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## Europeanization of Governance in Central and Eastern Europe

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## Europeanization of Governance in Central and Eastern Europe

The fall of the Berlin wall marked the beginning of massive *multiple* transitions in the countries from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia were all caught in a process of turbulent changes that would leave no aspect of their societies undisturbed. The omnipresent totalitarian state was to be replaced by a liberal democratic government and uncoupled from the structures of the Party. The free market was to re-emerge from the ashes of the centrally-planned economies. The very identity of these nations was called into question and re-defined. New borders were drawn between nations; between state and society; between public and private.

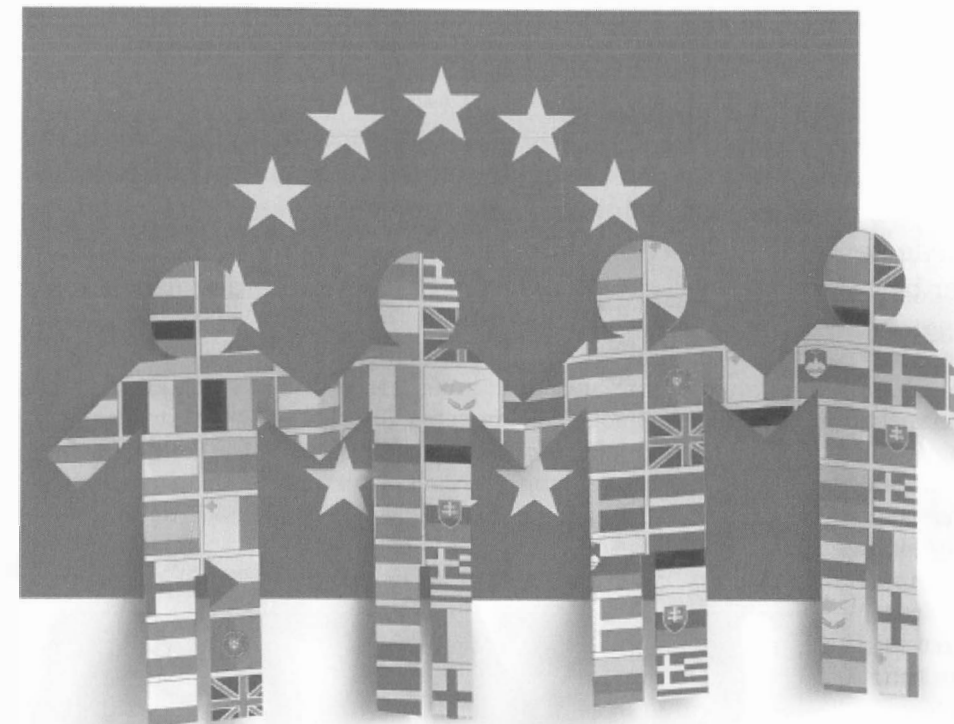
The public administrations of the former communist states from CEE have been simultaneously major agents of these reforms and objects of deep transformations. And these have been transformations that ranged from the "high" issues of designing constitutions and re-structuring the government, to the day-to-day routines of bureaucrats. At first, the mere phrase "public administration" sounded alien to the people throughout the region, and its usage was heavily contested. This was not a matter of rejection of the notions of openness and transparency conveyed by the term "public administration" as those were familiar tunes in the rhetoric of transition. Rather, the idea that public life is more encompassing than the conduct of state affairs; the rejection of the role of state apparatus as the only medium of public life; the heretical idea that there is more to administration than the enforcement of Law, were all felt to be implicit in the expression "public administration", and opposed. As a result, at least in some of the countries from CEE, the phrase "state administration" is still preferred to "public administration", "state servants" to "civil servants", and "state policy" to "public policy".

Nevertheless this "linguistic" resistance the public administrations in CEE have been fundamentally changed. The (re)introduction of statutes for the civil servants aimed at separating politics from administrations; the strengthening of local and regional self-governments; the emergence of a core executive focused on strategic policy-making; and the unloading of policy implementation to a new population of agencies are all crucial developments, visible to a varying degree in all the countries. In the course of a decade the administrative systems in CEE have been transformed from inefficient and poorly coordinated bureaucracies staffed with incompetent and corrupt officials to trusted and competent partners in the multilevel system of governance of the European Union (EU). In 2004 eight of the countries from CEE joined the EU, and at least two more will soon follow. But the last Enlargement is much more than a hallmark and a celebration of the reforms in CEE. The process of European integration is actually a major force in

framing the multiple transitions of the former communist countries. The impact of the EU has been potent and often decisive in the institutionalization of liberal societies, the creation of market economies, and the consolidation of democracy in CEE. But the impact of "Europe" has not been restricted to the grand problems of socio-economic transformations, as it might be suspected from a cursory look at the relations between the EU and the applicant countries. In practice, the EU has been involved in virtually all aspects, however salient or banal, of governance in CEE.

How has the EU been so influential? After all, there is no *acquis communautaire* in the field of civil service. There are no European-wide rules on the structuring of government. There is no EU template for the ministerial organization. The process of Enlargement, however, has given rise to a specific mode of

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relations between the applicants and the EU, with the consequences that the EU has quite a wide range of mechanisms and potential to influence the governments in CEE, even when the *acquis* is thin. Somewhat paradoxically, the impact of the EU can be greater when projected on the candidates than on the current member-states. Even if the emergence of a common European administrative space is still far beyond the horizon, in the case of CEE all the public administrations bear the marks of Europeanization.

Gate-keeping has been the most important instrument in the repertoire of the EU. The conditions, set in Copenhagen in 1993, for admitting new members in the European club included the requirement for stability of institutions and administrative capacity to fulfill the obligations of membership. Vague and open for interpretation as these criteria are, they gave the EU and the European Commission in particular, considerable discretion in applying the standards, and in assessing the administrative "readiness" of the candidates. As a result, the public administrations in CEE have been exposed to direct pressures for reform, and the "governance by conditionality" have given rise to both general demands for restructuring the system and focused pressures for particular changes. In addition to this rather "Byzantine" influence method, the EU has provided massive assistance, resources, know-how and expert advice on various aspects of policy-making and implementation. These "soft" methods have proved to be also influential, although sometimes abused by the governments in CEE.

A major proportion of the impact of the EU, however, has been indirect and less easy to trace. The conduct of the accession negotiations itself puts the whole governmental machinery under enormous pressure. The public administrations in the candidate countries had to transpose more than 80,000 pages of EU rules into their national legal

systems, prior to becoming members. This is no ordinary task and a few of the "old" member-states still have persistent troubles in transposing on time European legislation. The countries from CEE had to create new or to adapt myriads of rules and managing this process has changed their administration because of the novel pressures for co-ordination, strategic planning and policy preparation involved. Apart from transposition, the management of negotiations also demanded the creation of complex organizational structures and co-ordination mechanisms.

Taken as a whole, the various avenues for EU influence amount to a huge potential. How much of this potential

has been realized is still not exactly known. Moreover, the experience of administrative reforms in CEE has wider implications for our theoretical understanding of institutional persistence and change. How does the exogenous European influence interact with domestic factors in steering change? Why were some countries more successful than others in transposing EU law? What is the relative impact of the EU vis-à-vis domestic pressures for change? What kind of governance has emerged in CEE? Are we to expect convergence towards a European model, or national particularities will persist? Is institutional stability punctuated only by short periods of change? I am confident that the experience of 15 years turbulent transformations in CEE can provide exciting new insights for all these questions. □

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Dimiter Toshkov (1978) graduated in Public Administration from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and Leiden University. In 2004 he started a PhD research at Leiden University on the topic of transposition of EU directives in Central and Eastern Europe.

Dimiter Toshkov geeft de pen door aan Caelesta Poppelaars.