

Europeanization of Civil Society in the Baltic States: Promotion or Constraint of Democratization?

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*The paper deals with the impact of European integration on civil societies of the Baltic states in 1988-2004. The research applies an analytical framework derived from theories of civil society, democratization, and Europeanization. Identified are 4 mechanisms of the impact of the integration into the EU on the development of civil society of the Baltic states: the Political Accession Criterion of Democracy and the Rule of Law; the EU programmes for democracy promotion and the direct aid; reforms and adaptation of *acquis communautaire*; transnational networks and interest representation at the EU level. Along with these mechanisms, the impact of the integration into the EU on civil societies of the Baltic states is analyzed as the process of socialization and learning.*

Pagrindinės sąvokos: *piliietinė visuomenė, demokratizacija, europeizacija.*

Keywords: *civil society, democratization, Europeanization.*

Introduction

Integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures has been the main purpose of the Baltic states from the beginning of the “Singing revolution” in 1988. The guidelines for political and economic reforms in many ways have been drafted, and sometimes imposed, by Western states and institutions. The domestic agenda of the Baltic states in the recent 10 years has been dominated by the integration into the European Union and the fulfilling of the requirements of the EU. The countries have implemented radical reforms in crafting democracy and transforming their economies from state socialism to a free market economy, undergone administrative, legal, and social reforms. Fast reforms and privatization have caused a temporary economic decline and a rapid social differentiation. The process of democratic consolidation would have been easily reversed if the international environment had not been favourably disposed towards democratic development in the Baltic states. Democratization in the Baltic states has been in many ways encouraged by the EU and other Western institutions. The aid has often been provided in the form of support for local NGOs and promotion of the activities of civil society.

Owing to the fact that the Baltic states have been strongly committed to the integration into the EU, a transfer and internalization of European norms and collective understandings in the countries have been perceived as a natural way of reforming society. On the other hand, a diverse historical background and differences in political culture between the older members of the EU and the Baltic states have determined that the process of socialization and learning in some cases has been rather superficial and has caused outcomes other than has been expected. As a consequence, in the process of the integration into the EU, the role and the situation of civil society in the Baltic states have been affected in many ways, which have produced a manifold effect.

The Baltic states have managed to satisfy the formal standards of electoral democracy in the early stage of their independent development. Many indicators of consolidated democracy in the Baltic countries, as well as in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CCEE), however differ essentially in comparison to the countries of mature democracy. One of the exceptional features of post-communist countries which have chosen the way of democratic development is a weak civil society. The

EU in promoting democratization has made efforts to strengthen NGOs and other actors of civil society.

This essay explores the impact of the process of European integration in 1988-2004 on civil society in the Baltic countries.

Theoretical and methodological approach

The research applies an analytical framework derived from theories of civil society, democratization, and Europeanization.

Civil society is a central concept for understanding of the functioning of democracy and the process of democratization [9, p. 218-261; 47, p. 65-90; 19; 20, p. 8; 16; 4]. The revival of the term “civil society“ in the West begins with the political dissent movement in the late 1970s.

The resurgence of associational activity in the Baltic states began in 1988. It lasted however only a few years. The rapid decline of associational activity soon after the beginning of democratization is inherent to all the CCEE. A number of studies in recent years have revealed the fact that levels of organizational membership throughout post-communist Europe are substantially lower than in the established democracies [14; 38, p. 372-381]. Organizational membership in the Baltic states is among the lowest even in the group of the CCEE.

In the literature one can find a substantial number of sometimes even contradictory concepts of civil society. For our purpose we need a broad definition which could reveal a comprehensive impact of civil society upon democratic developments. The process of democratization needs actors which cannot be reduced to NGOs alone, as many definitions of civil society do. Active citizens in order to achieve their goals tend to join associations and various movements which afford them the possibility to represent their interests more effectively. Therefore we define civil society according to Linz and Stepan [20, p. 17]:

By “civil society,” we refer to that arena of the polity where self-organizing and relatively autonomous groups, movements, and individuals attempt to articulate values, to create associations and solidarities, and to advance their interests.

In analyzing the impact of the EU on civil society in the Baltic states we use the concept of Europeanization which has been widely used in recent years in explaining domestic impact of European level institutions and European integration [11; 35]. In our research we build on the

theoretical approach proposed by Börzel and Risse [2] which includes conditions and mechanisms of institutional change. The theoretical approach suggests that the necessary condition for expecting any change is a misfit between European-level and domestic processes, policies, or institutions. There must be mediating factors enabling or prohibiting domestic change. Börzel and Risse identify two ways of conceptualizing the adaptational processes in response to Europeanization. On the one hand, rationalist institutionalism follows a logic of resource redistribution and differential empowerment at the domestic level, on the other hand, sociological institutionalism exhibits a socialization and learning account.

The misfit between characteristics of civil society

According to Börzel and Risse [2], Europeanization is only likely to result in domestic change if there is a misfit between European and domestic norms, rules and the collective understandings.

Institutional arrangement with a different role of civil society for many years has constituted a fundamental difference between the western and eastern halves of Europe. Communist regimes in the CCEE for many years made a great effort to extinguish the tradition of associational activity. Mischelitz [24] argues that “[o]ne of the most characteristic features common to all East Central European countries and inherited from the Stalinist model forced upon them is the lack of a well-articulated civil society“.

The ‘Singing revolutions’ which broke out in 1988 in the Baltic states were a great surprise for the local and Moscow-based communist leaders as well as for Western observers. In these revolutions independent social and political actors played a major part. Usually it is stated that the peaceful revolutions in the Baltic states, as well as in the other CCEE, were carried out by revived civil societies. This is why many observers have expected a post-communist civil society to be strong and vibrant. Soon afterwards, however, the activity of citizens in the Baltic states weakened, the number of NGOs and the participation rate of citizens in various nongovernmental activities diminished. A revolutionary movement as well as a process of democratic consolidation requires an active engagement of civil society. The characteristics of civil society engagement

in each of these two developments, however, are quite different. This explains why the activity of civil society in the Baltic states in overthrowing the old regime and striving for independency has not constituted a reliable basis for a vibrant civil society in the period of democratic reforms.

The World Values Survey (1995-97) has revealed that the average number of organizational membership per person constitutes 2.62 in Sweden, 2.48 in Finland and 2.12 in W. Germany in comparison to only 0.70 in Latvia, 0.64 in Estonia and 0.46 in Lithuania [14, p. 69]. Ruutsoo [38, p. 371] points out that in conceptualizing the state of civil societies in the Western and the Baltic countries, we should deal not with numbers of associations but with the structural gap.

Europeanization of Civil Society in the Baltic States

Civil society of the Baltic states in the process of the integration into the EU has undergone a significant transformation. The preparation for the membership in the EU has been the main factor which has determined the direction of reforms and transformation of society in the Baltic states from the mid-1990s. By the same token, the integration into the EU has been the main factor in affecting a transformation of civil society in the Baltic states. The characteristics of civil society have been influenced in many ways. In 2004, the year of accession of the Baltic states to the EU, the role of civil society in the Baltic states, however, was still of substantially less importance than that in the older member states. This fact testifies that the integration into the EU and the strengthening of the role of civil society in the candidate countries are not parallel processes.

A misfit in the characteristics of civil society between the EU member states and the Baltic states at the beginning of the accession process was significant. Requirements established by the EU for civil societies in the candidate countries however were minimal. Consequently, a misfit and a pressure to adjust to the common practices of the EU member states in this case are not related directly. In addition, it should be noted that every member state has its own traditions of civil society and the common criteria could not be applied.

Börzel and Risse have proposed two pathways to study domestic impact of Europeanization which are not mutually exclusive. One of

the pathways is rationalist institutionalism which follows a logic of resource redistribution [2, p. 6]. On the other hand, from the perspective of sociological institutionalism, Europeanization is understood as “the emergence of new rules, norms, practices, and structures of meaning” which have to be incorporated into domestic structures [2, p. 7].

The Domestic Change as a Process of the Redistribution of Resources

It should be noted that in the democratization of the CCEE, the domestic change as the process of the redistribution of resources can not be clearly separated from the process of socialization and learning. We have identified 4 mechanisms of the impact of the integration into the EU on the development of civil society of the Baltic states. The impact can be analyzed as the process of the redistribution of resources and the differential empowerment of domestic actors. These 4 mechanisms are:

1. The Political Accession Criterion of Democracy and the Rule of Law;
2. The EU programmes for democracy promotion and the direct aid;
3. Reforms and adaptation of *acquis communautaire*;
4. Transnational networks and interest representation at the EU level.

An analysis of the process of socialization and learning which is inherent to all the 4 mechanisms mentioned will be presented below.

1. *The Political Accession Criterion of Democracy and the Rule of Law*

The EU's efforts to promote democracy is an important feature in European foreign policy [18, p. 270; 48]. The policy has been implemented regarding the CCEE after the countries became independent in 1989-1991 and started political and economical reforms with the aim to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic structures. The Copenhagen European Council in 1993 recognized the legitimacy of the CCEE desire to become members of the EU and laid down the accession criteria: the political, economic and the criterion of adopting the *acquis communautaire*. Countries with the accession perspective had had to comply with the Copenhagen criteria before they were entitled to enter accession negotiations. The political criterion encompassed a stability of institutions

guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. The task to elaborate on the content of accession requirements was left to the Commission.

An important circumstance in exploring the impact of the Political accession criterion is the fact that the elaboration of the accession requirements and the recommendation to the European Council to recognize that the applicant countries fulfil the Copenhagen political criterion (excluding Slovakia which fulfilled the political criterion two years later, in 1999) were presented by the Commission in the same document, Agenda 2000, in 1997 [5].

In 1997-2002, the Commission issued yearly reports with recommendations for improvement for each applicant and candidate country. The reports provided evaluations by the EU concerning, *inter alia*, the state of democracy and the rule of law. In the reports, numerous remarks were presented regarding such topics as the rule of law, civil rights, the role of political opposition, fight against corruption, the situation of civil society. The remarks and recommendations however were not systematic, the clear indicators of the evaluation were not elaborated. Kochenov [17] points out that the assessment of democracy and the rule of law criterion provided by the European institutions was not full, consistent and impartial and that the threshold to meet this criterion was very low. In the assessment documents of the criterion, the Union has given priority to the assessment of the rule of law. The democratic process in the candidate countries has not been analyzed in detail, the same holds true with regard to the attention to civil society.

Bearing in mind that the requirements for civil society of the applicant and candidate countries have not been elaborated in detail by the European institutions, it is quite complicated to evaluate the impact of the implementation of political accession criterion on civil societies of the Baltic states. Generally it could be stated that the Baltic states have tried to react to every critical remark which has been presented by the European Commission and to transform their societies following the experience of the Western countries. Raik [36, p. 49] argues that “[s]ince joining the EU has been a top priority for the CEECs, membership criteria have functioned as a powerful tool for the Union to influence the applicant states”.

Some students of democratization relate the ambiguous impact of Brussels on the democrati-

zation of the CCEE to the ‘democratic deficit’ in the EU itself. Raik [365, p. 230] points out that the EU’s “ability and credibility in terms of acting as a democracy promoter are restricted by its own democratic deficit”. Kaldor and Vejvoda [15, p. 166-7] have expressed concern that some aspects, criticized by the EU and imposed on the CEECs to be fulfilled before the enlargement - democratic politics and responsiveness to citizens - are missing in the European context. Zielonka [49, p. 525] points out that “Western pro-democracy pressure has largely constrained any effective self-rule by Eastern ‘democratic’ governments”.

2. The EU programmes for democracy promotion and the direct aid

The EU has developed the instruments for direct financial aid to promote democracy and to develop civil society in the applicant countries. The EU has offered financial aid mostly through various programmes within the framework of Phare which was established in 1989 to assist Poland and Hungary but soon was expanded to other applicant countries and countries of the Western Balkans (until 2000). Phare has been designed to help the CCEE “align their political, economic and legal systems with those of the European Union” [30]. In the first years of the programme the assistance did not include a specific aid for democratic consolidation. The EU’s three multi-country programmes for democracy and civil society were set up in 1992:

– *the Phare Democracy programme*, whose central objective was to promote the application of democratic principles and procedures in various spheres of society, such as the Government, Parliament, local administration, the media, professional groupings and associations;

– *the Phare LIEN programme*, aimed to stimulate citizens’ initiative and to strengthen the capacity of non-governmental and non-profit organizations working in the social sector, especially caring for disadvantaged groups of the population;

– and *the Partnership programmes* which focused on local economic development and cooperation between the private sector, local government and NGOs [6; 27; 36, p. 206].

In 1999, the Commission replaced the Phare LIEN programme and Partnership programmes with the Phare access programme for the CCEE. The Phare access programme aimed at strengthening civil society and at preparing for accession

the candidate CCEE. It was in operation in 1999-2002 with the total budget of about 20 million euros. 2003 was the final programming year of the Phare programme for the new member states, but contracting of projects continued up till 2005 [34]. In conjunction with the multi-country programmes, also implemented were the Phare national Civil Society programmes but these were implemented only in six countries. Lithuania was the only country in the Baltic states included in the latter programmes and received 0.8 million Euro. It is estimated that from the one program which was implemented in Lithuania approximately 1,000 NGOs benefited (in comparison, the Czech Republic got more than 12 million Euro, 62,800 NGOs benefited) [31].

Raik [36, p. 207] gives the figures on the Phare aid to Estonia stressing the fact that the aid to civil society composed only a small part of the financial assistance programmes in the country:

Between 1993–2000, Estonian civil society received over €3 million from Phare funds. The ACCESS programme was launched in 2001 and allocated €0,9 million to Estonia. In comparison, total Phare aid to Estonia was approximately €24 million annually in 1995–2000; Estonian GDP was €5.4 billion in 2000.

These figures are in line with the assessment of Smith [39, p. 49] that the EU's 1998 budget for assisting democracy amounted to less than 1 per cent of the total aid for the CCEE. In 1997 the EU declared that the CCEE (except Slovakia) fulfilled the criterion of democracy, and this criterion further played a relatively modest role in the Eastern enlargement process [36, p. 205]. Since one of the main Phare's objectives was strengthening public administrations and institutions, the state institutions of the Baltic states have received much more financial assistance than civil society organizations.

What impact has the EU democracy programmes had in the CCEE and the Baltic countries? The Report on the evaluation of the Phare and Tacis democracy programme 1992-1997 states that the programme has been of considerable value for the development of democracy and civil society in the CCEE. According to the report, "it has contributed to the growth of the NGO sector in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which plays a crucial role in the process of democratization" [29]. According to Smith [39, p. 49-51], the EU's democracy programmes have improved the transparency of public administration, encouraged local democracy, and strengthened NGOs. In Estonia and

Latvia the most important target has been the integration of the Russian-speaking minority into societies of the countries. Minority rights NGOs have had a clear advantage, whereas any significant support for other institutional levels and other types of civil society groups has been lacking. Youngs [48, p. 364-365] also points out that the EU's democracy aid focus in the CCEE has been concentrated on the issue of minority rights. Minority rights NGOs have had a clear advantage, any significant support for other institutional levels and other types of civil society groups has been lacking.

Wedel [45, p. 86], in her turn, questions the possibility to create a democratic pluralism from the outside. In the case of the CCEE, donors were profoundly ill equipped to make choices about just who the appropriate grantees were. Many NGOs and "foundations" were set up with the only purpose to receive Western funds. Gečienė [12] observes that the new organizations seem to be artificial: they are created from above, do not serve local communities nor represent indigenous interests. Ottaway and Chung [26], as well as Stubbs [41] generalizing the experience of external aid to civil society make a similar conclusion that the main beneficiaries of such aid often are the leaders of NGOs. The EU's democracy programmes have reached mostly the highly educated people and the bigger cities where intellectual capacities are concentrated. This is why in the EU policy to help civil society in the Baltic countries one can see an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, it has been aimed to bring new inputs into the sectors, which attract a great deal of attention in the older EU states but have been neglected in the societies of the Baltic states. On the other hand, for the reason that people in the recipient countries have other value priorities, the new initiatives often seem artificial and are used only by the small circles of the elite.

Phare has provided assistance for the preparation of the CCEE integration into the EU and has focused on capacity-building in the public sector. The evaluation of the impact of the programme on domestic actors of the applicant countries could be seen from the several different perspectives. According to one point of view, the EU's democracy aid programmes have offered additional resources to exert influence for national executives at the expense of the civil society actors. On the other hand, some students underline the fact that a democratic state needs a strong and trustworthy administrative appara-

tus which establishes conditions for activities of civil society. As Suleiman [42, p. 152] notes, a professional bureaucracy is crucial to the consolidation of the democratic process. Börzel and Risse [3, p. 10] argue that institution-building can also benefit democratic institutions, while Mendelson and Glenn [23, p. 5] in presenting the data on the Western assistance to democracy in the CCEE include also an assistance to administrative reform.

3. *Reforms and adaptation of aquis communautaire*

Over the past 15 years, the Baltic states have undergone a transformation, which has no analogues in the Western states. The development of civil society in the Western states has been a considerably long process, and the traditions of democracy have been developing under the conditions of the market economy. Transition from dictatorship to democracy, economic reforms in transforming the economy from socialism to capitalism and a state-building in the Baltic states have been implemented concurrently (Offe's 'triple transition' [25, p. 35]). Approximately since 1997, the main direction of the reforms in the Baltic countries has been determined by the requirement to implement *aquis communautaire* and to harmonize the legislation of the Baltic states and the EU. Vilpišauskas and Nakrošis [43, p. 28] have indicated that the main feature of the political development in Lithuania has been the overburdening of the agenda. In the years 1990 to 2000, the Seimas passed about 3000 legal acts, the Government adopted 14 000 resolutions, in 2000, respectively 520 laws were passed and 1516 Governmental resolutions adopted. Admittedly, such a speedy establishment of institutions has not been immune to perturbation and faults. Furthermore, in order to approve such a large amount of legal acts, it is nearly impossible to carry out discussions on them in detail, evaluate the opinion of the interest groups, and for the interest groups themselves it is not easy to decide what to prioritize when representing their interests. That is why the interests have been defended chaotically, following uncertain rules. These factors have reinforced the frustration of the civil society actors in the Baltic states [40, p. 141].

K. Maniokas [21; 22] while analyzing the impact of the EU membership negotiations on the institutional system of the CCEE, has made a conclusion that in the process of negotiations,

the European Commission imposed a new methodology of enlargement. This new methodology concentrated on regulatory functions and caused the delegation of powers to non-majoritarian institutions. The Commission used its power to change the balance of power in the candidate countries on behalf of executive and judicial authorities as an alternative to political control. Such depolitization of public policy has advantaged a small circle of actors and reinforced a democratic deficit in the then candidate countries. Consequently, the role of interest groups has diminished and the actors of civil society have almost been excluded from the process of decision making.

The business community of the CCEE has been far from being fully involved in consultations regarding the EU accession negotiations. For instance, the CAPE 2001 Survey on Corporate Readiness for the EU Single Market in the 10 CCEE (EUROCHAMBRES 2001) shows that only less than 5 per cent of the companies surveyed were regularly consulted, and only 7 per cent believed that they knew how negotiations were proceeding. Almost 69 per cent obtained only general information about the accession process through the media and considered that they did not influence their government's negotiating position at all. It could be assumed that the CCEE interest groups of the so-called diffuse interests, such as human rights, environmental, consumer groups or trade unions, have been consulted even less than that. According to Pérez-Solórzano Borragin [28, p. 219], there is not any clear evidence of the direct impact of the CCEE interest groups in the enlargement negotiations at the EU level.

Consultations in the Baltic states with interest groups regarding the EU accession negotiations were not systematic, the most important role in them was played by the main group of negotiators. On the one hand, such a situation was more convenient to the governments, and the political culture prevailing in the Baltic states has not helped to build a consensus; on the other hand, to take account of the propositions and opinions of different interest groups was quite complicated due to the complexity of the problems, the tight terms for the preparation of the position of the Baltic states and the strict requirements of the EU which the Baltic states often had simply to obey without having much opportunity for negotiation. The outcomes of the negotiations on the membership of the Baltic states in the EU have been of great impor-

tance and have determined the policy of the states in the many branches of the economy and society for a long time ahead. The important decisions made without adequate consultations with the structures of civil society have suppressed the initiative and instilled the thought that decisions are made far away in Brussels and domestic action cannot change anything.

4. *Transnational networks and interest representation at the EU level*

From the beginning of the 'Singing revolution' in the Baltic states, many organizations have sought membership in the European federations. Many NGOs, professional organizations, trade unions, business associations, political parties have joined corresponding federations of the EU. The membership has influenced the main objectives and organizational culture of the organizations. The EU has played an active role in establishing links between non-governmental actors in the Baltic states and the older member states. Some programmes have developed partnerships among NGOs across Europe [39, p. 50; 30]. Thus the European tradition in many cases has determined the pattern of the organizational structure of the society.

The European Commission and the other European institutions have been paying ever greater attention to a wider involvement of civil society [7]. There has been hardly any activity of civil society of the Baltic states at the level of the EU before 2004. The interest groups of the Baltic states did not have any representation in Brussels before their full membership in the EU. The domestic interest groups basically did not try to exploit European opportunities and enter into direct relations with European decision makers. In explaining this situation, a few reasons for the aforesaid developments could be provided. One of them has been the character of the negotiations concerning the conditions of the joining of the EU. The prerogative to conduct the negotiations has belonged to the governments.

The interest groups of the Baltic states have not seen the possibility of a successful lobbying in Brussels, as even for the governments to defend the position in the negotiations with the EU has been quite a difficult task. Some most influential interest groups have tried to represent their interests through associations operating at the EU level or using the opportunities of representation at the European Economic and

Social Committee. The efficiency of these channels, however, has been rather limited. Because of substantially lower level of economic development, the interest groups in the Baltic states do not have sufficient resources to represent their interests at the EU level. The other factors are weak civil activity of the society, political culture which does not encourage the articulation of the interests, lack of lobbying traditions, illegal channels of influence.

Anyhow, the process of integration into the EU, the changed weight centre of decision making influence the relations and configuration of stakeholders of the Baltic states. For example, it has been well understood that due to limited resources Lithuanian business associations have been able to set up in Brussels only one representative office, which could represent the interests of Lithuania, and that is why the competing business associations in Lithuania which have not yet been able to find common understanding have been forced to start deliberation on that point. This kind of Europeanization has had, however, only rather an insignificant effect.

The Domestic Change as the Process of Socialization and Learning

Socialization and learning constitute the basis for the development of civil society in the Baltic states and plays a major role in all four ways of the impact of the integration into the EU on civil society of the Baltic states.

Many students of democratization express quite a sceptical view concerning the idea of imposing democracy from abroad. Grugel [13, p. 128] however argues that the success of the international aid depends on whether the transitions to democracy and capitalism count on local support and legitimacy. From this point of view, the Baltic states have been advantageous recipients. The "Singing revolutions" in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania which began in 1988 were carried out under the slogan of "returning to Europe". The striving of the three nations to join the EU has been consistent and has had a broad support in the societies. E. g. Marju Lauristin, a prominent Estonian social scientist, maintains that "Estonia's transition" amounts to a "return to Western civilisation" [1, p. 11]. In addition to historical and cultural reasons, it is obvious that the authority of the EU has been based primarily on the economic success and the advanced social system of the Western European states. In the Baltic states there has been a per-

ception that the success of the EU has been related to a democratic regime. Among domestic actors there has been a decisively broad consensus that democracy “is only game in town” [19, p. 15; 20]. The transfer of values from the West in the region has been regarded as a natural process. In the words of Miszlivetz [24, p. 213], “from an Eastern, Central European or Balkan point of view Europe appears as a magnetic center which represents a higher set of values with which one should identify“. The aim to join the EU has been the top priority, and democracy has been seen as the main precondition for the membership. The role of the demonstration effect in these circumstances has been significant. As Raik [36, p. 225] points out, “[t]he EU has influenced domestic developments largely indirectly, by shaping visions and ideas about civil society, and by conditioning civic activity and especially its relations to the state“.

The survival of the democratic regime in the Baltic states should be related to the prospect of the EU membership. In 2001, 50 percent of Estonians, 51 percent of Latvians, and 59 percent of Lithuanians expressed the opinion that their country would be better governed if the current system were replaced by a return to the Communist regime, military rule, or dictatorship [37, p. 42]. Degutis [8, p. 98] in evaluating the political culture in Lithuania argues that there are not any conditions in the country for a long-time stability of a democratic regime. Opinion polls reveal that a majority of the population would remain passive if the democracy in the country would face a threat. Degutis points out however that the two conditions which make a return to the authoritarian rule hardly credible are the democratic attitudes of the political elites and the international environment. It can be stated that the EU to a great extent predetermines an international environment favourably-disposed towards the consolidation of democracy in the country, and, likewise, the perspective of the membership in the EU which has dominated the agenda of the Baltic states, anchors democratic attitudes among the political elite.

The type of the impact of the EU in this case can be conceptualized as Whitehead’s “consent“, especially as the aspect of the international demonstration effect of this concept [46, p. 15-6]. A distribution of public aspirations and expectations may owe much of its configuration to the operation of international demonstration effects. As Whitehead points out [46, p. 24]

,”[o]ne particularly striking illustration of how this may generate consent for democratization is when it is reinforced by the prospect of full membership of the EU“.

The EU has encouraged the governmental institutions of the Baltic states to consult social partners and civil society. In the governance schemes proposed by the EU there was a recommendation to incorporate more participatory decision-making forums [48, p. 363]. In an independent evaluation of the Phare programme in Latvia it was stated that Phare support established co-operation among social actors and “sometimes has unintended impact of engaging civil society actors in establishing new institutions“ [32, p. 7]. The report on Lithuania points out that the Phare projects resulted in the “transfer of EU best practices in local development and enhancement of local skills, strengthening institutional capacity and leadership in civil society for sustainable local development partnerships“ [33, p. 47].

In the methodological approach of Börzel and Risse [2, p. 9], a political culture is indicated as a mediating factor which leads to the internalization of new norms and the development of new identities. A political culture and other informal institutions entail collective understandings of appropriate behavior. There has been a broad consensus among various groups of society in the Baltic states that the integration into the EU is an auspicious way of the development for economic, political, and security reasons. Due to the European moral and cultural authority and the perspective of European integration, the consequences of many political, social and economic problems in the Baltic countries have been mitigated. Antidemocratic trends have been rejected by politicians and society realizing that they would not be in line with the European tradition and would be a great obstacle when joining the EU. The value transfer, the norm diffusion and the moral pressure “to Europeanize“ in these cases have been really remarkable. For agricultural workers and many enterprises the membership into the EU has meant a substantially greater competition, greater requirements for the quality of production and environmental protection. The proponents of the integration into the EU have lacked the reliable data and the evidence about the positive effects of the membership for the sectors of the economy. The leaders of various interest groups however have been persuaded that the membership would be advantageous to the

country on the whole and that their interest groups will benefit too in the end.

Through processes of persuasion and social learning the interest groups have redefined their interests and identities. *Norm entrepreneurs* [2, p. 9] which have persuaded actors to redefine their interests engaging them in processes of social learning have been elites, politicians but to a great extent also various actors of civil society.

The political culture in the Baltic states which is different from that in the countries of an established democracy, however, has caused the impediments to internalization of new norms and rules. The role of social actors and civil society in the decision-making process has been often neglected by the governmental institutions because such a tradition has been missing for a long time and the actors of civil society have been lacking the qualification and unity to negotiate and defend their interests. E. g., following the example of the EU member states, a Tripartite Council was established in Lithuania in 1995 whereby the Government should conduct negotiations with the employers and trade unions. The Tripartite Council exists officially, but in practice it is almost non-operational [43, p. 56].

Conclusions

The EU has promoted the patterns of democratic governance and has been an important factor in the support of civil society actors in the Baltic countries. The demonstration effect of the EU has played a crucial role in the process of democratic consolidation in the Baltic states. Social learning and the exchange of ideas and experiences have been an essential source for the strengthening of the NGOs and civil society actors. On the other hand, the integration into the EU has changed the balance of power on behalf of the executive authorities, caused centralization and isolation of state institutions from interest groups and grass-roots civil society. Direct, financial aid to civil society has composed only a small part of the financial assistance programmes in the region. The democracy promotion programmes have lacked a clear purpose and more specified aims.

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Saulius Spurga

Baltijos valstybių pilietinės visuomenės europeizacija: parama demokratijai ar jos suvaržymas?

Santrauka

Straipsnyje vertinama Europos integracijos įtaka Baltijos valstybių pilietinėms visuomenėms 1998–2004 m. Įvardijami keturi tokios įtakos mechanizmai: politinė demokratijos ir įstatymų viršenybės priimant į ES kriterijus; ES demokratijos plėtros ir tiesioginės paramos programos; valstybėse vykdytos reformos, įgyvendinant *acquis communautaire*; tarptautiniai tinklai ir interesų atstovavimas ES. Taip pat įvertinama socializacijos ir mokymosi įtaka.

ES skatino demokratines reformas, ir integracija į ES buvo svarbus faktorius stiprinant demokratiją bei pilietinę visuomenę Baltijos valstybėse. Kita vertus, integracija į ES suteikė daugiau galių vykdomosios valdžios institucijoms, sustiprino centralizaciją ir padidino valstybės institucijų atirbojimą nuo interesų grupių ir pilietinės visuomenės.

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