

# THE EUROPEANISATION PROCESS AND THE PRE-ACCESSION DYNAMICS IN ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** *In recent years a substantial part of literature that covers topics on European integration has turned its attention to how the membership of the European Union (EU) has generated and contributed to domestic reform, a process commonly known as Europeanisation. This process represents the reform of institutions, structures and policies in compliance with the requirements, policies and dynamics of the European integration mechanisms. Following the national - European interaction, countries internalise European legislation and adapt institutionally. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the Europeanisation process and also to what extent it has influenced the political and economic reform in Romania throughout the pre-accession period. Despite its essential contributions, the Europeanisation effects were less significant in Romania (especially in the early years of negotiations with Brussels) compared with other Eastern European countries. And this has not been caused by the Europeanisation lack of efficiency, but mainly because of the Romanian political class reluctant to change that largely undermined the dynamics of the accession process.*

**Keywords:** European Union, Europeanisation process, EU membership, Romania

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## 1. MAIN FEATURES OF THE EUROPEANISATION PROCESS (THE ROMANIAN EXPERIENCE)

Europeanisation is one of the theoretical instruments which had a vital influence on Romania's transformation especially at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Due to its aspirations of becoming member of the European Union (EU) and in its attempt to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria, Romania tried to comply with the *acquis communautaire* and the European principles under whose framework the EU has been built.

Romania's transformation which allowed the country to move closer to EU membership commenced with the submission of its membership application in June 1995 and it was chiefly influenced by the Europeanisation process and its effects. "Having applied to join the EU *club*, it was now in a position where it could abide by the club's rules and be a responsible member that could be relied on to fulfil its membership obligations." (Papadimitriou and Phinnemore, 2008, p. 7) The concept of Europeanisation means, by and large, "the reform of domestic structures, institutions and policies in order to meet the requirements of the systematic logic, political dynamics and administrative mechanisms of European integration" (Joseph, 2006, p. 2). Europeanisation is often depicted as a constant "interaction between the national and the European levels" (Risse *et al.*, 2001, p. 2), "as a merger of the top-down and bottom-up perspectives" (Börzel and Risse, 2003, p. 57). In this paper, the concept of Europeanisation employs a top-down perspective, analysing the limits of EU influence on domestic settings (in this case on Romania). The thorough understanding of the domestic environment upon which Europeanisation impacts is an essential prerequisite in order to explore the mechanisms of this process. Thus, Ladrech perceives Europeanisation as an "incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that European Community political and economic dynamics become part of the organisational logic of national politics and policy-making" (Ladrech, 1994, p. 69). As far as the changes at the national level are concerned, they shape *domestic structures*, specifically "those components of a polity or society consisting of regularised and comparatively stable interactions (i.e. *institutions, formal and informal, organizational routines and cultures, collective understandings of actors*)." (Risse *et al.*, 2001, p. 4)

Perhaps the most complete definition of Europeanisation is given by Radaelli. In his words, the concept consists of "processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, *ways of doing things*, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and sub national) discourse, political structures, and public policies" (Radaelli, 2003, p. 30).

Despite the diverse meanings that the concept of Europeanisation acquires within the literature, all of the aforementioned approaches share the assumption that this process is mainly limited to the EU member states. However, recent contributions to the European integration literature have pointed out that the Europeanisation process is influential even beyond the EU's geographic boundaries, particularly with regards to candidate countries. Thus, the concept of Europeanisation differentiates between *traditional Europeanisation*, which is mainly limited to the EU member states, and *enlargement-led Europeanisation*, which affects candidate countries and is

conditionality-driven. Romania went through both phases from candidate for EU membership to the status of current member.

Although Papadimitriou and Phinnemore argue that the new *eastward-looking* Europeanisation literature displays little consensus on how the Europeanisation process is exported to and is transforming the candidate countries (Papadimitriou and Phinnemore, 2003, p. 9), researchers agree that the influence of Europeanisation is also visible in the case of candidate countries. Thus, the EU's imposed conditionality has been the main driving force behind the transformations which occurred in the applicant states (especially in the case of countries which were part of the 2004 and 2007 enlargement waves). This conditionality could be enmeshed in the so-called *Copenhagen criteria*, notably the existence of stable democratic institutions, the functioning of market economy and the availability to adopt the *acquis communautaire*. The Copenhagen political criteria constitute the leverage that made Romania's modernisation and democratisation more plural, multi-cultural and consolidated. Besides the main criteria, states wishing to enter the Union also have to provide stable institutions forging the spread of norms on human rights, protection of minorities, respect for the rule of law and to align themselves to political, economic and monetary objectives of the union. According to Grabbe, the perspective of joining the EU represents a strong incentive for the candidate states to meet the requirements for a potential EU membership and to demonstrate their willingness to fulfil the accession criteria. (Grabbe, 2001, p. 1015)

Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier hold that the dominant logic underpinning the EU's conditionality is the bargaining strategy of *reinforcement by reward*: the EU provides external stimuli for a candidate country in order to comply with its conditions. (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004, p. 662) Since the day Romania was offered the candidate status, the country has sought to upgrade its legislation in tune with the European standards. Smith believes that conditionality could be of two types, both with considerable leverage: the EU manages the progress made by the candidates and either offers them the chance of carrying on the negotiations (positive conditionality) or it halts the transition to following procedural stages (negative conditionality). (Smith, 1998, p. 256) An example of negative conditionality could have been the delay of Romania's accession to the EU by a year should the country not respect its commitments and continue the reforms.

In one of her studies, Grabbe analyses the changes which occurred in the Central Eastern European Countries (CEECs) in the prospect of membership. Not only are the means used by the EU to influence the reforms in the candidate countries superior to those used in former cases, but also can the applicants barely contribute to the EU policy making from inside. Neither CEECs

applicants nor the group of Romanian and Bulgaria had the possibility of opt-outs from parts of the agenda, such as those obtained by the UK on the Social Chapter, Schengen, or monetary union. (Grabbe, 2003, pp. 303-304) Hence, the EU has often used the *carrot and stick* method to put pressure on Romania to accelerate the administrative reform in order to efficiently harmonise its legislation with the EU *acquis*.

According to Grabbe the factors which contribute to a greater convergence with the EU norms would be the speed of adjustment of the applicant countries to the EU standards owing to their ardent desire to join the club and the openness of the candidate states to take over the EU's *acquis*. Moreover, it could be underlined that the EU's agenda for Romania and Bulgaria has become even broader than for previous applicants and this through additional membership conditions tailored to each country's specific.

Grabbe identifies five mechanisms through which the Europeanisation principles are internalised into the candidate countries: 1) Models: provision of legislative and institutional templates to adopt the existing European laws and norms; 2) Money: aid and technical assistance (to support the costs of the implementation process); 3) Benchmarking and monitoring; 4) Advice and twinning; 5) Gate-keeping. Among these, the latter two are specific to applicant countries: the twinning programme is a mechanism for exporting Europeanisation which forges administrative reform in the candidate countries' domestic structures, and gate-keeping gives access to negotiations and further stages in the accession process according to the progresses already made. (Grabbe, 2003, pp. 312-314) Since the launch of twinning programme in 1998 by the European Commission, Romania has constantly updated and reformed its administrative capacity in the fields of regional policy and Justice and Home Affairs. This owed also to the strong pressure from the Commission which pushed the Romanian government to accelerate the pace of reform in areas where convergence with the *acquis* was lagging behind. As a result, the Europeanising effect generated extensive reforms in the Romanian executive. "Increased interaction with the EU at almost every administrative level as well as the profound importance of the full utilisation and speedy absorption of available EU aid funds have placed Romania's administration under immense pressure to restructure internally and promote greater inter-departmental coordination." (Papadimitriou and Phinnemore, 2003, p. 5)

The fulfilment of trade liberalisation stipulated in the European agreements has also demanded more efficient monitoring mechanisms. "The EU has been consistently promoting through mainly a series of PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD programmes the regionalisation of economic development and the diffusion of planning and implementation competencies to regional and local actors." (Demetropolou, 2002, p. 95)

At the political level, the enhanced relationship with the EU meant additional pressures for adaptation. The institutionalisation of top-level contacts between officials from the EU and Romania brought about the creation of entirely new European integration divisions (e.g. the Romanian Ministry of European Integration) and structures of interaction with the EU (e.g. Joint Parliamentary Committees to deal with the Europe Agreements). Thus, the process of adopting the *acquis* as well as building up the necessary institutions for its implementation had a profound transformative influence – politically, economically, socially, and institutionally – on the domestic setting in our country. This clearly shows that the candidate states are rather *consumers* than *producers* of Europeanisation in contrast with the already member states which largely contribute to the Europeanisation process from a *bottom-up* perspective. (Papadimitriou and Phinnemore, 2003, pp. 6, 9)

## 2. THE DIFFUSION OF EUROPEAN IDEAS ACROSS ROMANIA

The *consumer-producer* dichotomy depicts entirely the relationship between Romania and the EU. Romania seemed to depend on more than one level on the accession. Surveys showed a strong will to join in order to receive an *infusion of democracy* and economic stability and – an essential factor – a confirmation that they belong to the European identity. Romania set itself in the position to absorb European values in the last two decades. Other instruments through which Europeanisation had occurred were the funding of media campaigns with different messages (for instance, environmental protection and non-discrimination) and by the discourse of the EU politicians about Romania. A great role was also played by the periodical reports of the European Commission before accession, showing to a vast audience what else they should achieve in order *to be Europeans*. For instance, this is a good explanation for the fact that corruption – highly discussed in these reports – was ranked by Romanians as the second or third problem of the country (in national surveys), when it wasn't even the tenth more than ten years ago. The Romanian *consumer* society is highly sensitive to what it perceives as *EU values* since it has strived to affirm its European position and identity lost during the communist isolation, considering that it can legitimately be *European* only by joining the EU. This import of values in the process of Europeanisation was facilitated by Romania setting a position toward the EU much like a *student-teacher* relation. A proof of this fact is the huge percentage of EU's popularity (76% in 2004, compared to a 50% of the EU25) and of the population's wish to join the Union before accession. In the context of the EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007, a positive relation was been shown (for the twelve new member states) between Europeanisation and the levels of popularity (enthusiasm) and

trust in the EU before accession. Romania has displayed, over the years, a huge Euro-enthusiasm and this has facilitated its rapid process of Europeanisation. (European Commission, 2004, p. 12) Regarding the EU values embraced by the Romanian population, the 2007 Spring Eurobarometer gives us important clues on the values of the citizens. The economy (27%) and culture (27%) were the issues that most create a feeling of community – according to the responses given in the interviewees. Romanians, in this question, regard economy and culture less important (23 and 21%), but they have the highest score of all the states in ranking history as most important for the feeling of community (30%). (European Commission, 2007a, pp. 64, 67) This would support the hypothesis that the cultural attachment of Romanians to the EU and its values is, to a large extent, a historical one. On the EU level, asked about a diverse range of socio-economic concepts, respondents ranked the highest (as having a positive connotation): free trade, company, competitiveness, flexibility, welfare state. The political values include interest and civic duty, other values being the respect for human rights, gender equality, tolerance, freedom of speech, environmental protection. (European Commission, 2007b) The results for Romania (Autumn 2007) are similar to the European average on the importance of these values. Thus, on most recent surveys, Romania ranks close to the EU average scores on most reported attitudes and values.

Membership of the EU proved one of the main incentives for reforms of the political and legal system in Romania. With the extensive support of the EU, the aspiration of membership effect has been strengthened and led to complex processes of absorption and transformation. Europeanisation became a strong instrument in shaping the country's domestic policies and accelerated the momentum of political and economic reforms. However, Romania has often struggled in its quest towards EU membership. "It has been a long, arduous process, necessitating painful domestic reforms and significant external pressure for change". (Papadimitriou and Phinnemore, 2008, p. 1) And this has been partly due the catastrophic legacies of the Ceaușescu's era which confronted the country in the perspective of EU integration with a difficult task, and partly due to the former communist elite which following the revolution of 1989 was hard to change. The old communists reinvented themselves, changed ideology, became nationalists, remained at the helm of the state and under the guise of implementing reforms bred clientelism and corruption. In many cases, they postponed or artificially implement the reforms just to profit from a precarious economy corroborated with a poor legislation. During the '90s, could not be talked about a free market because the rules were chaotic and the inflation was galloping, reaching international records. The misgovernance, the incapacity of several successive governments to achieve credible long-term commitments regarding economic stability and structural reform and the *stop-go* policies failed to attract foreign direct investment and the process of privatisation did not proceed. The country

adopted a gradualist change (Iliescu's party electoral slogan: *therapy, not shock*) which made it a permanent laggard when it came to the fulfilment of EU's set of conditions for enlargement. This sparked additional economic and political convulsions.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Taken into account the scale of the economic, political and social challenges facing post-communist Romania, "it is remarkable that the country managed to move closer to and ultimately gain entry to the EU". (Papadimitriou and Phinnemore, 2008, p. 142) Hence, what the Romanian experience points out is that the impetus for the economic and political transformations was mainly generated by the engagement of the EU towards including Romania into its structures. And here the Europeanisation mechanism has had a vital role by ensuring a proper background for the EU to develop its policies vis-à-vis Romania. Apart from the dynamics behind enlargement process, stood the motivation of the Romanian political class to push the country to EU-membership, seen as the only way for attaining constant political and economic development as opposed to the potential risk of being relegated to the status of non-member. However, corruption, politicisation of the civil service, domestic political and economic instability continue to be major problems that obstruct both democratic development and economic growth.

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