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Dorota Dakowska

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Dorota Dakowska

Enlargement

in: Hélène Michel, Élisabeth Lambert Abdelgawad, *Dictionary of European actors*, Bruxelles, Larcier, 2015, p. 117-120.

Addressing the enlargement of the European Union (EU) with a focus on its actors raises two main analytical challenges. The first relates to the premise that this process is more than a chronology and a set of procedures and instruments. This entails treating the enlargement not only as a technical process but also as a social process involving complex power relations. The second challenge lies in defining who the actors of the enlargement are. Two main categories can be distinguished. First, the institutional and governmental actors formally frame the process in that they are the ones deciding how to proceed, negotiating on the chapters of the *acquis* and ratifying the accession treaties. Then, there are also actors that do not necessarily have an official status in the accession negotiations but are nevertheless involved in different ways. Representatives of interest groups or political parties have for instance contributed to shaping the enlargement process, and even sometimes to changing its course or giving it meaning. While the EU has witnessed several enlargement phases (1973, 1981, 1986, 1995, 2004, 2007 and 2013), the Eastern enlargement, often called a “big bang”, is the one that required the introduction of new and complex structures and instruments.

Grasping a complex process

As it enlarges, the EU attempts to project its institutional order beyond its borders (Sedelmeier, 2012). While it is possible to analyze the enlargement as an element of the EU’s foreign policy, two points need to be emphasized. First, this is a multi-sector policy, as shown by the 35 chapters of the *acquis* subject to negotiation; a wide range of actors are therefore liable to mobilize on the issue. Then, the enlargement involves a number of interactions between policy-makers from the EU and from candidate countries alike. Although their relationship is asymmetrical – the candidate countries must “absorb” the entirety of the *acquis* – both the old and the new Member States are concerned by the accession process.

Defining the actors of the enlargement is not easy. It could be argued that they are experts as well as political and administrative agents. These include the negotiating teams of candidate countries and the high-ranking civil servants from the Commission who are in charge of monitoring, steering and evaluating the progress made in the process. For experts from candidate countries, participating in accession negotiations is an opportunity to accumulate European capital (international legitimacy, institutional and procedural knowledge, political and social capital) that they can convert at the time of accession to work in the EU institutions or reinforce their position in the national space. Conversely, it is worth investigating to what extent having monitored specific candidate countries or negotiation sectors allows EU civil servants to acquire expertise that they can put to use in other settings.

The term of actors – or elites – of the enlargement can also refer to professionals of Europe from the new Member States – MEPs, national and European civil servants and other specialized agents whose work chiefly depends on the European institutions. There have been relatively few studies on these individuals, their career paths, their social backgrounds and resources (Ban, 2010, 2012). Those that have been conducted show that contrary to popular misconceptions, the backgrounds of the new Commission civil servants do not differ significantly from those of their counterparts with more seniority. These officials are for the most part graduates in law, economics or political science and have generally studied and/or

worked abroad; often they had already pursued a career in administration in their home country. They have a substantial linguistic capital and easily work in a multicultural environment.

The institutional actors

The first institutional actors of the enlargement are the heads of state of government who in meetings of the European Council take fundamental decisions on the enlargement process, which include granting candidate country status and formally concluding the accession process. The Copenhagen European Council of 1993, for instance, approved criteria required for applying for accession. The ministers of foreign affairs who meet in the Council of the EU take stances on the opinions of the European Commission on subjects such as the pertinence of opening accession negotiations with a country. However, the Commission has retained its leadership in the field of enlargement policy, acquired after coordinating Western assistance to post-Communist countries. The Commission has managed to come up with acceptable solutions for Member States, therefore contributing to making the enlargement “governable” by concurrently holding several key positions in the decision-making process and combining institutional, scholarly and relational resources (Robert, 2001). Within DG 1A, it has also mobilized the necessary expertise to launch the PHARE programme (Poland-Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies) in the summer of 1989, which was followed by other programmes and instruments such as the progress reports and the pre-accession funds. In addition to the civil servants and directors-general, the successive Commissioners in charge of enlargement – Günter Verheugen, Olli Rehn and Štefan Füle – have also played an important role.

While the European Parliament (EP) formally plays a smaller role, since its involvement in the process is limited to giving its assent on the accession treaty, in practice things are more complex. The EP can vote on resolutions relating to the accession process. The MEPs monitor the process through their work in parliamentary committees. Some have been members of joint parliamentary committees, which made regular visits in candidate countries. Lastly, representatives of transnational political parties at European level became mobilized in the pre-accession period, teaming up with their counterparts and potential allies in EU candidate countries (Dakowska, 2014).

The non-institutional actors mobilized on the accession issue

In candidate countries, the issue of accession is shaped not only by representatives of governments, ministers and the offices in charge of the negotiations but also by political parties (Neumayer, 2006). Lastly, several authors have investigated the involvement of sector-specific interests in the process. Farmers’ organizations have developed ties with the Commission and with their counterparts in candidate countries in attempts to transfer their know-how and include them in their forums (Saurugger, 2003). Multinational corporations operating in Hungary have managed to skew the accession negotiations in their favor (Bohle, Husz, 2005). Lastly, interest groups from candidate countries such as Turkey, whose accession remains at this point uncertain, have been included in the Euro-groups that operate in Brussels (Visier, 2010). Representatives of sector-specific and professional interests may thus act as forerunners who anticipate accession by forging ties with their counterparts independently from the institutional negotiations. They contribute to enhancing the mutual knowledge of representatives of different parts of Europe and to the socialization of newcomers.

Overall, enlargement is a complex process, halfway between the EU's foreign policy and its internal governance, involving institutional actors and interest representatives from all parts of Europe.

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Related entries: Assistance, Commissioners, Consultants, European civil servants, Europeanization, Farmers, Professionals of Europe, Socialization

Index rerum: new Member States, acquis communautaire, European Commission, pre-accession, PHARE, European Parliament

Index of names: Günter Verheugen, Olli Rehn, Štefan Füle