

## **EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ON CIVIL SOCIETY OF THE BALTIC STATES**

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### **Summary**

The paper aims at analyzing the impact of European integration on civil societies of the Baltic states in 1988-2004. Identified are 4 mechanisms of the impact of the integration into the EU on the development of civil society of the Baltic states: the Political Accession Criterion of Democracy and the Rule of Law; the EU programmes for democracy promotion and the direct aid; reforms and adaptation of *acquis communautaire*; transnational networks and interest representation at the EU level. Along with these mechanisms, the impact of the integration into the EU on civil societies of the Baltic states is analyzed as the process of socialization and learning. The criterion of democracy has played a modest role in the Eastern enlargement process. Direct financial aid of the EU to civil society in the Baltic countries has been relatively small-scale. On the other hand, the demonstration effect, social learning and the exchange of ideas and experiences have played an important role in the democratic consolidation.

### **Introduction**

Integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures has been the main purpose of the Baltic states from the beginning of the "Singing revolution" in 1988. The guidelines for political and economic reforms in many ways have been drafted, and sometimes imposed, by Western states and institutions. The domestic agenda of the Baltic states in the recent 10 years has been dominated by the integration into the European Union and the fulfilling of the requirements of the EU. The coun-

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tries have implemented radical reforms in crafting democracy and transforming their economies from state socialism to a free market economy, undergone administrative, legal, and social reforms. Fast reforms and privatization have caused a temporary economic decline and a rapid social differentiation. The process of democratic consolidation would have been easily reversed if the international environment had not been favourably disposed towards democratic development in the Baltic states. Democratization in the Baltic states has been in many ways encouraged by the EU and other Western institutions. The aid has often been provided in the form of support for local NGOs and promotion of the activities of civil society.

Owing to the fact that the Baltic states have been strongly committed to the integration into the EU, a transfer and internalization of European norms and collective understandings in the countries have been perceived as a natural way of reforming society. On the other hand, a diverse historical background and differences in political culture between the older members of the EU and the Baltic states have determined that the transfer in some cases has been rather superficial and has caused outcomes other than has been expected. As a consequence, in the process of the integration into the EU, the role and the situation of civil society in the Baltic states have been affected in many ways, which have produced a manifold effect.

The Baltic states have managed to satisfy the formal standards of electoral democracy in the early stage of their independent development. Many indicators of consolidated democracy in the Baltic countries, as well as in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CCEE), however differ essentially in comparison to the countries of mature democracy. One of the exceptional features of post-communist countries which have chosen the way of democratic development is a weak civil society. The EU in promoting democratization has made efforts to strengthen NGOs and other actors of civil society.

Civil society is a central concept for understanding of the functioning of democracy and the process of democratization (Diamond 1999: 218-261; Whitehead 2002: 65-90, Linz and Stepan 1996a, 1996b: 8; Gellner 1994; Putnam 1994; Keane 1988a; Cohen and Arato 1992). The revival of the term "civil society" in the West begins with the political dissent movement in the late 1970s. Writing not long before the emergence of Polish Solidarity, a Czech émigré J. Rupnik

characterized the situation in Poland as the rebirth of civil society (Pelczynski 1988:361).

The resurgence of associational activity in the Baltic states began in 1988. It lasted however only a few years. The rapid decline of associational activity soon after the beginning of democratization is inherent to all the CCEE. A number of studies in recent years have revealed the fact that levels of organizational membership throughout post-communist Europe are substantially lower than in the established democracies (Howard 2003; Ruutsoo 2002: 372-381). It is worth mentioning that associational activity of citizens of the CCEE is lower in comparison to the post-authoritarian countries of Latin America (Howard 2003). Furthermore, civil society in the Baltic states has been weak compared with that in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and other post-Communist countries (Berglund et al. 2001: 151-5; Kaldor and Vejvoda 1999). This causes many problems of state-building and democratic development, inasmuch as citizen involvement and participation represent an essential component of the quality of democracy.

In the literature one can find a substantial number of sometimes even contradictory concepts of civil society. For our purpose we need a broad definition which could reveal a comprehensive impact of civil society upon democratic developments. The process of democratization needs actors which cannot be reduced to NGOs alone, as many definitions of civil society do. Active citizens in order to achieve their goals tend to join associations and various movements which afford them the possibility to represent their interests more effectively.

An exhaustive concept of civil society has been given by Linz and Stepan (1996b: 17):

*By "civil society," we refer to that arena of the polity where self-organizing and relatively autonomous groups, movements, and individuals attempt to articulate values, to create associations and solidarities, and to advance their interests.*

According to the European Economic and Social Committee, "[c]ivil society is a collective term for all types of social action, by individuals or groups, that do not emanate from the state and are not run by it" (EESC, 1999: 32). Civil society organisations include trade unions and employers' organisations ("social partners"), other organisations representing social and economic players, NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), and religious communities (*Ibid.* 1999: 33-34).

An associational activity in the Baltic states has not significantly changed in time. Some data have revealed that it has been even declining (Ruutsoo 2002: 369, 378; Howard 70-73). Similarities of the 3 Baltic states with regard to the situation of civil society are quite remarkable, especially bearing in mind cultural, religion and linguistic differences. Howard (2000) made a conclusion that low levels of organizational membership in the post-communist countries can be explained by the prior Communist experience (rather than by the impact of economic, political-institutional and civilizational factors). Associational membership in the 3 Baltic countries generally is lower than in the other CCEE. By all appearances the reason for the fact is the former Soviet occupation, destruction of the national state structures and an "original" - harder than in the other states - Soviet regime imposed upon the 3 Baltic states for nearly 50 years.

This does not exclude a possibility that in the future differences of civic activity between the 3 Baltic states may develop. In December 2002, the Estonian Parliament adopted a national strategy, "The Estonian Civil Society Development Concept" (Estonian Parliament 2001), which was developed by the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations. It aims at establishing a model of cooperation between the state and NGOs and is the only document of this kind in the CCEE. Every two years, the Estonian Parliament, *Riigikogu*, organizes a public hearing on the implementation of its activities (first took place in January 2005). Apparently this is a sign of the changing attitude of the state institutions towards civil society in Estonia. The outcomes of this change have still to be evaluated.

This essay explores the impact of the process of European integration in 1988-2004 on civil society in the Baltic countries.

### **A fundamental difference between the western and eastern halves of Europe**

Institutional arrangement with a different role of civil society for many years has constituted a fundamental difference between the western and eastern halves of Europe. Communist regimes in the CCEE for many years made a great effort to extinguish the tradition of associational activity. Many scholars underline that the Communist one-party system can function only by frustrating or extirpating

the traditions of civil society. Under the one-party systems, civil society is always on the verge of extinction (Keane 1988b: 2, 5-6; Howard 2003; Ruutsoo 2002). Miszlivetz (1999: 57) argues that "[o]ne of the most characteristic features common to all East Central European countries and inherited from the Stalinist model forced upon them is the lack of a well-articulated civil society". In the CCEE dissidents have developed society-based approach to changing Soviet-type regimes. A significant movement independent from the state Communist structures has sprung up however only in Poland, where the trade union 'Solidarnosc' had as many as 1 million members at the beginning of 1980s. In the other countries the dissidents have composed only an insignificant part of the population. Especially this is true in the case of the Baltic states, for the countries were fully occupied and incorporated in the USSR.

The 'Singing revolutions' which broke out in 1988 were a great surprise for the local and Moscow-based communist leaders as well as for Western observers. In these revolutions independent social and political actors played a major part. Usually it is stated that the peaceful revolutions in the Baltic states, as well as in the other CCEE, were carried out by revived civil societies. This is why many observers have expected a post-Communist civil society to be strong and vibrant. Soon afterwards, however, the activity of citizens in the Baltic states weakened, the number of NGOs and the participation rate of citizens in various nongovernmental activities diminished. A revolutionary movement as well as a process of democratic consolidation requires an active engagement of civil society. The characteristics of civil society engagement in each of these two developments, however, are quite different. This explains why the activity of civil society in the Baltic states in overthrowing the old regime and striving for independency has not constituted a reliable basis for a vibrant civil society in the period of democratic reforms.

The World Values Survey (1995-97) has revealed that the average number of organizational membership per person constitutes 2.62 in Sweden, 2.48 in Finland and 2.12 in W. Germany in comparison to only 0.70 in Latvia, 0.64 in Estonia and 0.46 in Lithuania (Howard 2003: 69). According to Howard (2003: 147), the variation that does exist among post-Communist societies in comparison to the older democracies is best characterized as "differences in degree", as opposed to "differences in kind". Ruutsoo (2002: 371) points out that in con-

ceptualizing the state of civil societies in the Western and the Baltic countries, we should deal not with numbers of associations but with the structural gap.

One of the important democratic functions of civil society is to create channels for the articulation, aggregation and representation of interests (Diamond 1999: 239-250). The lack of traditions of civil society and the prevailing political culture in the Baltic states do not help in representing the interests of various societal groups (Spurga 2005). In Lithuania, the term "lobbying" has a negative connotation, often tantamount to corruption and bribery, and the population is not fully aware of the fact that in democratic societies the activity of the interest groups is regarded as a significant and legitimate constituent part of the political process (Paèèsaitė 2002). Currently, interest representation is an essential component of the political systems of the older democracy. Intermediary organizations, such as interest groups, play a particularly important role in connecting European-level institutions to the citizens of the EU (Eising 2003). Nearly 700 civil society groups active in the EU have registered themselves on a voluntary basis in the European Commission's database CONECCS (Mahoney 2004). Greenwood (2003) points out that Brussels offices have 170 national interest groups, and that there are also 171 regional offices there. Mainly, it is the non-governmental actors from the older member states that have been active at the EU level, whereas the interests of the various actors of the Baltic states have been represented relatively sparsely.

### **The mechanisms of the impact**

The preparation for the membership in the EU has been the main factor which has determined the direction of reforms and transformation of society in the Baltic states from the mid- 1990s. By the same token, the integration into the EU has been the main factor in affecting a transformation of civil society in the Baltic states. The characteristics of civil society have been influenced in many ways. In 2004, the year of accession of the Baltic states to the EU, the role of civil society in the Baltic states, however, was still of substantially less importance than that in the older member states. This fact testifies that the integration into the EU and the strengthening of the role of civil society in the candidate countries are not parallel processes.

We have identified 4 mechanisms of the impact of the integration into the EU on the development of civil society of the Baltic states. These 4 mechanisms are:

1. The Political Accession Criterion of Democracy and the Rule of Law;
2. The EU programmes for democracy promotion and the direct aid;
3. Reforms and adaptation of *acquis communautaire*;
4. Transnational networks and interest representation at the EU level.

Along with these mechanisms, further in the paper we analyse the impact of the integration into the EU on civil societies as the process of socialization and learning.

### **The Political Accession Criterion of Democracy and the Rule of Law**

The EU's efforts to promote democracy is an important feature in European foreign policy (Kubicek 2005: 270; Youngs 2001). The policy has been implemented regarding the CCEE after the countries became independent in 1989-1991 and started political and economical reforms with the aim to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic structures. The Copenhagen European Council in 1993 recognized the legitimacy of the CCEE desire to become members of the EU and laid down the accession criteria: the political, economic and the criterion of adopting the *acquis communautaire*. Countries with the accession perspective had had to comply with the Copenhagen criteria before they were entitled to enter accession negotiations. The political criterion encompassed a stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. The task to elaborate on the content of accession requirements was left to the Commission.

An important circumstance in exploring the impact of the Political accession criterion is the fact that the elaboration of the accession requirements and the recommendation to the European Council to recognize that the applicant countries fulfil the Copenhagen political criterion (excluding Slovakia which fulfilled the political criterion two years later, in 1999) were presented by the Commission in the same document, Agenda 2000, in 1997 (European Commission 1997).

In 1997-2002, the Commission issued yearly reports with recommendations for improvement for each applicant and candidate country. The reports provided

evaluations by the EU concerning, *inter alia*, the state of democracy and the rule of law. In the reports, numerous remarks were presented regarding such topics as the rule of law, civil rights, the role of political opposition, fight against corruption, the situation of civil society. The remarks and recommendations however were not systematic, the clear indicators of the evaluation were not elaborated. Kochenov (2004) points out that the assessment of democracy and the rule of law criterion provided by the European institutions was not really full, consistent and impartial and that the threshold to meet this criterion was very low. In the assessment documents of the criterion, the Union has given priority to the assessment of the rule of law. The democratic process in the candidate countries has not been analyzed in detail, the same holds true with regard to the attention to civil society. The requirements for civil society of the applicant and candidate countries have not been elaborated in detail by the European institutions. This is why it is quite complicated to evaluate the impact of the implementation of political accession criterion on civil societies of the Baltic states. Generally it could be stated that the Baltic states have tried to react to every critical remark which has been presented by the European Commission and to transform their societies following the experience of the Western countries. Raik (2003: 49) argues that "[s]ince joining the EU has been a top priority for the CEECs, membership criteria have functioned as a powerful tool for the Union to influence the applicant states".

Some students of democratization relate the ambiguous impact of Brussels on the democratization of the CCEE to the 'democratic deficit' in the EU itself. Raik (2003: 230) points out that the EU's "ability and credibility in terms of acting as a democracy promoter are restricted by its own democratic deficit". Kaldor and Vejvoda (1999: 166-7) have expressed concern that some aspects, criticized by the EU and imposed on the CEECs to be fulfilled before the enlargement - democratic politics and responsiveness to citizens - are missing in the European context. Zielonka (2001: 525) points out that "Western pro-democracy pressure has largely constrained any effective self-rule by Eastern 'democratic' governments".

### **The EU programmes for democracy promotion and the direct aid**

The EU has established the instruments for direct financial aid to promote democracy and to develop civil society in the applicant countries. The EU has



offered financial aid mostly through various programmes within the framework of Phare which was created in 1989 to assist Poland and Hungary but soon was expanded to other applicant countries and countries of the Western Balkans (until 2000). Phare has been designed to help the CCEE "align their political, economic and legal systems with those of the European Union" (The Phare Programme 1997). In the first years of the programme the assistance did not include a specific aid for democratic consolidation. The EU's three multi-country programmes for democracy and civil society were set up in 1992:

- *the Phare Democracy programme*, whose central objective was to promote the application of democratic principles and procedures in various spheres of society, such as the Government, Parliament, local administration, the media, professional groupings and associations;
- *the Phare LIEN programme*, aimed to stimulate citizens' initiative and to strengthen the capacity of non-governmental and non-profit organizations working in the social sector, especially caring for disadvantaged groups of the population;
- and *the Partnership programmes* which focused on local economic development and cooperation between the private sector, local government and NGOs (European Commission 1999; Penny 1995; Raik2003: 206).

In 1999, the Commission replaced the Phare LIEN programme and Partnership programmes with the Phare access programme for the CCEE. The Phare access programme aimed at strengthening civil society and at preparing for accession the candidate CCEE. It was in operation in 1999-2002 with the total budget of about 20 million euros. 2003 was the final programming year of the Phare programme for the new member states, but contracting of projects continued up till 2005 (Phare 2006). In conjunction with the multi-country programmes, also implemented were the Phare national Civil Society programmes but these were implemented only in six countries. Lithuania was the only country in the Baltic states included in the latter programmes and received 0.8 million Euro. It is estimated that from the one program which was implemented in Lithuania approximately 1,000 NGOs benefited (in comparison, the Czech Republic got more

than 12 million Euro, 62,800 NGOs benefited) (Multi-Country Thematic Report 2001).

Raik (2003: 207) gives the figures on the Phare aid to Estonia stressing the fact that the aid to civil society composed only a small part of the financial assistance programmes in the country:

*Between 1993-2000, Estonian civil society received over €3 million from Phare funds. The ACCESS programme was launched in 2001 and allocated 0,9 million to Estonia. In comparison, total Phare aid to Estonia was approximately 24 million annually in 1995-2000; Estonian GDP was 5.4 billion in 2000.*

These figures are in line with the assessment of Smith (2001: 49) that the EU's 1998 budget for assisting democracy amounted to less than 1 per cent of the total aid for the CCEE. In 1997 the EU declared that the CCEE (except Slovakia) fulfilled the criterion of democracy, and this criterion further played a relatively modest role in the Eastern enlargement process (Raik 2003: 205). Since one of the main Phare's objectives was strengthening public administrations and institutions, the state institutions of the Baltic states have received much more financial assistance than civil society organizations.

What impact has the EU democracy programmes had in the CCEE and the Baltic countries? The Report on the evaluation of the Phare and Tacis democracy programme 1992-1997 states that the programme has been of considerable value for the development of democracy and civil society in the CCEE. According to the report, "it has contributed to the growth of the NGO sector in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which plays a crucial role in the process of democratization" (Phare 1997a). According to Smith (2001: 49-51), the EU's democracy programmes have improved the transparency of public administration, encouraged local democracy, and strengthened NGOs. In Estonia and Latvia the most important target has been the integration of the Russian-speaking minority into societies of the countries. Minority rights NGOs have had a clear advantage, whereas any significant support for other institutional levels and other types of civil society groups has been lacking. Youngs (2001: 364-365) also points out that the EU's democracy aid focus in the CCEE has been concentrated on the issue of minority rights. Minority rights NGOs have had a clear advantage, any signifi-

cant support for other institutional levels and other types of civil society groups has been lacking.

Wedel (1998: 86), in her turn, questions the possibility to create a democratic pluralism from the outside. In the case of the CCEE, donors were profoundly ill equipped to make choices about just who the appropriate grantees were. Many NGOs and "foundations" were set up with the only purpose to receive Western funds. Geèienē (2002) observes that the new organizations seem to be artificial: they are created from above, do not serve local communities nor represent indigenous interests. Ottaway and Chung (1999: 107), as well as Stubbs (1996) generalizing the experience of external aid to civil society make a similar conclusion that the main benefitors of such aid often are the leaders of NGOs. The EU's democracy programmes have reached mostly the highly educated people and the bigger cities where intellectual capacities are concentrated. This is why in the EU policy to help civil society in the Baltic countries one can see an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, it has been aimed to bring new inputs into the sectors, which attract a great deal of attention in the older EU states but have been neglected in the societies of the Baltic states. On the other hand, for the reason that people in the recipient countries have other value priorities, the new initiatives often seem artificial and are used only by the small circles of the elite.

Phare has provided assistance for the preparation of the CCEE integration into the EU and has focused on capacity-building in the public sector. The evaluation of the impact of the programme on domestic actors of the applicant countries could be seen from the several different perspectives. According to one point of view, the EU's democracy aid programmes have offered additional resources to exert influence for national executives at the expense of the civil society actors. On the other hand, some students underline the fact that a democratic state needs a strong and trustworthy administrative apparatus which establishes conditions for activities of civil society. As Suleiman (1999: 152) notes, a professional bureaucracy is crucial to the consolidation of the democratic process. Börzel and Risse (2004: 10) argue that institution-building can also benefit democratic institutions, while Mendelson and Glenn (2002: 5) in presenting the data on the Western assistance to democracy in the CCEE include also an assistance to administrative reform.

### Reforms and adaptation of *aquis communautaire*

Over the past 15 years, the Baltic states have undergone a transformation, which has no analogues in the Western states. The development of civil society in the Western states has been a considerably long process, and the traditions of democracy have been developing under the conditions of the market economy. Transition from dictatorship to democracy, economic reforms in transforming the economy from socialism to capitalism and a state-building in the Baltic states have been implemented concurrently (Offe's 'triple transition' (Offe 1997: 35)). Approximately since 1997, the main direction of the reforms in the Baltic countries has been determined by the requirement to implement *aquis communautaire* and to harmonize the legislation of the Baltic states and the EU. Vilpiðauskas and Nakroðis (2003: 28) have indicated that the main feature of the political development in Lithuania has been the overburdening of the agenda. In the years 1990 to 2000, the Seimas passed about 3000 legal acts, the Government adopted 14 000 resolutions, in 2000, respectively 520 laws were passed and 1516 Governmental resolutions adopted. Such an overload of the agenda was caused by both objective (first and foremost, the preparation for EU membership) and subjective circumstances. Admittedly, such a speedy establishment of institutions has not been immune to perturbation and faults. Furthermore, in order to approve such a large amount of legal acts, it is nearly impossible to carry out discussions on them in detail, evaluate the opinion of the non-governmental actors, and for the interest groups themselves it is not easy to decide what to prioritize when representing their interests. That is why the interests have been defended chaotically, following uncertain rules. These factors have reinforced the frustration of the civil society actors in the Baltic states (Spurga 2005: 141).

K. Maniokas (2000, 2003) while analyzing the impact of the EU membership negotiations on the institutional system of the CCEE, has made a conclusion that in the process of negotiations, the European Commission imposed a new methodology of enlargement. This new methodology concentrated on regulatory functions and caused the delegation of powers to non—majoritarian institutions. The Commission used its power to change the balance of power in the candidate countries on behalf of executive and judicial authorities as an alternative to political control. Such depolitization of public policy has advantaged a small circle of ac-

tors and reinforced a democratic deficit in the then candidate countries. Consequently, the role of interest groups has diminished and the actors of civil society have almost been excluded from the process of decision making. During the negotiations on EU membership, consultations were held with the interest groups, representatives of business and NGOs. These consultations in Lithuania, however, were not systematic, the most important role in them was played by the main group of negotiators (Purlys 2004). On the one hand, such a situation was more convenient to the government, and the political culture prevailing in the Baltic states has not helped to build a consensus; on the other hand, to take account of the propositions and opinions of different interest groups was quite complicated due to the complexity of the problems, the tight terms for the preparation of the position of the Baltic states and the strict requirements of the EU which the Baltic states often had simply to obey without having much opportunity for negotiation. The outcomes of the negotiations on the membership of the Baltic states in the EU have been of great importance and have determined the policy of the states in the many branches of the economy and society for a long time ahead. The important decisions made without adequate consultations with the structures of civil society have suppressed the initiative and instilled the thought that decisions are made far away in Brussels and domestic action cannot change anything.

#### **Transnational networks and interest representation at the EU level**

From the beginning of the 'Singing revolution' in the Baltic states, many organizations have sought membership in the European federations. Many NGOs, professional organizations, trade unions, business associations, political parties have joined corresponding federations of the EU. The membership has influenced the main objectives and organizational culture of the organizations. The EU has played an active role in establishing links between non-governmental actors in the Baltic states and the older member states. Some programmes have developed partnerships among NGOs across Europe (Smith 2001: 50; Phare 1997b). Thus the European tradition in many cases has determined the pattern of the organizational structure of the society.

The European Commission and the other European institutions have been paying ever greater attention to a wider involvement of civil society (European

Commission 2001). There has been hardly any activity of civil society of the Baltic states at the level of the EU before 2004. The interest groups of the Baltic states did not have any representation in Brussels before their full membership in the EU. The domestic interest groups basically have not tried to exploit European opportunities and enter into direct relations with European decision makers. In explaining this situation, a few reasons could be provided.

One reason is the character of the negotiations concerning the conditions of the joining of the EU. The prerogative to conduct the negotiations has belonged to the governments. On the other hand, the interest groups of the Baltic states have not seen the possibility of a successful lobbying in Brussels, as even for the governments to defend the position in the negotiations with the EU has been quite a difficult task. Some most influential interest groups have tried to represent their interests through associations operating at the EU level or using the opportunities of representation at the European Economic and Social Committee. The efficiency of these channels, however, has been rather limited. Because of substantially lower level of economic development, the interest groups in the Baltic states do not have sufficient resources to represent their interests at the EU level. The other factors are weak civil activity of the society, political culture which does not encourage the articulation of the interests, lack of lobbying traditions, illegal channels of influence. The Lithuanian peculiarity is obvious assessing that, for example, Lithuania is the only member of the EU, which does not have its national representative in the influential and one of the best resourced lobbyist at the EU level - the European Consumers Organization (BEUC 2006).

Anyhow, the process of integration into the EU, the changed weight centre of decision making influence the relations and configuration of stakeholders of the Baltic states. For example, it has been well understood that due to limited resources Lithuanian business associations have been able to set up in Brussels only one representative office, which could represent the interests of Lithuania, and that is why the competing business associations in Lithuania which have not yet been able to find common understanding have been forced to start deliberation on that point. This kind of activity has had, however, only a rather insignificant effect.

### **The Domestic Change as the Process of Socialization and Learning**

Börzel and Risse (2000) use a sociological institutionalist perspective to explain the process of Europeanization as the emergence of new rules, norms, practices, and structures of meaning to which member states are exposed and which they have to incorporate into their domestic structures. According to Börzel and Risse, in socialization processes actors learn to internalize new norms and rules in order to become full-fledged members of international society.

Socialization and learning constitute the basis for the development of civil society in the Baltic states and plays a major role in all four identified ways of the impact of the integration into the EU on civil society of the Baltic states.

Many students of democratization express quite a sceptical view concerning the idea of imposing democracy from abroad. Grugel (2002: 128) however argues that the success of the international aid depends on whether the transitions to democracy and capitalism count on local support and legitimacy. From this point of view, the Baltic states have been advantageous recipients. The "Singing revolutions" in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania which began in 1988 were carried out under the slogan of "returning to Europe". The striving of the three nations to join the EU has been consistent and has had a broad support in the societies. Marju Lauristin, a prominent Estonian social scientist, maintains that "Estonia's transition" amounts to a "return to Western civilisation" (Alapuro, Liikanen and Lonkila2004: 11). In addition to historical and cultural reasons, it is obvious that the authority of the EU has been based primarily on the economic success and the advanced social system of the Western European states. In the Baltic states there has been a perception that the success of the EU has been related to a democratic regime. Among domestic actors there has been a decisively broad consensus that democracy "is the only game in town" (Linz and Stepan 1996a: 15; 1996b). The transfer of values from the West to the region has been regarded as a natural process. In the words of Mischel (1999: 213), "from an Eastern, Central European or Balkan point of view Europe appears as a magnetic center which represents a higher set of values with which one should identify". The aim to join the EU has been the top priority, and democracy has been seen as the main precondition for the membership. The role of the demonstration effect in these circumstances has been significant. As Raik (2003: 225) points out, "[t]he EU has influ-

enced domestic developments largely indirectly, by shaping visions and ideas about civil society, and by conditioning civic activity and especially its relations to the state".

The survival of the democratic regime in the Baltic states should be related to the prospect of the EU membership. In 2001, 50 percent of Estonians, 51 percent of Latvians, and 59 percent of Lithuanians expressed the opinion that their country would be better governed if the current system were replaced by a return to the Communist regime, military rule, or dictatorship (Rose 2002: 42). Degutis (2004: 98) in evaluating the political culture in Lithuania argues that there are not any conditions in the country for a long time stability of a democratic regime. Opinion polls reveal that a majority of the population would remain passive if the democracy in the country would face a threat. Degutis points out however that the two conditions which make a return to the authoritarian rule hardly credible are the democratic attitudes of the political elites and the international environment. It can be stated that the EU to a great extent predetermines an international environment favourably-disposed towards the consolidation of democracy in the country, and, likewise, the perspective of the membership in the EU which has dominated the agenda of the Baltic states, anchors democratic attitudes among the political elite.

The type of the impact of the EU in this case can be conceptualized as Whitehead's "consent", especially as the aspect of the international demonstration effect of this concept (Whitehead 2001: 15-6). A distribution of public aspirations and expectations may owe much of its configuration to the operation of international demonstration effects. As Whitehead points out (2001: 24) , "[o]ne particularly striking illustration of how this may generate consent for democratization is when it is reinforced by the prospect of full membership of the EU".

The EU has encouraged the governmental institutions of the Baltic states to consult social partners and civil society. In the governance schemes proposed by the EU there was a recommendation to incorporate more participatory decision-making forums (Youngs 2001: 363). In an independent evaluation of the Phare programme in Latvia it was stated that Phare support established co-operation among social actors and "sometimes has unintended impact of engaging civil society actors in establishing new institutions" (Phare 2003a: 7). The report on Lithuania points out that the Phare projects resulted in the "transfer of EU best



practices in local development and enhancement of local skills, strengthening institutional capacity and leadership in civil society for sustainable local development partnerships" (Phare 2003b: 47).

A political culture is a mediating factor which leads to the internalization of new norms and the development of new identities (Börzel and Risse 2000: 9). A political culture and other informal institutions entail collective understandings of appropriate behavior. There has been a broad consensus among various groups of society in the Baltic states that the integration into the EU is an auspicious way of the development for economic, political, and security reasons. Due to the European moral and cultural authority and the perspective of European integration, the consequences of many political, social and economic problems in the Baltic countries have been mitigated. Antidemocratic trends have been rejected by politicians and society realizing that they would not be in line with the European tradition and would be a great obstacle when joining the EU. The value transfer, the norm diffusion and the moral pressure "to Europeanize" in these cases have been really remarkable.

The political culture in the Baltic states which is different from that in the countries of established democracy, however, has caused the impediments to internalization of new norms and rules. The role of social actors and civil society in the decision-making process has been often neglected by the governmental institutions because such a tradition has been missing for a long time and the actors of civil society have been lacking the qualification and unity to negotiate and defend their interests. E. g., following the example of the EU member states, a Tripartite Council was established in Lithuania in 1995 whereby the Government should conduct negotiations with the employers and trade unions. The Tripartite Council exists officially, but in practice it is almost non-operational (Vilpišauskas and Nakrošis 2003: 56).

## **Conclusions**

The EU has promoted the patterns of democratic governance and has been an important factor in the support of civil society actors in the Baltic countries. The demonstration effect of the EU has played a crucial role in the process of democratic consolidation in the Baltic states. Social learning and the exchange of ideas

and experiences have been an essential source for the strengthening of the NGOs and civil society actors. On the other hand, the integration into the EU has changed the balance of power on behalf of the executive authorities, caused centralization and isolation of state institutions from interest groups and grass-roots civil society. Direct, financial aid to civil society has composed only a small part of the financial assistance programmes in the region. The democracy promotion programmes have lacked a clear purpose and more specified aims.

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