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EUROPEANISATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract

In postsocialistic period, the civil society sector in countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) experienced a series of transformations of both functional and normative nature. In these processes it is difficult to overlook the importance of exposure to Western concepts of understanding and organizing civil society, while the effects, which occurred due to the inclusion of CEE countries to European Union, take privileged place. The purpose of this article is a.) to determine what where the effects of the EU accession processes on the development of civil society in the CEE countries; and b.) to assess the extent and quality of involvement of civic organisations from countries of CEE into transnational European civic networks.

Key words: civil society, transition, East-Central Europe, europeanisation, EU

Introduction

After the disintegration of socialist regimes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) more favourable political and social conditions have incurred for the development of diverse and plural civil society sector and for citizens to form different civil society organisations (CSOs) and participate in various fields of policy processes in these countries. We use the term 'civil society sector' or 'organised civil society' to refer to a "broad array of organisations that are essentially private i. e. outside the institutional structures of government; that are not primarily commercial and do not exist primarily to distribute profits to their directors or owners; that are self-governing; and that people are

free to join or support voluntarily” (Salamon, 2003, 4). Additionally, our understanding is grounded in theories that claim, that these organisations are characterized by their intermediary role. It is assumed that they can act as a bridge between the grassroots of the society and political institutions, where policy making that affects the whole of the society takes place. Pestoff (1992) takes a bit broader approach, stating that CSOs mediate between the family and the local community, state and market and as such mediate between the formal and informal, public and private, and profit and non-profit. Finally their intermediary role can be understood also in Berger and Luckamns' (1995) understanding of 'intermediary institutions' mediating between individuals and established action patterns. They provide individuals with the opportunity to express their personal values and to contribute to the value system of the society. By doing so, they contribute to the production and dissemination of meaning.

After the breakdown of the socialist regimes, a foundation boom of CSOs took place. It was triggered by societal interests, needs and desires, which were going along with the process of political and social change from authoritarian to democratic rule. However, as Mansfeld et al (2004) point out, civil society in CEE countries did not start from scratch in 1989. There already existed traditions of civic engagement and non-profit activity that originally were affiliated with social movements, the churches or the gentry. But the characteristics of these activities differed greatly from those in democratic systems. One of major distinctions was the level of differentiation of civil society and freedom of civic activities. While in socialist regimes one can talk about a »forced homogenization of civil society« (Mansfeld, 2004: 102) and mandatory participation in state-controlled civic organizations (Howard, 2003) the tendency of competitive democratic systems is focused on the internal differentiation of civil society as well as freedom of choice and freedom of participation in public activities.

The nature of CSOs which under socialist rule had been subordinated under “mass social organisations, which closely adhered to the ideology of the ruling party” (Kubik, 2000) started to change in the 1980 and even more radically after the breakdown of the former regimes. They have experienced a series of transformations of both functional as well as normative nature. In these processes it is difficult to overlook the

importance of exposure to Western conceptions of civil society. Particularly in the 1990s foreign donors were eager to supply financial assistance to CSOs as this was seen as a good way to promote democracy. Among Western impacts on the development and organizing of civil society sector in CEE those that accrued due to association processes of CEE countries to the European union take a privileged place (see for instance Schimmelfening in Sedelmeier, 2005; Petrova in Tarrow, 2007; Glenn, 2008).

The purpose of this article is: a.) to determine and summarize the effects of the EU association process on the development of civil society sector in CEE countries; and b.) to assess the extent and quality of involvement of CSOs from CEE in European transnational civil society networks.

Based on the analysis of relevant literature, data and case studies, and own study - focus group: *Social capital, civic involvement and quality of governance in the European Union*, which was held in December 2005 in Brussels (Rek, 2007) in the framework of the EU's 6th framework CONNEX project – we will be looking for basic characteristics of »Europeanization« of civil society sector in CEE countries. Additionally we will be interested in the ways and extent of involvement of CSOs from CEE into transnational civic networks organized at the EU level. We will be especially interested in the conditions of such participation as we would like to understand, whether CSOs from CEE have developed capacities to function as equal partners in European associations and as such represent interests on people from CEE in similar manner as their counterparts from older, already established European democracies do.

The process of Europeanization

For decades, European studies have mostly been concerned with explaining European integration and Europeanization processes themselves. Debates between neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism, and the 'multi-level governance' perspective were evolving around the question of how to account for the emerging European polity. But most of the literature studying the effects of EU membership on the new member states used the Europeanization framework to assess patterns of policy transfer, the scale of domestic adaptation and the institutional and administrative capability of the new members to meet EU standards

as defined by 1993 accession criteria agreed in Copenhagen and the European Commission's prescriptive advice which framed the accession negotiations. Additionally, the literature on post-communist democratisation has focused mainly on the role of political parties and developments in institutional designs of individual state actors, while despite the importance of civil society and organised interests in a participatory model of democracy, few studies have analysed the impact of EU membership on interest intermediation in the new member states in a theoretically informed way and from a comparative perspective.

We should point out, that the scope of the use of the term Europeanization is broad and diversified (Fink-Hafner in Lajh, 2005, 17). Thus, in the scientific literature it is not possible to find a uniform definition of the concept of Europeanization, but it is defined in multiple ways and without clear boundaries. For some authors (see Cowles et. al, 2001) Europeanization means simply the transfer of decision-making authority to the EU level. The main problem of such an understanding is that we nearly equate the process of Europeanization with the process of European integration itself and the two concepts become substitutes for each other. Then there are authors who see Europeanization as a two-way process in which simultaneous influence between the Member States and the EU level arises (see Bomber and Peterson, 2000). While we can argue for the idea, that both levels influence each other, the difficulty of this approach remains the operationalization of this idea and particularly the creation of a constructive research strategy. Where do we begin to search for the cause and consequences of changing processes, when both units of the multilevel system of governance are interconnected?

Due to the problem of determining the dependent and independent variables, a number of authors prefer to understand the concept of Europeanization as a progressive influence of the EU on national and sub-national actors, their legal forms, decision-making and policy processes (as "top down" process). In this context Europeanization is regarded as a process through which the processes of European integration penetrate into the national sphere and, under certain circumstances, lead to the adaptation of domestic institutions, decision-making procedure and policy processes (see for instance Rometsch in Wessels, 1996; Hix and Goetz, 2001; Mair, 2004). However, the authors,

arguing for “top down approach” to studying Europeanization, differ depending on what they give priority to – some focus on the mechanisms of these processes, other on the effects.

But the experience of new member states showed that Europeanization is not limited only to the member states of the EU. The effects of Europeanization are even much easier to identify in the candidate countries as "a more fresh, extensive, and abrupt adaptation" Pridham (2001, 52). This is where the enthusiasm over linking Europeanization especially with new members, or even more specifically, new members from former socialist block, derives from. The fact that in the period of transition to democracy, when changing the whole of political and economic system, a whole series of institutional and regulatory changes have been made in these countries attracted a series of researchers studying the process of Europeanization. Due to the associational processes of countries in CEE to EU, these countries and their political, economic as well as civil society structures were pushed in the direction of greater convergence with various institutional models that exist and are in fact also constantly changing within the EU¹. Direct institutional adjustment at the national level as well as adjustments in individual public areas, were namely requested from the accessing candidate countries already before their full membership in the EU. Therefore, it was argued, “the candidate countries were subject to almost the same adaptation pressures of Europeanization as member states” (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2005, 29). Grabbe (2003) even believes that these pressures are basically the same as in the case of old member states, but broader and deeper in extent. In this context she defines Europeanization as "the impact of EU accession process on national patterns of governance in CEE" (Grabbe, 2001, 1014).

The EU is therefore often seen as a catalyst and facilitator of the transition to democracy. By pressuring on candidate countries to meet certain criteria, EU encouraged democratic development, respect for

¹ It is assumed that non-compliance would cause an adjust pressure comes. Hence, "lower than compatibility (consistency) between the European and national institutions, the more adaptation pressures" (Caporaso et al., 2001, 7).

fundamental human rights, and opening of the political system in these countries (see for example, Perez-Barragan, 2005; Bulmer and Lequesne, 2005; Knill, 2008; Iancu, 2009). This certainly does not mean that the effects of those processes were uniform. As we will argue in the next chapter, we can describe the process of Europeanization of civil society sector in a similar manner as Fink-Hafner and Lajh (2005) describe the case of political institutions: "The dynamics of adjustment of domestic political institutions is the result of both domestic (endogenous) and external (exogenous) factors, as well as the mutual interaction between both" (Fink-Hafner and Lajh, 2005, 116).

In addition, we cannot overlook the fact that "a united Europe is still a project of social elites, not the broad population" (Adam, 2008). The European Union is without a doubt a structure that was constructed on the principle of "top down" approach led by the new Eurocratic structure (Van Deth, 2006; Velikonja, 2005). One of the main challenges of Europeanization, therefore, remains social integration, as well as the formation of European public sphere (Habermas, 1991) and not only integrative institutional reform. These challenges are particularly acute when it comes to issues of Europeanization of civil society. Similarly, when it comes to effects of Europeanization on the development of civil society sector in CEE, which will be the main focus of next chapter, it is manageable to observe these process in terms of changing the institutional and organisational forms of civil society sector. A much bigger challenge is to analyze the transfer of norms and values associated with normative conceptions and functioning of civil society sector.

The Europeanization of civil society sector in CEE

In December 1994, at the Essen European Council, it was decided in particular, to use the resources of the Programme of Community aid to the countries of CEE (Phare programme) as part of the strategy for rapprochement between the ten CEE countries and the European Union with a view to their future accession. The Phare programme, as a pre-accession instrument, was the main channel for the European Community's financial and technical cooperation with the countries of CEE. Its activities concentrate on two priorities: a.) helping the administrations of the candidate countries to acquire the capacity to

implement the Community *acquis*; b.) helping the candidate countries to bring their industries and basic infrastructure up to Community standards by mobilising the investment required, particularly in areas where Community rules are increasingly demanding: environment, transport, industry, product quality, working conditions etc.

From March 1997 the program was focused on two priority areas, namely support for institutional development with the aim of training the administration in candidate countries in accordance with European standards (30 per cent of the funding) and co-financing of investments (70 per cent of the money) to achieve the European Union *acquis*. If, therefore, the PHARE program works as a means to transition to a market economy until 1997, it has now become an important element of pre-accession assistance in the field of economic and social cohesion. In 1999 it was completed also with the SAPARD program (of agriculture and rural development) and ISPA (transport and environmental infrastructure).

The first priority (support for institutional development) was further divided into the transfer of knowledge and transfers of physical capital, which was not limited only to state administration structures but included also the development of civil society sector in candidate countries. The financing intended for civil society sector development was carried through the *PHARE Democracy Program*, *Lien (Link Inter European NGOs) Program*, *Partnership Program* and the *PHARE Access program*. In the framework of the PHARE program, there was also a range of smaller, national targeted programs, which were aimed at strengthening civil society in each country individually. But despite quite an extensive assistance (both financial and technical) to the CSOs development a number of authors (Stewart, 2008; Rail, 2003; Gasior-Niemec, 2007) claim that the effects of these »inputs« were surprisingly small. However, this doesn't mean that there were no effects.

One of the areas where the EU had a significant impact on the development of civil society sector in CEE countries, was in changing the balance between CSOs performing essentially expressive function – such as cultural expression, community organisations, human rights, environmental protection etc. and CSOs performing essentially service function – such as the provision of health, education or welfare service

(Salamon, 2004). The EU funded programs gave priority and thus promoted the development of service-oriented CSOs, which were poorly developed in post-socialist states, mainly because of "state monopoly" of provision and implementation of social services both from the times of socialist regime as well as after its collapse. In the background of such orientated of funding programs Raik (2003) sees the desire to harmonize the civil society sector in countries of CEE with the existing situation in the older member states, where the type of CSOs, offering social service activities is the domain one. A whole range of social services in these countries is in the domain of local community associations and not exclusively the domain of state responsibility.

Another area of influence (and in accordance providing financial and technical assistance) concerned emphasizing the importance of particular fields of civic engagement. CSOs working in the fields of human rights, sustainability of democracy or minority rights had large sums of EU funds available, while some other fields of civic engagement were completely overlooked (Cram, 2008). Certain types of CSOs were therefore strongly promoted, mainly those, whose activities were aligned with rules or goals set in EU documents, such as Copenhagen criteria or *acquisi*, while actual (local) context, situation or needs that existed in each country didn't have major influence on the development, planning and distribution of EU funds intended for the development of CSOs in CEE. In practice, this often meant that civil society organizations indiscriminately modify their operations and activities only to be able to receive funding from EU programs.

In addition, their work has become primarily project-oriented, the acquisition of resources for their activities became based on their ability to raise funds on the "unstable market of EU funding programs" (or from other donors) and the development of expertise, whose central feature was a good knowledge of this market. The development of such specific *know-how* was a very positive development, which enabled the internationalization of civil society sector in CEE. But what was missing was the introduction of long-term strategic ways of organizing and developing of sustainable organisations. EU funding programs, unlike some other international donors, didn't offer basic or bridging funds for CSOs which would facilitate the development of organisations core activities, their identity and long-term strategies, their ability to align their

activities with actual needs of the grassroots of the society or to say specific publics they worked with. Longer-term positioning of these organizations in the context of the wider society and facilitating of networking with potential partners in both public and private sector didn't seem to be a priority. Stewart (2005, 7) even believes, that top-down, short term project orientation of EU funding fostered the »monopoly of short-sightedness« and gave a clear sign to CSOs, that they are subordinated to the EU institutions guidelines. She claims that even though the EU programs were meant to strengthen the development of civil society sector and foster networking among CSOs from CEE with those from old member states, this networking was based on hierarchical principals, where EU institutions determine the context of such development and networking, while CSOs from CEE have only little impact to express their actual needs arriving from the context of their activities and through that influence the development, implementation and evaluation of funding programs.

One of the positive sides of EU funding programs to strengthen civil society sector in the accession countries, was, that funding didn't necessary involve national governmental authorities, which was typical for other areas, but was offered directly to CSOs. Raik (2003) claims that this approach contributed significantly to increasing the capacity and resources of many CSOs, as they obtained knowledge, special *know-how*, connections and ability to take responsibility for the administration and management of EU projects and themselves participate in decision-making for the allocation of resources. Direct funding accelerated the intensity of learning and professionalization of individuals working in CSOs, which prepared them for more effective fundraising from Structural funds and Cohesion funds.

However Krzeczunowicz (2004) claims that in these processes in each of the candidate countries a small number of large, well-connected CSOs were privileged. He argues (2004, 6-7) that this didn't just affect the development of organisational structures of civil society sector but also sent a message about the normative requirements of such developments. »It created a perception of inferiority of smaller CSOs, which were strongly connected with the grassroots of the society, since it appeared, in accordance with the requirements of EU, that in comparison with more professional and bureaucratic larger

organizations, which were only loosely connected with the local publics, the smaller organizations weren't worthy of funding from the EU« (Krzeczunowicz, 2004, 7). Adam (2008) even considers the possibility of the development of the civil society elite. Bigger, better organized CSOs, which were able to accumulate the specialized knowledge and expertise that offered them a competitive advantage in obtaining EU funds, are usually located in capital cities. Financial resources and human capacity of these organizations therefore increased, but rarely meant also a wider involvement of several different, also smaller, local CSOs. This created and reinforced hierarchical relations (see, for example, Adam, 2008; Saurugger, 2008; Lagerspetz, 2002), as smaller, more "remote" CSOs had difficulties to access financing, as well as the expertise, know-how and connections needed to cooperate with foreign donors. This tendency was further promoted by extremely bureaucratic procedures of EU funding programs.

Bigger, better organized CSOs were also the once who started to represent the civil society in policy processes in CEE countries. By requiring increased civil society participation in political decision-making processes at the national level, the EU helped to justify the legitimacy of civil society organizations as actors in political decision-making both on the part of the civil society organizations and to government officials. If, for example, we mention the Strategy of Cooperation of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Cooperation with NGOs, which was accepted by the government of the Republic of Slovenia in October 2003, we find a statement, that »the entry of Slovenia into the EU in a special way triggered a more rapid change and encouraged the development of cooperation between governmental and non-governmental sector«. The process of building civil dialogue with the governmental structures of civil society organizations coincided with the process of integration of Slovenia into the EU. This can be also observed from the fact, that the government commission which was established to lead the dialogue with civil society sphere was established within the Government Office for European Affairs. Strengthening of civil society sector was considered as a condition set by the EU in becoming a member state as the European Commission explicitly recommended, that CSOs are to become and active and equal partners in proceeding and discussions leading to policy decision-making. From the point of view of the candidate countries it was particularly important to fulfil the

requirements that have been set by Copenhagen criteria. In accordance with them, a candidate state must ensure the stability of institutions providing and sustaining democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. Civil society organizations are among the entities that can contribute to ensuring the development in these areas. However, Stuart (2008) claims, that CSOs cooperation with governmental structures were created rapidly and this was less a process of mutual consent than an imposed version of democracy more or less directed by the EU Copenhagen criteria and the stipulation of the *aquis*. For this reason the cooperation didn't always function as the EU officials associated with the process anticipated. Stuart (2008, 225) believes, that this affected civil society development because national and local officials often had interpretations different from those propagated by the EU. CSOs were also not prepared to enter into dialogue with the authorities or needed time to gather resources (financial, human resources and social capital), develop expertise and confidence required (Šporar et al., 2003 , 12). Eventually however the organisational structures of CSOs strengthened, networks were created and their activities became more transparent. Gradually those organisations, whose interests were directed towards improving the state of civil society sector, linked and started to cooperate. Through networking they also became much stronger interlocutors to the governmental structures.

During the negotiation of the Association Agreements in the early 1990s, national governments from post-communist Europe were the main interlocutors voicing the interests of CEE at the EU level. They were the only legitimate representatives of their countries' interests at a time when the process of domestic political and socio-economic transition was still at a very early stage of development (Perez Solarzano Borragan, 2001). A decade later, the pre-accession experience, and the domestic political and socio-economic transformation have encouraged the flourishing of more sophisticated forms of pluralist representation such as CSOs which seek an active involvement in EU-related matters at the national and supranational levels. A number of authors (Raik, 2002; Blumer and Radaelli, 2005; Perez-Borragan, 2001) argue that the PHARE program also contributed significantly to the strengthening and increasing the density of informal contacts and links between CSOs in candidate countries (now mostly EU) and transnational civic networks

organized on the EU level. This led to the transfer of knowledge and values, which will be further discussed in the next chapter. This is also reflected in the ability of CSOs from CEE to participate in transnational networks, which enables them, at least in theory, to have a voice also on the EU level policy making.

To conclude, at the domestic level Europeanization of civil society sector is reflected on the interaction between CSOs and their national governments and parliaments and on the adaptation of CSOs structures and activities to the prospective EU membership. Finally, we should point out, that the inclusive model, offered by the EU, which was intended to strengthening the civil society sector in the candidate countries and new member states, to some extent also allowed to the relevant players to find ways of its adapting to domestic conditions and contexts. One cannot ignore the fact, that the EU had, in all countries of CEE, through formal and informal activities, big impact in the increasing importance and strength of CSOs in participation in policy processes in national level. However, despite a number of common features of EU funding programs intended for CSOs in CEE, the EU has never been intentionally or consistently promoted a single unified model of the development of civil society sphere, but also created opportunities for discourse, which were, despite the top-down processes and a share amount common feature also flexible enough for the selective adaptation (coordination) with the prevailing models of development of civil society sector in the relevant national contexts.

Inclusion of CSOs from new member states in transnational European civil society

The expanding transnational activity of CSOs from CEE and their exposure to the EU lobbying environment allowed for the exchange of norms and ways of doing between them. In this processes CSOs from CEE and their partners from old member states were faced with a number of challenges in terms of identification of suitable partners, trust, dependency, political culture, and diversity of interests that shaped the nature of their relationship.

In the period of approximation of CEE countries to the EU, CSOs from these countries weren't yet full members of European civic associations.

However, a number of CSOs already started to establish contacts with them. But in majority of cases they only played passive roles of observers as well as recipients of various resources and skills. Thus, CSOs from the acceding countries, in most cases did not participate in any decision-making of the European associations, and consequently did not have any impact on policy policies on the EU level.

At the same time, it was assumed that, when it comes to the articulation of interests in CEE, socialist heritage is still very present, while effective systems of interest articulation and representation still need to be developed. To overcome such situation, European associations offered different forms of aid to their prospective full members, aiming at strengthening the organizational, personnel and financial competences and recourses. Even though more than a decade has passed since, Perez (2005) still considers, that the articulation of interests in the former socialist countries is still faced with the institutional heritage of the previous political and economic arrangements, which to some extent still creates expectations and patterns of behaviour. She claims, that the articulation of interest and participation in policy consultation of CSOs from CEE are weak, while the understanding of lobbying and the possibilities, that it offers, is still unclear, even pejorative.

In such circumstances following question arises: are nowadays, when the states of CEE have become full members of the EUU, CSOs from CEE capable of performing the role of equal partners in European Associations. And, can they actively participate in consultative processes on the EU level?

Answering these questions was one of the reasons, why we organized a workshop called *Social capital, civil engagement and the quality of governance in the European Union*, which was held in the framework of EU funded 6th framework *Connex* project on the 1. December 2005 in Brussels. The workshop was conceived and executed as a focus group (Rek, 2007). The aim of our focus group was to gain additional insights into current reflections on the role, functioning and characteristics of civil society organized on the level of the EU, by bringing together practitioners (NGOs and interest groups representatives, policy makers

etc.)² working in the field of civil society in the EU with scientists researching these issues. The focus group consisted of discussions and reflections on following topics: 1) organizational aspects of civic engagement in EU; 2) the role of civic associations in EUs' decision-making processes; 3) inclusion of civic associations from new member states in transnational European civil society. The results of the discussion in the focus group will be together with the theoretical framework presented below.

The inclusion of CSOs from CEE to European civic associations and their exposure to environment of lobbying at the EU level facilitated the exchange of knowledge, norms and modes of action between the partners involved in transnational networks. New arrivals gained a better knowledge about political processes in the EU, access to communication networks and new contacts.

It was assumed that CSOs from CEE countries need to modify their mentality and behaviour patterns (see for instance Padgett, 2000; van Deth, 2006; Szabo, 2004). For example, Perez-Borragan (2001) states that a number of European Associations actually doubted, whether the organisations from CEE, they were cooperating with in order for them to become full members of their networks eventually, actually represent plural interests. They also stressed that the leadership of many CSOs from CEE is weak. Even today, after the accession of CEE countries to EU, identification of suitable partners seems to be a problem. One of the focus group participants described the situation as follows:

The established EU associations are facing quite some problems in acquiring members to EU associations in new member states (that they would like to attract, as they want to be representative), because in new member states civic organisations are badly organised in most cases, so in some cases individual organisations are being a member instead of

² 14 individuals (4 scientists, 2 representatives of business EU-associations, 1 representative of a think tank dealing with EU policies, 2 representatives of civic EU-associations, 4 representatives of liaison-offices in the field of research and a representative of European Commission) participated in our focus group. For further information on participants and outcomes of the focus group visit: <http://www.connex-network.org/>

associations, because the associations are simply not there. The established EU associations are facing quite some problems in acquiring members and associations to the EU new member states (that they would like to attract, as they want to be representative), because new member states, and civic organizations are badly organized, and most cases are in some cases individual organizations are instead being a member of associations, because the associations are simply not there.
--- *President, Society of European Affairs Professionals*

Besides, the spread of membership on such a diverse group of new members caused problems of internal organization of European associations and opened new dilemmas of creating a common policy of action. The European associations had to therefore, adopt their operational structure in according to the increase of membership. They also had to find mechanisms, which would help them to overcome problems in forming cohesive interest frameworks, as the interests of new arrivals may have been much different from already established ones in the network. It was therefore often necessary to resolve individual *policy* dilemmas in order to ensure and preserve the group cohesiveness (establishing the balance between European identity, the identity in the field of activity, while also including interests and identities of new member organisations), which is an important element of maintaining credibility *vis-a-vis* the EU institutions.

The next problematic feature, which was often attributed to the CSOs from CEE, is a poorly developed ability for cooperation and networking. It is not rare that the organizations in CEE, which represented same or similar interests, were not able to create a common front, which would give them a better chance in implementation of these interests. These problems were associated with lack of experience in lobbying in liberal regimes. This is the reason why the Western colleagues organized a series of events and processes, *know-how* transfers, which would allow CSO managers from CEE to better perform following functions:

1. to inform their members about EU legislation, funding opportunities and the development of civil society sector;
2. to represent their members in European associations;
3. to provide specific services for their members;

4. to provide trainings and seminars for their members in order to increase their knowledge about the EU (Peres, 2001; 177).

The European associations were prepared to provide new members in particular with:

- information on events related to specific *policy* areas in the EU;
- information on the structure of European institutions and legislative procedures in the EU;
- reports, elaborated by their analytical units and the expertise in specific policy fields
- information about potential sources of co-financing of European projects (Fink-Hafner, 1994, 229).

But they were more reluctant, when it came to sharing the leverages of power. Even after full membership, individuals and organisations from the old member states remained in the »inner circle« of organisations, which had contacts with the officials in the EU institutions, while the organisations and individuals from new member states mainly remained on the periphery of the decision-making processes. On the other hand, CSOs from CEE weren't really giving priority to participation and influencing of decision-making processes. Namely, the results of the survey *Eurochambers: Corporate Readiness for Enlargement in Central Europe* (2003, 2004) show that the majority of CSOs focused primarily on the exchange of expertise and training. As a consequence, the relationships built were often of asymmetrical nature, since CSOs from CEE were depending on the European Associations both in terms of know-how especially in terms of networks of contacts, related to the policy decision-making.

But CSOs from CEE weren't only active as members of European Associations. Even before the full membership to the EU organized interests from the CEE countries started to open their own non-governmental representation offices in Brussels, which was an already established practice of organized interests from old member states. The purpose of such Liaison offices is to expand the activities of advocacy and lobbying from national to the EU level. The number of representative offices established in Brussels is constantly expanding ever since the

CEE countries have become full member states. In 2005, Perez-Borrerano (2005: 5) wrote "nowadays, there are 38 offices operating in Brussels. The overall number does not even reach 2% of the Brussels based lobbying community, but the number of offices has more than doubled since 1996 and there are plans for further expansion "(Perez-Solarzano Borrerano, 2005). So, the development of Liaison offices or branches in Brussels, where interest groups extend their representation and organization activities from the national level to the European level, has been on the rise since the full membership of the new states to the EU. The status and representation arrangements of these offices are very varied and loose at times. Important is also networking among them (for instance The Network of Interest Representation Offices for Candidate Countries (NIROC) ³, Research, Innovation and Business Network for Central and South Eastern Europe (RIB Network)). But we should also stress out, that the establishing of Liaison offices in Brussels are still mainly limited to the field of business and research, while the cases of CSOs Liaison offices from new member states are extremely rare (for instance Polish NGO office in Brussels).

Activities performed by these representative offices from CEE, are very similar to the activities of comparable organizations in the old EU member states. They mainly include:

- informing members at the national level about relevant EU legislation, funding opportunities, relevant events and trends in the EU;
- promoting their members' interests at EU level;
- representing the interests and lobbying for members at the EU institutions and European associations;
- advising and providing operational assistance to members in communication with Brussels;
- on request, advising members about suitable consultation, law or PR-services in Brussels in accordance with a specific project or issues;
- other tasks that contribute to a better presentation of their members at European institutions and associations.

In our focus group, we asked the participants, to list those factors that enhance or hinder the implementation of such activities. The participants

pointed to the problem of visibility in Brussels and capacity to enter the already existing networks of influencing and lobbying.

Visibility in Brussels is very important, although it should be noted that its importance is often underestimated. When you are once present in Brussels, meet people, give suggestions, share experiences, get invitations to important meetings ... people that see ... you know processes ... you start to slowly but steadily creating an awareness of the presence and interests of new members in Brussels, but also contribute to a different understanding of EU affairs in the domestic arena.

--- *Research Advisor, Slovenian Business and Research Association (SBRA)*

Another problems the interest representation offices in Brussels (from new member states) commonly face is a lack of unified opinion about their role on the national level (national members and founders and funders) and a lack of long term strategically thinking and positioning of these organisations in Brussels.

In Czech republic there is the lack of structure, also in the research and civil society field, also the ministry is not dealing with it well, we often have no idea what is their position, so it is difficult to work in this environment and at the same time the civil society structures are not really build” In Czech republic there is the lack of structure, also in the research field and civil society, also the ministry is not dealing with it well, we often have no idea what is their position, so it is difficult to work in this environment and at the same time the civil society structures are not really built.

--- *Representative of CZELO (Czech Liaison Office for R&D)*

As with other already established liaison organisations from the old member states, there are also problems in communication with members on a national level. On the national level there is a lack of human and financial resources and lack of knowledge on how to get engaged in the policy processes in Brussels. There is also a lack of interest to get involved, as individuals and organisations don't feel affected by the activities on the level of the EU. A number of CSOs on national level lack human and financial resources as well as know-how.

There is also a lack of interest to get engaged in policy processes in the EU, as individuals and organizations do not feel affected by the activities on the level of the EU

A lot of times, what we do here, our services, sometimes they go only in one direction, we send the information to various organisations in Slovenia and we never get a response, and I think it is because they don't see how this could personally affect them. A lot of times, what we do here, our services, sometimes they go only in one direction, we send the information to various organizations in India and we never get a response, and I think it is because they do not see how this could affect them personally. And they don't feel that they can change anything over here, so there is a kind of apathy, and this was already mentioned earlier“And they do not feel that they can change anything over here, so there is a kind of apathy, and this was already mentioned earlier
--- *Research Advisor, Slovenian Business and Research Association (SBRA)*

Such views are problematic in terms of enforcement interests of people CSOs from CEE represent at the EU level, since in Brussels a very simple liberalistic principle has been formed: those who are not aware of their interests or don't actively represent and voice them in the eyes of others, don't really have them.

Moving from a learning period to a more active participation, where CSOs from CEE start contributing and taking the initiative, was stressed as a crucial point in the development of engagement of civil society actors to the transnational networks in the EU.

After the first year of full membership to the EU, what we noticed is that everyone is still learning the new process. We are new, we are learning, you have to learn this and that ... and that eventually has to change. You only have to, or can learn for so long, after that you have to start contributing and take that initiative of moving to that stage.
--- *Secretary General, European Movement International*

When looking at the ongoing EU projects, civic and other organized interest representation offices from the new member states are very active but are always working as partners. A shift from the partnership

role to taking that coordination role is needed. Additional problem is, that CSOs from CEE are often not seen as credible by the EU institutions, so it is still safer to ask a partner from an old member state to become a coordinator, because they are financially more viable, have more experience and a history of finalized projects and as such are taken as more credible. Civic organizations from the new member states are very welcome with a nice partner from an old member state, but they are rarely perceived as a centre.

Conclusion

Before we summon the key findings, it is necessary to point to an important limitation of this study, namely, the regional focus on civil society sector. It is actually difficult to talk of civil society sector in CEE countries as a homogenous phenomenon, since there are a number of differences among individual new EU members. Important differences in the characteristics of CSOs in CEE existed already in the eighties and similarly we can establish important differences in terms of development of civil society sector after two decades of democratization processes (see for example Adam et al, 2008). Despite a similar heritage of the development of civil society in CEE the individual countries themselves face their own context and circumstances of its developments. However, when it comes to Europeanization, it makes sense to look at them also in regional context, because this was also the main perspective of the »top down Europeanizing transfers«. They were all recipients of similar process of diffusion, learning and adaptation to formal and informal, rules, procedure, styles, ways of doing and shared beliefs and norms of the EU. In summary, as a significant move, which marked the development of civil society sector in CEE (as a result of the association to the EU) we can list following:

- changing the balance between CSOs performing essentially expressive function and CSOs performing essentially service function;
- emphasizing the importance of particular fields of civic engagement (for instance human rights, sustainability of democracy, minority rights);
- professionalization of CSOs management;

- altering the structure of relations between CSOs in the national environment - strengthening the hierarchical relations;
- justifying the legitimacy of CSOs as actors in political decision-making processes, both on the part of the part of CSO as well as government officials and the public;
- developing specific *know-how*, which strengthened the internationalization of civil society functioning;
- strengthening and increasing the density of informal contacts and links between civil society actors in candidate countries (now members of the EU) and the old members of the EU.

Today, many CSOs from CEE are full members of European civic associations. In the paper we have listed several factors that influenced their performance in these networks. Those that are most frequently mentioned are problems of weak organizational capacity, poor coordination, lack of financial resources and human resources. In addition, we indicated that the European associations hold back, when it comes to sharing the leverages of power. CSOs and individuals from the old member state often remain in the "inner circle" of organizations that have contacts with the bodies of the EU, while organizations from CEE remain on the periphery of decision-making processes.

Finally, equipped with all the above mentioned findings we can assess whether the civil society actors from CEE countries are equally competent to be engaged in the civil society networks organized on the EU level. It has already been argued, that the lack of infrastructure of civic organisations (especially international ones) and weaker representativeness and accountability of civic organisations can be hindering elements when considering engagements of civic organizations from Central and Eastern Europe on the level of the EU. Nevertheless we can establish that civil society organizations from Central and Eastern Europe can equally participate in the civil society organized on the EU level, if they poses adequate competences, know the EU affairs and are embedded in social networks in Brussels. However, the analysis showed that in case of civic organisation from CEE the competences needed to actively participate in transnational

networks on the EU level, are poorly developed. Among the reasons for such a state we can list following:

- lack of human and financial resources;
- lack of coordination, network building and synergy on national level;
- lack of initiative (the need for shift from partnership role to coordinator role);
- lack of interest to get involved, as individuals and organizations don't feel affected by the activities on the level of the EU;
- lack of unified opinion about their role;
- lack of long-term strategic thinking;
- need some time to become visible in Brussels, to become part of networks;
- poorly developed organized civil society (both domestic as well as internationally oriented).

However, we can expect that in the coming years we will witness an accelerated development of CSOs involvement from CEE countries at the EU level policy-making. With better positioning, expanding of existing structures, increased visibility, expansion of channels of communication and channels of influence in Brussels (it should be noted that these processes can't be achieved overnight) and history of finalized projects, CSOs from CEE should gain credibility. Besides, the added value of a small number of non-governmental representations from CEE in the Brussels lobbying arena, however, can be seen in entering of new approaches and enthusiasm to the networks of already established stable relationships and alliances. Therefore, we can understand the involvement of CSOs from the new members also as a process, which compels the networks at the EU level into new adaptations and establishment of new balances due to the integration of interests and modes of action of "new arrivals."

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