

The European Union and the Limits of Accession: Romania and Poland in Comparative Perspective

Clayton J. Cleveland
University of Oregon
Department of Political Science
1284 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-1284
Tel: 973-477-2668
Fax: 541-346-4860
Email: cleveland@uoregon.edu

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Introduction

In May 2004, ten countries joined the European Union (EU). What effect if any has the process of joining this organization had upon the domestic politics of these countries? Before joining the EU these countries were required to alter their form of government, adjusted their economies and changed their domestic practices to conform to the standards of the European community. These accession countries have become full members of the European Union. In principle this means they have joined the European community of liberal democratic states with complementary formal rules and appropriate political behavior. Recent research suggests their political behavior may be lagging behind their adopted laws (Grabbe 2001; Sissenich 2005). If the accession countries have become liberal democratic states, what is the role in the EU in producing this outcome? How extensive are these changes? What are the limitations of the EU's influence on the newly acceded countries? Determining how the accession countries became members of the community of European states can help illuminate the role of international actors in promoting domestic change. Identifying the conditions under which intergovernmental organizations have influence over the domestic politics of member countries contributes and understanding of the causal processes of international-domestic interactions.

Additionally, clarifying the theoretical issues surrounding the accession to the EU, this paper promotes a greater understanding of the current and future politics between “old” and “new” Europe. This paper takes a look at the differences between the Polish and Romanian experiences with accession. This comparison highlights the differences between these two cases in light of how the European Union has interacted with each. The role of the European Union makes the crucial difference in the outcome of

democratic consolidation in each case. For Poland, the formation of external support provided an environment within which the nascent democratic domestic impulses could find fertile ground to bloom. In Romania, the opposite seems to have taken place. The absence of external support has allowed the domestic elites to manipulate their rhetoric to perpetuate authoritarian politics within a formal democratic setting. The lack of EU support in this instance has made all the difference in transferring the regional norms of the European liberal democratic community.

Poland easily joined the liberal democratic order in Western Europe while Romania has lagged behind (see Graph 1). The EU has played a role in the democratization of Central and Eastern Europe (Dimitrova and Pridham 2004). For Romania the failure to secure EU membership in the first round of enlargement has hurt support for democratic institutions (Ciobanu 2003). One major difference between these two countries was the degree of support provided by the EU in the lead up to the 2004 accession (see Graph 2). This paper aims to explore the differences between these two countries in light of the impact of accession on their democratization efforts.

There are two primary paths that the EU can influence democracy through the accession process. Based on the logics of social action (March and Olsen 1998) the EU can influence the instrumental motivations of the domestic population of the potential members through the logic of consequences or it can appeal to the normative concerns based on the logic of appropriateness. The latter is a form of normative change that is based on the socialization of a target country to become part of the “in-group” community of Western Europe (Adler and Barnett 1998; Flockhart 2005). The difference between these two cases should be apparent in the motivation for adopting the rules and

political behaviors of the EU. In Poland, the expectation is that the support for democracy is based on notion of what is “right” and normative concerns based on liberal democratic behavior. In Romania, the expectation is for the basis for political decisions including the attempt to join the EU to be based on instrumental concerns of the costs and benefits of integration.

Democracy and Consolidation

Democracy is a very vague and nebulous concept. As it is a form of social kind that forms the basis of this phenomenon it is difficult to define succinctly (Collier and Levitsky 1997). The problems inherent in defining this concept are compounded when attempting to determine when democracy has become consolidated. The search is for what leads to democratic consolidation is a difficult task when considering at what stage democracy becomes the “only game in town.”¹

The term may be elusive but it evokes the necessary conception to bring forth a sufficient understanding of the phenomenon of interests for academics, policymakers and even the mass public to understand what is being discussed. The general idea for democracy is the increased participation of those who are not able to participate before to be able to determine their own future Robert Dahl’s conception of polyarchy or the application of democracy to the nation-state contains seven institutional attributes which contain these trappings (Dahl 1971). These seven practical institutions include elected officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, a right for any citizen to run for

¹ This phrase has been attributed to two different authors: Guiseppe DiPalma and Adam Przeworski. Juan Linz and Alfred Stephen have attributed it DiPalma (Linz and Stepan 1996, 5). Alternatively, Adam Przeworski has used it to describe democratic consolidation (Przeworski 1991, 26).

office, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information and the ability to independently and autonomously choose those each person associates with (Dahl 1989, 221). While important when examining the institutions of modern democracy, it is important to note these categories which Dahl uses to explain polyarchy are ideal types which no democracy measures up. But, some political systems are closer to the ideal than others.

Once democracy is in place, the next stage is to examine whether or not it is a consolidated democracy. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan examine many of the problems associated with democratic transitions and consolidation (Linz and Stepan 1996). They make specific contributions to the understanding of democracy from their conceptualizations of both transition and consolidation. The three levels of consolidation that are necessary to reap and preserve the gains made through transition provide a benchmark standard of what is necessary. The utility of this benchmark is that it avoids the pitfalls of uniquely correlation measurement such as the “two-turnover test” (Huntington 1991, 77).² Their working definition of democratic consolidation is:

- Behaviorally, a democratic regime in a territory is consolidated when no significant national, social, economic, political, or institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to achieve their objectives by creating a nondemocratic regime or turning to violence or foreign intervention to secede from the state
- Attitudinally, a democratic regime is consolidated when a strong majority of public opinion holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life in a society such as their and when the support for antisystem alternatives is quite small or more or less isolated from the pro-democratic forces.
- Constitutionally, a democratic regime is consolidated when governmental and nongovernmental forces alike, throughout the territory of the state, become subjected to, and habituated to, the resolution of conflict within the specific laws, procedures, and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process (Linz and Stepan 1996, 6).

² This test suggests that to become consolidated a democracy must have executive power turn-over peacefully within the rules established by the democratic regime to the opposition twice. After this second peaceful handing over of executive power, Huntington, suggests the polity is then consolidated and will most likely not regress into authoritarianism.

There is a fundamental quality that is expected to perpetuate the existence of the democracy for the foreseeable future. This key quality is the perception of the individual citizens. Despite the focus of the scholars who have advanced theories about the role of elites in the process of transition in democratization (Bermeo 1992; Burton and Higley 1987; Higley and Burton 1989; Higley, Kullberg, and Pakulski 1996) the role of the masses may be more significant in perpetuating democracy (Diamond 1999).

Incorporated in the institution of democracy are many norms bundled together to function to continue the existence of such an institution. Fundamentally, political equality is a necessary first step. This interpretation draws heavily upon the notion of the procedure definition of democracy advanced by pluralists such as Robert Dahl and Joseph Schumpeter (Dahl 1989; Schumpeter 1947). While the similarity is intentional the conclusions which can be drawn from such a connection is more profound. The procedural relevance reflects strongly upon the nature of the society which institutionalizes the norms within their society to consolidate a particular regime.

Of the three levels of consolidation the attitudinal is the most significant for theoretical developments. This is because the other two levels do not have the same implications upon the persistence or endurance of a democratic regime. At the behavioral level, the specific actions of actors within the domestic sphere are examined without a corresponding understanding of their motivations. The logic used to determine any given actors behavior can be based on either consequences or the behavior's appropriateness (March and Olsen 1998). Behavioral approaches to democratic consolidation do not provide a greater understanding of the formation of this logic. With the assumption that today's behavior is a good predictor of tomorrow's action it does not provide an

explanation of how or why these domestic agents perform in a given manner (Gilley 2005).

The attempt to use constitutional approaches to determine democratic consolidation fall prey to a similar fault. The formal rules and procedure which constitute a regime are easily identifiable. However, it has been widely demonstrated that these formal democrat institutions are a necessary but insufficient part of a fully democratic regime (Eisenstadt 2000; Karl 1995; Zakaria 1997).

The easiest way to conceptualize democratic consolidation is the minimalist interpretation offered in the democratization literature (Diamond 1994; Linz and Stepan 1996; O'Donnell 1996; Przeworski et al. 1996; Schedler 1998). This minimalist interpretation is that the democracy will persist in the future and that there will not be a regress into authoritarian forms of governance. This interpretation differs from conceptions of democracy in that it does not depend upon improving the forms of democratic governance but that a status quo of the regime is merely maintained. It is future oriented encountering the problems of prediction in the social sciences (Gilley 2005).

Conceived of in this way democratic consolidation becomes a search for a cause (Schedler 1998; Schedler 2001). In searching for this cause there are many factors which need to be taken into account. To assist in the analysis of these factors, they can be subdivided into the artificial separation of domestic factors and international factors.³

³ This division follows along with Kenneth Waltz's conception of the different "images" in international relations or international politics (Waltz 1959). However, the use of this socially constructed division between spheres comes with the acknowledgement of the nature of the conception. The division is an artificial construct that makes the individual portions easier to understand when considering each individually. However, at time it makes the comprehension of the interaction of the two more complex to conceive of them as distinct spheres of interaction.

These are used as the conceptual foundation of the examination into the influence of international norms and domestic political change.

International Factors

How does the international affect the domestic sphere? Most theories of international politics posit the causality as going from either the domestic to the international (Moravcsik 1997), or that international outcomes are generated at the international level (Waltz 1979). However, the process of “Europeanization” suggests something else may be happening.

Traditionally, the events which occur within the domestic sphere are suggested to solely have domestic causes. While many of these changes are domestically derived this essay does not deal with the domestic origins of domestic change. Domestic economic performance has an effect on regime type (Przeworski and Limongi 1997) and social groups do influence the conduct of domestic politics (Putnam 1988). However, recounting these effects and potential influences are beyond the scope of this essay.

Traditional treatment of the interaction of among states either suggests that international outcomes are derived from the interaction of states without regard to the particular characteristics of the units themselves (Waltz 1979) or that the characteristics of the state and the interaction of societal actors within the domestic sphere determines the behavior of states on the international level (Moravcsik 1997). However, there is a possible alternative form of interaction between the levels of analysis that are traditionally adopted when examining world politics. The direction of the causal arrow can go the other direction from the international level to the domestic or internal politics.

Variants of theorizing have begun to explore the interaction of domestic and international politics in “two-level games” (Putnam 1988) and the “second-image reversed” (Gourevitch 1978). These theoretical frameworks may help us understand the events in Central and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War.

One form of international influence which is expected to have an implication on domestic change is the international economy (Gourevitch 1978). Since it was introduced, the conception of the international system having an effect has gained momentum in producing several noteworthy studies dealing with the effects of the ways in which the international system affects domestic politics. The types of influences stemming from the international level include more direct forms of relations between states such as military intervention or meddling (Gourevitch 1978). Advances in understanding the intersection between these spheres include international-domestic bargaining models (Evans, Jacobson, and Putnam 1993; Putnam 1988) and imposition of institutions by military force (Owen 2002) such as outright military enforcement of the domestic regimes as in the enforcement of USSR approved regimes in Eastern Europe during the cold war (Huntington 1984).

The second image reversed explores the possibility of indirect influence at a systemic level can affect the makeup of the parts of the system. In this framework the spheres adopted originates from different images of international politics (Waltz 1959). More indirect influences include the international state system and the international economy (Gourevitch 1978). This typology is useful for exploring the potential implications of the international or transnational effects on domestic political phenomena.

International Norms

The first step in determining if norm diffusion has taken place is establishing the presence of a norm. Transmission of a norm set is exceptionally difficult if there is not a coherent norm which exists as part of the community in-group (Grigorescu 2002). Thus, at the regional level it is important to establish the existence of a shared regional norm set. This is established in two ways. The first is the practices of the members of the European Union. This demonstrates the model the members of the European Union display to the accession countries. How much of this promotes norm transmission is a more complex question. However, as Jeffrey Checkel indicates, the actual practices of the promoter of a norm does influence the reception of the idea in the receiver (Checkel and Moravcsik 2001, 222). Thus, not only does the EU talk the talk, they walk the walk as well. The presence of the norm among the member states of the EU is demonstrated and a permissive condition for norm transmission is also present.

Central and Eastern Europe

Since the mid-1970s, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have undergone substantial domestic change. International factors have had a dual role in the content of the changes occurring in this region. First, international factors acted to prevent domestic change from occurring, with the USSR acting to enforce its interests and prevent domestic actors from changing their political structures (Huntington 1984, 217). Second, beginning with the Helsinki accords these countries experienced change as their domestic

practices began to conform to more liberal conceptions of human right norms (Thomas 1999).

The influence of the European Union upon the accession countries may be more limited than previously though because of the two factors which have had an effect upon the accession criteria. The first is the positive enforcement of EU conditionality which no longer has the capacity to effect a post-accession environment. The second is the emphasis upon harmonization rather than development within the accession countries.

In examining the influences of international organizations in Europe upon several of the Central and Eastern European countries who have begun transitions to democracy the examination of the strategies employed is useful. In examining three different strategies to promote domestic change it seem there is a strong potential for external incentives to work the best at promoting compliance. However, the three forms corroborate the overarching argument that incentive based approaches such as membership conditionality work better to affect domestic behavior than socialization-based efforts, such as persuasion and social influence (Kelly 2004). In the promotion of social policy within Poland and Hungary external incentives have been successful at promoting change within the policies of the target governments but less effective at promoting behavioral change (Sissenich 2005). The limits of external incentives may be their effectiveness of promoting a formal expression of change rather than a substantive way in which politics are conducted.

However, in some instances the ability of social learning to promote domestic change has produced effective results. International organizations have demonstrated themselves to be effective organizational platforms to promote normative change by

teaching the value of certain institutional organs (Finnemore 1993). In Central and Eastern Europe this strategy is suggested to account for broad based acceptance of EU rules (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005, 211). As such this potential for social learning activated by membership in intergovernmental organizations is suggested to produce positive results within the processes of democratization (Pevehouse 2005).

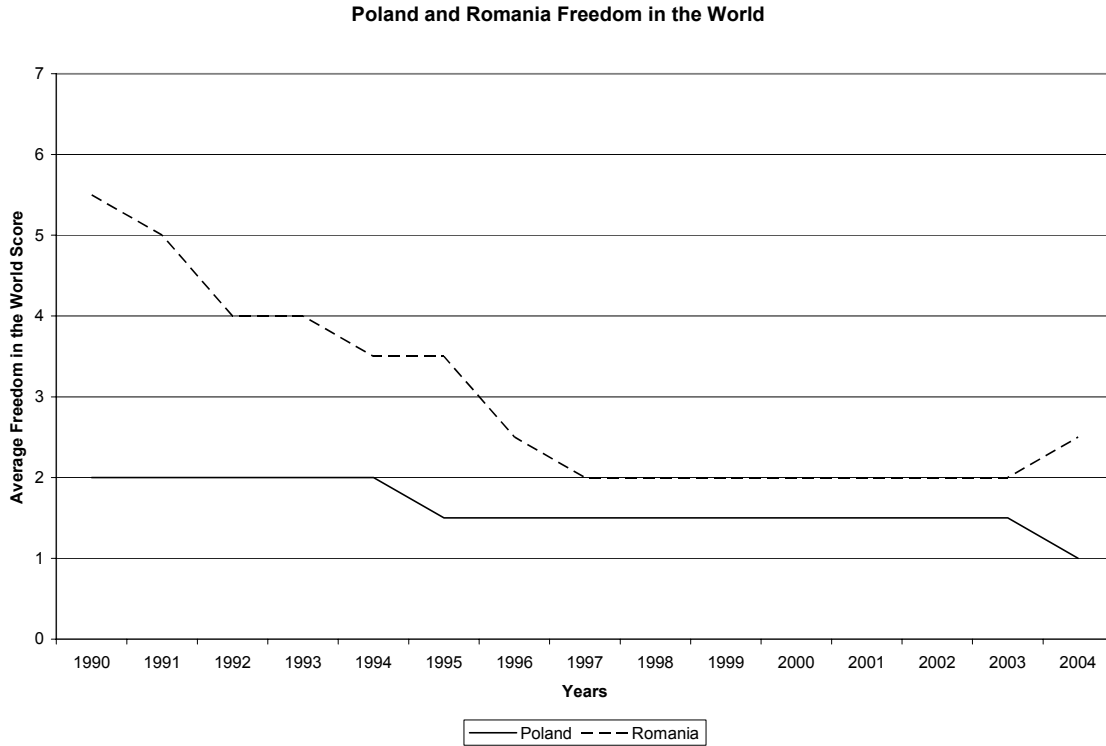
Monica Ciobanu identifies three factors that have significant effect upon the diffuse support for democracy in Romania (Ciobanu 2003).⁴ The possibilities for democratic consolidation on this diffuse support. One of these key factors is the foreign policy failure of the Romanian government to secure entrance to the European Union. The problem which emerges from this is how to determine the direction of causality in this equation. The EU decided to not accept Romania which is a foreign policy failure for the Romanian Government. This affects the support of nascent democratic political institutions. The reason put forth by the EU for their decision is that Romania had not met the criteria for membership including the Copenhagen criteria that outlines the democratic necessities to join (European Commission; European Council Copenhagen 1993). Thus, one conclusion that can be drawn in a counterfactual manner is that if the EU had accepted the Romanian bid for membership support would have been higher and the notions of democratic

Conclusion

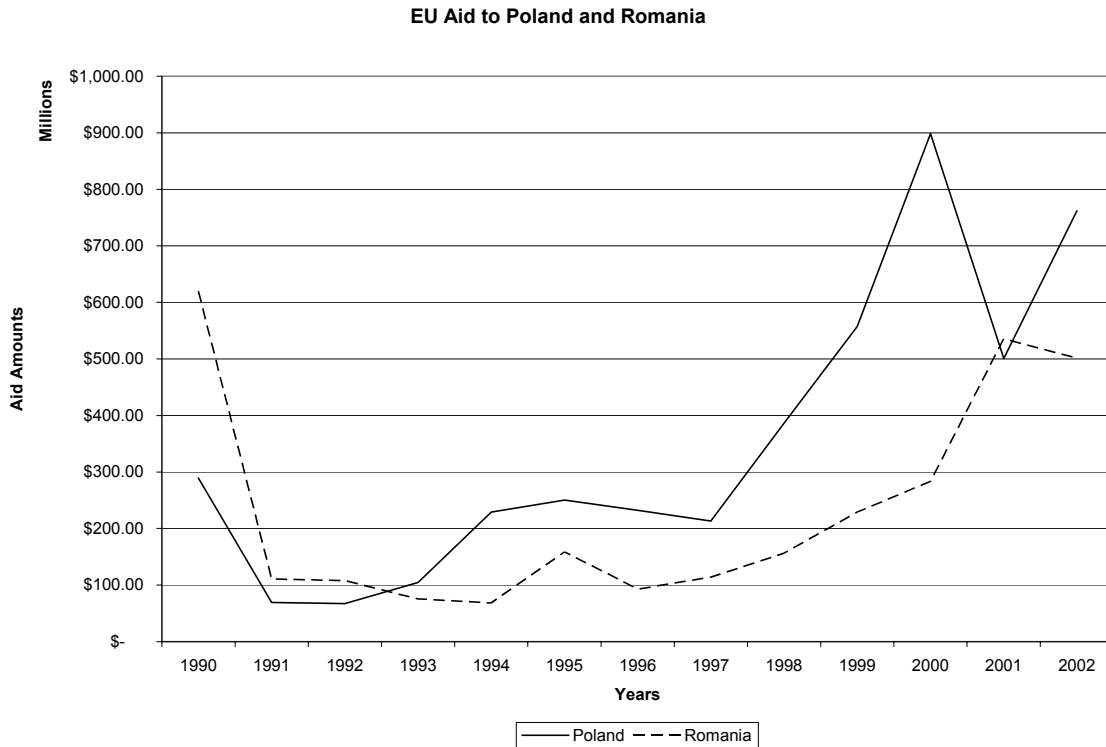
Insight into the ways in which accession and European integration helps promote democracy will increase understanding of how these process occur. An examination of

⁴ For more on the concept of diffuse support see (Easton 1975)

the differences between the basis for social action within the domestic sphere of these two countries and their links to the EU illuminates the ways in which norms are transferred from the regional level to become incorporated into domestic societies.



Graph 1: Poland and Romania Average Freedom in the World 1990–2004 (Source Freedom House).



Graph 2: EU Aid to Poland and Romania 1990–2002 (Source Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

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