



THE EUROPEAN UNION AND CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

ASSESSING PERFORMANCE

Edited by
Dimitris Papadimitriou, Dorina Baltag and
Neculai-Cristian Surubaru



The European Union and Central and Eastern Europe

The role of the European Union (EU) in Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) and its 'near abroad' has attracted much scholarly attention over the past few years. Notwithstanding the successes of the EU's eastwards enlargement, the 'transformative power' of the EU in the region has often been called into question, in terms of both its depth and its longevity. This book addresses a number of key questions: *What determines EU performance in post-communist Europe? What are the conditions that influence it? How does the projection of EU power differ between its enlargement policy and the European Neighbourhood Policy?* To answer these questions this volume brings together a wide range of case studies, based on different approaches and methods, but with a single analytical focus on 'performance'. The book's coverage and focus will be of interest to academics, practitioners and students interested in the EU, CEECs, pre- and post-enlargement studies and more widely to those interested in the international relations and the governance of wider Eastern Europe.

The chapters of this book were originally published as a special issue of *East European Politics*.

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From ambitious goals to improper fit: hybrid performance of Phare pre-accession programme for civil society development in Bulgaria

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Assessing the performance of the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe and in its neighbourhood

Dimitris Papadimitriou , Dorina Baltag and Neculai-Cristian Surubaru

More than a decade after the big bang enlargement, it seems that the European Union (EU) and its Central and Eastern European member-states have mutually adapted to one another. The debates regarding the historical implications of enlargement have now reduced in tempo and much of Eastern Europe seems to be an integral part of the European integration project. After the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 (and Croatia in 2013), and in light of the EU's internal troubles, enlargement has been sidelined from the EU agenda. The issue of the EU's performance in the "wider Eastern Europe" remains poignant, not least because of current developments in its "neighbourhood" (such as the crisis in Ukraine or Moldova's downturn from success story to a captured state), the uneven pattern of reform across some of the recently admitted states (such as the turmoil in Hungary and Poland or the ongoing monitoring of Bulgaria and Romania in the area of rule of law), and the evident slow pace of progress and even back-sliding in parts of the Western Balkans (e.g. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia). These cases, inter alia, illustrate that the EU's performance in the area is neither linear nor uncontested. Thus, questions regarding EU performance reoccur frequently and very often, its "transformative power" can be called into question. What determines EU performance in Central and Eastern Europe and in its Neighbourhood? What are the conditions that influence it? This collective inquiry addresses some of these questions.

Much of the EU's own discourse puts emphasis on "performance" as a key driver of its policies and engagement with its partners (European Commission 2008, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015). In parallel, the scholarly literature generally questions the extent to which the EU addresses the most important challenges and (external and internal) pressures and whether its instruments are fit for purpose. Much of the literature has linked EU performance to EU effectiveness (a subset of the wider notion of performance), emphasising that increased effectiveness may render the EU more legitimate in the eyes of both, its member-states and its partners (Börzel and Risse 2007; Bouchard, Peterson, and Tocci 2013; Bretherton and Vogler 2013; Edwards 2013; Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2011; Smith 2010, 2013). Externally, scholars have examined EU performance in major multilateral settings such as the United Nations, the World Bank or the International Labour Organisation (Oberthür, Jørgensen, and Shahin 2013; Oberthür and Groen 2015), during negotiations in different policy settings (Dee 2015; Romanyshyn 2015; Van Schaik 2013)

or more recently investigated EU diplomatic performance (Baltag and Smith 2015). Internally, scholars have focused on assessing performance in relation to domestic processes. For instance, one can note a strong focus on various sectoral policies (e.g. cohesion policy) and their performance in Central and Eastern Europe (Bachtler, Mendez, and Oraže 2013; Ferry and McMaster 2013). Others have sought to probe the domestic impact of the EU in CEE countries and how interaction with the European Union shapes institutional structures and policies both internally and externally (Börzel and Risse 2012; Dimitrova 2010; Grabbe 2001, 2014; Papadimitriou and Phinnemore 2008, 2004; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Sedelmeier 2008, 2012). Using concepts such as “diffusion”, “social learning” or “instrumental rationality” scholars have tried to explain the mechanisms behind these interactions and examine how the EU influences domestic configurations and developments in new member-states (MS) and in third countries (Börzel and Risse 2012; Bosse 2009; Casier 2011; Grabbe 2001). It is still widely assumed that the European Union has a strong impact on domestic settings. Yet, more clarity is called for with regard to the processes and factors that can mediate the EU’s performance internally or externally, in the region under examination.

Given the very little cross-fertilisation between the analytical bodies on external and internal EU performance, a suitable theoretical “niche” arises for this inquiry. One of the key contributions of this Special Issue is that it systematically examines the performance of EU policies and processes as well as their impact in the “wider” Eastern Europe. This is done by taking into account cases from the EU’s Eastern enlargement and from the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Conceptually, our key contribution is to link EU policy and its impact in “wider” Eastern Europe (enlargement + ENP) with the literature on performance. It allows us to study EU performance from two analytically distinct angles which provide for a more holistic understanding of the mediating factors of EU’s external projection. Drawing on these literatures, this Special Issue investigates what drives or impedes EU performance in countries from Central and Eastern Europe that are now part of the European Union and in countries from the Eastern neighbourhood.

This introductory piece introduces a working definition of “performance”, highlighting the distinction between “process-driven” (i.e. internal to the EU) and “outcome-driven” performance (i.e. the EU’s impact on the ground). Subsequently, we identify a number of common themes related to EU performance that have guided individual contributions and ensured an overall level of coherence for the arguments advanced in this Special Issue. Finally, the main findings of each individual contribution are introduced and briefly discussed throughout this introductory article. The main argument pursued here is that the performance of the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe is shaped by a plethora of factors which, in recent years, questioned and limited the ability of the EU to reach a certain level of internal coherence and constrained its impact on the ground across the region.

1. A working definition of “performance”

To analyse and assess performance is, both in academic and in practical terms, a notoriously challenging task. The concept of performance has been widely used in public policy research to measure performance in public management (Bouckaert and Halligan 2006; Howlett and Ramesh 1995; Peters and Pierre 2006; Versluis, Van Keulen, and

Stephenson 2010). Scholars, hence, define performance as “an organisation’s ability to achieve agreed-upon objectives” (Gutner and Thompson 2010, 231). These analyses most commonly associate performance with an organisation’s capacity to deliver its set tasks or functions in a successful manner: effectively, efficiently, in a relevant manner to its stakeholders, and within the context of financial viability (Lusthaus et al. 2002). Political science scholars have also discussed performance in their study of political systems and have defined it in relation to the capacity of the system to act and evaluate its outputs and processes (Almond and Powell 1996; Eckstein 1971; Roller 2005). Whether defined as a way to measure the performance of political institutions in Western democracies (Eckstein 1971; Keman 2002; Roller 2005) or the management of governments (Ingraham, Joyce, and Kneedler Donahue 2003), analysing performance entails assessing the process – the effort, efficiency and capabilities – as well as the outcome produced by any given action. We use this broader understanding of performance in the case of the European Union which we examine as a political and as a policy-oriented entity.

Several important distinctions require further attention. First, one significant distinction is that the existing scholarship engages in both policy and political analysis. While policy analysis assesses the policy content in order to understand the political process and behaviour, political analysis reflects on the outcome (Rossell 1993). A second distinction refers to defining what the EU is. On the one hand, the EU reflects “the way in which the EU has dealt with its own international relations internally” (Hill and Smith 2011, 9). This shapes its capacity to act as a collective actor and its ability to coordinate its actions, including for international purposes. On the other hand, the EU is a major actor that has an impact via its policies on its member-states as well as on its neighbours which implies that Brussels can shape its internal and external environment (Hill and Smith 2011, 9). Hence, EU performance can be measured not only by accounting for EU processes (e.g. negotiations, conditionality or external trade) but also by establishing a clear-cut outcome at the level at which policies or European actions are themselves being implemented. In this context, the final distinction we apply is that between *process-driven performance* and *outcome-driven performance*. Although in real life “process” and “outcome” are inextricably linked, we have opted to keep these two stages analytically distinct as a means of structuring our empirical inquiry and to fine-tune our assessment. Thus, EU performance becomes the difference between the desired effect of Brussels-designed policies and the real outcome they have at the internal and external level.

Under *process-driven performance*, we evaluate the nature of the capabilities and the mechanisms and procedures used by the European Union. This dimension examines intra-EU processes and deliverables that refer to EU’s capacity to act as a collective actor and the ability to coordinate common interests and preferences internally. Any political system refers to a set of institutions concerned with formulating and implementing the collective goals of those they represent (Almond and Powell 1996). Hence, the focus is on producing political goods such as security, welfare, justice or freedom for its members (Pennock 1966). Others explain that this can refer to narrow benchmarks such as statements or m/s decisions within the Council to broader ones that examine EU actions and efforts to carry out those internally agreed positions (Blavoukos, Bourantonis, and Portela 2015). From these standpoints, *process-driven performance* will reflect primarily on the internal decision-making processes and policies of the EU, and how these may reflect on outcomes and outputs not only at the wider, supranational level, but also equally on the ground.

Under *outcome-driven performance*, we examined whether or not EU self-proclaimed goals or objectives have been achieved. This dimension deals with the causal link between the EU's actions and its environment. In its international dimension (i.e. the ENP), *outcome-driven performance* encapsulates the relationship between a political system and its environment: "systems are oriented by their environment not just occasionally and adaptively, but structurally, and they cannot exist without an environment" (Luhmann 1995, 16–17). In this respect, this dimension evaluates the extent to which the EU interacts with its external environment and how it impacts it (Allen and Smith 1990; Elgström and Smith 2006 and others). *Outcome-driven performance* reflects namely on the EU's ability to link (policy) means and ends, that is, resources and capabilities that the EU can mobilise in order to achieve a goal (Börzel and Risse 2007 and others). *Outcome-driven performance* thus concentrates on the impact that European Union actions and policies have on the ground both in its own member-states and in its enlargement and ENP partners.

Drawing on insights from enlargement, post-enlargement and ENP partner countries, the empirical contributions to this volume have examined both the *process-driven* and *outcome-driven performance* of the EU. Therefore, this Special Issue evaluates EU performance not by looking at the domestic effects it may have on different branches of national policies or institutions, but by isolating the difference between the established and expected outcome of EU interventions in the area. Explaining the factors that constrain this performance is therefore one of the key aims of this Special Issue and has been dealt with across different internal policy areas (Enlargement policy, Energy and Climate change policy, Cohesion Policy), as well as with regard to several external policy areas (the impact of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Ukraine and Moldova, export and arms control, Twinning policies and foreign aid instruments).

2. "Measuring" EU performance in CEE and the ENP space

From a methodological point of view, as a collective endeavour, this Special Issue has addressed problems in variation on the independent variables, which often affected Europeanisation research (Haverland 2006). It did so by scrutinising both member- and non-member-states in order to understand how EU performance varied in each of them. This enhanced the possibility of comparing the effects of European Union actions across different cases and has potentially strengthened the validity of the conclusions drawn. The unpacking of the analytical and methodological problems of understanding EU performance forms a key objective of our undertaking. The measurement of EU performance, inevitably, involves a degree of contestation in relation to the vast and empirically rich field of inquiry looking at the relationship between the EU, CEECs and ENP countries. Specifically, borrowing from frameworks used in the organisational and Europeanisation-related literatures, we propose three possible modes of operationalisation.

2.1. An assessment of performance based on the EU's own stated policy objectives

As suggested by the literature on organisational management literature (Cohen and Levinthal 1990; Gutner and Thompson 2010; Zahra and George 2002), analysing an actor's performance can be based on an evaluation of their specific tasks, policies and

procedures. This allows the examination of how narrow functions are performed and whether these have been successfully executed. Performance remains a critical issue across EU policies and Treaty reforms. In order to exert and reach this performance, the EU has at its disposal various policy instruments. These instruments define “how, who and within which organizational structures to do things in order to attain the defined goals and objectives” (Lenschow, Liefferink, and Sietske 2005, 805) as well as the ability to adapt to change, assimilate new information and use this for (policy) innovation (Cohen and Levinthal 1990; Zahra and George 2002). Hence, such an operationalisation of performance can be defined as the ability of European and national institutions to implement EU-set policy goals. Notably, such an operationalisation is an established benchmark enforcing many policy evaluation research designs (Vedung 2007). For instance, the EU’s own “horizontal” strategies and/or country-specific agreements (European Neighbourhood Policy, Enlargement, Stabilisation and Association Agreement, etc.) often contain a set of objectives whose fulfilment can be used as a measure of its performance. These are officially presented in declarations of the European Council and/or key policy announcements by senior EU officials.

2.2. An assessment based on expectations of EU actorness by its partners

An assessment of performance based exclusively on the EU’s own perceptions may offer a rather narrow view on this issue. Very often in public discourse, and in the academic literature, the EU’s performance gets criticised on the premise of its limited ambition; of what it chooses *not* to do. In this sense, the expectations that third countries attach to the EU, and the extent to which the EU matches them, tell a very important story about its performance. The EU’s actions or inactions trigger political effects in partner countries, some desirable and some less desirable; to a similar extent, it may cause stability as well as instability (Ginsberg 2001; Tonra 2009). The expectation of the EU to perform in its assumed international role as a conflict-manager or promoter of good governance is linked to the EU’s ability to agree internally, combined with the availability of resources and instruments. This is the dimension of *presence* articulated by the literature on EU actorness (Bretherton and Vogler 1999, 2006; Papadimitriou and Petrov 2012). The way in which the EU acts on the international arena and how it presents itself to its partners also discloses EU credibility concerns (Duke 1999; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008; Tulmets 2008).

2.3. An assessment based on the severity of the constraining (to EU action) factors on the ground (time pressures, strength of veto players-international, EU and domestic agency)

The EU’s *outcome-driven performance* cannot be isolated from local and international factors that mediate its engagement with its partners. Neither can EU level veto points be ignored in the *process-driven performance* (e.g. member-states preferences or the role of the European Parliament). More and more, it has been widely acknowledged that the EU may not be regarded as the single causal explanatory factor for domestic changes (Exadaktylos and Radaelli 2009; Grabbe 2006). Not only the literature on Europeanisation, but also studies of international relations using “second image reversed” research