New Regionalism and Enlargement Negotiations in Central and Eastern Europe

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Introduction

The contemporary international system is restructuring, and the history of the international system's transformations shows us that the redistribution of power was accompanied by spatialization. Nowadays, the international system has become itself an important actor of international relations. It is already detectable that one of the spatialization's manifestations in the process of the international system's transformation relates to the regions, understood as actors of international policies (as in the case of the European Union). The establishment and the operation of regions in the international system is based, first of all, on negotiations, mainly because the process has now an accelerated dynamic.

The covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that the mature understanding of the role and of the networks of regions could facilitate the innovation of the functioning of globalization. The contribution provided by the European Union and other regional associations to multilateralism and global governance is undoubtedly significant.

The basic paradigms for understanding the post-Cold War world need a reconsideration, mainly in the light of the latest international evolutions, which involved several different actors and factors (for example, the pandemic). It seems that a better expression of the reality of the contemporary world is the new regionalism, seen from the perspective of regional constructs which took the role of the political, social and economic characteristics of the multipolar world. Autonomy, sovereignty and the lack of constraints have to be understood in a very realistic frame, because the international scene never reflected it with all the nuancés (added by negotiations). Over the last decades, new paradigms emerged as options for the constraints or threats, on the freedom of the states in the evolution of international system.

But in Europe, for the specific reasons connected with a bloody history of conflicts, an integrated structure of regions was created, which could be interpreted as a pragmatic response emerged from the Cold War. It proved to be a good alternative for the new interest emerged in the 1990s. The second major initiative for the modern regionalism was the creation of Mercosul–Mercosur (Southern Common Market) (1991–1994), as

an experiment for a common political and economic development in South America, followed by other models such as: NAFTA (North American Free Trade Area, 1994), ASEAN (Associations of Southeast Asian Nations, 1967) and the Organization of African Unity (1963; African Union from 2002).

The potential of the new regionalism consists in the solutions which it offers, in a globalized context, or a better political, economic, social and cultural development, being an alternative to the hegemonic stability. Practically, the region is the main activator at the state and supra-state level, facilitating the cooperation between different categories of actors (state and non-state).

The success of the regional model is demonstrated by the initiatives developed, indicating that regionalism will become a permanent and, maybe, a prominent characteristic of a restructured international system, framing a theoretical response to a system which seemed confused. The European Union, in this context, has a very important role, not only with the examples of economic regionalism which were tested (Internal Market, Economic and Monetary Union), but also by giving examples for political cooperation. The negotiations system will facilitate the bridging of networks of sovereign states with a new political structure, and many other initiatives. This could be one of the ways in which the European Union will become a more important international actor.

We do not know now how the international system will look like after the covid-19 pandemic, but, without any doubts, in the future system of international relations, regionalism will be an important theoretical and practical construct, with an innovative role, which will shape the inter-state relations (for sure at European level).

This paper brings a new element into the study of international relations by analyzing the role of new regionalism in explaining the Europeanization process of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, understood as a European integration process. In the paper I opted for a qualitative analysis, with case study and the comparative approach as research methods. The questions of the research are: Is the new regionalism the approach of the developmental policy for the CEE Member States? Which is the contribution of Europeanization to the integration process and what is the role of negotiation in this enlargement process?

Regarding the structure of the paper, in the first part I presented the most recent approaches to the new regionalism, then the CEE region is presented from the perspective of European integration. These theoretical parts will offer the basis for the answer to the research questions. The paper ends with the conclusions, which will open the interest for future research.

New Regionalism and Beyond

THE TOPIC of regionalism was intensely studied in the 1990s and maintained the interest of researchers from international relations and European affairs during 2000–2010, mainly because of the fifth enlargement wave, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The European regionalism model is a success story and it was deep-

ly analyzed from various perspectives: economic, political, and cultural. Moreover, some European policies are especially designed to support the consolidation of the model and its expansion (regional development). In fact, we are referring to a developmental policy which could offer the support for a future integrative and interdependent strategy for developing a specific governance model for the EU. It could be one of the ways which will offer a consistent pillar for a stronger global dimension of the EU.

Nowadays, the security approach of the new regionalism concept brought about a revival of the concept.¹ By offering an understanding of security as a "situation of being well" and "being away from fear and threat,"² the newest interpretation of the new regionalism concept is being outlined. The security dimension of the European regional model will offer also new guidance for the elaboration of the regional development European policies. If so far, the economic, cultural and political factors described the reason for the creation of regions, the security dimension will favor an adaptation to the new realities and threats of different forms (as, for example covid=19).

Regional cooperation and integration were the basis of European integration. Trade and investments were the drivers for the European policies that followed. The interest for free trade areas gave the state-actors the instruments for building the regional institutions to regulate a market in full expansion. From this point, regionalism became the solution from the state-actors to material gains in terms of reduced costs of transactions, foreign direct investments, and greater credibility in international markets and institutions³ and global and regional interdependencies accentuates the need for regionalism's consolidation. Regionalism was seen in Europe as a facilitator for bilateral and multilateral negotiations, with member states as main actors of European integration and policy making. Intergovernamentalism supported it for protecting the economic and geopolitical interest, and multilevel governance pressed for further integration to promote the economic and political interest of private (non-state) actors (business and trade unions).⁴ The different theoretical approaches (intergovernamentalism, liberal intergovernamentalism, neo-functionalism and multilevel governance) of regionalism have at their core the interstate negotiations' and European integration, which, through cooperation between state actors, will be deepened and widened.

The new regionalism theory went beyond the former state centrism approach of regionalism and enlarged the framework of building regions by adding the non-state actors (market structures and NGOS).⁶ This perspective will impact the further regional integration and cooperation, and the shaping of the negotiation strategy according to the alliances and formal and informal networks as well as the complexity of regional and global interdependencies.

According to Börzel, from and international relations perspective, there are three drivers that accentuates regional integration and cooperation, especially at European level. (1) Endogenous and exogenous factors for region-building. The effects of the action of these factors could be instrumentalist (rationalist) or norm-based (social constructivist) social actions. The last approaches underlined the importance of shared beliefs, conventions and practices, and not only institutions (as the rationalist approach). (2) Exogeneous explanations differ because of their diffusion and the institutional similarities

are not the result of interdependent decision-making through which actors from a region influence the institutions from another region, but a similar response of actors from different region appear because of the similar decision of actors as the response of the action of similar challenges. For example, the regional monetary fund instituted especially to respond to a future global financial crisis. (3) The role of the non-state actors.⁷

The reference to regionalism has to emphasize the management of economic interdependences, coping with security threats and securing the regime survival as main reasons for which state actors engaged in region-building. The drivers of regionalism depend on the regional context and there are different combinations of factors that favor regionbuilding and their functionality and effects.⁸

For a better understanding of the new regionalism, a short review on the evolution of regionalism is necessary:

• hegemonic regionalism within the Great Powers' sphere of influence—for example, Germany's Mitteleuropa, Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, or the United States' Monroe Doctrine;

• alternative approaches to conflict management-regionalism as a basis to the universalism of the United Nations Charter;

• expressions of cultural identity and autonomy, such as pan-Americanism, European identity, pan-Arabism, pan-Africanism, pan-Asianism;

• framework for the suppression of nationalism and war through political and economic integration—the EU's case;

• platforms for advancing decolonization and national liberation—major motivation for regionalism in Asia, Africa and the Middle East;

• resistance to Great Powers' intervention—applies to Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East;

• efforts to promote economic development and political stability—the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Mercosur Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the South African Development Community (SADC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS);

• indicators of fragmentation of international order in strategic blocks.9

With this short chronology, Amitav Acharya explained and contended that regionalism does not have a European origin, rather, it is similar to different global regions. But the European model of regionalism and its integration and cooperation "can reasonably claim to be the most effective form of regional organization in the world."¹⁰ The EU is part of contemporary regionalism, a success story with institutions and processes and mechanisms that cannot be replicated in other regions of the world because of the differences of contextual factors (political, economic, cultural, social). The ending effects of regionalism in other regions of the world is autonomy (in the sense of preserving the state's sovereignty) and not integration (as for Europe, in the sense of developing a different degree of supranationalism).¹¹

One of the newer perspectives on regionalism is *new regionalism*, which appeared as a critique of the "old regionalism," state-centric, bringing new factors into the regional approaches—non-state actors, along with constructivism diffusion of norms and com-

munity building. It has a specific understanding of regionalism, covering a broader spectrum of phenomena, ignored by former theories, such as non-state actors and informal flows, setting it within international relations theory, not only within EU studies.

The new regionalism is EU-centric, has as its basis a causal theory and its foundational text was published in 1994 following a pilot project of the United Nations University, World Institute for Development Economics Research, in Helsinki:

Europe represents the most advanced regional arrangement the world has seen, and it will consequently serve as our paradigm for the new regionalism in the sense that its conceptualization eagerly draws on empirical observations of the European process.¹²

The constructivist paradigm supports the new regionalism from an international relations (IR) perspective. It introduces the norms, ideas, identity, but also "an ideational and normative yardstick" for the outcomes of the new regionalism.¹³ For the regional institutions, the ability to create and disseminate norms could be one example. For the European Union, the presence of constructivism theory in the study of new regionalism is emphasized by the progress of the Single Market, common currency, political initiatives which led to the European identity and normative power emergence.¹⁴

Acharya made an interesting observation regarding the lack of capability for the non-Western world to duplicate the Eurocentric model of regionalism, without saving that this part of the world was "inconsequential or irrelevant."¹⁵ The political and economic challenges required greater regional cooperation, implicitly, norms, rules, procedures or institutions. The normative power of the EU favors the success of the application of the European regionalism model, improved with the participation of non-state actors (new regionalism framework).

Another important concept that will help us explain the differences within global regionalism is the concept of "regional world," originated in a project of the University of Chicago, concerned with the challenges of the contemporary world on regions. The project aimed to replace the old concepts regarding regions, like "geographical, civilizational and cultural" with a new strategic, "more dynamic and interactive" perspective on regions. ¹⁶ So, this new perspective, based on a regional world perspective, new regionalism and constructivism, sees the regions as "dynamic and socially constructed ones that can take on the quality of imagined communities." The regional world's perspective enlarges the framework of the regional approach by underlying the cooperation between regions, in the context of the management of global order. It is about the internal and external dynamics of the regions.¹⁷ In this way, the region will be influenced by the interactions, interdependencies and common learning process—the basis of the European inter-regionalism. The mutual learning process of regions that cooperate opens the transregionalism perspective regarding the non-EU relations—East Asia and Latin America or North America and Asia.¹⁸

The "regional world" emphasizes the possibility of projecting ideas and institutions in different parts of the globe and new regionalism offers the possibility to research the role of state and non-state actors. There are differences not only regarding the Western and the non-Western world, but also within the non-Western world, like for Latin America, the non-intervention norm, for Asia, the anti-collective defense norm, or Africa's sensibility to the inviolability of borders.¹⁹

It could be stated that regionalism is an expansive concept, developing in response to the new challenges (such as security and economic integration), offering solutions to a broader variety of problems, like: climate change, migration and refugees, human rights' promotion. The growing interdependencies, democratization, the increasing role of non-states actors on a global scale accentuated the role of regions and regionalisms in developing a new global order and a new international system, with strong non-state actors. As for the European Union, the institutional development favored the development of a European regionalism model, which could be a good inspiration for other regions of the world.²⁰

For a better understanding of the new regionalism's influence on the European integration and its implicit instruments (European negotiations), a number of elements will be developed in the next chapter.

Integration of the Central and Eastern European Region

DUROPEAN ENLARGEMENT is one of the reasons for the appearance and development of the regional policy. Diminishing the developmental gaps between different regions of European Union, reaching convergence in the European Union and its Internal Market, the influence of regional and global interdependencies, the new challenges of climate change and the European Green Deal are the main arguments which will place regional policy within a transformative dynamics. It constituted a "watershed in the history of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). In the course of enlargement, the countries of the region have undergone pervasive 'Europeanization'—a process of EUdriven or EU-oriented change of their political, economic, and administrative systems."²¹

The Central and Eastern European region was seen in the 1990 as composed of "transition/reforming countries" and their accession to the European Union was deeply analyzed.²² The countries considered are: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. The eastward enlargement was very enthusiastically received by the governments of the former communist bloc as a way of stabilizing their new democracies, and metaphors like "one single cultural region" or "sphere of civilization" were often used. The regionalism approach was present from the beginning of the eastern enlargements with the cultural perspective of belonging. But despite of the political enthusiasm coming from the Central and Eastern European governments of that time, European integration was a marginal topic in the political debates, indicating that it was an instrument used by political actors in the internal political fights for power. These actors were interested in a clear option and a time schedule for the accession to the European Union and NATO²³ and rarely these accessions were presented as development project for their countries.

The Copenhagen criteria for EU membership were established in 1993 and are essential conditions to be satisfied by all candidate countries:

• *political criteria*: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;

• economic criteria: a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces;

• administrative and institutional capacity to effectively implement the acquis and the ability to take on the obligations of membership.²⁴

In the 1990s, the approach was seen as cultural and political by the candidate countries and political and economic aspects were brought into discussion by the "old" Member States. A division in two regions within the European Union was obvious, even though at political level the public discourses, the political strategies and programs were presenting it as a single European cultural political, economic and administrative vision. The costs-benefits approach and the debate regarding eastern enlargement were consistent. Even today, in political campaign these reminiscences are present and are exploited by the right wing's representatives in some Member States (the Netherlands, Germany or France).

Other approaches indicated that eastern enlargement could be seen through three different lenses: (a) of *interest*—maximizing the economic and security preferences; (b) of *identities*—"proof of the existence of a different logic, a logic of appropriateness under which the fall of the Berlin Wall and the emergence of new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe would have led EU members to put aside material considerations and act according to their historic and moral responsibilities towards the peoples with which they share a common identity," and (c) *arguments*—the explanatory power of the EU's collective identity.²⁵

It is obvious that in terms of decision-making, the rational choice theory is the basis for explaining the enlargements, completed by the idiosyncrasies of psychological rational approaches.

Patricia Bauer contended that the GDP of the countries in Eastern Europe indicates that this part of Europe constitutes "a distinct class by themselves."²⁰ But the disparities between the two regions (West and East) could be reduced by acceding the Internal Market and applying the EU law and European policies, such as: competition policy, environmental policy, transport policy, system of agricultural pricing, regional policy, rules of Customs Union, taxation policy, fiscal competition and common currency.²⁷

The Central and Eastern European countries' governments understood at that time that the only development option for their countries was the European path marked by the accession to the European Union. In this way, the "old chimeras" of the division of West and East would disappear. The Visegrád Group, a creation of the 1990s of four countries from Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) intended to be similar to the Benelux association. It could be seen as an expression of regionalism because the initiatives belonged to the state actors. Romania also intended to join, but due to the events from June 1990, its access was denied. Eastern enlargement was practically the solution for diminishing the fragmentation into groups within the European Union. It marked the passing from regionalism to new regionalism, because the complexity of accession negotiations involved the market structures and non-state actors, especially in the internal negotiations from the national level of the candidate countries. Of course, when we present the European regions, the developmental criterion is not the only one. One could add the Economic and Monetary Union and the common currency, the Single Market, or even the Schengen area. It could easily be seen that economic factors represent the red dividing line.

The CEE countries acceded to the European Union in two periods: 2004 (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) and 2007 (Romania and Bulgaria). The accession negotiations represented the strategic instrument for developing the new way of working for the future implementation of European policies and deepening the European integration. The Europeanization process, due to the accession negotiations, was seen as a transformation for the CEE countries "from an aspiration to an obligation" and "shifted from political institutions to public policies."²⁸

The European Member States have seen that the cooperation and collaboration on specific regional projects/strategies is a key element for their development. The regional strategies represent the success of European integration, good examples for new regionalism. They do not benefit from extra European funding, but favor cooperation and collaboration on specific integrated projects. It is worth mentioning the following macro-regional strategies:

• European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)—a macro-regional strategy adopted in 2010 by the European Commission—it has fourteen member countries (following the flow of the Danube River), nine Member States (Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria) and five from the neighboring area (Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro). It has four pillars and priority areas: strengthening the region; connecting the region; protecting the environment and building prosperity. Through partnerships established between the member countries specific projects could be developed.²⁹

• European Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)—involves 7 Alps Mountains countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia and Switzerland). It has three thematic priorities: competition and innovation; environmentally friendly mobility; and the sustainable management of energy, natural and cultural resources.³⁰

• European Strategy for the Baltic Region (EUSBSR)—covers the basin of the Baltic Sea and involves 12 countries, 8 are Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden) and four are neighboring countries (Belarus, Iceland, Norway, Russia). It was the first macro-regional strategy, established in 2009. It has several objectives: clear water in the sea; a rich and healthy wildlife; clean and safe shipping; good transport conditions; reliable energy markets; connecting people in the region; the Baltic Sea Region as a frontrunner for deepening and fulfilling the single market; climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management.³¹

• European Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)—covers the Adriatic and Ionian Seas basin and involves 9 countries, of which four are Member States (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia) and five are accession countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia). It has many priorities: blue technologies; fisheries and aquaculture; maritime and marine governance and services; maritime transport; intermodal connections to the hinterland; energy networks; marine environment; transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity; diversified tourism offers; sustainable and responsible tourism management.³²

The Member States from CEE are members in two macroregional strategies: the Danube Region Strategy (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) and the Baltic Sea Region (Poland). A closer look to the macro-regional strategies and regional policy indicates that these projects are supporting the European enlargement. They are good instruments for learning the European cooperation through negotiations, useful for the pre-accession and accession periods.

New regionalism, through negotiations, supports the building of networks, based on partnerships. The complexity of the accession negotiation process led to its reorganization into six different clusters:

• *Fundamentals*, which includes the following chapters: Judiciary and Fundamentals Rights; Justice, Freedom and Security; Public Procurement; Statistics; Financial Control.

• Internal Market, which includes the following chapters: Free Movement of Goods; Free Movement of Workers; Rights of Establishment & Freedom to Provide Services; Free Movement of Capital; Company Law; Intellectual Property Law; Competition Policy; Financial Services; Consumer & Health Protection.

• Competitiveness & Inclusive Growth, Customs Union; Education & Culture; Science & Research; Enterprise & Industrial Policy; Social Policy and Employment; Economic & Monetary Policy; Taxation; Information Society & Media.

• Green Agenda & Sustainable Connectivity, Environment & Climate Change; Trans-European Networks; Energy; Transport Policy.

• Resources, Agriculture & Cohesion, Financial & Budgetary Provisions; Regional Policy & Coordination of Structural Instruments; Fisheries; Food Safety, Veterinary & Phytosanitary Policy; Agriculture & Rural Development.

• External Relations, Foreign, Security & Defence Policy; External Relations.

The negotiations begin with the cluster *Fundamentals* and also close with it, and progress on it will determine the overall advancement on negotiations.³³

For the CEE countries the accession negotiations period represented an "exceptional phase" in their Europeanization history. As Member States, the mechanisms and conditions of Europeanization have changed for CEE countries and "legal enforcement replaces conditionality." For the new regionalism perspective it is important to understand the political Europeanization of CEE countries and region, because it involved citizens and other interest groups.³⁴

An interesting model was developed by Graeme Crouch for a better understanding of the horizontal Europeanization of CEE countries, especially in the Southeastern part.³⁵

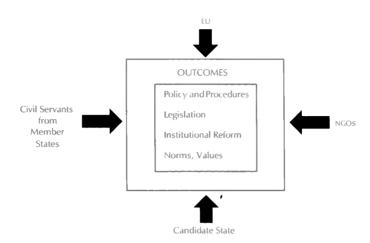


FIG. 1. DIRECTION OF EUROPEANIZATION (CAUSALITY)

SOURCE: Crouch, "New Ways of Influence," 45.

In the framework of new regionalism, the Europeanization of CEE has to be understood within the role of "change agents," as for example the entrepreneurs or epistemic communities, which are networks of actors with knowledge and a normative agenda.³⁶ These networks could influence the decision-making process. The civil servants from CEE Member States are working with their colleagues for the development of specific legislation, procedures, and policies. The NGOS possess the knowledge from the ground, and the implementation capacities which could be absent from governmental institutions. But the main weakness for the CEE (and SEE) countries is the underdevelopment of the administrative and political capacity. The necessity for a national mechanism of implementation of the *aquis* and other directives is imperative. The transnational cooperation and network, specific for NGOS' activity, are implicit tools for decision-makers in the elaboration of policies and implementation procedures.³⁷

It is important to differentiate the "horizontal" approach from top-down or bottomup approaches. If the top-down approach underlined the importance of the EU in the accession negotiations, and the bottom-up approach emphasizes the importance of the national system in influencing the transnational system, the "horizontal" approach evidences the role of the professional structures and NGOS in the influence on the reform process, legislation, policies and procedures. According to this approach, the EU acts as a facilitator, which provides the framework or environment for the actors to interact. It is a new approach and new regionalism is strongly supporting it.

It could be stated that after the eastern enlargement the Europeanization process changed due to the interdependent nature of the international system and that new regionalism for the CEE countries is understood as the Europeanization process.

Conclusions

The NEW regionalism is a current that needs more attention from the scholars of IR and EU studies, mainly because it will provide a deeper understanding of the complexity and dynamics of contemporary phenomena. It could be a solid basis for a complete explanation and clarification of the European integration process and of Europeanization.

Europeanization is framed beyond the traditional top-down or bottom-up approaches, but mainly through the lenses of networks and of the complex, multilevel negotiations that are occurring. It is an ongoing process, and the process and its outcomes could be examined from an economic, financial, political, cultural and social perspective, bringing a larger view on the new regionalism actually functioning.

The present paper intended to present a different perspective on the new regionalism, by emphasizing the role of international negotiations, seen as a useful instrument in the hand of political actors, but also in the hands of markets structures and of NGOS representatives. The horizontal approach, supported by negotiations, will add the transnational dimension for the networks building process.

The future approaches to the topic of this article will add the lenses of "rhetorical action" devised by Schimmelfennig³⁸ and of Schneider's "theory of discriminatory theory."³⁹ The first approach explained the success achieved by the supporters of the enlargement to CEE, which overcame the negotiating power of their partners: through the strategic use of arguments based on the liberal norms of the European international community, the "drivers" caught the "brakemen" in the community trap and, step by step, shamed them into acquiescing in the eastern enlargement.⁴⁰ The second approach emphasized the previous one and the cost-benefit analysis, adding that the eastern enlargement has to be understood from the perspective of the negotiating ability of the new Member States in terms of gains and losses.⁴¹ Future research on this topic could enlarge the view by adding the context and the actions of non-state actors in the analysis of the new regionalism in the CEE region.

The new regionalism could support the European development policy and especially the European Green Deal with all its challenges for the CEE region. The increasing role of the non-state across will redraw the international system and will frame a more complex context for negotiations. Only by developing their negotiating abilities will the CEE Member States' governments increase their political credibility and succeed in the difficult process of the modernization of their societies.

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Abstract

New Regionalism and Enlargement Negotiations in Central and Eastern Europe

The present paper presents a new approach on the new regionalism, from the perspective of enlargement negotiations. The analyzed region is Central and Eastern Europe. The international system is in a reconfiguration phase and the new post-pandemic context has to take into consideration the new power and role of the regions. The new regionalism will explain the importance of the involvement of non-state actors in negotiations during the accession and integration process. The integration process is understood as a continuing Europeanization process. The horizontal explanation for the Europeanization process is presented especially for the CEE Member States, enlarging the former top-down or bottom-up approaches. The article employs as research methods a qualitative research strategy and case study, resorting to the comparative method. The conclusions provide the answer to the research questions and will open the interest for future research challenges.

Keywords

new regionalism, negotiations, enlargement, Europeanization, integration