Slovakia in the Context of Integration of the CEEC into the European Union

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Resume: The paper deals with some aspects of the current enlargement of the EU in the more general context of all candidate countries of the Central and Eastern Europe and their related problems. Before the particular enlargement could take place, not only the EU has to complete its internal reforms but also candidate countries have to convince their partners in the EU that they are really prepared to become full-scale members. Otherwise, their entry into the EU could be either postponed or accompanied by several specific exemptions and/or derogations.

1) SOME OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS BUT ALSO SPECIFICS FOR UNIFICATION AND/OR INTEGRATION IN EUROPE

Europe although being to some extent the smallest continent in the world – without the territory of the former UdSSR which has been part not only of Europe but also of Asia is evidently even smaller than Australia - on the other hand can be characterized by several very specific features which make it very complex as far as its unification and/or integration is concerned. They are as follows:

- geographic – it is very difficult to define exactly what is the territory of Europe as far as e.g. its eastern border is concerned. The same is regarding such territories as Greenland, Turkey, the Canary Islands, Russia, Kazakhstan, etc. This question of European geography is important especially from the aspects of the enlargement of the EU as according to the basic treaties „any European country may apply for a membership…“.
- richness of different European cultures including languages represented by about forty different official national or regional languages means another important aspect of integration and its complexity in the context of Europe.
- there is a rather complicated social, ethnic and cultural divisions between different parts of Europe (East – West, North – South, complexity of the Central Europe itself, etc.)
- political division and unification – in the whole history, Europe has been in the permanent process of division and unification of tens of nations and/or states, city states, empires, unions, federations, confederations, etc. which have permanently been shifting state borders hundreds of kilometers in all directions
- ethnic division of Europe means several groups of nations (romanic, slavic, saxon, franco, celtic, ugro-finn, etc.) what leads again to rather complex national relations in Europe
- very different interests of different nations of whom some have traditionally been interested more in their overseas territories than in the European affairs
- never in the whole history, any kind of unification and/or integration has succeeded neither by peace or force (occupations, invasions, wars, etc.) nor politically, ideologically or by a religion
- there has been a permanent process of various kinds of conflicts and/or tensions of whom even the current EU has not been spared
- as a result, there has been a permanent problem of the common European identity and again within the EU as well.
2) THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS ENLARGEMENTS – IT HAS NEVER BEEN AN EASY OR SIMPLE PROCESS

The initial vision of the „founding fathers“ of the EU has been that they have started the process of the future United States of Europe. In view of this their vision and intentions, the treaties establishing the initial communities have been very liberal, simple and to some extent directly supportive to the process of the future enlargements as: „…. any European country may apply..“ but in practice, the process of enlargement has always been rather complex and time consuming process. That all in spite of the fact that until now the whole process of European integration has still been more a process of the regional economic integration than any substantial political unification.

One of the reasons has been the motivation itself for the integration steps in Europe as they have always been very different and specific in case of individual member countries:
- France originally wanted - after the devastating second world war – to secure a peace and prosperity in Europe through a broader international cooperation and integration
- Germany and Italy wanted to find their place in the new post-war Europe
- UK was twice rejected for not being enough „European“ and was rather critical regarding the initial Paris Treaty
- Denmark and Ireland followed the UK and in addition Ireland has not demonstrated enough „commitment“ and was too much critical and permanently complaining regarding its only neighbor
- Greece was originally not recommended by the European Commission as a country ready for the accession negotiations
- Greenland as a relatively autonomous part of Denmark has after a period of its „membership“ quit its EU membership
- Spain and Portugal were too poor and underdeveloped in time of their application for the EU membership and historically had too much complicated mutual relations
- a former GDR made a so called „back door“ entry into the EU only thanks to its unification with the former FRG without meeting any criteria for accession
- Austria and Finland had some constitutional problems regarding their neutrality vis-à-vis the positions and strategic goals of the former UdSSR
- Sweden had also had problems with its traditional neutrality and specific relations with Norway which prompted it to apply for the EU membership
- Norway has twice rejected its accession to the EU by the national referendum hence finally Sweden became an EU member but without Norway
- Switzerland has so far postponed its entry into the EU indefinitely.

In view of these historical aspects of all previous enlargements it would be oversimplification to expect that the current enlargement regarding the countries of the CEEC with forty years of completely different political, economic and social development could be simpler, easier or faster than any of the previous enlargements.

3) THE EU – THE BIGGER, WIDER, DEEPER AND MORE UNIFIED IT BECOMES ALSO MORE COMPLEX FOR FUTURE ENLARGEMENTS

On the one hand it is an undisputed fact, that the EU during the whole its development has achieved many remarkable successes in its internal integration as well as in its position in the world. In many respects it has served as a model also for other parts of the world in their drive for the regional economic integration as a part of the overal process of globalization but at the
The EU has developed from its original initial sectoral community for coal and steel to the Union based on three basic pillars i.e. the Common Market as its 1st pillar, the Common Foreign and Security Policy as its 2nd pillar and Common Policy in Justice and Home Affairs as its 3d pillar. In addition, the EU has developed a whole range of various very important and in some cases also budgetary demanding common policies of which the most famous are the CAP – Common Agricultural Policy, Cohesion Funds, Regional policy, but also the Schengen Agreement, EMU, EURO, CFSP, EUROCORPS, etc.

As a result there has still been more and more common institutions (the latest one being e.g. the European Central Bank, a post of a Secretary General for the Common Foreign and Security Policy @ Mr. CFSP, etc.), tens of specialized „euro“-institutions spread all over the EU, etc. The European Commission itself as an executive body of the EU has developed from its relatively small original predecessor of the „High Authority“ to one of the largest administrative institutions in the world with ever growing – mainly due to subsequent enlargements - staff of currently over 16,000 staff. The European Parliament and its current number of 626 MPs makes this institution one of the largest parliamentary assemblies in the world but still with relatively limited powers in comparison with its national counterparts, etc. On the external side, the EU has become one of the three most important economic players in the world - together with the USA and Japan - especially as far as the trade, technical and financial assistance, research and education programmes are concerned, etc.

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As a consequence there is a declining role and power of the European Commission i.e. „the government“ of the EU, but only slowly growing role of the EP hence there is a kind of ongoing process in the re-definition of the functioning, institutional structures, power sharing of the EU and its institutions. There has been a strong tendency to solve the problem of the so-called „deficit of democracy, transparency and closeness to the people of the Union“. On the other hand there has been a growing role of already mentioned inter-governmentalism which is slowly changing the EU into the new political player in the world. By the growing
number of the member countries, the process of „intergovernmentalism“ will be further developing.

4) EUROPEAN UNION AND THE PROCESS OF ITS ENLARGEMENT THROUGH INTEGRATION OF CEEC INTO THE EU

The EU has not been prepared for the historic changes in the CEEC in the end of 1980s. There has been no so-called „ost policy“ of the EU vis-à-vis the CEEC but general declarations. Even in 1993 when the first association treaties with some candidates countries have already entered into force, Santer’s „Cellule de Prospective“ recommended a rather cautious approach regarding the future development and integration of the CEEC into the EU mainly due to the rather unknown potential development in new democracies of the CEE.

As a consequence, neither the Maastricht Treaty of 1993 nor the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 have reflected any specifics of the EU enlargement regarding the CEEC. Only one of 13 protocols attached to the Amsterdam Treaty contains a text with an indirect reference to the future enlargement up to 20 member states but without any direct reference to the CEEC. Hence, the EU even now, ten years after the historic changes in the CEEC, has not yet been prepared for an enlargement, neither constitutionally i.e by treaties, nor institutionally as e.g. regarding the European Commission, but mainly not by the European Parliament and especially the Council and its weighted voting on the most important issues of the future development of the EU, etc. The question still remains the same, where and by what or whom to start any of the necessary institutional and political reforms of the Union? Even more questions exist regarding the future financial aspects of these reforms. The question is again the same – who will pay the bill of the enlargement? Answers to all these and other related questions regarding the future enlargement have thus become recently a part of the agenda for the current IGC as a preparatory stage for the new Treaty on the EU vis-à-vis the future enlargement.

So far not much optimism is coming for the process of the future enlargement from the current development of the recently introduced EMU and EURO. In any case the common European currency either developing successfully or less successfully what has been its current case is automatically against an enlargement. From the political aspects of the enlargement, the CEEC represent mostly small, relatively poor countries which will only further complicate the decision processes of the EU. In any case, the future enlargement will bring into the EU new social problems with big disparities between existing and future new members which will be even much more complex than existing problems with the former GDR in spite of an enormous contributions of about 200 billion DM annually from the former FRG in the process of the German unification. Thus the unification of Germany and the direct entry of the former GDR into the EU serves as a warning precedence for any fast track enlargement regarding the CEEC. That all in spite of the fact that the process of unification of Germany and thus also of an enlargement of the EU has been a case of one, although for 40 years divided country, with the common history, language, culture, identity, etc. However, the biggest problem with the future enlargement will be the economic one. With over 100 million people of the CEEC there will be an increase for the EU only 6.1% of its GDP what is the share of Portugal and the Netherlands with 25 mil. people!

In addition to all the above problems, the EU itself is currently passing through a rather complex and difficult period of an evident economic recession with a relatively weak EURO e.g. in comparison with the US$ it lost about 25%, a high unemployment of about 10%,
almost a zero growth, a huge and expensive CAP still requiring about 50% of the common budget of the EU, not fully functioning market economy regarding some of four basic freedoms and/or free movements, etc.

5) CEEC CANDIDATE COUNTRIES VIS-À-VIS THE EU

If the EU has not been prepared for the future enlargement of the EU, then even more it is the problem of the CEEC. Due to their over 40 years of relatively isolated development under the totally different socio-economic conditions of a command system they have had until now big problems to adjust themselves to the challenges of their future membership in the EU and its exclusive market orientation. In no case the EU could be understood due to its policies of community spirit, solidarity, cohesion, etc. as a type of the EU of „a mutual economic assistance“ as in many cases the former socialist countries incorrectly and naively expected. As a consequence of this tough market conditions and competition which have found its place also in the association agreements, the trade balance between the EU and the CEEC has changed from 578 mil. ECU in favor to the CEEC in 1989 to – 5,689 mil. ECU in 1995 and it is expected that it will achieve approx. 40-50 bil. ECU in 2010. Just for a comparison the PHARE assistance program has brought to the CEEC countries in 1990-94 about 4.2 bil. ECU and will bring about 10.9 bil. ECU in 1995-99 (just for another comparison it is less than the EU assistance to Spain).

In addition to that, the CEEC candidate countries have also made many mistakes regarding their mutual relations which instead of regional cooperation within e.g. the CEFTA or V4 have been dominated more by an unjustified competition, rivalry, mutual tensions, etc. The internal problems of almost all candidate countries are dominated by the problems of unsuccessful economic transition, restructurization, privatization, by the lack of development investments, etc. Again just for illustration, the total amount of all foreign investments into the CEEC is less than their amount to Singapore – a city state with less than 5 mil. people. As a consequence the most CEEC have still GDP per capita below their levels in 1989, they have a relatively high unemployment, budget deficits, etc. In general the CEEC is now more far from the particular levels of the EU than in 1989 when e.g. the former CSSR had 62% of the average of the GDP per capita of the EU but now it is still only about 45% and in the case of other candidate countries it is even less but Slovenia with about 60% what in general used to be considered as a threshold for the entry into the EU. But some candidate countries even in the first group have still only about 30% of that important indicator. In some other countries as e.g. Poland the other big obstacle is a high share of agriculture on the GDP and/or employment, which achieves about 25% with more than 4 mil. small farmers, etc. what vis-à-vis the current policy of the CAP means absolutely unresolvable problem as Poland itself would take almost 50% of its total budget. Therefore there has also been an ongoing process of debates on necessity either to substantially revise the CAP or to exclude CEEC from its funding for some initial period of their membership in the EU.

As a consequence of these objective obstacles in the preparation of the candidate countries for the accession to the EU, the criteria for such entry becomes more and more complex and they are too complex for any fast enlargement of the EU regarding the CEEC as they do not have enough resources to implement in practice all the requirements of the harmonized communitary legislation. Hence, in a retrospect of the last decade development in the CEEC, one can come to the conclusion that the candidate countries due to their low preparedness for the challenges of the future membership of the EU have already lost a momentum for an early and fast membership in the EU.
6) PRESENT STATUS ACHIEVED IN THE INTEGRATION OF THE CEEC INTO THE EU AND ITS FURTHER PROSPECTIVES

As just being mentioned above, the CEEC have lost a historic chance for an early entry into the EU. The experience of all previous enlargements has fully confirmed that for the relatively poor candidate countries such as in the past were e.g. Spain, Portugal, Greece, Ireland and before that also Italy the best way for becoming a member is a quick entry with a sufficient transition period with some derogations rather than a long-term preparation for an entry outside of the Union. For example, Spain and Portugal which in the time of their accession were less developed than CEEC in 1989 got transition periods up to ten years and with many substantial derogations regarding their membership obligations.

On the other hand the CEEC after ten years since the historical changes in their countries have not yet completed not even 50% of the ,,chapters“ for negotiations while e.g. Spain and Portugal within ten years after political changes in their respective countries from the previous dictatorial regimes to democracies have already been full scale members of the EU. The truly and real accession negotiations start only when such sectors are negotiated as agriculture, transport, competition, energy, fishery, regional and cohesion funds and that has not yet happened even in the case of the first group of candidates as they have first to wait for the results of the ongoing IGC and the draft of the New Treaty and for the practical implementation of the AGENDA 2000 in the EU.

Under these circumstances the further development in the current enlargement process will be still rather slow and complex for both sides as:

- the negotiations will have to last for at least another 2-3 years but even that to much extent will depend upon the ,,progress“ in the implementation of the reforms according to the Agenda 2000 and thus also when the above ,,difficult“ sectors could become a part of the accession negotiations
- at least one year will be needed for the work of the IGC (the third since the changes in the CEEC) and the preparation of the new treaty
- the ratification of the new treaty in 15 member countries and X-candidate countries – future members will take again about two years.

Hence, the whole remaining process of the current enlargement will require from now another 5-6 years what is shifting the next enlargement regarding CEEC well into the next millenium i.e. to the years 2005-2006 i.e. much later than it has originally been expected especially in the Central and Eastern Europe. In view of this the whole process of the current enlargement since the historical changes in 1989 could last for 15-16 years i.e. more than anytime before.

References:

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