
46th Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European & Eurasian Studies

On Thursday, 20 November 2014, a roundtable was held at the 46th Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European & Eurasian Studies, entitled "Conditionality and Conditions: Requirements and Realities in EU-Balkan Relations." The roundtable was chaired by Francine Friedman (Ball State University).

The first panelist, Stefano Bianchini (University of Bologna), focused on the positive conditions that had made European Union (EU) enlargement successful. He then explained why these conditions were declining and the impact of their decline. Bianchini stated that the success of conditionality depends on the will and approach of political elites to negotiations, reforms, etc. Thus, conditionality is faltering because elites are more divided now than they were previously.

Another aspect that made enlargement successful between 1995-2004 was the simultaneous deepening and widening of the EU. The larger the number of members, the more relevant are the problems related to the effectiveness of governance. The decision making mechanisms that were effective when the members states were 6 or 9 needed a significant adaptation to a prospective Union of 25-30 members. As a result, while negotiating with candidate countries, the EU outlined a pathway for strengthening the integration of member states.

This process of transformation of the EU had involved the candidate members, and the Agenda 2000 had already approved the budget, including the needs of potential new members. Furthermore a constitutional treaty project was launched and the convention that was invited to prepare the constitutional draft included, among others, all candidate countries (including Turkey). This working method encouraged candidate states to actively participate in the negotiations and bettered the conditions for strengthening conditionality.

However, the positive conditions that drove conditionality previously declined after 2005 when the referenda in France and the Netherlands rejected the constitutional treaty, thereby stopping the possibility of a more effective integration. Since then, the deepening of the EU has slowed for a variety of factors, including the economic crisis in Europe, as well as the inability of EU institutions to provide answers for the crisis or to put forward any strategies for sharing the effects of the crisis. Thus, the EU is deeply divided and seems to be concentrating on the problems of its members states in adapting to the dismal economic situation. Furthermore, the widening of the EU has slowed as well, as member states and the EU Commission began to focus on the EU absorption capacity,

postponing further enlargements to an indefinite future. On the other hand, there appears to be an increasing lack of will among the elites of the candidate states to move forward with accession plans.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) provides a good example of the problems assailing the candidate states. This is a country divided into two entities, which do not cooperate easily. The recent elections did not produce elites who were willing to end the paralysis in government. Macedonia, too, appears not to be encouraged to follow the pattern of reforms for accession to the EU, even though such a decision might have negative consequences for the future of the country. The weakening of conditionality was also demonstrated recently in reports that some elites in Great Britain favored abandoning the EU. While the results of the recent Scottish referendum were positive for the EU, as the vote was against secession, questions arise about such disgruntled European regions as Catalonia and the Basque region. Such potential partitions within European countries are not only a problem for the country itself but also for the EU--and particularly for the viability of the Euro.

Bianchini concluded by pointing out that if the surrounding context of the EU is not being supported, then conditionality is weakened and the EU loses its capacity to influence positively conditions in the candidate members. Conditions affecting the future of conditionality also affect the EU's "soft power." That no enlargement will occur until 2020 is discouraging for the future of the EU: the EU continues to concentrate on internal reforms and neglects the promises it made to the candidate members, which, in turn, weakens the EU's positive impact on the candidate members.

David Kanin (Johns Hopkins University) discussed the context of conditionality in the EU. He stated that, if the set conditions for accession to the EU were structured and consistent, there would be no need for discussion about problems of conditionality, because each candidate country would know how close it was to accession by objective measures, not by the politics of each country's situation. Kanin then discussed three elements of the context of conditionality.

1. Conditions in Europe

What is happening in the EU is anthropological. Europe is adjusting to how small it has become since 1945 and is looking for a way to remain relevant. Its role has now become to be "wise and humane," giving to humanity the gift of knowledge about how to avoid such problems as Europe suffered throughout its history like slavery, colonialism, etc. The advice given to other countries is to "do as we say, not as we did," in order to avoid the bad outcomes suffered by Europe throughout the ages.

The candidate members to the EU are now supplicants, which gives Europe some global influence still. Europe can, thus, retain its "superiority" because of its wisdom regarding ideas, culture, and justice. However, the supplicants are frustrated with the EU, because conditionality is contingent on the Balkan states understanding that the EU has a lot to offer, even while they understand that the EU has its own problems, too.

Europeans are not expressing their uncertainties publicly, even though conditions in Europe are dismal and even while they acknowledge that there are problems. The supplicants, therefore, do not know exactly what actions they must take in order to satisfy the EU. For example, does accession require that such painful steps as putting all politicians in prison in order to attain transparency be taken? The candidate members want to know if such sacrifices will result in entry into the EU? If not, these countries want to know why they should take such difficult actions.

2. Conditions of the candidate countries to the EU

In the Balkans, Serbia seems to be ahead of Montenegro in the race to accession, because the Serbs are now handling themselves competently. The Vucic-Dacic duo are very open about the recession, for example. Furthermore, regarding the Brussels 2013 deal about Kosova, the Serbs will win if they simply do not deny Kosova, while not recognizing it as an independent state either. While the EU continues to make declarative statements about the subject, Serbia does not have to resolve the Kosova problem. Serbia is also handling the Ukrainian situation well. Because Serbia is not in the EU, it is not bound to EU rules; Serbia can continue to maintain good relations with Russia, while not seeming to snub the EU regarding sanctions. Russia understands and acquiesces to this nuanced approach. A problem for Serbia, however, is the release of Vojislav Seselj by The Hague tribunal. The Croatian response as a member of the EU could possibly be to deny Serbia EU membership over Seselj's continued freedom.

3. Conditions of the conditions, i.e., how will the conditions be applied to the candidate members and to the EU members

How much does all of the above matter? The accession conditions continue to be a moving target, which confuses the supplicant states. For example, must they meet certain austerity conditions? Do the EU members even meet the conditions that the candidate members must meet? If not, how can the candidate members be expected to follow rules that the EU members themselves do not adhere to?

As a result of these three elements of the context of conditionality, it can be concluded that Europe is not as healthy now as it was previously.

Julie Mostov (Drexel University) discussed the effects of conditionality on citizens in the EU countries. She recalled that, in the early stages of the EU from the early 1990s through 2004, there was sufficient funding of programs, institutional practices and standards that citizens of EU countries enjoyed significant benefits in the fields of education, gender equality, etc. In that way, EU conditionality and enlargement benefited the common people within the EU through local government initiatives, non-profit organizations, etc.

However, the lessons and difficulties of conditionality have not been learned, especially with regard to the developing countries in the region. Thus, these countries have not learned the lessons about the importance of transparency, of setting appropriate conditions to be fulfilled, of looking at the implications of their policies. By 2004, ordinary people saw that conditionality was not benefiting them. While money might be allocated by the EU for programs to benefit ordinary people, the funds rarely reached the target populations, because they could not meet the conditions tied to that allocation. This was often because the target governments had no interest in meeting these

conditions, and NGOs were not considered by the EU as proper, or honest, partners to ensure that the programs were implemented. Furthermore, elites could highlight difficult conditions that they had to implement in order to receive the funding, and then not reach other goals either, such as equality of gender or minorities. Thus, in effect, the governmental elites were gaining by their rhetoric of conditionality, but the ordinary people were receiving little to no benefits.

This situation is becoming worse every day. Common people know that the EU does not have enough money anymore to devote to infrastructure, universities, and other programs that would make life easier and more productive. They also believe that conditionality now focuses more on superficial, cosmetic issues and on scoring rhetorical points to the detriment of the ordinary people. For example, Russia is taking advantage of Serbia, but the politicians continue to play their games and ignore the situation of their constituents. In this way, conditionality has become a screen for politicians, but it has less benefits for the people.

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