The role of National Parliaments in the EU Integration Process: Towards Better Understanding of the Mechanism of Institutional Adaptation

Abstract

Due to the severe loss of competencies by the national parliaments in the EU pre-accession, accession and, especially, post-accession process, ***domestic legislatures*** *have to react* ***institutionally*** *to this process, trying to cope with the new challenges and the danger of loss of authority in different ways. Therefore, the paper investigates the* ***institutional adaptation*** *of the national parliaments in the EU pre-accession and accession process as an important prerequisite for the more active* ***role of the national parliaments*** *in the EU accession process. It seeks the answers on the following questions: how certain* ***national parliaments adjust themselves*** *institutionally to the* ***Europeanization pressures****, why some national parliaments are more actively involved in the accession and integration process compared to others and, consequently, under which conditions national parliaments may play an effective role during the EU integration process. Thus, the identification of these explanatory conditions and factors of smooth and effective parliamentary involvement in the EU matters during the European integration process is of crucial importance, in particular for those Eastern European and Balkan countries that are actually striving for the EU membership. In context, we can hypothesise that the overall level of the parliamentary scrutiny over the executive and the role of the national Parliaments in the European integration process depend on the degree of institutional change and occur in a different way.*

The paper concludes that the national parliaments' active role as "promoters" of European integration depends on the following aspects of Europeanization: institutional Europeanization; behavioural Europeanization; the role of the parliament independent of integration; public opinion on membership; party position on integration; external dimension of Europeanization.

The problems and challenges of the impact of the Europeanization process on national institutions

The EU's latest enlargements in 2004 and 2007 draws political researchers' attention to the "***Europeanization***" concept that can be described within four broad categories:[1]

- as an historical process (spread of European norms and traditions);
- as a matter of cultural diffusion;
- as a process of institutional adaptation (of the domestic institutions to common European institutional requirements);
- as the adaptation of policy and policy processes (synchronisation of the domestic policy processes with the European ones).

Generally speaking, Europeanization focuses on the process through which European norms are incorporated into the logic of domestic politics and public life.[2] The word "logic" emphasizes that the formal transposition of the EU rules or the adoption of the EU terms are less important than how rules are institutionalised, i.e. how they turn intro shared cognitive orientations or norms that are taken for granted by domestic political actors. According to Radaelli, "*Europeanization*" consists of the process of (1) construction, (2) diffusion, (3) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigm, styles, "*ways of doing things*", and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and the incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and sub-national) discourse, political structures and public policies.[3]

In this general theoretical context, "Europeanization" highlights the:[4]

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[1] Featherstone, Kevin and Radaelli**,** Claudio, eds. 2003. *The politics of Europeanisation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 5

[2] Brusis, Martin. 2005. "European Union enlargement and the Europenization of Eastern Europe: research puzzles and policy issues" in *Patterns of Europeanisation in Central and Eastern Europe. Hamburg*, ed. Mansfeldová, Zdenka. Krämer, p. 22

[3] Featherstone, Kevin and Radaelli**,** Claudio. 2003. *The politics of Europeanisation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 17

[4] Kenneth Hanf and Ben Soetendrop. 1998. *Adapting to European Integration. Small States and the Europeanization of Public Policy*. London, Longman, p. 19

- adaptation of institutional changes in the broadest sense (of rules, procedures, norms, practices) at a different political level in response to the dynamics of European integration;
- role of the pre-accession process in the continued democratization and "marketization" of Central and Eastern Europe;
- emergence of new, cross-national policy networks and communities;
- shifts in cognition, discourse, and identity affecting policy in response to Europeanization developments;
- restructuring of the strategic opportunities available to domestic actors, as EU commitments, having a different impact on such actors, may serve as a source of leverage.

In context, it should be mentioned that none of previous cases of enlargement involved such a deep projection of the EU's political and economic power upon the applicant states and the asymmetry of power between the two "*negotiating*" partners had never been so striking.[5] The Central and Eastern European states were and are effectively set a much higher threshold than had ever been set for prospective members.[6]

The creation of formal accession conditions has given the EU much more wider leverage to get these applicants to comply with its demand than previous ones.[7] The EU has applied *conditionality* as a key element to govern the enlargement process. This means that accession countries can be expected to incorporate EU rules even in areas where they already have consolidated institutions or where domestic institutions are not compatible with EU rules:[8]

- The basic conditions for enlargement were spelled out in Copenhagen in 1993 and subsequently specified in the Agenda 2000;

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[5] Zielonka, Jan. 2006. *Europe as empire: the nature of the enlarged European Union.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 45

[6] O'Brennan, John. 2006. *The eastern enlargement of the European Union.* New York; London: Routledge, p. 16

[7] Featherstone, Kevin and Radaelli**,** Claudio. 2003. *The politics of Europeanisation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 305

[8] Brusis, Martin. 2005. "European Union enlargement and the Europenization of Eastern Europe: research puzzles and policy issues" in *Patterns of Europeanisation in Central and Eastern Europe. Hamburg*, ed. Mansfeldová, Zdenka. Krämer, p.24

- The *acquis communautaire* has to be adopted by the candidates in its entirety; negotiations are primarily concerned with determining how much of it should be implemented prior to the accession.[9] The permanent growth of the *acquis communautaire* indicates both the rise of the para-constitutional set-up as well as the "invasion" of the legal space of member states.[10] So, national parliaments have to play a strong role in the legislation's harmonization process (i.e., Czech and Slovenian Parliaments introduced special "fast-track" possibility for the examination of the EU related laws to speed up their adoption);[11]
- The whole process of readjustment was and it is being carefully monitored;[12]

The main difference between the applicant countries and the EU member-states is that EU accession countries cannot "upload" their own preferences into those European level policies.[13] In addition, they cannot object if an EU policy fits very badly with their domestic structures or policies.

Moreover, the accession conditions apply to all the candidates, regardless of how far they are from membership. Both front-runners and those further from accession need to show that they are making progress. Receptiveness to EU conditions changes as countries get closer to membership, but it also depends on how well the EU's priorities fit with other domestic and foreign policy concerns.[14]Also, the EU can attach specific conditions to particular stages in the accession process. Their fulfillment is mandatory for a successful application process.

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[9] Featherstone, Kevin and Radaelli**,** Claudio. 2003. *The politics of Europeanisation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.304

[10] Kaarlőp, Liia. 2001. "Experience of the Nordic parliaments in the EU – What lessons for Estonia?". *Article provided by Mr. Olev Aarma, the Head of EU Affairs Committee's Secretariat, Estonian Riigikogu*

[11] Mair, Peter, and Zielonka, Jan. 2002. *The enlarged European Union: diversity and adaptation*. London: F. Cass, p. 111

[12] Zielonka, Jan. 2006. *Europe as empire: the nature of the enlarged European Union.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 56

[13] Featherstone, Kevin and Radaelli**,** Claudio. 2003. *The politics of Europeanisation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 312

[14] Grabbe, Heather. 2001. "How Does Europeanization Affect CEE Governance? Conditionality, Diffusion, and Diversity." *Journal of European Public Policy* 8 (6): 1016

From "Europeanization's" point of view, like older member states, the newcomers have also passed through several stages of the "*EU Europeanization*".[15] Even in the early stages, the integration of post-socialist countries with the EU started to interfere with the national political systems of these countries. The EU indirectly influenced national political systems and their practices by evaluating and estimating the level of democracy achieved (first in applicant countries and later in candidate countries).

Generally speaking, there are three general aspects of the domestic adoption of the EU rules:[16]

- Rule adoption may be driven by external incentives set by the EU. This means top-down logic where the EU prescribes standards or policy models, backed by a conditionality of rewards or sanctions. States aspiring to membership are expected to comply and are treated according to whether they adjust to EU expectations.
- The adoption of EU rules may resemble a process of social learning in which domestic actors are socialised into a community of shared norms. In the course of their socialization, they learn modes of appropriate action internalise EU norms and identify with the aims and values underlying the Union.
- Adopting as a bottom-up process driven by the needs and interests of domestic actors who seek to draw lessons from abroad and use EU rules in order to address the problems or shortcomings they perceive. This way may generate institutional competition among national parliaments, when they are motivated to adjust either because they want to be better than others or because they deem it easier to copy solutions rather than find new ones in their own.

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[15] Fink-Hafner, Danica. "Europeanization of the core executive in the transition from circumstances of EU accession to full EU membership." Paper prepared for the presentation at the EUSA Ninth Biennial International Conference, Austin, Texas, March 31-April 2, 2005 [cited November 2006]. Available from http://aei.pitt.edu/3041/01/Europeanis_paper_ZDA05popr.pdf

[16] Brusis, Martin. 2005. "European Union enlargement and the Europenization of Eastern Europe: research puzzles and policy issues" in *Patterns of Europeanisation in Central and Eastern Europe. Hamburg*, ed. Mansfeldová, Zdenka. Krämer, p. 22

The last two mechanisms suggest that rules will be more deeply institutionalised than rules that are adopted mainly due to EU pressures. EU conditionality and compliance of an applicant country doesn't necessarily mean that the EU drives rule adoption. Compliance might still be voluntary adaptation, motivated by domestic concerns or reasons.

Some scholars, for example Börzel, argue that there are two conditions for expecting domestic changes in response to Europeanization. First, Europeanization must be "inconvenient," i.e., there must be some degree of "misfit" or incompatibility between European-level processes, policies and institutions, on the one hand, and domestic-level processes, policies and institutions, on the other. This degree of fit or misfit constitutes adaptational pressures, which are a necessary but not sufficient condition for expecting change.[17] However, if European norms, rules, and the collective understandings attached to them are largely compatible with those at the domestic level, they do not give rise to problems of compliance or effective implementation more generally speaking. At the same time, if European norms and rules are too different with those at the domestic level, the adaptational pressures are not able to appear as there is not any necessary framework for the domestic changes.

The degree of adaptational pressures determines the extent to which domestic institutions, in our case – national parliaments, would have to change in order to comply with European rules and policies.[18] However, too high adaptational pressure may result in *inertia*.[19] Inertia is a situation of lack of change, when a country finds that EU political architectures, choices, models or policy are too dissimilar to domestic practice, which may take forms of lags, delays in implementation of

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[17] Börzel, Tanja and Risse, Thomas. 2000. "When Europe Hits Home: Europeanization and Domestic Change." *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)* 4 (15):2 [cited November 2006]. Available from http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2000-015a.htm

[18] Cowles, Maria Green, James Caporaso, and Thomas Risse, 2001. *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, p. 7

[19] Radaelli Claudio. 2000. "Whither Europeanization? Concept Stretching and Substantive Change." *European Integration Online Papers (EIoP)*, 4 (8) [cited November 2006]. Available from http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2000-008a.htm

certain EU norms or resistance to EU-induced changes. But, as the EU membership requires ensuring compatibility between European and domestic processes and structures, applicant states have to avoid the situation of inertia in order to pass successfully through the process of the adaptational pressures. Moreover, the easier adaptation of the Parliaments of the accession countries to the Europeanization challenges can be expected as the consequence of the lack of solid and stable institutional traditions, rules and principles and rather fragile institutional structure of these countries.

Europeanization misfit is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the domestic change. "Mediating factors" or political and organizational structures that are responsible for inducing structural changes as the result of the adaptational pressures are identified as a sufficient condition for domestic change.

General status of the national Parliaments in the EU accession process

Europeanization of national parliaments brings us to more specific questions, such as what institutional and other changes should be adapted by the national parliaments during the Europeanization in order to play a more active role in the European integration process.

While speaking about the Europeanization of the national parliaments, we should mention that almost all scholars agree that national parliaments are often considered as "the losers" of the process of European integration process[20] as one of the consequences of the so-called "*democratic deficit*".[21] While European Treaties have been revised and amended, national legislatures have accepted a shift

[20] Maurer, Andreas, and Wessels, Wolfgang, eds. 2001). *National Parliaments on their Way to Europe: Losers or Latecomers?* Baden-Baden: Nomos, p. 20

[21] Ágh, Attila. 1998. "Democratic deficit in the EU and the ECE accession process." *Papers on Democratic Transition* 222: 29; Bellamy, Richard and Castiglione, Dario. 2000. "The Uses of Democracy: Reflections in the European Democratic Deficit" in *Democracy in the European Union: Integration through Deliberation",* ed. Eriksoen, Erik O. and Fossum, John E. London and New York: Routledge; Neunreither, Karlheinz. 1994. "The Democratic Deficit of the European Union: Towards Closer Cooperation between the European Parliament and the National Parliaments." *Government and Opposition* 29 (3): 299-314; Dimitrakopoulos, Dionyssis. 2001. "Incrementalism and Path Dependence: European Integration and Institutional Change in National Parliaments." *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 39 (3)

of competencies to the European level. This transfer has reduced their final say over major areas of traditional legislative powers and the political control over governments. Several country reports reveal that the overall majority of national parliaments have been slow and retarding adapters concerning this change.[22] Meanwhile, other actors, such as interest groups, non-governmental organisations and regional governments have emerged who seem to be more successful in influencing the output of the EU system. Given the growing importance of the EU organization as one part of an ever progressing world political network, participation and involvement are crucial issues for the overall weight and role of parliaments.[23] National Parliaments of the EU's "new member-states" have had to undergo profound changes in the EU accession, at the same time they have been playing a very active role in making their countries more Euro-conform.[24] In this case accession states' governments, including Parliaments, play a triple role:

1) to show the EU that they are willing and able to play a full part as a member – state;

2) to show their domestic electorate that they are taken seriously by the EU as a full partner to legitimate their policy programme by reference to EU policies;

3) to raise public awareness, providing public support of the EU integration process and explaining the adaptation to the Europeanization to the electorate (so-called "communicative" or "deliberation" function).

However, the second role can spur certain reluctance towards the Europeanization among MPs, if European policies are not relevant in national elections and, therefore, parliamentarians cannot gain much by becoming specialists in this field. These two roles determine the situation when candidate countries tend to engage in anticipatory adjustment to the EU policies as well adopting the EU

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[22] Maurer, Andreas, and Wessels, Wolfgang, eds. 2001). *National Parliaments on their Way to Europe: Losers or Latecomers?* Baden-Baden: Nomos, p. 20

[23] Kaarlőp, Liia. 2001. "Experience of the Nordic parliaments in the EU – What lessons for Estonia?". *Article provided by Mr. Olev Aarma, the Head of EU Affairs Committee's Secretariat, Estonian Riigikogu*, p. 3

[24] Agh, Attila, 2005. "National Parliaments and the EU: The Role of the ECE Parliaments in the EU integration." In *Post-accession in East-Central Europe. The emergency of the EU-25,* edited by Agh, Attila. Budapest: Hungarian Center for Democratic Studies, p. 69

norms or practices before the EU tells them they must do so[25] and national parliaments need to find options to motivate at least a group of MPs to actively participate in the Europeanization process of the national parliaments, including establishing the modes of the efficient scrutinizing the governments.

If up to recently, European policy was on a national level considered to be part of "external" or international affairs. This is not any more the case, "the European affairs" have become "our" matter to discuss about on national level. The European level has been internalised as a common and normal frame of reference for decision makers and policymakers at all levels of government in the member states as well as in those who apply for membership. Thus, parliamentarians take part of a "nested game".[26] This term means situations where actors participate in two different games at the same time: European and domestic. The internalisation of policy making generally and the Europeanisation of an increasing proportion of national issue areas in particular have transformed the environment in which the legislative bodies operate. Foreign contacts, standing committee trips abroad, receiving delegations of parliamentarians from other countries have become a day-to-day activity.

Mechanism of national Parliament's institutional adaptation to the Europeanization pressures

Due to the severe loss of competencies by the national parliaments in the EU pre-accession, accession and, especially, post-accession process, domestic legislatures have to react institutionally to this process, trying to cope with the new challenges and the danger of loss of authority in different ways.[27] It is a conventional wisdom that all enlargements have introduced different variations of institutional adaptations to the Europeanization pressures and it is an open question whether East

[25] Agh, Attila, 2005. "National Parliaments and the EU: The Role of the ECE Parliaments in the EU integration." In *Post-accession in East-Central Europe. The emergency of the EU-25,* edited by Agh, Attila. Budapest: Hungarian Center for Democratic Studies, p. 314

[26] Kaarlőp, Liia. 2001. "Experience of the Nordic parliaments in the EU – What lessons for Estonia?". *Article provided by Mr. Olev Aarma, the Head of EU Affairs Committee's Secretariat, Estonian Riigikogu*

[27] Wessels, Bernhard. 2005. "Roles and orientations of members of parliament in the EU context: Congruence or difference? Europeanisation or not?" *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 11 (3-4): 461

European countries on their way to Europe will or should imitate one of the incumbent's style or develop a new pattern of their own in an enlarged Europe.[28] And here it is important to acknowledge that "*institutions preserve themselves,…by developing their own criteria for the definition of appropriate and successful action. Institutions evolve through a process of "experiential learning" based on trial and error. Even when there are calls for change, they are assessed on the basis of conceptions and images of "appropriate action" that are shaped by a longer-lasting historically defined process*".[29] Therefore, it is important to understand how certain national parliaments adjust themselves institutionally to the Europeanization pressures and, consequently, why some national parliaments are more actively involved in the accession and integration process compared to others. In this framework, we can hypothesise that *the overall level of the parliamentary scrutiny over the executive and the role of the national Parliaments in the European integration process depend on the degree of institutional change and occur in a different way.*[30]

The following institutional mechanisms of adjustment to the integration pressures suggest that national parliaments have adapted to moves towards greater European integration:

I. *General institutional reforms characteristic to all national parliaments*

- one or more special committees for European integration were set up (committees specifically responsible for coordinating the parliament's involvement in EU affairs);
- a clear mechanism of Parliament-Government cooperation in EU affairs was established:
  - so called "access to information",[31] that is a) when are parliaments informed about EU matters and when do they actually start processing European issues (*timing*), and b) what documents do the parliaments have the right to receive from the governments (*scope*) conducting consultations in the

[28] Agh, Attila. 2005. "National Parliaments and the EU: The Role of the ECE Parliaments in the EU integration." In *Post-accession in East-Central Europe. The emergency of the EU-25,* edited by Agh, Attila. Budapest: Hungarian Center for Democratic Studies

[29] Dimitrakopoulos, Dionyssis. 2001. "Incrementalism and Path Dependence: European Integration and Institutional Change in National Parliaments." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 39 (3): 405-22

[30] Norton, Philip, ed. 1998. *Parliaments and pressure groups in Western Europe*. London: Frank Cass, p. 178

[31] Raunio, Tapio. 1999. "Always One Step Behind? National Legislatures and the European Union." *Government and Opposition* 34 (2): 321

parliament (committees, plenary session, hearings with the representatives of the ministries in charge of the certain EU integration issue)

- ability to mandate the government to represent the given country in substantial EU matters ("mandatory" or "consultative" voting instructions)

II. *Specific institutional reforms carried out in individual national parliaments*

- European special sub-committees were organized in all or, at least, the most important parliamentary committees, that allowed concentration of special expertise of different aspects of the EU accession (i.e., Austrian Nationalrat, Spanish Parliament, Hungarian National Assembly, Polish Sejm (subcommittees created ad-hoc));[32]

- Special forum for discussing strategically important EU integration questions by all parliamentary political parties was ensured (i.e., so-called "EU Grand Committee" was set up by the Hungarian National Assembly in September 2002, having held the mandate expiring on the date of accession[33]);

- Several national parliaments introduces the practice of common meetings with other parliamentary committees when issues of EU interest were considered (i.e., Bulgarian, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Polish Senate, Slovenian cases);[34]

- Introduction of the "fast-track" possibility for the examination of the EU related laws to speed up their adoption by several Parliaments (i.e., Czech and Slovenian Parliaments cases);[35]

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[32] The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation. "European Affairs Committees: The Influence of National Parliaments on European Policies", ECPRD, European Parliament, Brussels, 2002, [cited November 2006]. Available from http://www.ecprd.org/Doc/publica/OTH/European%20Affairs%20Committees.pdf

[33] Gyori, Eniko. 2005. "How can the National Assembly preserve its sovereignty." In *Post-accession in East-Central Europe. The emergency of the EU-25,* edited by Agh, Attila.Budapest: Hungarian Center for Democratic Studies, p. 105

[34] The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation. "European Affairs Committees: The Influence of National Parliaments on European Policies", ECPRD, European Parliament, Brussels, 2002, [cited November 2006]. Available from http://www.ecprd.org/Doc/publica/OTH/European%20Affairs%20Committees.pdf

[35] Mair, Peter, and Zielonka, Jan. 2002. *The enlarged European Union: diversity and adaptation*. London: F. Cass, p. 111

- Reorganization of parliamentary services (i.e., establishment of the EU information/documentation Centers inside the Latvian and Bulgarian Parliaments, increasing the number of advisers and consultants for European Affairs Committees, etc.);[36]

- Mutual contacts with the European Parliament, various EU structures and other national parliaments have been developed or intensified to improve information exchange etc (i.e., the *Conference of the European Affairs Committees of the Member States and Candidate Countries*, COSAC[37] that brings to joint forum the delegations dealing with European Union issues from the parliaments of member states and candidate states[38]).

Thus, institutional changes or institutional adaptation to the Europeanization pressures implemented in all EU member-states' national parliaments were aiming at mitigating the problem of loss of legislative competences by national parliaments in the process of European integration and enhancing the role of the national parliaments in European affairs. In this context, in our opinion, the "Government-Parliament" relationship is one of the most crucial in the context of the Parliament's role in the Europeanization process because governments have been favored in the information process at the expense of the parliaments as *""Europe" was essentially a matter for the Executive*".[39]

There are three procedures to be regulated in the "Government-Parliament" relationship of managing EU affairs:[40]

- the governments have to inform the parliaments regularly on the EU-related issues;

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[36] The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation. "European Affairs Committees: The Influence of National Parliaments on European Policies", ECPRD, European Parliament, Brussels, 2002, [cited November 2006]. Available from http://www.ecprd.org/Doc/publica/OTH/European%20Affairs%20Committees.pdf

[37] Kelam, Tunne. "The Role of the Riigikogu in the Accession of Estonia into the European Union", 2001 [cited December 2006]. Available from http://www.riigikogu.ee/rva/toimetised/rito3/artiklid/49summary.htm

[38] Riigikogu of the Republic of Estonia. 2000. *Preparations for Estonia's Joining the European Union.* Co-report of Chairman of Riigikogu European Affairs Committee Tunne Kelam on 19 January 2000 at the Riigikogu

[39] Norton, Philip, ed. 1998. *Parliaments and pressure groups in Western Europe*. London: Frank Cass, p. 178

[40] Agh, Attila. 2005. "National Parliaments and the EU: The Role of the ECE Parliaments in the EU integration." In *Post-accession in East-Central Europe. The emergency of the EU-25,* edited by Agh, Attila. Budapest: Hungarian Center for Democratic Studies

- the parliaments have to develop a scrutiny over government actions in decision-making on the EU affairs;
- there is a need for a cooperation mechanism on the most important issues and for the opportunity of national parliaments to express their opinion on the negotiation position of the government.

Thus, an effective scrutinizing of the national governments in the EU related matters depends on the above-mentioned "access to information" mechanism or type and amount of documents forwarded by governments to their parliaments as well as time given to national parliaments to sift the received documents.[41] However, the type and amount of information is also determined by the Parliament's own activities to acquire information about European issues. Even if parliamentarians are keen to be actively involved in EU issues, the problem of overloaded working agenda or finding the time appears as scrutinizing EU related documents or activities necessitates additional knowledge and is, generally speaking, an institutionally "costly" procedure. These practical problems have limited the capacity of national legislatures to give the time and attention to European affairs to the extent that they may wish, and, in so far as national parliaments address European issues, have produced a "patchwork quilt" response.[42]Therefore, this scrutinizing function in European issues depends not only on proper institutional provisions, but also demands increased efforts of national parliaments.

Besides the controlling or scrutinizing European role of national parliaments, the communicative or deliberative role[43] also demands increased efforts of national parliaments. National parliaments have to act as windows to the EU for the population by informing the citizens about EU issues and about the parliamentary work in EU affairs.

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[41] The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation. "European Affairs Committees: The Influence of National Parliaments on European Policies", ECPRD, European Parliament, Brussels, 2002, [cited November 2006]. Available from http://www.ecprd.org/Doc/publica/OTH/European%20Affairs%20Committees.pdf

[42] Norton, Philip, ed. 1998. *Parliaments and pressure groups in Western Europe*. London: Frank Cass, p. 189

[43] Agh, Attila. 2005. "National Parliaments and the EU: The Role of the ECE Parliaments in the EU integration." In *Post-accession in East-Central Europe. The emergency of the EU-25,* edited by Agh, Attila. Budapest: Hungarian Center for Democratic Studies, pp. 70 - 71

Moreover, in the current EU enlargement scenario "pre-accession" policies play a much more dominant role than in previous enlargements of the European Union, as the pressure on candidate-countries for adaptation and policy convergence are considerably greater than those on previous applicants, owing to the Union's much more advanced state of policy development.[44] Therefore, parliaments as representative institutions will have to play more prominent role in any future EU enlargements because of the following "minimal" tasks:[45]

- detailed legal and political harmonization of national legislation with the "*acquis communitaire*";
- national parliaments have a decisive role in formulating national interests for the pre-accession, accession and post-accession period;
- a "communicative function", since the parliaments are perceived as the windows to the EU for the populations able to provide active public support of the EU integration process;
- "scrutiny function" of the national institutions in the EU accession process that can efficiently influence on the structural adjustment of the whole national administration system to the EU requirements (ensuring the accountability of governments with regard to their activity in European affairs[46]);

Conclusions:

We can presume that the national parliaments' active role as "promoters" of European integration depends on the following different aspects of Europeanization:[47]

[44] Featherstone, Kevin and Radaelli**,** Claudio. 2003. *The politics of Europeanisation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 305

[45] Agh, Attila. 2005. "National Parliaments and the EU: The Role of the ECE Parliaments in the EU integration." In *Post-accession in East-Central Europe. The emergency of the EU-25,* edited by Agh, Attila. Budapest: Hungarian Center for Democratic Studies, pp. 70 - 71

[46] Kaarlőp, Liia. 2001. "Experience of the Nordic parliaments in the EU – What lessons for Estonia?". *Article provided by Mr. Olev Aarma, the Head of EU Affairs Committee's Secretariat, Estonian Riigikogu*

[47] Wessels, Bernhard. 2005. "Roles and orientations of members of parliament in the EU context: Congruence or difference? Europeanisation or not?" *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 11 (3-4): 447

- *Institutional Europeanization* with regard to the establishment of new rules and procedures as well as new institutional provisions in national parliaments to coop with the increasing impact of the European level.
- *Behavioural Europeanization* with regard to attitudes, self-definitions of roles and behaviour of political actors, namely parliamentarians'. MPs behaviour or the degree of involvement in Europeanization process can be constrained by the domestic institutional structure (*high benefits vs. low costs equitation*) as the EU related matters are institutionally "costly" procedure, because national MPs need specific knowledge about EU structures and procedures and have to share responsibilities and intensively cooperate with MPs in other specialized committees etc. Besides it, this degree directly depends on the electoral impact of parliamentary involvement in the EU related matters, as the MPs are more likely to control and communicate the EU related issues, if the electoral impact of such involvement is greater.
- *The role of the parliament independent of integration*[48]

Generally, the level of scrutiny depends on the overall legislative-executive relations. Where parliaments are stronger, they will implement stronger scrutiny rights, where they are weaker, scrutiny rights are weaker as well. Thus, the level of the influence of parliament in a political system can be measured by its impact on policy, the degree to which the parliament independently sets its own agenda and extent to which it attracts lobbyists.[49]

- *Public opinion on membership*[50]

Eurosceptical public opinion increases the probability of the legislature subjecting the government to tighter scrutiny in EU integration as parliamentarians depend on the public opinion in their constituencies

[48] Raunio, Tapio. 1999. "Always One Step Behind? National Legislatures and the European Union." *Government and Opposition* 34 (2): 329
[49] Ibid
[50] Ibid, p. 332

- *Party position on integration*[51]

Existence of any "soft" or "hard" Eurosceptic parties in the Parliament increases once again the probability of the legislature subjecting the government to tighter scrutiny in EU integration. The national parliament is less likely to be involved in controlling EU – related matters if the attitude of parliamentary parties towards European integration is more favourite, as MPs are in general considerably more pro-integrationist than the citizens.

- *External dimension of Europeanization*[52]

The internationalization of issues in general and the method of working in the European Union in particular have contributed to creating a new, international dimension in parliamentary work.[53] Cooperation and network-building are the key components to characterize any kind of activity, either in private or public sphere, this includes the legislative branch. Responding to Europeanization of politics, national parliaments established contacts to parliaments in other EU member-states, either within the framework of COSAC, the regular meetings of European Affairs Committees, or in bilateral meetings of members of parliament.[54] These contacts and cooperation were directed to the 'real' activities of the EU, providing the accession states with the precious orientation concerning the different aspects of the European integration process. Therefore, through such an orientation, the national parliaments were expected to benefit optimally for their main objective of scrutinizing their own governments in EU affairs.[55]

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Concluding, it should be noted that the national Parliaments play an important role in the overall shape of the European accession mechanism. This mechanism implies the usage of a lot of Parliament's instruments, being determined primordially by the role of the Parliament as an institution that represents directly the vote and will of the people. In context, the efficient adaptation of the national Parliaments to the Europeanization pressures add additional value to the necessary legitimization of this process.

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