin 1999, Helsinki 1999 – are just chronologically retold as seamlessly unproblematic following of one strategically shaped by the EU enlargement policy, which goes through stages progressively following one after another.

However, on the one hand, the degree of opposition of the Member States varies over time, in various policies, as well as among them, which Sedelmaier himself illustrates through an analysis of the negotiation of the European Agreements (EA). On the other hand, the ratio between relative opponents and supporters is also changing in time with the accession of Sweden, Finland and Austria in 1995. There is no justified reason for these variables to stop affecting the process after 1995, as they did before it. Finally, the contradiction between interests and values does not seem to be unproblematic, given that the author himself argues that the values and norms of the Union are essential for its operation and therefore of vital interest for Member States.

Despite the controversial results in relation to the research purpose, the book of Sedelmaier unintentionally shows important components of the enlargement process. The follow-up of the specifics in the relationship between Member States and the EC illustrates the essential differences in their positions against the Eastern enlargement, as well as the importance of the compromises achieved between them in designing the process.

The line of idealistic explanation of the behavior of the Member States as shaping the enlargement process was continued by Anias Lasas. He also tries to explain the paradox of the enlargement. According to the Lasas, the assertion of the responsibility of the EU to the CEEC as a basic motive for the acceptance of the accession of the CEEC is not justified by an objective standard, i.e. it has not been adequately proven by Sedelmaier. Therefore, he is trying to fill this gap by proving that the sense of responsibility to the CEEC is “real” and precisely because of this the moral responsibility or so-called “historical imperatives” have a key role in shaping the positions of Member States on enlargement (Lasas, 2010).

According to Lasas, this moral responsibility is based on the commitment of the western political elite with historical-psychological heritage and in particular the collective guilt for the so-called “black trinity” – the Munich Agreement, the Pact Ribbentrop-Molotov and the agreements of the Yalta-Potsdam. Because of the collective guilt, the EU Eastern Enlargement constitutes for the key member countries (UK, Germany, France) an act of historic compensation for the group of post-communist countries affected by this “black trinity”. Although the enlargement is not in the interest of some of the countries in the EU, their counter-reaction is limited by the feeling of “moral responsibility”. The author tries to prove that the variations in the collective guilt form the stages in the enlargement process and its dynamics.

Despite the ambition to overcome the research deficits of Sedelmaier, Lasas was unable to go further because of no less frivolous starting assumptions. First, the grouping of the three components of the “black trinity” as single scale ones due to their similar “symbolic” value is debatable. The three treaties in question have a qualitatively different motives, goals and countries/range. For example, the Pact Ribbentrop-Molotov aims at dividing Poland by a military invasion between two totalitarian states, while the Treaty of Yalta-Potsdam governs the division of spheres of influence in order to ensure peace and it was contracted between two democratic and one totalitarian country. The same refers to the countries which were affected by them. According to the author, the comparison of constituent federative republics, like Slovenia and Serbia, with sovereign countries, such as Poland and Hungary, does not seem problematic.

In addition, Lasas does not justify the way in which the feeling of guilt is “spreading” among the Member States which are not connected with “the black trinity”, but he is content with the finding that the common organizational framework is sufficient to provide it. So, it is not clear how political elites in countries such as Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Finland (some of which are directly negatively affected by the Yalta-Potsdam contracts) share the historic guilt, so it becomes a “collective” guilt.

Unlike Sedelmaier, however, Lasas allows variability in the positions of the Member States, both over time and among them. This approach allows him to analyze the dynamics of the process of enlargement after 1995 also and not as hassle-free following a trail at that, but as a series of inconsistent strategic decisions affecting also the policy of conditionality. Despite the controversial conceptual framework, the author problematizes the influence of the Member States, subject to their interests (though value-oriented) in

the implementation of the policy of conditionality, defining it as lowering its effectiveness in relation to the pre-accession preparation of candidates.

Focusing namely on “national interests”, the study of Catherine Milzow looks like it has the potential to shift the debate of the Eastern Enlargement to a new plane, but, in fact, it is a continuation of the line of idealizing the behavior the Member States (Milzow, 2012). She aims to overcome the problematic neglect of “national interests”, due to dangerous belief-burden of this concept in the studies of European integration. According to her, the public political discourse about national interests is essential in explaining the key points of the European integration process, including the process of Eastern Enlargement.

Milzow aims to answer the questions “when” and “how” the enlargement to the East adopted, questions to which previous researches of the process have not given conclusive answers. According to this research, Eastern Enlargement illustrates the emergence of two logics for formulation of the policy for conducting the process. On the one hand, there is the acceptance of Eastern Enlargement in principle, because of proclaimed principles and ideas of the European project. On the other hand, the specific political preferences of the EU – in terms of financial and institutional conditions of the Eastern Enlargement – turn this issue into a separate political topic that is being discussed like other problematic policies such as the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) or CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy). Through the analysis of the interaction between these two logics in the evolution of the public positions of the leaders of France, Germany and the United Kingdom (so as to strike a balance between the material and idealistic, between the “European” and the “national” interests) Milzow reaches the conclusion that the acceptance of the prospect of Eastern Enlargement should be regarded as a process that continues well after the decision to open negotiations of the Council in Luxembourg in 1997.

Despite the undeniably exactly identified deficiency in the scientific literature on enlargement – the importance of national interests on the dynamics of the process – the research results of Milzow contribute partly to its overcoming, due to two major reasons. First, the unreasonable output assumption that the discourse of national interests operates more as a reference to “national” rather than as a direct reflection of the “substantial interests or political priorities”. It seems as if there are only talks about “national interests” without having any real ones. The second, which is actually a deep pre-requisite for the first, is the author’s intentional refusal

to enter into meaningful discussion on the problem what national interest is and how the interests generally formatted political decisions.

National interests, however, have a determining role for the direction, content and dynamics of European integration. They are a traditionally used concept in the historical analysis of the process. In this context, they are decisive for the enlargement, as it is unintentionally illustrated in the study of Sedelmaier. Milzow herself concludes that the topic of Eastern Enlargement is instrumentalized by binding it with European principles, so as the specific political goals of France, Germany and Britain can be achieved. The evolution of the enlargement discourse after the opening of the negotiations with all candidate countries (Helsinki 1999) reflects the striving of Chirac, Schroeder and Blair to improve their negotiation positions in the last phase of the enlargement, so that national preferences can be made difficult to reject. The isolation of the study only in the field of rhetorical leadership manifestations determines the ignoring of the policy of conditionality. However, it is a major instrument of the policy of enlargement, the formation of which (when and how) the author explores.

Notwithstanding the limited (compared to otherwise ambitious research) results, Milzow justifies significant conclusions related to the dynamics of the enlargement process. First, she proves the wide differences in the positions of key Member States, reflected in the discourse strategies of their leaders. Secondly, namely because of these differences, the shaping of the enlargement policy is neither outlined, nor self-obvious, but it is a continuous process (going on between 1997 and 2002), following a series of decisions.

Although the listed authors, supporters of the idealistic version of the behavior of Member States touch upon the question of the impact of national interests on the dynamics of the process, the research framework in which it is placed prevents the achievement of sound and integrated conclusions on it. Therefore, this research perspective contributes to sharpening the imperativeness of the main question rather than for its convincing answer.

Parallel to the development of the idealistic version of the Member States behavior in relation to the Eastern Enlargement, a limited range of authors analyze the dynamics of the process from the perspective exactly of the specific national interests, dictating the great gap in the positions of the countries regarding the EU enlargement (Torreblanca, 2001; Papadimitriou, 2002; Skalmes, 2005; Moravcsik, and Vachudova, 2005; Schneider, 2009).

Jose Torreblanca aims to explain the formed according to him contradiction between the stated by EU main goal of the accession of the

CEEC – through ensuring the economic and political reforms to ensure stability in the region – and the hesitant policy of the Union, which virtually resists the idea of Eastern Enlargement, acts slow and undertakes limited liberalization. The author criticizes the positivistic view that the EU policy in relation to the CEEC is planned and implemented with decisive actions, on the basis of a collective identity. According to him, this misunderstanding is a result of the static outcome research position, which is focused on the results, not on the process itself.

In order to overcome this static position, Torreblanca explores the dynamics of the association process. He analyzes the ways in which the countries of the EEC protect their national preferences – in matters of trade liberalization regarding the CEEC – through day-to-day policies of the national representatives within the framework of the Council institutions of the EU, which have a determining influence on grand bargains. He focuses on two major themes – a) the differences between Member States in relation to the Eastern Enlargement from the beginning of the debate, and b) the problematic management of external relations of the EU, when they involve the negotiation of financial and commercial tools with third parties. According to him, a contradiction has been formed between the proclaimed regulatory principles that dictate generosity and acceptance of the prospect of enlargement and the interests requiring minimization of losses and postponing the enlargement. This fundamental conflict frames the association process and sets the logic of its progress.

On the basis of this analytical perspective, Torreblanca concludes that the achieved compromises between EU countries on the basis of their specific interests shape the content of the policy of association – limited liberalization. The main aim of this policy is to preserve the prospect of membership, but without accepting it. This perspective is accepted (by the decision of Copenhagen in 1993), only then when it is certain that it won't have immediate political, institutional and budgetary implications.

Torreblanca manages to justify some of the reasons for the behavior of the EU as a “reluctant leader” on the accession of the CEEC. Due to some controversial assumptions, however, this explanation is partial. On the one hand, he assumes that rapid accession of the CEEC to the EU is possible (in the short term) and therefore he comes to the conclusion that even though the divergence in national interests among the Member States is overcome creatively – in favor of the prospect of membership – this happens on account of unfounded (apart from the national interests in the field of trade) delay

of four years. As it became clear from the literature on the Europeanization of CEEC, however, the specifics of the post-communist candidate countries requires carrying out massive, deep and prolonged pre-accession preparation, so as to ensure Europeanization for which the Union does not have the tools. From this perspective, the “bewildered” and “delayed” reaction of the European Union is not a result solely of divergence of the Member States private interests in the field of trade, but also by the realization of the need for unprecedented instrumental innovations to be invented that would match the scale of the challenge. Therefore, it is the relationship between national interests and the creation and implementation of specific Euro-integration tools for the CEEC that are essential for the dynamics of the enlargement process. But it remains away from the main focus of the study.

Notwithstanding the indicated limitation, Torreblanca justifies significant conclusions regarding the influence of national interests on the dynamics of the process of enlargement in its first phase – of association. First, he proves the big discrepancy between economic interests and, accordingly, the national preferences of the Member States against the Eastern Enlargement, as well as the importance of the compromises that balance these interests for shaping the policy of enlargement in this early phase yet. Second, he justifies the dominant role of Member States in shaping and implementing the policy of enlargement and their active resistance against the attempts of the EC to extend its institutional influence, because of the specifics of the process. Third, he proves that the inertia of the integration process allows the trend of giving immediate priority to private interests over the adopted principles to dominate in the foreign policy of the EU.

The output research position of Christina Schneider is similar. She criticizes the research results of Sedelmaier and Schimelfennig, according to which the enlargement process runs smoothly and predictably and she aims at presenting a new framework for its understanding through an alternative answer to the question why the Eastern enlargement succeeds, despite the losses of some of the countries. In pursuance of this objective, she focuses on the process of negotiations concerning the conditions of accession (Schneider, 2009).

Schneider analyzes the significant divergence of national preferences, prompted by “domestic concerns” in some of the key issues of the negotiations – liberalization of the free movement of workers, common agricultural policy – the “distribution conflicts” formed, as well as the way these issues were resolved. The requirement of unanimous voting allows

the losers to apply a suspensive tactic to achieve redistribution of gains and losses, which is acceptable to them. In turn, those countries which support the enlargement tend to bear part of the costs, so as to compensate the losers. An essential tool for balancing the profits and losses are the transition periods agreed in the negotiations. These transition periods make it possible for Member States to reallocate losses and gains from the accession. This redistribution accounts for the success of the enlargement, even when some of the Member States expect heavy losses.

Schneider discloses significant conclusions about the dynamics of the enlargement process. Through an alternative approach she confirms Milzow's conclusion that even in the last phase of the Eastern Enlargement, the process is neither outlined, nor with guaranteed success. Precisely because the approach is different – the arguments are not only in the field of talking – it proves the essential importance of achieving compromises, balancing the differences between the Member States in relation to their interests, for the progress of the negotiations for membership, and therefore, for the dynamics of the process. But also for its result.

This answer to the research question, however, is not sufficiently complete, because of an unjustified output assumption. According to Schneider, the rounds of enlargements of the EEC and the EU are comparable, so that the Eastern Enlargement represents yet another “link” from this common “chain”. Although as it has been repeatedly stated above, this enlargement has no way of “weaving” into the otherwise convenient for common logical format historical continuum. And because the accession of the CEEC represents an unprecedented problem, a major component in resolving it is the introduction of the innovative policy of conditionality as a central tool for pre-accession preparation. This policy, however, is completely ignored by the author. From this point of view, the assertion that only the resolving of “distribution conflicts” among Member States shall ensure the successful completion of the process is not fully justified (without inclusion of the policy of conditionality, within the framework of which candidate's progress towards membership should be measured and stimulated during the negotiation process). The question arises – is there and what is the relationship between the conflicts of Member States as a result of the different involvement of their national interests and policy of conditionality in the last phase of enlargement and how that relationship affects the dynamics of the process.

From the presented results of the critical analysis of research perspectives regarding the Eastern Enlargement process, presented above, a few basic conclusions can be made.

First, the studies focused on EU enlargement policy through conditionality fail to explain the way in which that policy is formed and established as an essential instrument for the Europeanization of CEEC. Even when the center of the research interest becomes the change in this policy, in particular – the change of the enlargement conditionality itself – it is seen as a natural, historical fact with no alternative (Gateva, 2015).

Second, studies that attempt to explain the influence of the Member States on the dynamics of the process tendentiously weaken or completely overlook the importance of their specific national interests in relation to this impact – at the expense of adherence to values, norms and moral commitment.

Third, the studies that focus on the impact of specific national interests of the Member States on the course of the enlargement process, on the one hand treat them partly as a chronological framework (a separate phase of the process) and a particular field (economic and budgetary matters) and, on the other hand, ignore the policy of conditionality. Which is actually a direct consequence of the lack of attention to the CEEC specifics, justifying a particular political approach to the Eastern Enlargement of the EU?

In this context, the question of the impact of the Member States national interests on the dynamics of the enlargement process (and therefore on the formulation and validation of the policy of enlargement of the EU through conditionality) remains open.

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