

Global Access and Local Support to the Processes of European Integration in Central and Eastern Europe Through Global Networking

INTRODUCTION

One of the dominant features of the overall socio-economic development since the end of the Second World War and especially exhilarating one during the last decades has been the process of European integration. The process which started as a relatively humble goal of preventing for the future any new devastating wars in Europe gradually has become one of the dominant factors not only of the whole development in Europe but to some extent also worldwide and one of the best examples of the gradual regionalization and globalization of the contemporary world which has become to some extent a model emulated all over the world by various regional and sub-regional clusters of countries.

In the next parts of this paper we will deal in more details with some specific features of this process in the context of the contemporary development trends in the European integration vis-a-vis the processes of the EU enlargement to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and especially with the role of the modern information technologies in the support of these processes.

PRESENT STATUS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION DEVELOPMENT AND THE CHALLENGES OF ITS ENLARGEMENT TO CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

During the last over fifty years of its existence, the European Union (EU) has been passing through the development process which could be characterized by at least two main characteristics. They have been as follows:

- a) gradual and steady enlargement of the EU
- b) systematic increase and development of the common institutions, legislation, various rules and regulations of common policies and all of them leading to further accelerated development but also strengthening of the EU as a whole and its member states individually. In case of necessity, the development of individual relatively weaker member states has been supported through various programs and funds of particular common policies and funds (agriculture, cohesion, infrastructure, etc.)

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a) In this respect, the EU has developed from its original six members in the mid of 1950s (France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy and Germany) through gradual enlargements to the existing 15 members Union. In addition to the original six members, the present EU includes another nine members who joined the Union later on as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark in 1970s, Greece, Spain, Portugal in 1980s and Austria, Finland, Sweden in 1990s.

In view of this its gradual development, the EU has become one of the strongest economic powers in the world and in many respects even the most strongest at all. This strength has been increasing not only by each new member but also by the synergic effect of their mutual cooperation and integration

b) all above processes of mutual cooperation and integration in no way should be understood as a simple consequence of the gradual process of enlargement of the EU covering at present - with few exemptions (Norway, Switzerland) the most advanced part of the continent. At least as important as the enlargement itself and to some extent even more important has been the gradual development of the institutions, legislation and various other common policies, funds, rules and regulations of the EU which in their mutual interaction have further substantially contributed to the acceleration of the overall development of the Union. In this respect we could come to the conclusion that in many ways the EU has gradually developed the unique system of international institutions, legislation, "law", etc. which of course has to be fully respected not only by all member states but also by all partners outside the EU and in particular by all candidates for the future membership.

In this respect the most important institutions of the EU which have been overseeing the overall development of the Union and in this respect also being institutions producing the particular rules and regulations of the common policies have been:

- the European Commission

- the European Council
- the European Parliament
- the European Court of Justice

These basic four institutions of the EU are further supported by a large number of various other, more specialized and/or technically oriented institutions, agencies, etc. Altogether, it represents a staff of more than 20,000 international civil servants serving in three main hubs of the EU i.e. Brussels, Luxembourg, Strassburg and having their official representatives and missions all over the world. Of these over 20,000 staff, more than 16,000 have been working directly at the European Commission at Brussels as the most important and powerful executive arm of the EU providing and executing the day-to-day functioning of the EU internally but also externally and sometimes unjustly referred as “bureaucrats” or “euro-bureaucracy” due to the enormous number of various legislation, rules and regulations they have been permanently producing for every aspect of the community life and activities.

If in view of the above we would try at least very briefly to assess the challenges of the current process of enlargement of the EU to the Central and Eastern Europe we have to take into account several important aspects. All candidate countries for this forthcoming enlargement are former socialist countries which emerged in the end of the 1980s as new future democracies and market economies. Since that time on both sides i.e. the EU as well as these new democracies it was clear that the future development of the EU has to proceed towards its further enlargement by these ten new candidate countries if the Europe would like to eliminate any negative consequences of its further and/or continuing division. However, due to the completely different political and socio-economic development in both parts of the Europe i.e. in the EU itself on the one side and in the candidate countries on the other, the process of unification and integration of the whole Europe has been much more complex, time consuming, fund demanding, etc. than it had been assumed in the end of 1980s and beginning of 1990s when the necessary political preconditions for this kind of integration has been created.

Among various other differences as e.g. much lower level of the overall development in the candidate countries (only about 6% of the GDP of the EU while by the population it is more than 1/3 of its current population), the main problem is the necessity to prepare the candidate countries for their future in the EU in the terms of legislation and all various community rules and regulation. What in general has been named as a process of approximation and harmonization of legislation of the candidate countries to the so-called “acquis communautaire” of the EU or its community legislation in its broadest sense.

ROLE OF GLOBAL NETWORKING IN THE PROCESS OF THE FUTURE ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

In order to understand the complexity of the above processes of the approximation and harmonization of the legislation of the candidate countries with the totally different legislation from their former “socialist” past with the “acquis” we have to realize that the later one represents an enormous volume of various legislative acts which in general consists of two main parts:

- primary legislation - all basic treaties by which the EU and before that the European Communities have been established i.e. the Paris Treaty, two Rome treaties, Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties respectively represent the basic part of the “acquis” to which every new member has to access in full and without any exemptions. That of course requires from them to have also the suitable technical tools and means for such an access

- secondary legislation - an enormous amount of various legislative acts, norms, regulations and standards permanently enacted by the EU for the day-to-day running of the EU and mostly initiated by the European Commission. In this case again the candidate countries have to adopt and implement all of them in their national legislation. But in difference to the primary legislation, in this case with the possibility of some flexibility in adoption regarding some of them. What on one hand makes the process of harmonization and approximation more flexible but on the other hand it is also more challenging and more complex in seeking the most optimal ways of the particular adaptation according to the national needs and priorities. But in any case it again requires an efficient and direct access to the particular sources of the secondary legislation.

In view of the above it is clear that the whole process is very closely related to the efficient utilization of the modern contemporary information and communication technologies and their global networking. It has been a historical coincidence that the processes of European integration in the Central and Eastern Europe have started and been proceeding in the environment of the acceleration of the global networking and direct access to the remote data bases and at the same time of a possibility to use networking also for the local support to these processes. As we will demonstrate in the following parts of this paper, some activities in this respect would almost be impossible if this particular “global” access and “local” support through the contemporary networking technologies would be not existing.

In this connection we have to realize that during its over fifty year existence and mainly due to its relatively extensive institutional framework (in particular regarding

the European Commission), the EU has up to now accumulated an enormous amount of "acquis" and related and/or derived or supporting information, documents, acts, etc. According to the latest available edition it represents a list of:

- 51 specialized data bases of what 46 have been on-line data bases and 5 CD-ROMs

- 4 World Wide Web servers

- in addition there have been a long list and ever growing number of other specialized on-line and off-line data bases, new editions of CD-ROMs and www pages e.g. in the TAIEX Office of the European Commission as an office created in 1995 for providing technical assistance to the candidate countries in approximation of legislation according to the White Book but also in mastering the latest information and communications technologies.

In addition we have to realize that the amount of these data sources and data bases has been further increased by the fact that in accordance with the community rules all of them are either in all 11 official languages of the EU (every member country's language is an official language of the EU) or in some of them (mostly English, French, German) with at least annotations in all other.

The list of the EU data bases is as follows:

ABEL - Document delivery of Official Journal L and C series

AGREP - Agricultural research projects of the EU

APC - Commission preparatory acts

BACH - Harmonized company acts

CCL-TRAIN - Common command language training database

CELEX - Community legislation, case-law, preparatory acts, parliamentary questions, national provisions implementing directives

COMEXT - Intra and extra EU trade (also on CD ROM)

CORDIS - Research and development information service (also CD ROM)

CORDIS RTD ACRONYMS - Research and technology development

CORDIS RTD-COM DOCUMENTS - Commission's initiatives

CORDIS RTD-CONTACTS - Contact points of Cordis database

CORDIS RTD-EOI - Expressions of interest

CORDIS RTD-NEWS - Latest news on RTD

CORDIS RTD-PARTNERS - Partner search service

CORDIS RTD-PROGRAMMES - EU-funded research programmes

CORDIS RTD-PROJECTS - Details of projects

CORDIS RTD-PUBLICATIONS - Abstracts of EU publications

CORDIS RTD-RESULTS - Information on results and prototypes

ECDIN - Environmental chemical data (EU, USA, Japan)

ECHO NEWS - Echo news for users

ECLAS - European Commission library

ECU - European currency unit

EMIRE - European employment and industrial relations

EPISTEL - European Parliament press information system

EPOQUE - European Parliament on-line query system

EUROHISTAR - European historical archives

EURISTOTE - Academic research on European integration

EUROCRON - General European Union statistics

EURODICAUTOM - Directory of terminology

EUROFARM CD-ROM - Statistics on agricultural holdings

EUROLIB-PER - Collective catalogue of periodicals

EUROSTAT CD-ROM - Electronic statistical yearbook of the EU

HTCOR-DB - High-Temperature database

HTM-DB - High temperature materials database

I&T Magazine - Industry, telecoms and information market

I'M GUIDE - Information market guide

INFO 92 - European internal market and its social dimension

IUCLID - Classification and evaluation of existing substances

NEW CRONOS - Macroeconomic statistical database

OIL - Weekly oil bulletin

OVIDE - Information service of the European Parliament

PANORAMA CD-ROM - Panorama of EU industry

RAPID - Up-to-date information on EU activities

REGIO - Regional statistics

REM - Radioactivity environmental monitoring

SCAD - Community documentation access system

SESAME - Energy technology research projects

TED - Tenders electronic daily

THESAURI - Structured vocabularies

TIDE - Technology initiative for disabled and elderly people

supplementary)

- Commission proposals
- European Parliament resolutions
- Economic and Social Committee opinions
- Court of Auditors opinions
- Judgments and orders
- Opinions of Advocate-General
- Written parliamentary questions
- Oral questions
- Questions at Questions Time
- Parliament documents

This database is on-line but available against payment only and at present it contains about 200,000 entries with a growth rate of about 10,000 entries per year. The biggest advantage of the CELEX is the fact that it contains not only all kinds of references and accompanying information but also the official full text of all basic legal documents including primary and secondary legislation.

It is evident that such an amount of information could not be effectively handled without possibilities for a global access through a global network. This is the only way how this, the most important source on the community legislation i.e. the back-bone of the whole EU can be made to be directly accessible from the member countries of the EU as well as candidate countries of the Central and Eastern Europe. In this connection we have to realize that this global access is needed not only from the point of view of government institutions but also by any business entity and/or a person being in need to proceed and/or familiarize with the community legislation.

Another important aspect of the above databases from the users point of view is the fact that many of them (directly operated by the EC) are available free of charge while some other are available only on the commercial basis.

GLOBAL ACCESS AND LOCAL SUPPORT TO THE PROCESSES OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IN SLOVAKIA AS A CANDIDATE COUNTRY

The above system of the EU databases is physically located mostly at the European Commission at Brussels or in some other institutions of the EU or have been operated by an official database operator under the special arrangements with the European Commission. In order to be accessible

Although not all of the above databases have the same importance for the functioning of the EU, its member states and/or candidate countries it is evident that their proper utilization can in many aspects contribute to the better knowledge and/or communication with the EU and its institutions. Especially important it is in the case of the candidate countries as on the bases of some of the above databases they can directly be preparing for the challenges of the future membership. In this respect one of the most important databases is the CELEX which contains "interinstitutional" documentation system for Community law. Not only by this its orientation but even more by its content it is the most valuable source of information on "acquis" as in its subsystems it contains information on:

- Legislation (primary (treaties), secondary,

also from the other end e.g. the candidate countries it is necessary to make the necessary arrangements and preparations also in the particular country.

In the specific conditions of the Slovak Republic these preparations have started already in 1995 when the European Agreement on Association with the EU entered into force and it has become clear that it will be necessary to create all necessary preconditions for developing an efficient computer network which would enable all government institutions an access not only to the above EU databases but also it would create conditions for the local support and cooperation between individual government institutions in implementation of the Europe Agreement and one of its most important task i.e. approximation and harmonization of legislation.

On the basis of the technical assistance from the EU, the particular computer network has been established under the PHARE program in the form of the computer network linking together all government departments into a computer network.

This specialized computer network for the processes of European integration has the following main features:

- it has been operated as a specialized network within the broader "GOVNET" i.e. the Governmental network system

- it consists of two hubs served by two servers. One being indicated as "CS" i.e. a central server for the network of 28 computers distributed to all central organs and departments of the state administration. The other one "IAP" i.e. a central server for a network of 12 computers at the Institute of Approximation of Laws (IAL) as a specialized institution of the Government for methodical and technical coordination of the specific processes of the approximation and harmonization of the legislation of the Slovak Republic with the legislation of the EU

- in order to reduce operational costs of an on-line access to the particular data bases in Brussels, they have been physically directly available also in the IAL in the form of CD ROMs with monthly updates for local access and utilization

- the whole system of GOVNET enables through the

Internet facilities a direct connection to the outside world especially to the institutions of the European Union and in particular to the European Commission in Brussels as well as to all other institutions of the EU and/or also other partner international as e.g. OECD in Paris, etc.

The main contributions in addition to the above global access to the information sources of the EU are mainly in the area of the local support to the processes of European integration through the particular computer network. As all the government departments have been linked together to the particular "Intranet" its main benefits are as follows:

- direct access and support to all various specialized databases as they have been created or will be created in support of processes of European integration

- direct support to the processes of approximation and harmonization of laws. Especially it is beneficial in case of the legislative acts having "cross-departmental" character i.e. the responsibility for their approximation lies with several departments. In such cases one of them has been acting as a coordinating "gazetteer" department for all other departments participating in the adaptation process. In particular in these cases the function of the global network as well as a local support is inevitable as only the network can create a working environment for on-line cooperation and joint activities on the same "piece" of legislation at the same time by several departments

- another important contribution of the global access and local support of the network is in the enormous amount of activities related the processes of translation of the "acquis" from the official language of the EU (the Slovak Republic in this case uses English version of the legislation) to the Slovak language and then after its harmonization and approximation back being translated to English for the needs of notification and monitoring by the EU. The whole translation itself without the global access and local support of the network would be almost impossible if we take into account the size of the "acquis" and still relatively low level of English comprehension in the countries of CEEC and Slovakia in particular as a new country which before its independence had only very limited opportunities for international relations, etc.

- in view of this, an important role has been played by the computerized thesauri, key words, glossaries, etc. as prepared by the European Commission for the needs of the candidate countries

- another important aspect of the local support to the approximation and harmonization of laws has been in the area of the global access and local support to the

processes of securing proper interpretation of the approximated, harmonized legislation which has to have exactly the same meaning as the official version of the same legislation of the EU.

- the importance of providing this “common” interpretation of the national legislation with the “acquis” has also been directly supported by the network as the whole process in full utilizes its functions and services. The particular “certificate on the compatibility” when issued by the IAL as the official certification authority of the Government of the Slovak Republic is again available at the network for future use in order to prevent any uncertainties in this respect

- the whole process of the harmonization, approximation of the legislation after being officially certified by the IAL has to be notified to the European Commission and in particular to its specialized TAIEX (Technical Assistance Information Exchange) Office in Brussels which provides not only technical assistance to the candidate countries in the harmonization of legislation but is also administering the particular data base on the progress achieved in the whole process. The particular data base monitors the development and progress achieved in the harmonization of legislation in all ten candidate countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Czech, Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania) on the basis of so-called “Harmonogramme” which traces the whole process of harmonization and serves directly to the evaluation of the particular candidate countries and their process of “approximation” to the EU in this single most important area i.e. legislation.

- of course that the global networking plays a very important role also in many other related areas of the European integration, in particular regarding e.g. the processes of preparation and in-service training of the civil servants for their new tasks vis-a-vis their new responsibilities in the processes of European integration, approximation of laws, implementation of Europe agreement, etc. The particular network in this respect serves as an indispensable source of particular information but at the same time also as a set of tools and means for in service distance education and learning

- the same function has been played also in relation to the university education of the students specializing in European integration as e.g. at the Faculty of Management of the Comenius University in Bratislava as well as at other faculties of the same university e.g. at the Faculty of Law but also at some other faculties not only in Slovakia but also in other candidate countries of CEEC.

CONCLUSION

Also from these few examples it is quite evident that the role of the global networking and its functions in global access and local support to the processes of European integration in the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe are inevitable. They make the whole process of integration much more efficient and in many cases it is not at all an exaggeration if we say that without these functions some activities would be almost impossible to carry out within any reasonable time period. Otherwise, the process of the European integration and unification would be even more time consuming and hard-to-be completed if we realize that in spite of these enormous support from the contemporary information technologies the gap between the countries of the EU and the candidate countries is still rather widening than narrowing. But this issue is already beyond the scope of this paper.

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