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NON-ECONOMIC FACTORS IN THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION DEVELOPMENT: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

The article examines the evolution of the role of non-economic factors in the development and enlargement processes of the EU, and reveals the trend of its growing importance. It emphasizes that the process of formation of the Europe of civil rights and values, freedom, solidarity and security determines the main vector of social modernization of the countries joining the EU. It finds out that the processes of social transformations and adaptation to the EU rules were generally difficult and controversial, while the biggest problem has been the gap between formally proclaimed rules and the actual practice of relations, including the capacity to implement European standards.

Keywords: non-economic factors of development, European integration, European Union, countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Formulation of the problem. The European integration processes unfold under the impact of a sophisticated complex of factors – not merely economic but also political, ideological as well as cultural and value motives. This broad social context of the integration process has been revealing itself gradually, as interaction was deepening and spilling over to new areas of social connections. This trend pushed research to proceed from the initially rather pragmatic considerations towards the search of general fundamentals for shaping European unity – not as purely practical search for profits, extra income or higher growth rates but as a disclosure of the *deeply rooted mental-value affinity of the European civilization*.

The importance of this theoretical principle has grown extraordinarily in 1990s because of the transition of the European integration participants from the measures aimed mainly at removing barriers hampering the flows of goods, services, capital and labour towards a new target. This new aim has been associated with a more diversified social and economic interaction, and coordination in building up of an economic and monetary union as well as a political union of the EU member states. These developments produced an ever-growing impact of various non-economic factors on the integration process. They acquire a decisive role when the regulation of social relations evolves towards a more complex structure and traditional intergovernmental relations are complemented with a diversified network of relations between nongovernmental entities – citizens and their professional and social communities. The latter launch the formation of multi-level systems of participation in the integration process, and pave the way to the emergence of *European network structures* representing an important instrument to foster integration.

Under these circumstances, the EU integration ceases to be an exclusively regional economic process: it appears ever more as a process of *Europeanization* of all the aspects of social life and behaviour. It requires a system of diversified informal mechanisms resting on moral norms and ethics of mutual relations, customs and traditions, public opinion stereotypes, and widespread forms of voluntary interaction. In other words, the course of European integration and the development of its participants have begun to depend significantly on the evolution of *institutions*, which are determined by cultural foundations of the society, its prevailing mental-value symbols and orientations. The December 2007 adoption of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights*, as one of the founding documents of the EU that is compulsory for all countries joining the Union, consolidated this priority of the value component in the development of the European integration.

Analysis of actual publications.

Scientific research of the issues of European integration started under the conditions when security considerations were in the forefront, and this was the basis for the emergence and spreading of the concept of *security communities* [1]. The

investigation along this direction (in particular [2]) put emphasis on the importance, for the sake of a stable and secure development, of such factors as *trust* and *common interest*, presence of *common identities*, *shared values and meanings* spread among integrating states. Alongside with pure economic considerations, they turned to be the basis for the unfolding of European integration, its further deepening and spilling over to new participants.

Ernst Haas [3], a founder of the European integration theory, used to emphasize the importance of non-economic components of a successful integration process by postulating that excessive emphasis on pragmatic-interest politics endangers integration. If not reinforced with deep ideological or philosophical commitment, it would be ephemeral and can be readily scrapped, thus easily turning integration into disintegration.

Substantial expansion of non-economic approaches in the research of European integration issues can be found within the theoretical paradigms of *sociological institutionalism* and *social constructivism* [4]. The latter formulate their theoretical principles proceeding mostly not from the logic of consequentialism (following the targets of maximizing or optimizing personal gains and preferences) but from the logic of appropriateness – following the rules which link certain identities with certain situations [5]. The use of these newly approaches to an analysis of European integration makes us recognize this process as not only (and not so much) as a more rational method to enhance economic efficiency but primarily as a *mode to implement existing ideal perceptions of the future* – in conformity with *social meanings and “cultural codes”* dominating in a particular social environment. Such sort of approach in an analysis of European integration exerts a growing impact on the processes of shaping the political basis for the EU development.

In Ukraine, the research of non-economic factors of European integration are in an acute shortage. It results, on the one hand, from a sheer hypertrophy of the analysis of purely commercial aspects of development and the effects of market liberalization for economic dynamics; but on the other hand, it rests on the naïve belief that the positive influence of more developed European institutions spreads

almost automatically. Both of these approaches do not appear to be adequate and need to be corrected.

The objective of this research is to define the role of non-economic factors in the processes of modernisation of social structures in CEE countries aimed at their adaptation to the conditions of EU membership, as well as to reveal basic problems and barriers on this way, which are to be accounted for by candidate countries of the subsequent waves of the EU enlargement process.

The main results of the research are the following.

The very first steps on the way of European integration were associated with the supplementing of seemingly pure economic mechanisms with certain social aspects. Thus, the formation of the European Economic Community in 1958 incorporated social issues among the priority areas of interaction. For this purpose, the European Social Fund was set up as far as in 1959, its objectives including the reduction of differences in social conditions across member states through settling the problems of employment. With this aim, the Fund granted subsidies for professional training, programmes of employment and jobs creation in depressed industries, and assistance in employment of vulnerable population. However, at initial stages of the development of the European Communities social issues remained to be non-essential and played rather an accessory role.

Later on, in February 1986 the Single European Act considerably expanded the sphere of interaction over the boundaries of mere economic contacts. Thus, it initiated co-operation in research and development based on the mechanism of multiannual framework programmes, environment protection, and foreign policy; it extended interaction in the area of social policy and introduced the Community policy of economic and social cohesion. Following this new course, the participants of the European Communities (except United Kingdom) adopted in 1989 the Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights of Workers (the so called *Social Charter*), and in December 1991 concluded the Social Policy Agreement.

However, genuinely cardinal shifts in the structure of the European integration process took place in the 1990s, in the aftermath of the approval of the Maastricht

Treaty on European Union [6] and the Treaty of Amsterdam as of October 2, 1997 [7]. They set up the system of three pillars backing the development of the European integration process – by supplementing the existing mechanisms of economic integration within the European Communities (the first pillar) with common foreign and security policy (the second pillar) and co-operation in the fields of justice and home affairs (the third pillar, as defined by the Maastricht Treaty; the Treaty of Amsterdam reformulated this pillar as police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters). These treaties strengthened the principles of democratic legitimacy in the functioning of the European Community and created a clear-cut social dimension within it – at first, via rendering the earlier signed Social Policy Agreement the status of an annex to the Maastricht Treaty, and later – through full incorporation of social issues into the EU law by the Treaty of Amsterdam. These treaties also introduced several new common policies relating to education and professional training, youth policy, culture and co-operation in environment protection (sustainable development), as well as the citizenship the European Union. The Treaty of Amsterdam set forth the principle of common regulation of basic civil rights and the principle of free movement of persons, doing this by the incorporation of the Schengen *acquis* into the European law.

The new stage in the development of the European integration is associated with the adoption on December 13, 2007 of the Treaty of Lisbon [8], which entered into force on December 1, 2009. It paved the way not merely for a cardinal reform of the institutional basis for the EU functioning but also for the passing of the Charter of Fundamental Rights [9], the implementation of which has been supported by the real opportunity to defend the relevant rights in the Court of Justice of the EU¹. This document not only consolidated the national legislative guarantees of political, economic, social and civil rights that had existed for a long time; it proclaimed a set of new rights – on protection of personal data, bioethical rights, right to good administration, and the right to petition the European Parliament.

¹ The imperative character of the Charter is somewhat restricted by reservations made in relation to United Kingdom, Poland and the Czech Republic.

The adopted Charter of Fundamental Rights makes the core of a more general process outlined by the Treaty of Lisbon, that is the process of the formation of Europe of civil rights and values, freedom, solidarity and security, which is aimed at supporting democratic values and strengthening safeguards for liberties existing in the EU – not only economic but political and social as well. An important vector of this process is the consolidation of the principle of solidarity among member states by means of introduction of the so-called solidarity clause that stipulates the order of common action in case of a terrorist attack, natural or man-made disaster. It essentially expands the scope of opportunities for common action to safeguard security, which envisages consolidation of mechanisms of civil protection, healthcare, and provision of various kinds of humanitarian aid.

Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that non-economic issues in the EU development, if compared with the economic ones, are to a substantially lesser extent regulated by the so-called supranational (that is existing exclusively on the level of the community) powers of the EU bodies. The issues of social policy, environment protection, and the functioning of the area of freedom, security and justice are subject to shared powers with its subsidiarity principle. The latter means that existing problems are to be resolved at the level where it can be done most efficiently. At the same time, the issues of healthcare, culture, education and professional training, tourism, sports, and youth policy are referred to the area of supporting, coordinating or supplementing activities of the European Union. It means that national policies retain their leading role here, although they are performed in a coordinated manner. Such approach is justified by the fact that, contrary to trade and economic activities facing growing unification of commercial procedures in the course of globalization, social and humanitarian processes are dependent largely on specific factors of national culture. And here we witness very significant differences in the modes of organization across various countries or country groups.

It is worth noting that the intentions of the European Union to strengthen civil rights and freedoms encounters certain obstacles. Currently, it faces major challenges that have substantially intensified because of the long-term effects of the 2008-09

global financial and economic crisis accompanied by the Eurozone crisis that emerged in the wake of it and have not expired so far. These crisis manifestations have illuminated brightly all the vulnerable aspects of the European social model, which shows the signs of hypertrophied social guarantees as well as disruption of financial obligations on social programmes from the actual potential to finance them, especially taking into consideration the negative demographic trends in the EU member states. The excessive social benefits weaken the stimuli for productive labour and innovative entrepreneurship. That is why many EU member states face the need to adjust their social security and social protection systems (this is explicitly revealed by the case with several Eurozone member states whose government finances had to go through sanitation procedures within the last three years).

The main changes that are making their way during the reforms of the social security systems arise from the necessity to make a certain shift from emphasising passive instruments of protection and compensation of low incomes towards the policy of active support to efforts aimed at enhancing the potential of efficient employment, raising of qualification and providing flexibility of labour markets. These changes have been reflected in a number of the EU common programmes of innovative development and competitiveness.

The significant growth of the importance of non-economic aspects of the development policy inherent for the European Communities and the European Union has direct consequences for the content and format of the EU enlargement process, and accession of new member states. It means that the criteria used to evaluate the level of readiness of a candidate country to become an EU member are essentially dependent not only on the state of its economy but its social and humanitarian spheres as well. This principle have been clearly defined by the formalised criteria for evaluating the readiness for EU membership that are known as the Copenhagen criteria as of 1993 [10]. As is well known, the latter include not only the economic criterion of “the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union”, and the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to

the aims of economic and monetary union. The first component of the set of these criteria is essentially a political one requiring from the candidate country the “achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities” supplemented with the country’s adherence to the aims of political union. EU accession negotiations envisage adaptation to the EU *acquis* along 35 directions (chapters), non-economic issues playing a very significant role among them (see Table 1).

Table 1

Compulsory areas for adaptation of national legislation with the EU *acquis* during the period of preparation for EU accession

Economic	Economic with significant non-economic content	Political	Social and humanitarian	Versatile issues of general support
Chapter 1: Free movement of goods	Chapter 2: Freedom of movement for workers	Chapter 22: Regional policy and coordination of structural instruments	Chapter 25: Science and research	Chapter 18: Statistics
Chapter 3: Right of establishment and freedom to provide services	Chapter 7: Intellectual property law	Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights	Chapter 26: Education and culture	Chapter 34: Institutions
Chapter 4: Free movement of capital	Chapter 10: Information society and media	Chapter 24: Justice, freedom and security	Chapter 27: Environment	
Chapter 5: Public procurement	Chapter 11: Agriculture and rural development	Chapter 30: External relations	Chapter 28: Consumer and health protection	
Chapter 6: Company law	Chapter 12: Food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy	Chapter 31: Foreign, security and defence policy		
Chapter 8: Competition policy	Chapter 19: Social policy and employment			
Chapter 9: Financial services				
Chapter 13: Fisheries				
Chapter 14: Transport policy				
Chapter 15: Energy				
Chapter 16: Taxation				
Chapter 20: Enterprise and industrial policy				
Chapter 21: Trans-European networks				
Chapter 29: Customs union				
Chapter 32: Financial control				
Chapter 33: Financial and budgetary provisions				
Chapter 35: Other issues				

Source: [11].

The attained level of conformity along these directions is subject to permanent monitoring in the course of negotiations on the terms of EU accession. It is embodied in relevant conclusions of documents that are annually prepared by the European Commission both for the entire group of candidate countries (Strategy Paper) and with regard to each of them (Progress Report). It means that the entire process of transformations taking place since the awarding of a candidate country status is to be placed under strict monitoring procedure on the part of the EU governing institutions.

General principles derived from the integration experience of CEE countries in fulfilling non-economic reforms

The processes of preparation for EU accession fostered the necessary systemic reforms inside the candidate countries in order to adapt themselves to the functional conditions of the Union². Although the path of each candidate country was marked with explicit specifics caused by the presence of an original spectre of existing problems, yet one can speak about certain common features of this process, which are certainly of a regular nature and, therefore, are to be taken into account by subsequent candidates for EU membership.

First of all, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that many of the non-economic components of the process of adaptation to EU conditions precede the implementation of the similar adaptation measures in the economic field. This is fully proved by the early attainment by all candidate countries of the political criteria of EU membership –progress in strengthening and deepening the foundation of the stability of institutional arrangements guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect and protection of minorities. Practically all the candidate countries of the fifth (the largest) wave of EU enlargement had fulfilled these requirements already in 1997 (and only Slovakia in 1999³), although the so-called

² This article deals with CEE countries participating in the fifth (2004), sixth (2007) and seventh (2013) waves of EU enlargement.

³ Here and later on, the analysis of the experience of the candidate countries and their problems revealed in the process of adaptation to EU requirements was performed by the author on the basis

Europe Agreements launching this EU accession process had been concluded mostly from 2 to 4 years earlier (see Table 2).

The more rapid development of the processes of political adaptation as compared to adaptation in the economic sphere can be explained by fact that any successful implementation of economic reforms requires the presence of an efficient system of governance, with a clearly defined division of powers and protection against corruption. That is why the candidate countries put themselves on track of large-scale reforms in the area of governance and modernization of their judicial systems. And if, for instance, in Romania this process faced more impediments than in other countries, it made a significant impact on the pace of adaptation to the norms of the EU *acquis* in economic and social domains.

The essence of the problem is that effective transformation processes cannot be ensured by mere transposition of certain norms of the European law onto the national ground. It is necessary to have an administrative capacity to secure their real functioning. The process of adaptation to the EU *acquis* has, apparently, two components: 1) the process of taking over (transposition) of the relevant provisions of the EU *acquis* to a national law system; as a rule, this process is rather intensive and completes within a short period of time; 2) mostly a slower and more gradual process of augmenting the administrative capacity to fully incorporate and implement these normative and legislative requirements. Such ramification determines an unsystematic character of initial measures to adapt oneself to the *acquis*, with further intensification of efforts in this field, thus rendering the process a more expressed systemic character in a longer term. One can clearly notice this peculiarity in all of the three Baltic states, in Czech Republic and Poland. For example, in Poland, during the initial stages of the adaptation to the EU *acquis*, a rather noticeable lag was registered with regard to enhancement of administrative capacity not only for the regulation of the EU single market functioning; it was also evident for non-economic

of relevant papers published by the Commission of the EC in the framework of the monitoring of pre-accession procedures, with special regard of the Strategy Paper as of 2002 [12] outlined for countries that acceded the EU in 2004 and 2007, as well as the documents on Bulgaria and Romania [13] and Croatia [14].

development aspects as well, including the issues of food safety, regional policy, social sphere, environment, judiciary and home affairs. But later on, this gap was closed.

Naturally, this process unfolded specifically in different countries, and sometimes the mentioned peculiarity of acceleration of the rate of legislative changes did not happen: for instance, in Romania one could witness for a long time an expanding disruption between the formal introduction of the *acquis* norms and the ability to implement them inside the country. At the same time, Slovenia provided a different case of a positive link between the transposition and implementation of the *acquis*, both developing in parallel from the outset.

Table 2

**Agreements with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that
launched the process of their EU accession**

Candidate country	Type of agreement	Date of signing/ entering into force	Special arrangement of partnership, and the date of its introduction	Date of EU accession (or awarding the status of a candidate country)
Poland	Europe Agreement establishing an association, abbr. – Europe Agreement	16.12.1991/01.02.1994	Accession Partnership, 30.03.1998	01.05.2004
Hungary	Europe Agreement	16.12.1991/01.02.1995	Accession Partnership, 06.12.1999	01.05.2004
Romania	Europe Agreement	01.02.1993/01.02.1995	Accession Partnership, 30.03.1998	01.01.2007
Bulgaria	Europe Agreement	08.03.1993/01.02.1995	Accession Partnership, 30.03.1998	01.01.2007
Czech Republic	Europe Agreement	04.10.1993/01.02.1995	Accession Partnership, 30.03.1998	01.05.2004
Slovakia	Europe Agreement	04.10.1993/01.02.1995	Accession Partnership, 30.03.1998	01.05.2004
Estonia	Europe Agreement	12.06.1995/01.02.1998	Accession Partnership, 30.03.1998	01.05.2004
Latvia	Europe Agreement	12.06.1995/01.02.1998	Accession Partnership, 30.03.1998	01.05.2004
Lithuania	Europe Agreement	12.06.1995/01.02.1998	Accession Partnership, 30.03.1998	01.05.2004
Slovenia	Europe Agreement	10.06.1996/01.02.1999	Accession Partnership, 30.03.1998	01.05.2004
Croatia	Stabilisation and Association Agreement	29.10.2001/01.02.2005	Accession Partnership, 20.02.2006	01.07.2013

FYR Macedonia	Stabilisation and Association Agreement	09.04.2001/01.04.2004	Accession Partnership, 30.01.2006	Candidate country since 17.12.2005
Serbia	Stabilisation and Association Agreement	29.04.2008/01.09.2013	European Partnership – together with Montenegro, 14.06.2004; renewed for independent Serbia on 18.02.2008	Candidate country since 01.03.2012 Accession negotiations launched on 21.01.2014
Montenegro	Stabilisation and Association Agreement	15.10.2007/01.05.2010	European Partnership 14.06.2004 (together with Serbia), renewed for independent Montenegro on 22.01.2007	Candidate country since 17.12.2010 Accession negotiations launched on 29.06.2012
Albania	Stabilisation and Association Agreement	12.06.2006/01.04.2009	European Partnership, 14.06.2004	Candidate country since 24.06.2014

Source: compiled by the author based on the data contained in [15–17].

The introduction of the *acquis* in the candidate countries had a significant impact primarily on the implementation of the following positive shifts within the system of social organization:

- A substantial decrease in the level of corruption, which resulted from the policies against corruption that included implementation in certain cases (Lithuania, Bulgaria)⁴ of a national Anti-Corruption Programme (Strategy); reduced incidence of various criminal schemes and money laundering (Hungary), cases of organised crime and trafficking (Bulgaria).
- Progress in the organisation of the judiciary, including its genuine independence and self-administration, and in home affairs, in particular in the regulation of migration and asylum (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, and Czech Republic).

⁴ Here and later on, the indication of country in brackets means that it can be regarded as a positive example of substantial transformations in the given area; but it does not mean that in other countries these measures did not take place.

- The improvement of the instruments of regional policy (Estonia, Slovenia), including providing, if needed, decentralisation and local self-administration (Slovakia).
- Progress achieved in internal social cohesion and in the solution of the problems existing in relations with minorities (Estonia, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia, and Croatia)⁵.
- Advance in the field of social policy, inter alia regarding the issues of developing social dialogue as well as providing conditions for employment (Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary).
- Substantial improvement of activities in the field of environment protection (Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary).

At the same time, one should take into account the peculiarity that the process of adaptation to the EU *acquis* on the part of CEE countries was complicated, from the very outset, by a number of grave problems of inadequacy, which had to be tackled by all candidate countries, even the most successful of them. Thus, the Commission of the EC emphasized [12] the following important issues.

1. Despite the transformation of the governance systems within the candidate countries, their level of efficiency, even at final stages of preparation for the accession, proved to be inadequate and caused delays in the implementation of certain tasks to adapt to the EU *acquis*. For instance, in Latvia the low administrative capacity in many areas became a major challenge for the course to integrate into the EU. That is why the country had to create or restructure many institutional arrangements in the field of regional policy, protection of the environment, justice and home affairs, etc. Romania also had been showing for a prolonged period a very significant register of unfulfilled work to introduce European norms in the national

⁵ However, these processes were rather ambiguous in their development. For instance, in Estonia, according to the Commission of the EC, existing language legislation did not fully met “the principles of justified public interest and proportionality, Estonia's international obligations and the Europe Agreement”. In Hungary, the Roma policy was not well integrated into general social development strategies. The problems of social discrimination regarding the Roma were found also in Bulgaria and Czech Republic. In addition, in Croatia, despite the adoption of a special constitutional act on the rights of minorities, the problem is still not resolved in full scope, especially in relation to the Roma.

law system. In addition, in Bulgaria, the Strategy for Modernisation of the State Administration encountered serious obstacles in the aspect of efficiency, transparency and accountability.

2. Existing corruptive practices and various illicit activities were largely persistent, as they were enrooted in business culture and overall cultural traditions inherited from the past. A high level of urgency of this problem one could witness in many countries, including Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. To overcome these phenomena, it was necessary to employ a comprehensive approach targeted at not only implementation of relevant administrative and legal measures but also at a considerably wider context of shaping political, administrative and business ethics that would be free from the corruption bias. The majority of the candidate countries faced problems in the field of combatting existing violations of intellectual property rights, while for some of them (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania) had to take extra efforts to suppress the cases of fraud, money laundering and organised crime in general. These problematic aspects were largely associated with migration flows⁶, and therefore, it required substantial improvement in border management and more efficient regulation of migration. Moreover, the spread of corruption to the system of government procurement at the local level as well as incomplete implementation of the measures to prevent the conflict of interests (witnessed in the case in Croatia) could not but render the problem of corruption more depth.

3. The fields of justice and home affairs also demonstrate a number of difficult issues, especially in Romania where the reform of the judiciary was limited and gave space for significant involvement of the executive power in judicial affairs. Latvia faced the problems arising from the need to secure *de facto* (not merely declared) independence of the judiciary, enhance its efficiency and quality, and upgrade its infrastructure. Apart of this, in Lithuania and Poland one could notice, from the standpoint of EU standards, deficiencies in professional qualifications and ethical

⁶ For Baltic States, these problems were significantly intensified by the Russian factor, because of the territorial neighbourhood with the Russian Federation and the presence of the Russian diaspora at their territories.

norms in the activities of judges and prosecutors, as well as excessive terms of court proceedings and inadequate enforcement of judgements.

4. At the initial period of adaptation, there was an almost pervasive inadequacy and inconformity to existing EU norms relating to regional policy. If candidate countries had failed to resolve existing predicaments in this area, it would have prevented them from accessing to corresponding EU structural development funds. Moreover, it is to be emphasized that the countries faced considerable difficulties in overcoming these obstacles. Even Slovenia, which was the most successful in adaptation to EU norms, demonstrated only a limited progress in the area of regional policy. Bulgaria, three Baltic States, Poland and Hungary demonstrated restricted capacity to programme and implement European regional policies, and the Commission of the EC even in 2002 regarded Romania as lacking a clear and consolidated cohesion policy. As regards Slovakia, this country was not efficient in the aspect of administrative procedures used in this area. Generally, all countries were hit by a shortage of relevant human resources capable of conducting technical preparation of large-scale development projects, as well as by the lack of inter-ministerial co-ordination and partnership in these matters.

5. Adaptation to the European norms of environment protection posed a most acute and large-scale problem for the entire group of candidate countries. Perhaps, this domain revealed the most extensive spectre of problematic issues, for which, apparently, the lack of money may be only a partial explanation, as mostly they arise from certain mental underestimation of these issues persistent during a prolonged period. Even Slovenia, the exemplary “European student”, could not avoid certain delays in passing required elements of the environmental *acquis*, i.e. the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control directive.

However, these predicaments were most vividly present in the countries that were lagging behind by their attained level of development. Among them was Romania, where the transposition of the relevant norms of the *acquis* into the national legislation were supported neither by administrative nor by financial resources needed for this purpose. At the same time, it is worth emphasising that inadequate

rates of environmental investments were noticeable practically in all candidate countries, perhaps except for Slovakia.

Certainly, the lack of financial sources to solve various environmental problems was a major factor impeding the adoption of European ecological norms along such directions of ecology policies as waste management and control and disposal of dangerous substances, nature protection, air and water quality, effective radiation protection and nuclear safety, industrial pollution control, waste treatment and environmental risk management. Even if relevant legislative acts were adopted, they could not be easily implemented, in the particular, because of the general lack of mechanisms of inspection, co-operation and co-ordination of measures taken in the environmental field (the case of Latvia). For instance, Lithuania faced multiple problems with implementation of already adopted environmental legislation in the areas of nature protection, waste management, water quality, industrial pollution control, disposal of dangerous substances and control over GMOs. And the lack (both at national and regional level) of appropriate strategically targeted approaches as regards combatting climate change became an essential reason causing implementation lags in the environmental field.

6. Actually all candidate countries encountered the problem of sheer inconformity of their systems of social and employment policies to the requirements set by the EU. The biggest challenges for these policies in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania represented the existing labour laws (in particular, with regard to securing equal opportunities in this area), and provision of healthy and safe work conditions. Deep reforms in the sector of healthcare were also urgent, even in the most developed CEE countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Czech Republic) and Estonia, the most successful Baltic state. Similarly, it was necessary to rise significantly the level of safeguards for consumers as regards their rights and health protection while consuming goods and services. In the aspect of social and labour relations, the most topical issues on the agenda of adaptation the EU *acquis* included the provision of full conformity to the EU standards for professional training (this problem was most acute, in particular, in the Baltic states), and adequate

mechanisms for conducting social dialogue in the process of shaping social protection systems. As regards Croatia, even at relatively advanced stages of preparation for accession, the country was reported to be only at the early stage of reforming the labour market; the negative effects of this lag were intensified by existing distortions in the area of social transfers (inadequate targeting at bringing social aid to those who really need it).

However, it should be noted that the candidate countries undertook effective measures to overcome the lags from the EU normative standards in the absolute majority of the above-mentioned aspects. Pro-active and systematic technical assistance to reforms rendered by the EU within the framework of the so-called twinning projects (see Table 3) was an important mechanism that fostered such policies. These projects, due to established permanent contacts on the level of related ministries and agencies, provided optimal conditions for the transfer of advanced experience of work organization, assisted in improving management structures, augmented human resources in the field of governance – thus accelerating the process of adaptation of the *acquis*. The attained level of efficiency in solving the problems of social and economic development in the countries that had been acceding to the EU during the last waves of enlargement is testified by the current ability of the most successful CEE countries to put on the agenda of qualitatively new tasks within their participation in the European Union. These new aspirations are linked to their intentions to attain in future much more influence on the formation of political priorities for the development and institutional transformation of the EU [18].

Table 3

**Number of twinning projects between the EU and candidate countries
under PHARE programme in 1998-2002**

	Agriculture (incl. Veterinary and Phytosanitary projects)	Environment	Public Finance (incl. Taxation, Customs, Internal Market, etc.)	Justice and Home Affairs	Social Policy	Regional Development and Preparation for Structural Funds	Others	Total
Bulgaria	13	11	15	17	2	4	2	64

Estonia	8	4	8	8	7	3	1	39
Latvia	4	3	13	7	2	4	3	36
Lithuania	7	2	12	12	6	3	8	50
Poland	27	12	36	16	12	19	12	134
Romania	11	6	26	22	9	15	6	95
Slovak Republic	9	9	10	17	6	3	7	61
Slovenia	9	1	11	8	3	5	3	40
Hungary	12	11	12	10	8	4	3	60
Czech Republic	7	10	16	19	15	6	7	80
Total for 10 candidate countries	107	69	159	136	70	66	52	659

Source: [12, p. 90].

The experience of accession of the countries of the fifth and sixth waves of EU enlargement created the basis for the contemporary stage of enlargement involving the Balkan countries within the framework of the processes of Stabilization and Association, European Partnership and Accession Partnership. The strategic principles of the EU policy with regard to the Balkan countries [19] proceed from the necessity of an earliest implementation of the criteria set in chapters concerning judiciary and fundamental rights as well as justice, freedom and security. This once more emphasizes the growing significance of normative value principles in EU activities and in the processes of entering its integration structures. Moreover, it largely explains why the process of accession of the new candidates has become, following the new approach adopted in December 2011, more strict and comprehensive. In fact, this is determined both by the leading trends of the evolution within the EU itself and the lessons of the previous waves of enlargement. The main lesson reads: “Fundamentals first”.

Nowadays, the provision of the rule of law principle has been declared the core of the process of EU accession. In this context, it is necessary to prove convincingly at the early stage of accession that a candidate country has deeply rooted and irreversible achievements in the implementation of a judicial reform as well as in

combatting organized crime and corruption. Another declared priority refers to strengthening of democratic institutions and ensuring inclusive democratic processes. Key questions here are a stronger role of civil society, further progress in the fields of electoral system, parliamentary activities and public administration, securing freedom of expression, and the protection of the rights of minorities not only on the level of law articles but in everyday practice. Finally, an important priority is developing good neighbourly regional relations and co-operation, and resolving existing conflicts.

Generalising, the yet short experience of the preparation of the Balkan countries to possible future accession to the EU testifies that the significance of non-economic factors for this process continues to rise and ever more explicitly appears as the foundation on which rests the whole building of European integration.

Research conclusions

1. European integration processes has unfolded, from their very outset, not only under the impact of economic factors but also political (first of all security) and social factors, as well as mental-value principles defining the identity of the European civilization. The significance of non-economic factors demonstrates a rising trend as the integration process tends to be structurally more comprehensive and proceeds to higher stages that are associated with the formation of a political union, and produces diversified social connections at different levels of social organization. The general tendency determining an enhanced significance of non-economic factors in contemporary development also contributes to this trend.

2. The processes of European integration serve not merely as tools for more efficient economic activities; they primarily appear as modes of common implementation of existing mental perceptions of the future that Europeans have in the framework of the dominant social meanings. The European choice is, first and foremost, the choice of basic values, the indication of cultural preferences and social meanings that are shaped around the recognition of the primary role of a human being in social development – in all the complex set of its natural and formal rights, aspirations, feelings, and social responsibility for actions taken. Thus, the formation

of the European area of civil rights and values, freedom, solidarity and security determines the main vector of social modernization of acceding countries as well.

3. The EU enlargement has been determined, to a considerable and ever growing extent, by the adaptation of candidate countries to the terms of European community's functioning in political, legal and social areas, and by their practical ability to provide evidence of their adherence to the system of fundamental European values.

4. The processes of preparation to EU membership have become a potent stimulus of deep systemic transformations of all aspects of social life in the candidate countries of the fifth (2004), sixth (2007) and seventh (2013) waves of EU enlargement. However, social transformations and adaptation to EU norms are generally performed with difficulties and in a controversial way, their effects being substantially dependent on the initial position of a country, its institutional maturity, and expressed political will to change. The most serious problem here is disruption between formally declared rules and actual practices, the ability to implement European norms.

5. The newest approach to the enlargement process has been associated with a further rise of the significance of fundamentals as regards participation in the European integration, namely the adherence to the system of European values and their core – the principle of the rule of law. Demonstrating the ability to comply with this principle is the decisive precondition for a successful dialogue on economic issues of integration into the EU.

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