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The Dynamics of Eastern Europeanization and the Impact of “Membership Credibility” in Enlargement Rounds Compared

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Abstract: Research on enlargement-led Europeanization has extensively focused on countries from Central Eastern Europe and only recently enriched with studies dealing with specific issues and/or countries from Western Balkans. Still more comprehensive study across new and previous potential member-state countries is needed. This article will assess to what extent the new and previous potential candidate countries from Eastern Europe have been able to bring their policies and institutions – both in formal and practical terms – in line with EU requirements. By tracing the progress of all, previous and new, candidate countries we show the asymmetry among enlargement rounds in adopting and implementing EU acquis. In this respect, “membership credibility” has been an important factor in adoption and implementation performance among and within enlargement rounds.

Key Words: Central Eastern Europe, Eastern Europeanization, Membership Credibility, Western Balkans.

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Introduction

The eastward enlargement was a historical decision which made possible in 2004 the accession of eight Central Eastern European (CEE) countries. This was just an initial part of a larger enlargement process continuing with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, the forthcoming accession of Croatia in 2013 and the still ongoing preparation of all other Western Balkan (WB) countries. Although EU (then EC) committed itself to enlarge eastward, the approach toward CEEs and WBs was different. If CEE countries gain their perspective of joining EU on 1993, it was only in 2000 where the WB countries were considered *potential candidates* for EU membership. The reason for such a differentiation on the EU approach could be attributed mainly to the different transitions experienced by the CEEs and WBs (Jano 2008, 143 ff.). Today, where all the CEE countries have become full EU member-states, the attention is focus into the EU enlargement towards WB countries as being the next step of fulfilling the overall “project of unifying the continent”. Different from CEE accession process, the WB countries present various speed and modalities with regards to EU enlargement process. Can this variety in speed and modalities of accession be attributed to the different degrees of WBs compliance with EU requirements?

Many concerns and doubts have been raised on the Europeanization capacity of the Western Balkan countries. The scepticism becomes more pronounced as EU enlargement conditionality and its ‘transformative power’ has been put into question. Most of the academic contributions speak of the limited impact of the EU incentives into the WBs (see Noutcheva 2009; Freyburg and Richter 2010). Others argue still in favour of a strong EU leverage in the region through different incentive structure where specific policy conditionality matters more than membership conditionality (see Renner and Trauner 2009; Trauner 2009). The question rests still on how to produce generalizable results for the WB region as a whole and with what to compare if the region has progress or not on Europeanization. The few studies on Europeanization of the WB are without any doubt important insights of the differential enlargement impact on the specific (group) of countries and/or issues but insufficient for understanding the whole region. The understanding of Europeanization in Western Balkans regardless of some recent studies is still insufficient, especially when compared with that of the Western or Central Europe (Anastasakis 2005, 80). Furthermore, regardless of the growing literature in Europeanization of the potential member-states, still comparisons among enlargement rounds are missing (Sedelmeier 2011, 30).

In order to address these gaps in the literature and get comparative insights on Europeanization dynamics we compare the CEE and WB qualitative data gained from the Commission reports on the progress of the potential member-states. By tracing the progress of all potential member-states (1997-2010) we show the asymmetry in adopting and implementing EU *acquis* among enlargement rounds. In this respect, the credibility of membership matters if group of countries in same enlargement rounds is considered. The “membership credibility” has been an important factor in adoption and implementation performance among and within enlargement rounds, having major implications on the very dynamics of the enlargement-led Eastern Europeanization.

Getting Europeanization Right in the Potential Member-state Countries

The more rigorous usage of the concept of Europeanization is closely linked to European integration. Europeanization refers to the domestic changes attributed to European integration process in the case of member-state countries and by analogy, to enlargement process in the case of potential member-state. Europeanization research focus on the *impact of enlargement*, analysing the effects the process of enlargement brings about in the potential member-states (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier 2002, 504-507; 2005c, 6-9). It answers the question *how, to what extent* and in *what ways* EU enlargement has changed the potential candidate states.¹ There are two key characteristics of the impact of EU on member-states that are comparable to those on potential member-states: first, the significant extent to which EU actors and institutions direct and enforce the adjustment process, although instruments differ and secondly, the comprehensive nature of adjustment to cover all of the *acquis* (Sedelmeier 2011, 6). Potential member-states are subject to adaptation and implementation of EU policies the same as current member states are. Although the process of Europeanization in potential member-states is essentially similar to those in member-states, the circumstances are different (Bulmer 2007, 54). Given their candidacy status, the EU’s influence on applicants has the added dimensions of conditionality and of the accession negotiations (Grabbe 2001, 1014; Heritier 2005). Such circumstances give Europeanization of the potential member-states a distinctive characteristic regarding first, the instruments used by EU to influence and to monitor the adjustment process and secondly the asymmetrical relation process (Sedelmeier 2011, 6).² Furthermore, the effects of Europeanization in potential member-states although similar in nature with those in EU member-states, they are much broader and deeper in scope (Grabbe 2003). The EU agenda for institutional and policy change in candidate countries is extensive. As set out in the Copenhagen European Council meeting (1993), the candidate countries must not only adopt and implement *acquis communautaire* but have also stable democratic institutions, form competitive market economies, respect human and ethnic rights. Furthermore, Europeanization in the potential member-states not only proceeded at a much quicker pace than in the member-states because of time pressures of accession but also produced more homogenous and convergent outcomes (Grabbe 2001, 1014; 2003, 306; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier 2005b, 225; 2007, 98). The overall process, where European enlargement has an impact on to-become member-state countries has been referred to as “Eastern-style Europeanization”. That is, for potential member-states because of their preparation for accession, we can speak of a pre-Europeanization process. All the adjustments and transformations are “anticipatory effects” preparing for accession and at the same time “anticipated effects” on the likely long-term implications of future eventual EU

membership (Goetz 2007, 75; 2001, 1036; Lippert *et al.* 2001). The distinct pre-accession pattern of Europeanization is, in principle, a transitional phenomenon. Conditionality will remain an external force as long as the potential member-state countries are not yet full EU members but once they acquire full membership rights, Europeanization mechanisms and substance can be expected to progressively approximate those in the member-states (Goetz, no date).

In this context, Europeanization is nothing but a member-state building where potential member-state countries had to become, in abstract term Europe-like or in more concrete terms they had to adopt and implement new legislation and institutions prior to accession conform EU's standards. The stabilization and association process had put forward not only political and economical criteria of general character to be fulfilled but also specific requirements on domestic legislation and policies with those of the *acquis*.

Measuring the Formal and Behavioral Aspects of Europeanization

If consensus exists on what process the Europeanization concept describes, questions arise to what its outcomes may be. This, primarily because enlargement has affected many *aspects* of the domestic political spheres being them rather institutional structure, policy-making processes or representative politics and the *forms* of change may be either communicative, formal or/and behavioral change (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier 2005a, 7-8). When speaking about the outcomes of Europeanization, terms like compliance, implementation, transposition, adoption, approximation or adaptation have been used interchangeably. Moreover vast units of measuring them have been used, such as *transposition time* (rates of prompt transposition, delay in transposition), *occurrence of infringement procedures* (notifications, reason opinions, referrals and judgments by the European Court of Justice), *performance in adoption and implementation*.

Europeanization outcome being a complex concept is very difficult to pin it down to only one concrete indicator, so at best it can be used to summarize the association among different observable components. Facing such an issue, one has to make choices and narrow the scope of investigation by analyze only certain aspects of the Europeanization outcome. To argue for a more comprehensive Europeanization outcome we follow Radaelli's suggestion for a more dynamic analysis, of considering not only policy change but also macro-institutional structures (2004, 7).

To argue for a comprehensively Europeanization effect that might take place not only on the formal level of revoking legislation but also on the behavioral level of implementation we code formal rule *adoption* and their practical *implementation* separately, then using Boolean logic both components (adoption and implementation) is reconnected according to conjunctive 'and' model which represents a lack of substitution among components (none of the components does substitute the other), thus both components should be present (Verkuilen 2005, 471). The conjunctive 'and' model, taking the minimum of all components, account not only for the formal aspects (adoption) but also for the aspect of practical application (implementation) of the EU requirements. This is a good strategy for making a balance between keeping the full representation of the concept and at the same time have clear and concrete indicators.

To provide a measure for both the adoption and implementation with the EU *acquis* conditionality of the potential member-state countries, the European Commission progress reports will be used. In 1997, the European Commission gave its first opinion on CEE countries' application for membership. From then on, the commission published annual regular reports, in form of strategy, composite and comprehensive papers, assessing adoption and implementation progress by each of the candidate countries. On 2002, the European Commission published its first annual report on the Stabilization and Association process for Western Balkan countries and from 2005 onwards the key findings of the progress is published in forms of MEMOs. All these reports offer a very useful source of systematic and aggregate information on a yearly base.³ The qualitative data of the reports are comprehensive and unique, in the sense that they evaluate the progress of each potential and candidate country with regard to not only the formal transposition of EU laws and policies (adoption) but also the aspect of their practical application (implementation).⁴ The reports used distinct qualitative phrases to describe "progress"⁵ with regard to adoption and implementation of the EU requirements. The outcome corresponding to adoption and implementation in each of the European reports can be grouped into four main categories according to their assessment of *no progress; little, few, limited or some progress; progress; and good, significant or full progress*.

Table 1: Qualitative Data on Adoption, Implementation and Europeanization of PMS (1997-2010)

Year	Country	Adoption	Implementation	Europeanization
1997	Bulgaria	Progress	Some	Some
1997	Czech Rep.	Progress	Some	Some
1997	Estonia	Progress	Some	Some
1997	Hungary	Progress	Some	Some
1997	Latvia	Progress	Some	Some
1997	Lithuania	Progress	Some	Some
1997	Poland	Progress	Progress	Progress
1997	Romania	Some	No	No
1997	Slovakia	Progress	Some	Some
1997	Slovenia	Progress	Some	Some
1998	Bulgaria	Progress	Some	Some
1998	Cyprus	Progress	Good	Progress
1998	Czech Rep.	Some	Some	Some
1998	Estonia	Progress	Some	Some
1998	Hungary	Progress	Good	Progress
1998	Latvia	Some	Some	Some
1998	Lithuania	Progress	Some	Some
1998	Malta	Some	Some	Some
1998	Poland	Some	Some	Some
1998	Romania	Good	Some	Some
1998	Slovakia	Some	Some	Some
1998	Slovenia	No	Some	No
1999	Bulgaria	Progress	Some	Some
1999	Cyprus	Some	No	No
1999	Czech Rep.	Some	Some	Some
1999	Estonia	Some	Some	Some
1999	Hungary	Progress	Progress	Progress
1999	Latvia	Good	Some	Some
1999	Lithuania	Progress	Good	Progress

1999 Malta	No	No	No	2003 Malta	Good	Good	Good
1999 Poland	Some	Some	Some	2003 Poland	Good	Some	Some
1999 Romania	Some	Some	Some	2003 Romania	Progress	Some	Some
1999 Slovakia	Good	Some	Some	2003 Serbia	Some	Some	Some
1999 Slovenia	Good	Some	Some	2003 Slovakia	Good	Some	Some
2000 Bulgaria	Good	Some	Some	2003 Slovenia	Good	Some	Some
2000 Cyprus	Good	Progress	Progress	2004 Albania	Some	Some	Some
2000 Czech Rep.	Good	Some	Some	2004 Bosnia	Some	Some	Some
2000 Estonia	Progress	Progress	Progress	2004 Bulgaria	Good	Good	Good
2000 Hungary	Good	Progress	Progress	2004 Croatia	Progress	Some	Some
2000 Latvia	Progress	Some	Some	2004 Kosovo	Progress	Progress	Progress
2000 Lithuania	Good	Progress	Progress	2004 Macedonia	Some	Some	Some
2000 Malta	Good	Progress	Progress	2004 Romania	Good	Progress	Progress
2000 Poland	Some	Some	Some	2004 Serbia	Some	Some	Some
2000 Romania	Progress	Progress	Progress	2005 Albania	Some	Some	Some
2000 Slovakia	Good	Progress	Progress	2005 Bosnia	Progress	Some	Some
2000 Slovenia	Good	Progress	Progress	2005 Bulgaria	Good	Some	Some
2001 Bulgaria	Good	Some	Some	2005 Croatia	Progress	Some	Some
2001 Cyprus	Good	Good	Good	2005 Kosovo	Some	Progress	Some
2001 Czech Rep.	Good	Progress	Progress	2005 Macedonia	Good	Some	Some
2001 Estonia	Good	Good	Good	2005 Romania	Good	Some	Some
2001 Hungary	Progress	Progress	Progress	2005 Serbia	Progress	Some	Some
2001 Latvia	Progress	Some	Some	2006 Albania	Some	Some	Some
2001 Lithuania	Good	Progress	Progress	2006 Bosnia	Progress	Some	Some
2001 Malta	Progress	Progress	Progress	2006 Bulgaria	Good	Some	Some
2001 Poland	Progress	Some	Some	2006 Croatia	Some	Progress	Some
2001 Romania	Progress	Some	Some	2006 Kosovo	Some	Some	Some
2001 Slovakia	Good	Some	Some	2006 Macedonia	Some	Some	Some
2001 Slovenia	Good	Good	Good	2006 Montenegro	Some	Progress	Some
2002 Albania	Progress	Some	Some	2006 Romania	Good	Some	Some
2002 Bosnia	No	No	No	2006 Serbia	Good	Progress	Progress
2002 Bulgaria	Good	Progress	Progress	2007 Albania	Progress	Progress	Progress
2002 Croatia	Good	Some	Some	2007 Bosnia	Some	Some	Some
2002 Cyprus	Good	Good	Good	2007 Croatia	Progress	Progress	Progress
2002 Czech Rep.	Good	Progress	Progress	2007 Kosovo	Progress	Some	Some
2002 Estonia	Good	Progress	Progress	2007 Macedonia	Progress	Some	Some
2002 Hungary	Progress	Good	Progress	2007 Montenegro	Some	Some	Some
2002 Kosovo	Some	No	No	2007 Serbia	Progress	Good	Progress
2002 Latvia	Progress	Progress	Progress	2008 Albania	Progress	Some	Some
2002 Lithuania	Good	Some	Some	2008 Bosnia	Some	Good	Some
2002 Macedonia	Some	Some	Some	2008 Croatia	Progress	Progress	Progress
2002 Malta	Progress	Good	Progress	2008 Kosovo	Some	Some	Some
2002 Poland	Progress	Progress	Progress	2008 Macedonia	Good	Some	Some
2002 Romania	Progress	Some	Some	2008 Montenegro	Progress	Some	Some
2002 Serbia	Some	Some	Some	2008 Serbia	Some	Good	Some
2002 Slovakia	Good	Progress	Progress	2009 Albania	Progress	Some	Some
2002 Slovenia	Good	Good	Good	2009 Bosnia	Some	No	No
2003 Albania	Some	Some	Some	2009 Croatia	Good	Some	Some
2003 Bosnia	Progress	Some	Some	2009 Kosovo	Some	No	No
2003 Bulgaria	Good	Some	Some	2009 Macedonia	Progress	Some	Some
2003 Croatia	Progress	Some	Some	2009 Montenegro	Progress	Some	Some
2003 Cyprus	Good	Good	Good	2009 Serbia	Progress	Progress	Progress
2003 Czech Rep.	Good	Good	Good	2010 Albania	Progress	Some	Some
2003 Estonia	Good	Good	Good	2010 Bosnia	Some	Some	Some
2003 Hungary	Good	Good	Good	2010 Croatia	Progress	Some	Some
2003 Kosovo	Some	Some	Some	2010 Kosovo	Some	No	No
2003 Latvia	Good	Good	Good	2010 Macedonia	Progress	Some	Some
2003 Lithuania	Good	Good	Good	2010 Montenegro	Progress	Some	Some
2003 Macedonia	Some	Some	Some	2010 Serbia	Progress	Some	Some

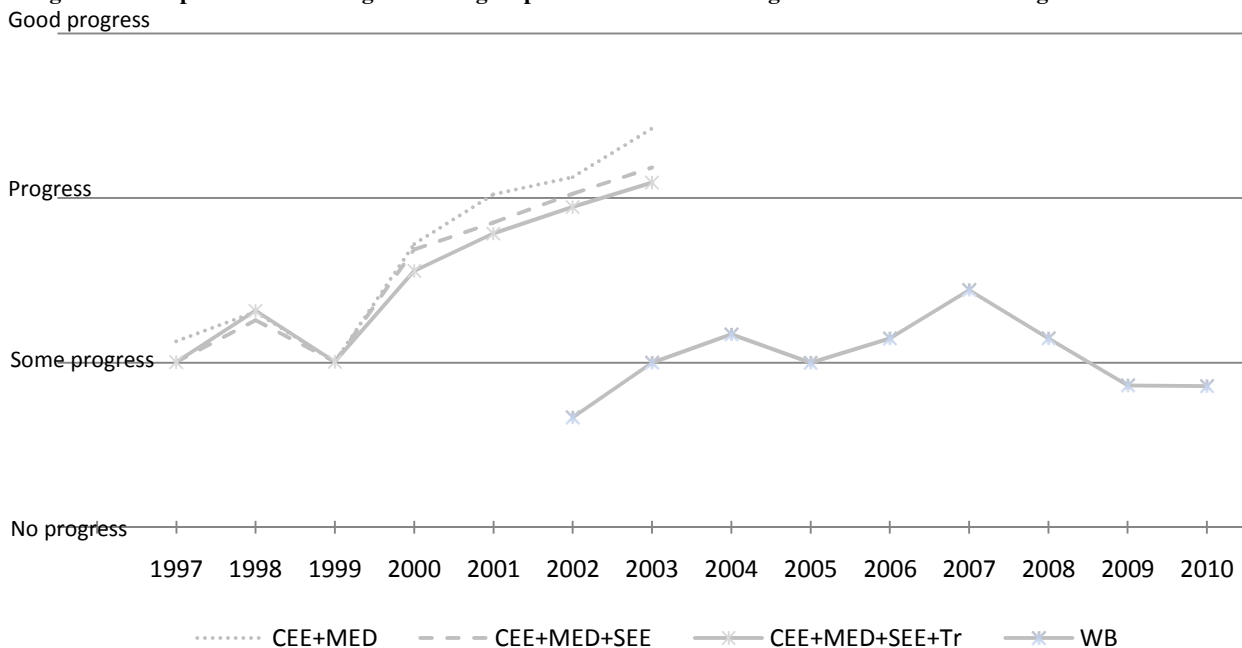
Source: Qualitative data from Commission Opinion, Composite Paper, Annual Reports and Memos on Key Findings (1997-2010). Here we consider only the general evaluations on EU standards/acquis sections, not on political and economic evaluation.

Europeanization Dynamics in Enlargement Rounds Compared: CEE's and WB's Experience

In general, adoption records better than implementation scores. This is because, implementation does not relate only to the political will of the potential member-states but it needs also to be backed up with administrative and budgetary resources. Progress in adoption and implementation of the *acquis* varies significantly between countries and has its ups and downs through the years. The quite diverse performance of potential member-state countries is attributed to political and administrative domestic factors. But what can we say about Europeanization dynamics comparing the group of countries in the same enlargement rounds? Does “membership credibility” play any role on Europeanization dynamics?

In order to respond to these questions, we construct and compare the index of Europeanization of the CEE⁶ countries and WB countries using the compensatory “average” model which represents trade-offs among components (Verkuilen 2005, 471).

Figure 1: Europeanization average score of groups of countries according to their EU accession stage



If referred to this average qualitative data, some important conclusions can be drawn regarding Europeanization dynamics with reference to the groups of countries in the various enlargement rounds. First of all, the trend of Europeanization does not change much if Bulgaria and Romania (2007 enlargement round) or even if Turkey is added to the group of 2004 enlargement round (CEE plus Cyprus and Malta). Still as expected and argued in the literature, Bulgaria, Romania or Turkey had performed worse slightly decreasing the overall performance of the 2004-enlargement group. Secondly, beside the low scores and the ups and downs in the first period (1997-2000), the 2004-enlargement group made substantial and rapid progress after accession negotiations with the second block of CEE countries started in 2000.⁷ These findings are in line with most of the studies on the previous candidate countries who speaks of a ‘transformative power’ that EU exerted through enlargement conditionality to make the CEE countries comply with EU standards. Thirdly, differently from CEE’s successful Europeanization, the region of the WB lacks behind. Throughout the examined period (2002-2010), the WB’s Europeanization scores are very low to only *some progress*. Still, within this trend of low performance, there are periodic oscillations towards improvements with two peaks (2004, 2007) and stagnation after 2009.

Tracing the Process: Accession Impact into the Dynamics of Europeanization Progress

Considering the ups-and-downs in Europeanization average scores of the WBs and the CEEs experience, the next important question will be to see what “factor(s)” may explain the different Europeanization trends in enlargement rounds. The broad explanatory argument in the literature is that the successful EU’s policy impact will depend on a credible membership incentive (Sedelmeier 2011, 22). The novelty in the context of Western Balkans enlargement is that CEE’s enlargement matters and have potential to influence the membership conditionality, as a consequence influence the domestic impact of enlargement as a whole. As such it can be argued that the speed of the entire process of EU accession determines also the level of Europeanization, the faster and the more credible the process is going the more adaptation to *acquis* is expected. A faster degree of integration “raise positive expectations” at both sides, making EU asking more progress and at the same time the potential member-state countries trying to do more.

In terms of credibility of enlargement process the two major political enlargement decisions have to be considered; the decision to open association negotiations (for Europe Agreements and for Stabilization and Association Agreements) and the decision to open accession negotiations (Schimmelfennig 2008, 922). Through opening of association/accession negotiations the EU creates the expectation that the applicant country will at some yet unknown moment join the Union as long as it has satisfied the conditions of membership (Steunenberg and Dimitrova 2007). Moreover, the opening or closing of negotiations with some states increases also the credibility of rewards for all the candidates, as it demonstrates the EU is willing to conclude negotiations (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005b, 215).

In the case of CEE, the EU’s impact intensified especially once accession negotiations were open. In 1998, the accession negotiations started with Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Cyprus, and in 2000 Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Malta also started accession negotiations, an evidence that EU’s membership incentive was credible in those years. Tracing the progress of those countries (see figure 1) we can see that especially in those years CEE has the tendency of greater progress. The findings are in line with the literature argument that the EU’s impact on the CEE’s Europeanization intensified especially once the EU opened accession negotiations, the most important evidence that the EU’s membership incentive was credible (Sedelmeier 2011, 22). The argument of the importance of accession credibility is more obvious and pronounced in the case of the WBs enlargement round. The WB region as a whole has progressed towards adoption and implementation (2003-2004) the time when CEE accession was decided and later accession treaties with CEE’s countries signed. After a slow down of progress, the performance of WB gets a further push in 2005, the time when accession of Bulgaria and Romania was decided. A progress that continued to grow until Bulgaria and Romania signed accession treaty in 2007. After this period the progress of the WB region has continuously decreased. The peaks on the progress in the WB region are on the years 2004 and 2007, the dates when accession of CEE countries, Cyprus and Malta and later Bulgaria and Romania were concluded. So, the Western Balkans can be Europeanized (Demetropoulou 2002) if membership credibility is high.

Concluding Remarks

The debate on the impact of EU on the Eastern Europe has been on how much EU has and can transform the entire region. The literature is divided on this issue, and as we show the dynamics of Europeanization varies according to enlargement rounds. Regardless of the predominantly explanatory factors linked to domestic preferences and capacities in explaining domestic impact, we have shown in this article that the credibility of membership is an important explanatory factor that account for Eastern Europeanization dynamics, if considering the progress of the groups of countries in the same stage of accession. By tracing the progress of countries in the same enlargement rounds and the temporal key political enlargement decisions made, we find Europeanization progress to score better when credibility membership is high, that is when EU open or close association/accession negotiations with potential member-states. In this respect, the CEE accession and later accession of Bulgaria and Romania, through increasing of membership credibility, has been an important factor in increasing Europeanization performance in the WB region.

This finding has policy consequences. For EU to repeat its CEE success story in WB, despite all uncertainties and domestic difficulties, the membership credibility should be kept high in EU policy agenda. The speed (*tempo*) as well as the irreversibility of Europeanization in the WB region will mostly depend on EU membership incentives, regardless of their domestic preferences and capacities.

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Notes:

¹ For the argument on EU Enlargement theory as an ontological stage of research and Europeanization as its post-ontological stage on candidate countries see Grabbe (2003, 309-310; 2006, 47-49) who makes an analogy with the same argument Radaelli (2000) used for Europeanization in the member states as being post-ontological stage, different from the ontological stage of EU integration. The point here is that Europeanization would not exist without European integration or EU enlargement in the case of (potential) candidate states.

² In order to induce adjustment EU institutions cannot rely on the treaty-based sanctions or through financial penalties imposed by the European Court of Justice (ECJ), but rather on other instruments such as conditional incentives, normative pressure, persuasion or framing. Furthermore European Commission, different from the infringement procedures used in member state, publish Regular Reports as a way to monitor the process of compliance with EU conditions in candidate countries.

³ Although the reports are compiled by the Commission they are based on information gathered from many sources including information and contributions from the Commission delegations in each country's capital, the national governments of the potential member-states and the EU member-states, European Parliament reports as well as assessments made by various international organization, in particular Council of Europe, OSCE, International Financial institutions, and other non-governmental organizations.

⁴ The indicator for measuring adoption and implementation, and as a result Europeanization, is the *positive change* in terms of both formal rule adoption and implementation compare to the previous status quo at a given point in time rather than assessing the actual degree of convergence achieved. This because the misfit with European norms and rules has been deep and full convergence needs time to arrive at it.

⁵ 'Progress' is measured on the basis of decisions taken, legislation adopted and measures implemented. As a rule, legislation or measures which were under preparation or awaiting parliamentary approval have not been taken into account. This approach ensures equal treatment across all reports and permits an objective assessment.

⁶ We construct and report in the figure 1 the three indexes for eastern enlargement, once including all CEE and Mediterranean (MED) countries of Cyprus and Malta, the second index include also the countries of South Eastern Europe (SEE), Bulgaria and Romania; while in the third index we include also Turkey (Tr).

⁷ The first CEECs countries (Cyprus also started in the same year) that start accession negotiations in 1998 where Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. The rest of the countries (Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia – Malta was also included) started accession negotiations in 2000.