

**Exporting Europeanisation: EU enlargement, the twinning  
exercise and administrative reform in Eastern Europe**

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## Abstract

This paper looks at the EU's efforts to assist administrative reform in Eastern Europe. It pays particular attention to the twinning exercise; the new EU policy instrument through which civil servants from the member states are seconded to the applicant countries with the task of speeding up the process of their legal convergence with the EU and the setting up of institutions for upholding and implementing the *acquis communautaire*. Conceptually the twinning exercise is linked to the literature on Europeanisation. The paper argues that much of the debate on Europeanisation has been rather 'inward looking', with attention predominantly focusing on the way in which existing member states are being transformed as a result of their participation in EU structures. Yet the political importance attached to EU membership by the accession applicants, as well as EU's determination to ensure the applicants' compliance with the *acquis communautaire* prior to their entry into the club, points to the fact that Europeanisation is not only a process confined to existing EU member states, but one that can also be exported outside the geographical borders of the EU, particularly to those who wish to join it. Against this background the paper argues that extending the scope of the Europeanisation thesis beyond the existing EU member states can not only help us understand better the process of transformation in Eastern Europe and the ongoing accession negotiations, but can also contribute towards the refinement of the term's rather blurred conceptual content.

## Introduction

The process of enlarging the European Union (EU) with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs) has already entered its final stages. The EU opened detailed accession talks with Estonia, the Czech republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia in March 1998, whilst in December 1999 five more CEECs (Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Romania) were added to the list of those negotiating fast-track entry into the EU. With all ten East European accession applicants at a relatively advanced stage of economic and political transformation (albeit with different degrees of success)<sup>1</sup>, accession negotiations are now focusing on the practical and more difficult side of enlargement: the applicants' ability to comply with the EU's *acquis communautaire*, that is the full body of EU legislation, its institutional arrangements and its *finalité politique*. The adoption (in full or of a substantial part) of the *acquis* upon accession is a daunting task for all applicants. Ensuring the compatibility of the 70,000-80,000 pages of EU law with domestic legislation can be financially and politically a costly business and one that poses major challenges to the administrative structures of the EU membership aspirants.

Inefficiency, lack of expertise and corruption have been some of the most damaging socialist legacies to the CEECs' administrations. Over the last decade administrative deficiencies have undermined the region's economic recovery and have often strained relations with the EU both in terms of the incomplete implementation of the provisions of the Association agreements and the long delays experienced in the absorption of the available EU aid to the CEECs. Administrative reform is, therefore, a crucial factor if the accession applicants are to be successful in harmonising their legislation with the EU *acquis* within the very tight timetable available to them and in easing fears within the EU over the capacity of their administrative structures to uphold the *acquis* once they have become members of the club. Indeed, the ability of the accession applicants to effectively police the implementation of the EU *acquis* has already been a major point of friction during the current accession negotiations as the EU appears determined to ensure that the forthcoming enlargement should not undermine the functioning of the Single Market and hinder its member states' efforts to deepen their co-operation in sensitive policy areas such as Home and Justice Affairs (HJA).

This paper examines the EU efforts to assist the CEECs' administrations to cope with the pressures of the current accession negotiations and eventual EU membership. Particular attention

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<sup>1</sup> For the Commission's latest assessment of the applicants' performance in relation to the Copenhagen criteria, see European Commission (2001).

is given to the 'twinning' exercise - a new EU policy instrument through which civil servants from the member states are seconded to the accession applicants with the task of speeding up the process of their legal convergence with EU and the setting up of institutions for upholding and implementing the EU's *acquis*. If one accepts the Wilsonian (1887) dichotomy of the executive branch of government between the elected political masters and the non-political public administration, then this paper focuses predominantly on the latter. In doing so it builds upon and extends the recent literature on the role of the forthcoming EU enlargement as a driving force for executive reform in Eastern Europe (JEPP, 2001). Conceptually the study of the twinning exercise is linked to the Europeanisation literature. It is argued that extending the scope of the Europeanisation thesis beyond the existing EU member states can help us to refine its rather blurred conceptual content, as well as to better understand the process of transformation in Eastern Europe and the ongoing accession negotiations.

In its first two parts, this paper reviews the existing Europeanisation literature and challenges two of its main assumptions. The first relates to the idea that the Europeanisation process is only contained within the EU's current member states. The second, largely linked to the first, relates to the conceptualisation of the Europeanisation process as a two-way interaction between the 'national' and 'European' levels where EU member states are considered both the architects and the products of their own Europeanisation. The third part of the paper looks at the rationale behind the launch of the twinning exercise and the institutional arrangements surrounding its operation. The concluding section of this paper will attempt to evaluate the twinning exercise's added value to the EU's pre-accession strategy and assess its significance as an instrument for exporting Europeanisation to the accession applicants.

### **Europeanisation: self-contained or exported?**

Over the last few years the growth of the Europeanisation literature has been staggering. Yet, with few very recent exceptions ( Gh, 1999; JEPP, 2001; Grabbe, 2001b; Demetropoulou, 2001), much of the debate on Europeanisation has been rather 'inward looking'. Attention has predominantly focused on the way in which existing member states are being transformed by EU membership. The process of Europeanisation, in this respect, is seen as a constant two-way interaction between the 'national' and the 'European' (Cowles *et al*, 2001: introduction) with member states assuming the role of both contributors and products of European integration (Rometsch and Wessels, 1996: 75). In other words, whilst the EU member states are the principal architects of the European polity, they are often unable to control the timing and shape in which the outcomes of this polity are re-imported at the national setting (Cole, 2001). To use Meny's words, the Europeanisation process "...creates a permanent challenge to national political systems, which are forced to adapt to a normative and strategic environment that they have as yet only partially mastered (Meny, 1996: 8). Within this context, Ladrech defines Europeanisation as the process in which "...EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organisational logic of national politics and policy making" (Ladrech, 1994: 69). Building on Ladrech, Radaelli broadens this definition in order to account for the EU impact on "...domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies (2000: 4).

The mechanisms through which the Europeanisation process is transforming the EU member states as well as the platforms on which the process manifests itself are still a matter of debate in the literature. Cowles *et al* (2001), for example, offer a very broad typology of Europeanisation which, depending on the level at which it takes place, involves institution building at the European level, a response to the globalisation process and institutional adaptation at the national level. With specific reference to the domestic institutional adaptation, Cowles *et al* put forward the 'goodness of fit' thesis. Here, the degree of institutional compatibility between the national

and the European levels is a crucial factor in facilitating/impeding Europeanisation. The 'goodness of fit' thesis has been extensively utilised by authors focusing on the domestic impact of the Europeanisation process. Borzel, for example, offers a new institutionalist analysis in order to highlight how differences in domestic institutional arrangements shape responses to Europeanisation and lead to differential distribution of resources among domestic actors (Borzel, 1999: 577-578).

Explicit EU prescriptions of institutional adaptation at the domestic level is also one of three mechanisms of Europeanisation put forward by Knill and Lehmkuhl (1999: 1-2). In a far more 'top down' approach than the one offered by Borzel, Knill and Lehmkuhl point to two more ways in which Europeanisation affects the domestic setting: (i) through the alteration of domestic opportunity structures with certain domestic actors benefiting over others and (ii) through the alteration of beliefs and expectations of domestic actors leading to changes in cognition and preference formation. The cognitive or ideational aspect of Europeanisation and its impact on domestic transformation has been emphasised by a growing number of scholars. McNamara (1998), Dyson and Featherstone (1999) and Dyson (2000), for example, have pointed to the role of ideas and cross national elite learning in relation to EMU. Further examples can be found in Radaelli's work on policy transfer and mimetism within the EU (1997, 2000b) as well as in Schmidt's study (1997) on the role of European ideas as a legitimising force for domestic reform. The impact of international politics on domestic actors and their perceptions of self-interest is not, of course, a novelty of the Europeanisation literature. Both Radaelli (2000) and Featherstone (forthcoming) acknowledge that the study of the cognitive effects of Europeanisation can draw useful conclusions from Gourevitch's 'second image reversed' (1978) thesis as well as from the work of constructivist scholars such as DiMaggio and Powel (1991) and Checkel (1997).

A perception of the Europeanisation process as being self-contained and limited only to the EU's member states may however be misleading. Europeanisation can also be exported. Nowhere else can this process be seen more clearly than in the case of the East European accession applicants. Indeed, in recent years a growing number of scholars have pointed to the EU's Europeanising effect on those countries from Central and Eastern Europe aspiring to join it (JEPP, 2001). Similar to what has been described in the case of earlier works on Europeanisation, the new 'eastward-looking' Europeanisation literature displays little consensus over the meaning of the Europeanisation term and the mechanisms through which the Europeanisation process is exported to the accession applicants. Grabbe (2001: 1014), for example, identifies Europeanisation as "...the impact of the EU accession process on national patterns of governance..." in Central and Eastern Europe, whilst Goetz (2001: 1036) links the term with the anticipatory and anticipated effects of EU enlargement on the CEEC's administrations. Lippert *et al.* (2001: 980) chose a rather more vague definition, arguing that Europeanisation "...is about the resources in time, personnel and money directed by current and future members states towards the EU level". The same variety of views can also be observed with regards to the mechanisms through which the Europeanisation process is transforming governance in Eastern Europe. Grabbe (2001), for instance, points to the significance of the EU's conditionality principle as a Europeanising force in the accession applicants and identifies five mechanisms through which the EU's Europeanising effect is filtered into the would-be members of the club: gate-keeping (access to negotiations and further stages in the accession process); benchmarking and monitoring; provision of legislative and institutional templates; aid and technical assistance; and advice and twinning. Lippert *et al.* (2001), on the other hand, identify five stages of Europeanisation that are linked to the evolution of the CEECs' relations with the EU since 1988. The authors' main argument is that the early seeds of the CEECs' Europeanisation were sown in the late 1980s (pre-stage) and since then the EU's Europeanising effect in Eastern Europe has continued to grow through the introduction of the Europe agreements (first stage), the pre-accession strategy (second stage) and lately the

opening of accession negotiations (third stage). In an analysis that borrows heavily from the path-dependence literature, Lipert *et al.* argue that in the fifth, post-accession, stage of the CEECs' Europeanisation process, the administrative structures that were set up for serving the current accession negotiations are likely to persist in the future thus leading to an increased bureaucratisation of policy making in the EU's Eastern European members to be.

Despite its variations over the definition of Europeanisation and mechanisms associated with it, the contributors to the recent special issue of JEPP (2001), amongst others (e.g. Demetropoulou, 2001), have provided convincing evidence to suggest that the preparation for entry into the European Union has sparked widespread reforms in the CEECs' executives. Indeed, the CEECs' vastly increased interaction with the EU at almost every administrative level as well as the profound importance of the full utilisation and speedy absorption of the available EU aid funds have placed the CEECs' administrations under immense pressure for internal restructuring and greater inter-departmental co-ordination. The management of trade liberalisation envisaged by the Association agreements has also demanded more efficient monitoring mechanisms. At the political level, too, the deepening of the CEECs' relations with the EU has unleashed pressures for adaptation. The institutionalisation of top-level contacts between governmental officials from EU and the applicant countries and the ongoing nature of negotiations between the two sides is creating an information-rich environment for the management of which high levels of expertise and a great deal of strategic thinking are required (Lipert, 1999a). Similar to the experiences of existing EU member states, most CEECs' executives have responded to the new circumstances by creating entirely new European integration divisions within key ministries and/or the Prime Minister's office (Lipert *et al.*, 2001).

Yet executive reform forms a part of wider institutional adaptation that Knill and Lehmkuhl (1999) linked with the Europeanisation process. CEECs' legislatures are also facing a radically different environment with new structures of interaction with the European Union (e.g. Joint Parliamentary Committees provided for by the Association agreements) and a massively increased workload. The process of law approximation which begun tentatively by the Association agreements and was significantly expanded by the Commission's 1995 White Paper, is today (within the context of accession negotiations) continuing at a sprint-like pace. The sheer volume of EU legislation in need of transposition into the CEECs' legal systems and the time constraints imposed by the enlargement timetable are testing the law-making capacity and scrutinising abilities of the applicant countries' legislatures to their limits. The latter point has recently been picked up by a number of scholars (Grabbe, 2001; Lipert *et al.*, 2001) who have argued that the preparation for entry into the EU has led to the structural weakening of the legislature vis a vis the executive in almost all East European accession applicants. Similar adaptational pressures can be observed in the judicial systems of the CEECs. Here, the process of economic and political transition of the last decade was accompanied by major constitutional changes and a radical shake up on the content and delivery mechanisms of justice. The ongoing enlargement negotiations and in particular, the transposition of the EU *acquis*, is revolutionising the content of justice in the applicant countries once again, leaving their legal systems struggling to 'digest' and adjudicate upon a huge volume of 'imported' EU legislation in a very short period of time.

Knill and Lehmkuhl's (1999) other two mechanisms of Europeanisation, changes in cognition and domestic opportunity structures, can also be seen at work in the EU accession applicants. The cognitive effects of the European integration process on CEECs have been immense since the early stages of the transition process. The 'return to Europe' slogan came to shape the identity and long-term strategy of the CEECs in the aftermath of the 1989 revolutions. In this process, the European Union offered not only a blueprint for the political elites on the content of the needed

reforms, but also an important legitimising force for ‘selling’ these reforms to the CEECs’ electorate. The EU’s role in this process is, indeed, very similar to the south European experience (Featherstone, Kazamias and Papadimitriou, 2001). Domestic opportunity structures in the CEECs have also been radically altered as a result of preparing for EU accession (Gh, 1999b). Compliance with the EU’s *acquis* requires painful economic reforms and further shake up of East European societies. This process opens up opportunities for some, but also confronts entrenched interests and deep rooted mentalities of others. Thus, the return to Europe is creating new groups of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. Political discourse too has been re-shaped along the lines of ‘modernisers’ and ‘traditionalists’ – with the former enthusiastically supporting convergence with the EU at any cost and the latter adopting an increasingly eurosceptic profile (Grabbe and Hughes, 1999; Millard, 1999). Here, too, developments in Eastern Europe parallel those of the EU’s southern member states (Featherstone, 1998).

The conception of Europeanisation as an exporting commodity and an outward looking process is not only relevant to the dynamics of transformation in post-communist Eastern Europe, but also compatible with a more historically-informed interpretation of the West European core’s relationship with the periphery both within Europe and the wider global context. Featherstone (forthcoming), for example, is critical of what he regards as the “...EU-centric, public policy dominated and often ahistorical” use of the term and points to the role of the EU as a ‘penetrative’ agent both within and outside its geographical boundaries. Mjoset (1997), too, provides an excellent analysis of the changing meaning of Europeanisation in different historical settings and concludes that the end of the Cold War has allowed the process of ‘West Europeanisation’ (as developed within the EC/EU framework during the post-war period) to spread to Eastern Europe through convergence with the EU and NATO membership (Mjoset, 1997: 35). Others too have tried to refine the focus and content of the Europeanisation term by making reference to processes such as ‘EU Europeanisation’, ‘Unionization’ and ‘Communitisation’ (for an overview see Goetz, 2001). Indeed, the concept of Eastern European applicants being ‘West Europeanised’ or ‘EU Europeanised’ offers an interesting perspective to the ongoing EU enlargement process, particularly when one considers the power asymmetry of the two sides and the way in which accession negotiations are structured (see below)

### **Europeanisation: Mutually constituted or one-sided?**

The idea of the EU member states as contributors and products of European integration has been a common thread amongst many Europeanisation scholars (see above). However, a wider use of Europeanisation to account for transformation dynamics outside the geographical boundaries of the EU, requires a rethink of some aspects of the existing literature. Two main points deserve closer consideration here: that of causality and that of the ontology of the term Europeanisation.

The conception of Europeanisation as a two way process where the EU member states create European rules which are then re-imported to transform the national setting does indeed possess important descriptive power. However, in analytical terms the blurred distinction between European and national levels, offers little help in establishing a cause-effect relationship which is crucial for our understanding of the Europeanisation process. The problem is, indeed, a serious one. The almost tautological use of cause and effect represents a definitional weakness that clearly undermines the conceptual soundness of the Europeanisation term. For those reliant on explanations based on social constructivism (Checkel, 1997, 1998, 1999), the problem may not be an insurmountable one since cause and effect are treated as inherently relational concepts.<sup>2</sup> Many may sympathise with this view. Yet, such an approach leaves itself vulnerable to

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<sup>2</sup> However, even Checkel (1999: 551-552) recognises the usefulness of an analytical division between ‘European’ and ‘national’.

accusations of theoretical sloppiness leading to simple ‘story telling’. For others (Featherstone, forthcoming), the problem of causality and the almost impossible task of disentangling structure and agency within the Europeanisation process leaves the term as a useful starting point for research, but not a “stand alone concept”. Radaelli, too, argues about the benefits of analytically separating the “...process leading to the formation of a certain policy, and the reverberation of that policy in the national arenas” (2000: 6). His solution to the problem comes from a definition of Europeanisation which, similar to Ladrech (1994), has a distinctive top-down bias influenced by ‘second image reversed’ research designs. Yet, one may challenge the artificiality of such a top-down definition, particularly when applicable to existing EU member states which have themselves played such an instrumental role in shaping the content and meaning of Europeanisation! Once again, Featherstone’s comments (forthcoming) on structure and agency within the Europeanisation process are relevant here.

Interestingly, the study of Europeanisation in candidate countries poses, in analytical terms, fewer problems. Here the lines between European and national are more clearly drawn and the top-down direction of the process is easily recognisable. Whilst developments in Eastern Europe and, particularly, the prospect of eastwards enlargement have a profound effect on the internal development of the EU (e.g. the Nice Treaty), the accession applicants themselves have no direct involvement in the making of the EU’s *acquis*. Yet, the process of adopting the *acquis* as well as building of the necessary institutions for its implementation are profoundly transforming (politically, economically, socially, and institutionally) the domestic setting in the candidate countries. In this respect, the CEECs are the ‘consumers’, not the ‘producers’, of Europeanisation. The top-down direction of the process is also mirrored in the way in which accession negotiations are structured as well as in the power asymmetry between the negotiating partners. The *acquis communautaire* forms the basis of the every negotiation (trade or otherwise) between the EU and the third countries. In the case of accession negotiations, the *acquis* assumes an almost mythical status. Its content is non-negotiable. What, instead, becomes the focus of accession negotiations is whether and for how long will candidates countries be granted transitional arrangements (that is agreement not to comply, temporarily, with certain aspects of the *acquis*) once they become full members of the EU. In this sense, the accession applicants are left with no room to co-determine the content of their Europeanisation, particularly in areas of ‘positive’ integration where the EU prescribes a specific institutional model to which domestic arrangements have to be adjusted (Knill and Lehmkuhl, 1999). In such areas, the East European applicants can best hope to influence the pace, but not the content, of their Europeanisation.

The study of Europeanisation’s impact on prospective EU member states also raises important questions relating to the ontological focus of the term. A review of the Europeanisation literature reveals an astonishing lack of consensus on what the term actually means and what it seeks to describe. Europeanisation is often used simply as a synonym to the terms ‘integration’, ‘convergence’ or ‘harmonisation’, whilst at a conceptual level its properties can be difficult to distinguish from existing frameworks of neo-functionalism and/or ‘second image reversed’ inspiration. Radaelli (2000: 6) seeks to alleviate the existing confusion by pointing to the post-ontological focus of Europeanisation. Borrowing from Caporaso (1996), he argues that Europeanisation is not concerned with the questions of why or how states decide to surrender aspects of their sovereignty to supranational polities (ontological stage of research). Instead, the focus of Europeanisation research is post-ontological; that is what happens after states join the EU and supranational institutions begun to produce their effects.

Such an exclusively post-ontological focus of Europeanisation, however, may be more difficult to sustain in the study of the EU’s enlargement. In its Agenda 2000 the Commission made clear that in the forthcoming accession negotiations it would follow a minimalist approach in the granting

of transitional periods. In practice, this means that the CEECs will enjoy fewer and shorter exemptions from the *acquis* than was the case with the EU's Mediterranean accession applicants in the 1980s. Yet since the last Iberian enlargement the EU's *acquis* has grown massively both in quantitative and qualitative terms. This has clearly made preparations for entry into the EU all the more difficult for the East European candidates. It also raises a wider question: is Europeanisation a consequence or a precondition of EU membership?

### **The Twinning Exercise: A Means of Exporting Europeanisation to the East European Candidates?**

Law approximation has been an important parameter of the EU's relations with the CEECs recognised by both the Association agreements (Title V, Chapter III) and the Copenhagen European Council.<sup>3</sup> Later, as the EU's commitment to eastwards enlargement deepened, a series of initiatives were launched aiming to assist legal and regulatory convergence between the CEECs and the EU, particularly in the areas of the Single Market. The Commission's 1995 White Paper, prepared within the framework of the 'pre-accession strategy' agreed in Essen, offered a new impetus in this respect, providing the CEECs with more specialised advice and a suggested sequencing of legal approximation to the Single Market. Administrative reform in the applicants countries formed a crucial aspect in this process. The White Paper warned that "the main challenge for the Associated countries in taking over internal market legislation lies not in the approximation of their legal texts, but in adopting their administrative machinery and their societies to the conditions necessary to make the legislation work" (Commission, 1995: point 3.25). Similar concerns were also raised by the Madrid (December 1995) and Feira (June 2000) European Councils which considered administrative deficiencies in the applicant countries as a major impediment for enlargement (DOC/95/9, 16.12.1995; DOC/00/14, 20.6.2000).

The improvement of the applicant countries' administrative structures was also at the forefront of the Commission's Agenda 2000 proposals. Under the heading of "institution building" of the "reinforced pre-accession strategy" document the Commission first floated the idea of "programmes for the long-term secondment to applicant countries of experts from the administrations of the Member States must be drawn up for each applicant in the light of the needs identified, particularly in the opinions [avis]" (Commission, 1997: 4). Funding for these initiatives was to be provided by the rebalanced Phare budget which since 1997 had pledged 30% of its total funds for 'institution building' in the CEECs (Commission, 1997). Following five months of preparatory work, the twinning exercise was officially launched by the Commission in May 1998 with the aim of assisting the accession applicants to establish a "...modern, efficient administration that is capable of applying the *acquis communautaire* to the same standards as the current member states" (Commission, 1998b: introduction). A slightly revised version of the twinning manual was published by the Commission in February 2000 (Commission, 2000a). The changes introduced, however, did not alter the main objectives of the exercise and were confined in predominately procedural matters.

The wording of the 1998 twinning manual reflects the Commission's eagerness not to repeat some of the mistakes which have tarnished the reputation of other Phare-funded projects in the past; namely the vagueness of objectives, difficulties in monitoring progress and evaluation and the reliance on expensive short term western consultancy without much concrete results (Mayhew, 1998: 138-150). For these reasons the new initiative is not designed "...to provide advice or achieve sectoral improvements. It is [instead] a sweeping operation in a specific field that must yield guaranteed results. By the time twinning ends, the applicant country should have

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<sup>3</sup> See, in particular, the fourth Copenhagen criterion stipulating the candidate country's capacity to take on the obligation of EU membership.

developed an efficient, working organisation enabling it to fulfil its Community obligations” (Commission, 1998b: paragraph 1.2). To achieve this, twinning provides for the secondment of pre-accession advisors (PAAs) from the members states’ civil services to the applicant countries for a minimum of one year with the task of diffusing know how on the implementation of the *acquis* to local administrations.

The operational aspect of the twinning exercise has been crucially affected by the 1998 changes introduced by the Commission in the implementing procedures of the Phare programme (Commission, 1998a). The principles of deconcentration and decentralisation formed the backbone of this reform. Deconcentration provided for the delegation of the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the EU’s aid programmes from the Commission’s central services to the Commission’s delegations in the applicant countries. For this purpose, the delegations’ financial and contractual management capabilities as well as their budgets and personnel were to be expanded (Commission, 2000b). Decentralisation, on the other hand, provided for the gradual delegation of responsibilities over the administering of EU funds from the Commission to the applicant countries themselves. For this purpose, a National Fund (NF) under the responsibility of a National Authorising Officer (NAO) has been created in the Ministry of Finance of each candidate. The work of the NAO was to be supplemented by a Central Finance and Contracting Unit (CFCU) with the responsibility of carrying out the tendering and contracting of EU aid projects (Commission, 1998a).

Under the new rules, the design, selection, implementation and monitoring of the twinning projects is based on a triangular partnership between the Commission (both its central services and its delegations), the EU member states and the accession applicants with each partner having varying degrees of involvement in different stages of the process. The Commission plays a crucial role in the design of the twinning projects. Central services in Brussels draw up “...the legal, financial and procedural framework” of the twinning exercises where as their specific priorities and targets are set in collaboration with the delegations in the candidate country (Commission, 2000a: 17). In 1998, four priority sectors, common to all accession applicants, were identified: agriculture, environment, finance and justice and home affairs. A fifth priority sector was also added according to the specific needs of each applicant country, as those identified by the Commission’s avis and in accordance to the National Programmes for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAAs) as elaborated by the applicant countries within the context of their Accession Partnership (AP) with the European Union (Commission 1998b: introduction).

The Commission’s involvement in the process of selecting twinning partners is more limited, focusing merely on a co-ordinating and advisory role. Having set the priorities of the twinning projects, the Commission invites proposals and organises bilateral talks between the applicant country and each of the EU member states wishing to take part in a twinning scheme. For this purpose, National Contact Points (NCPs) have been created in all EU member states and the candidate countries (Commission, 2000a: Annex 8). The final decision on the selection of the twinning partner(s),<sup>4</sup> however, lies with the applicant countries themselves which are free to “...forge ties with the member state(s) whose systems best suit its own culture, organisation and national interest” (Commission, 1998b: paragraph 3.3). Nevertheless, the Commission does encourage a ‘varied approach’ to the selection of twinning partners in order “to prevent the blanket duplication of a member state’s [administrative] system in an applicant country” (Commission, 1998b: paragraph 3.3). Central to the Commission’s rationale is the idea of creating a ‘market’ of twinning projects from which the applicant countries will be free to choose the most suitable for their needs.

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<sup>4</sup> Participation of consortia from more than one member state in a twinning project is also possible.

Bilateral consultation between the applicant country and the selected partner is also crucial in determining the specific means through which targets set out by the project are to be achieved. At this stage the Commission may also provide technical advice on finalising the binding covenant between the partners. Significantly, the final twinning covenant, as signed by the accession applicant and the relevant member state, is still the subject of a funding application to the Commission's Steering Committee based in Brussels (see below). Whilst the Commission's final approval may be considered as merely procedural, it does nevertheless provide an important counterbalance to the significant degree of autonomy enjoyed by the accession applicants in selecting their partners and elaborating the strategies to be employed in the twinning projects (Commission, 2000a: point 3.8).

The Commission dedicates a large part of the twinning manual to the detailed description of the monitoring mechanisms of the twinning projects. Earlier accusations over the failure to monitor effectively the Phare operations in Eastern Europe as well as the experience gained from the distribution of the structural funds amongst the EU member states have clearly influenced the design of the twinning exercise in this respect. The Commission's delegations are assigned to monitor the day-to-day implementation of the twinning projects conducting, if necessary, on-the-spot visits and holding monthly meetings with the PAAs and the relevant ministries in the applicant countries in order to assess the project's progress. The delegations are also responsible for the drafting of quarterly progress reports as well as of a final assessment on the implementation of the twinning project (Commission, 2000a: point 6.3).<sup>5</sup> The Commission's Steering Committee forms the second line of assessment of the twinning projects. This is a body drawn from the relevant Commission departments and chaired by Directorate General for Enlargement. In addition to its role as allocator of funding for twinning projects, the Steering Committee also deals with the most controversial aspects of monitoring holding powers to withdraw or suspend funding if the implementation of a project is considered unsatisfactory. In addition to these regular procedures, the twinning projects can also be scrutinised by ad-hoc audits by the Commission as well as by the annual report of the EU's Court of Auditors (Commission, 2000a: point 7.11).

In July 2000 the twinning programmes was subjected to a comprehensive performance evaluation conducted (on behalf of the Commission) by senior civil servants from Germany, France, Sweden and the UK. The evaluation covered both aspects of programme management and issues relating to the exercise's efficiency and impact on the candidate countries.<sup>6</sup> Whilst 'wise men' final report acknowledged the significance of twinning as an instrument for speeding up the candidates' convergence with the EU, it did nevertheless criticised the over-bureaucratisation of the exercise which undermined two crucial elements of its operation: the speed with which twinning covenants are being finalised (Commission, 2000c: 26) and the efficiency with which twinning projects are being monitored. In the latter area, in particular, the report exposed significant inconsistencies between the manual's rhetoric and the reality on the ground (Commission, 2000: 28). The report attributed many of these problems to the poor co-ordination between the Commission's central services and its delegations in the candidate countries and urged further

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<sup>5</sup> The final report is submitted by the twinning partners during the last month of the project. The report is subsequently enriched with comments and recommendations by the Commission's assessors and submitted to the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) and to the twinning partners, who will ensure that recommendations are followed-up. The JMC is a body consisting of the National Authorising Officer, the National Aid Co-ordinator and representatives of the Commission (either from the EU's delegation to the applicant country or the Directorate General for Enlargement). The Central Financing and Contracting Unit (CFCU) is also involved in the assessment of the budgetary aspects of the twinning covenants. See Commission (2000a: point 6.4)

<sup>6</sup> This performance evaluation was published in the website of the Commission's Directorate General 1 in September 2000 under the title "Report on an Assessment of the Twinning Instrument under PHARE".

progress towards the deconcentration of responsibilities away from the Brussels headquarters and the strengthening of the delegations' financial and human resources capabilities (Commission, 2000c: 17).<sup>7</sup>

The most serious points arising from the evaluation report, however, relate to the Commission's objective of creating a 'market' of twinning projects for the accession applicants. The report identifies a number of factors currently undermining the smooth operation of such a 'market'. As far as the 'supply' side is concerned the report warns about the limitations facing the member states' administrations in providing the necessary number of experienced PAAs needed to manage the rapidly increasing number of twinning projects.<sup>8</sup> The report also points to the diversity amongst the member states' administrations both in terms of their interest to participate in the exercise and their financial capabilities to support the drafting of twinning applications (Commission 2000c: 20 and 25). As far as the demand side of the exercise is concerned, the report questions the applicants' ability to cope with this type of aid programme and make 'informed decisions' when selecting their twinning partners (Commission, 2000c: 25-26). The areas where administrative reform is needed are not always easy to define. The lack of expertise in many cases leads the applicants to submit requests for support that are too general or ambitious. Moreover, the selection of twinning projects is often driven, not by real administrative needs, but by political considerations and particularly the applicants' eagerness to please their 'patrons' within the EU. To support this view the report makes some explicit references to the lobbying activities of the member states' embassies in some of the candidate countries (Commission, 2000c: 25).

### **Conclusion. Europeanisation, Convergence and Administrative Reform in Eastern Europe**

The introduction of the twinning exercise as the main instrument of 'institution building' has provided a new form of assistance aiming to facilitate the preparation of the candidate countries for entry into the EU. Its main innovation has been the provision for accession driven assistance delivered by public sector practitioners on a long-term basis. This marks an important shift from the vagueness and short-termism of consultancy-driven projects which often plagued the old Phare system. However, the full potential of the new scheme has not yet materialised. The 'market' of twinning projects available to the candidates, as envisaged by the Commission's 1998 manual is a rather imperfect one where certain 'providers' of assistance begin with a significant head-start over their competitors and where the beneficiary countries are not always in a position to make informed choices. Much of the confusion over the operation of the twinning exercise has been fuelled by the recent radical changes in the implementing mechanisms of the Phare programme as well as the internal restructuring of DG1 following the collapse of the Santer Commission. The success of the twinning exercise, however, is also crucially dependant on longer-term factors: in particular the EU's ability to maintain the diversity of the exercise as well as on the applicant countries' determination to restructure and invest in their chronically underdeveloped administrations. The latter should supplement and not be substituted by the EU's efforts in this direction.

The twinning exercise also provides useful insights into the Europeanisation of the East European candidates. The EU's determination to ensure compliance with the *acquis* prior to the applicants' entry into the club points to the fact that Europeanisation is not a process affecting only existing member states, but one that can be exported outside the geographical borders of the EU,

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<sup>7</sup> This, particular, recommendation of the report has been taken on board by the Commission. For more details see Commission (2000d).

<sup>8</sup> By the end of 2000, more than 371 twinning projects were approved in all candidate countries (Commission 2001b: 26).

particularly to those who wish to join it. The twinning exercise provides a good example of how EU aid programmes can serve as mechanisms of exporting Europeanisation to Eastern Europe and as a means of policing administrative reform in the accession applicants. In the context of the forthcoming EU's enlargement the Europeanisation of the accession applicants has a distinct top-down direction. This is an important difference from the early Europeanisation literature that pointed to the mutually constituted (by the European and national levels) character of the whole process. The East European applicants have a minimal influence over the construction of the EU's *acquis*, yet it is this *acquis* that sets the main framework of their Europeanisation. Even the most basic tools with which future Eastern EU member states will be able to influence the content of the EU's *acquis* such as the weight of their votes in the Council and the number of their Commissioners and European Parliamentarians have been decided in their absence. With the current structure of the enlargement negotiations, itself a reflection of the asymmetrical interdependence between the EU and those in its periphery, the accession applicants can best hope to influence the pace with which they will adopt the EU's *acquis*. Its content, however, will remain non-negotiable. In this sense the accession applicants can be better understood as 'importers' or 'consumers' of Europeanisation, not as co-determinants of it.

Yet, on a different level, both the extent and precise nature of the accession applicants' Europeanisation remains unclear. So far the cognitive impact of the CEECs' increased interaction with the EU as well as changes in the applicants' domestic opportunity structures in view of enlargement have varied significantly as the Europeanisation process is mediated through the different political landscapes of each candidate and other international factors (e.g. globalisation). At an institutional level the changes driven by the enlargement negotiations also point to a rather diverse picture (Grabbe, 2001). This is particularly true in the case of the accession applicants' administrations. Whilst there is no doubt that preparations for the forthcoming entry into the EU have unleashed pressures for widespread reforms, no single pattern of administrative change has emerged in Central and Eastern Europe (JEPP, 2001). This conclusion mirrors Heritier's (1998) observation that even amongst the existing EU member states administrative responses to EU membership have kept a distinct national flavour. Others (e.g. Nunberg, 1999) have even disputed the capacity of the CEECs' administrations for 'paradigmatic' change arguing that that 'old' administrative practices have remained remarkably resilient in the face of European (and international) pressure for reform. In most cases only small enclaves of technocratic expertise have been created to deal with the demands of intensified interaction with the European Union (Lippert *et al.*, 2001). Here too the conclusions drawn for the East European accession applicants parallel those of the literature on administrative reform in the EU's southern member states (Ioakimidis, 1998; Featherstone, Kazamias and Papadimitriou, 1999; Spanou, 2001).

The lack of an explicit EU prescription for reforming national administrations may come a long way towards explaining the existence of such a mosaic of administrative traditions and practices across existing EU member states (Crabbe, 2001). Whether the strength of national administrative traditions is the reason or the consequence of the EU's reluctance to act decisively in the field of administrative convergence is still a matter of debate. What is important for the purpose of this paper, however, is that the EU's reluctance in this field seems to have persisted in the ongoing enlargement negotiations with the CEECs. This, despite the fact that the transitional character of the post-communist administrations in Eastern Europe offered fertile ground for the opposite. Hence whilst the EU has been vigorously pursuing the accession applicants' full and speedy compliance with the *acquis*, the administrative tools through which such a compliance is to be achieved has very much remained in the hands of the applicants themselves. The twinning exercise offers perhaps the most striking example of this paradox. Far from prescribing a specific 'European' administrative model for the EU's new members states, the Commission in the twinning manual urged the accession applicants to pursue a 'varied approach' in choosing their

twinning partners and forge administrative ties with as many of the existing EU member states as possible. In fact, the creation of an 'administrative market' from which the candidate countries will be free to choose what fits best their national needs has been, from the outset, the cornerstone of the twinning exercise.

The lack of a uniform pattern of administrative reform in the accession applicants should not necessarily be seen as detrimental to the validity of the Europeanisation thesis as a framework for understanding change in Eastern Europe. Even though the EU does not prescribe specific administrative models for its future members states, the immense pressures it exercises upon their public administrations remain undisputed. In this sense Europeanisation can be better understood in relation to the process, not the outcome, of domestic cognitive, institutional and political change resulting from greater interaction with the EU's institutions and member states (on this see Radaelli, 2000). Given the complex and multi-faceted nature of the EU's Europeanising effects on Eastern Europe, however, the use of the Europeanisation term, if not adequately unpacked, is in danger of blurring, rather than clarifying, our understanding of the reform process in the accession applicants. The unpacking of the of the EU's Europeanising impact on Eastern Europe is unlikely to come from studies that look at the macro level of the EU's eastwards enlargement. Instead, more empirical research based on smaller and 'neater' case studies of the reform process in the CEECs is better placed to help us understand the differing meaning of Europeanisation across different sectors and countries in Eastern Europe as well as to locate the different mechanisms of its advocacy and the diverse domestic settings that mediate its success. It is only then that a more informed assessment of Europeanisation's cross-country and cross-sector discrepancies as well as its long-term sustainability and effects can be made.

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