EU ENLARGEMENT, EU IDENTITY, CULTURE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE EASTERN REGIONS

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Abstract: The objective of this paper is to examine whether the enlargement would deepen the institutions of the European Union or the separate paths of west and east over the course of history have created a divide which would mean serious difficulties in political, cultural and economic cooperation in the future. The author analyses the behaviour of representatives of the different regions of the core states, the later entered members and the accessing states in the fields of politics, languages, religion and culture.

1. Introduction

The EU’s expansion plans received a double boost in the accessing countries when Hungarians, Maltese, Poles, Slovaks and Baltic states voted overwhelmingly to join the bloc and the ten candidate countries signed the treaty of accession in Athens on 1 May 2004. The development towards a politically integrated and geographically more comprehensive European Union seems to be irreversible.

This development raises some questions. One is the extent of political integration through the European institutions. The other is the matter of the eastern border, the question of which countries should belong to the EU and the importance for the formation of a European ‘demos’, a European identity.

2. EU Enlargement and Regions

According to research funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), local elites in post-communist accession countries have a limited knowledge of the EU and were not engaged in the accession process.

Dr. Jim Hughes of the London School of Economics, who led the project, which is part of the extensive One Europe or Several? Programme claims local officials, business people, the media and the cultural intelligentsia feel that the accession process is relevant only to national decision-makers and has little to do with them. The research also suggests that the gap between the pro-Europe views of the national elites and the increasingly Euro-ambivalent attitudes among local elites and public opinion could have a negative effect on implementing the agreed conditions of EU membership,
The research, which is one of the largest studies of elites in Eastern Europe undertaken by UK academics, included 446 interviews about attitudes to economic and political transition and to the EU and NATO in 'second' cities in Hungary, Romania, Poland, Slovenia and Estonia, as well as in Russia and Ukraine. In addition, the researchers conducted 30 interviews with officials in the Enlargement and Regional directorates of the European Commission.

One of the most startling findings of the research was that, unlike their national governments, key opinion formers outside the capital cities were largely unaware of the immense financial gains that most regions in the accession countries will receive from EU regional support. Despite the fact that some of the regions covered had already received substantial EU aid, most local opinion-makers identified the economic and security dimensions of the Union as being important and ranked the structural funds and subsidiarity relatively low down when asked what the EU meant to them.

Hughes warns that the exclusion of sub-national elites from the negotiation process, and their lack of knowledge and ambivalent attitudes towards the EU could have a far-reaching effect on their commitment to the implementation of EU legislation once the candidates become member states of the EU, especially as regards agriculture, regional development and the environment and that the virtual exclusion of sub-national elites from the process of integration may strengthen the growing euro scepticism in the CEECs. This scepticism is reflected in *The Guardian Weekly* where it is written that 'the Hungarians have voted to join the EU in a referendum, but a low turnout means many people remain indifferent and sceptical towards membership' (*The Guardian Weekly*, 17-23/04/03)
3. European Identity

The question about the formation of a European identity could be approached from two points. First, from the extent of shared political values and behaviours by the different European countries; second, from the extent of systematic differences between Western, Central and Eastern Europe and their cultural borders.

According to Huntington, differences between groups of countries can be mapped on a geographical west-east axis. In his assumptions the most democratic communities can be found in the Anglo-American and the Western European countries and the least developed democratic communities are the Muslim countries in South-Eastern Europe and the Eastern European countries. Between the EU-15 and the accessing ten countries of Europe there is little difference in political values and behaviours that are necessary for democracy; that is why their collective identity is considerable.

There seems to be a divide, from a cultural point of view, between Western and Eastern parts of Europe, a great 'schism', forged by history, and this can be dated back to the separation of Christianity into its Roman and Byzantine versions; and it has even deepened since the end of World War II. (the Euro-Atlantic Community and the Euro-Asian Community)

A survey, conducted by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), calculated from cross-country data for language, religion and popular culture, shows that there exists a pan-European cosmopolitan culture and it is rapidly extending to the Eastern applicant countries. Parallel with this cosmopolitan European culture there exist national cultures and these remain vibrant in the West and the East; and although the differences between the national cultures of the EU states are considerable, they fall within the extremes. Stunningly, the cultural patterns exhibited by respondents from the applicant states are somewhat closer to the patterns shown among the original six EEC countries than in the case of the post-six entrants. The explanation for this stunning result can be that those on the periphery often have a greater motivation to assimilate into the norms of the centre than those closer to the original six core states.
4. The 2±1 Configuration of Europe

Laitin draws the conclusion, that the incorporation of East European states into the EU, from a cultural point of view, has greater potential for the deepening of European integration than for its erosion. He claims that this analysis demonstrates that the citizens of the applicant states from the EU are moving towards full membership in what can be called the 2±1 configuration of Europe. This means that all Europeans who wish to participate fully in a wide range of mobility opportunities need to be able to communicate with an all-European continental culture. They also have to be integrated into the national culture of the state in which they are citizens/residents and they will maintain the vital differences in the so-called ‘mentalités’ that differentiate intra-European national cultures. Thus, all socially mobile Europeans will need to participate in two complementary cultural worlds. He argues that those Europeans whose national cultures are close to the continental norm need only be a member of a single cultural world (2-1); but those Europeans living in ‘foreign’ European states and those who live in regions of states with ‘state-promoted regional cultures’ may need to be fully familiar with three cultural worlds (2+1). As a consequence, all socially mobile Europeans will therefore have 2±1 cultural repertoires.

This leads us to the conclusion that in the emerging European ‘quasi-states’ all socially mobile Europeans must be fluent in the continental language, English. Obviously they must also be fluent in the state language in which they live, so bilingualism (the ‘2’ of 2±1) is becoming a European standard. If regional governments require the languages associated with those regions as media of instruction, or as necessary tools for regional government service, residents of those regions will be required to have a third language (2+1). But for residents who live in the UK, where English is both the European and the state language, the pattern is 2-1. All this suggests, that there is a 2±1 cultural repertoire emerging and East Europe is becoming a part of this cultural configuration.

Eurocrats, businessmen, students, those who want a career in Europe, must know English. Although French is the language of several European institutions, no language other than English of the European Court can be a preferred one. At the same time, state bureaucracies and school systems operate in the state languages, so it is not possible to communicate with state officials in any European state without speaking the state language. The third language becomes crucial when regionally influential groups are making similar demands for their residents and government memos, educational texts and public announcements are written in the regional languages.

The question arises whether the East European states will become part of this language configuration. According to the ISSP surveys with three members of the core states of the EEC (West Germany, Italy and Netherlands), six members of the expanded EC (Austria, Ireland, UK, Spain, Sweden and East Germany), and seven applicant countries (Poland, Latvia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Hungary) the answer seems to be positive.
The role of English as a lingua franca throughout Europe is becoming a fact of life. Among
the above mentioned original EEC members 29.8 per cent speak English as a supplementary
language, while only 6.8 per cent speak German as a supplementary
language, and 11.2 per cent speak French. Among the applicant countries, German (8.6 per
cent) overtakes English
(with 5.7 percent), but French has merely 1.0 cent. Among those under 35 years of age in
the applicant countries, however, 11 per cent claim fluency in English as a supplementary
language and 10.6 claim that for German. It can be clearly seen that English has already
become or is becoming the preferred second language of choice in all the three groups of
the examined countries. English is the language of wider communication in Europe

Besides language, this 2±1 configuration applies to religion and other fields of culture (eg.
film, music, popular culture).

As Eastern European countries become part of Europe’s trans-national institutions, these
authoritative institutions set the boundaries for cultural expression within the societies that
live within those boundaries. Susan Watkins’ has shown that patterns within Europe began
to be explained far more adequately by the country of residence than by the so-called
cultural community within which the individual identifies. Cultural shift goes with state
institutions. The more Eastern European states are integrated into European institutional
structures, the more there will be a shift in cultural norms toward the European
standard. Elite and ambitious members of peripheral societies will have an interest in
copying the dominant culture so that they could secure their positions of responsibility
within it. As a consequence these people have a strong interest in setting the utopian image
of ‘Europe’ and a well-defined ‘European’ culture, while for the culturally secure
Europeans, the citizens of the West European states this is not an issue. Parallel with them
exists a class of secular cosmopolitans who have no connection to any church.

The data of a study sponsored by ISSP show that there is a greater level of common
cosmopolitanism, multilingualism and secularism among the original members and present
applicants than there is among the later members. The respondents from the entrant
countries were divided into two subpopulations: those under 35 years and those 35 years or
older. It is the young populations of the later entrants who are moving more quickly to the
religious culture of the original six than the young populations in the applicant states. One
interpretation of these data can be that the later entrants adjusted culturally from one
generation to the next in light of EU membership, but the populations of the present
applicants do not find such a cultural shift as necessary as those in the first group.
Another interpretation can be that though the Eastern Europeans did not experience the
Enlightenment in their history and secularisation came later due to the delegitimisation of
Soviet communism it has been highly successful in achieving secularisation of the
individual.

The religious surveys on Eastern Europe and the original EEC members show that the
norms are quite close regarding beliefs and values concerning the role in public life. There is
an emerging secular religious culture all over Europe that sees religion separate from
political life. Most European citizens are influenced both by a universalist secularism and by an identity connected with the dominant/historical church of their region.

A similar convergence can be seen in the attractiveness to both East and West Europeans to the popular culture (film, music). Respondents from the original six countries, some later entrants and the applicant states are all attracted to the same internationalist movie culture which shows the hegemony of Hollywood. There can be several explanations for this phenomenon. US films attract wide audiences throughout the world because big-budget films are better produced and technically superior, with special effects and animation; European film industries are poor, they reduced the production of films; good European directors are invited to Hollywood to produce American films; with the growth of multiplex theatres in Europe the American distributional chains gain control over screens and limit screening of domestic films. Although American films dominate throughout Europe, the European film industry is strong or is re-emerging in some states (France, Italy, UK, Poland).  

In the field of pop music, applicant states are part of a global music. There are three main musical cultures: the global pop music culture; the remnants of national pop music cultures and a European pop music. The ’best seller’ is the English-language internationalist popular music. The 1950s, 1960s, 1970s brought American rock and roll and later Americanisation of youth culture to Europe but from the 1970s the European disco culture ’invaded’ America. European domestic artists for domestic audiences also contribute to the sales of ’international pop’.

5. Summary and conclusions

Despite the diversity of the national and nationality cultures that characterise the EU states there is an emergent cultural configuration that represents a common European cultural sphere. Despite this diversity between nations there exists a coherent cultural system that enables most Europeans to act appropriately according to both local and European standards within the European Union. There is an emerging lingua franca used parallel with state languages and besides, there are protected minority languages. In religion the accepted European norm is to support secular Christianity, respecting national churches and the minority religious groups. As far as popular culture is concerned, the ’international pop’ is largely in English language but it is multicultural in form. Europe participates in an international popular film and music system, but each member has a small but viable national production of film and music that is made for domestic audiences.

The data above show that the fact that Eastern Europeans seek to learn English, want a secular rule, watch the ’top ten’ films and listen to the ’top ten’ songs, and it gives the notion that they seek to become members of the European culture.
Notes:

i The ESRC is the UK’s largest funding agency for research and postgraduate training relating to social and economic issues. It provides independent, high-quality, relevant research to business, the public sector and Government. The ESRC’s database of research provides a key source of information on ESRC social science research awards and all associated publications and products. The website can be found at http://www.regard.ac.uk.


iii The data are supplied by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at http://www.icpsr.umich.edu.


vi http://culture.coe.fr/Eurimages