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**The new social reality of the  
EUROPEANS**

**A constructivist view over Europeanization**

**LETRAS**

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## Introduction

The way Europe behaved over the last 70 years has shown a face of it that no one thought it had after countless centuries of conquests, crusades, and wars. We believe that this change in behavior is a result of the World War II, which motivated the European states to mobilize and overcome the post-war crisis through a common effort. This effort required many compromises in international relations, which led to the formation of the European Steel and Coal Community (ECSC). Established after the Shuman Declaration in 1951 at the Paris Treaties, the ECSC was the first supranational organization founded to deal with political pressure between countries with major interests in the Ruhr basin: France and West Germany.

Later, the successful cooperation within the ECSC stimulated the formation of two other European Communities: The European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC) and the European Economic Community (EEC). Thus, at that time Europe was endowed with 3 communities working to achieve the same goal: the unification of the European nations, overcoming internal conflicts on the continent and supporting a harmonious development of the Europeans.

As a result of the successful cooperation between all the members, which achieved a high level of economic prosperity, in 1965, the activity of the 3 communities led to the unification of their Commissions and Councils into a single Commission and a

single Council. This decision was an important step towards the formation of a supranational structure (European Parliament, 2020).

Gradually, these communities grew, and their collaboration expanded from the economic to the political domain and further to the formulation of common policies, etc. All these changes led to the final step in building the European Union, namely the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, which is the basic act of the formation of the Union.

The foundation of the European Union was a proof of a fruitful cooperation of the states from the Western Europe, which motivated the other European countries to join the organization.

Accession to the Union has been and still is a difficult process. As the economy within the EU is well balanced, the membership comes with several conditions, especially in the field of justice, national legislation, internal market, etc. which must be aligned with the Union standards. All these conditions trigger changes that were initially attributed to the European integration process because it was believed that the incorporation of values, ideas, principles, regulations, etc. of the European Union was stimulated by the states desire to be part of the Union. But defining integration as a process in which one is able to follow the habits of a group before and after becoming a member (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020) has raised a question about the states that are going through a process of change but are not or do not intend to be members of the Union. Thus, we wonder if these changes were related to the existence of another process, different from the European integration one, namely Europeanization.

The Europeanization term did not appear until 1990. Its definition was based only on the knowledge of that time. For this

reason, at first it used to be confused with terms such as globalization, European integration, modernization, or Americanization. We come to find more systematic definitions of Europeanization in the 2000s, which described it in different ways. But this made it impossible to agree on a single definition, except for the fact that Europeanization is a process of change. However, the differences we find in those definitions highlight aspects of Europeanization that if put together, form a clearer picture of the concept. Following this logic, we came to identify the major areas of influence of Europeanization, like politics, policies, and policy, i.e., each area of political governance. Thus, through the Europeanization of these fields we finally reach a Europeanized society.

If we define Europeanization as a process of change, largely at the national level, under the influence, recommendation, and pressure of the European Union, then we understand that the ideas, values, projections, and models of the EU become the basis of a society that by continuing this process encourages the idealization and normalization of these values, rules, principles, and laws based on which policies have been built and the behavior of the whole society has been designed. These observations underline the fact that Europeanization became a new social reality, which influences our daily lives.

To understand Europeanization many authors chose to study the process in the EU member states due to the ease it can be observed in this area. But there are authors such as Schneider (2010), Schimmelfennig (2012), Džankić, Keil and Kmezić (2019), that focused their research on countries outside the EU, believing that Europeanization was present there too as a result of communicating with the EU.

In the late 1990s, most authors agreed that the changes in various fields within national states at the recommendation and pressure of the European Union were related to this new process called Europeanization. A few years later, the authors studying the process outside the EU agreed that Europeanization is a process present even in those countries that are not in the EU or do not pursue the EU membership.

All these observations brought new perspectives and research directions for Europeanization. Some research aimed to identify the mechanisms of Europeanization by studying Europeanizing countries outside the EU, while others continued to deepen the knowledge by analyzing this process within the Union.

Given the need to understand Europeanization and its role in defining the social reality of the Europeans we decided to focus on a new approach to Europeanization.

We started this book from the idea that Europeanization is a process so common in Europe that it became a new social reality. To test this assumption and to verify if Europeanization is indeed a new objective social reality, we chose to focus on the case of Romania.

A first step in this research is the analysis of the Europeanization of the Romanian Competition Council (RCC) since its appearance, as a model of Europeanization of the national institutions. We observe the impact of Europeanization on its way of working, its level of efficiency and transparency from 1996 to 2018, the staff training, etc.

From the beginning we chose to focus on the Romanian Competition Council because of the close relationship it has with the EU unlike other national institutions, and this aspect we believe helped us to easily observe how Europeanization came to

be a new social reality and how it settled in the Romanian society. From a certain point of view, the Romanian Competition Council is a result of Europeanization of the Romanian society, which, since its inception, got to embrace Europeanization because of continuously reporting and adapting to the EU standards, laws, values and ideas, which transformed the process of change under EU pressure and recommendations in a normality.

This change of values, ideas, norms, principles and 'ways of doing things' has gradually passed from institutions, such as the Romanian Competition Council, to the society. We believe that the transition was ensured by the activity of the Europeanized institutions and the national ones, including the RCC, that transmitted to citizens the ideas, values, and rules of the Union in order to comply themselves with Europeanization.

To verify these beliefs, to understand if Europeanization is a new social reality of the European society and how it settled in the national states, we divide our research into two parts. At first, we measure the changes associated with Europeanization in the field of competition in Romania by using:

- a positivist quantitative methodology, which helps counting national laws that refer to or derive from EU legislation, ideas, values, or rules. In parallel, we count the infringement procedures that Romania had in the field of competition.
- a social constructionist qualitative methodology, which helps us measure the results of Europeanization by averaging the RCC employees evaluations regarding the RCC efficiency in the application of the European competition policy. This way of looking at reality gives us the possibility to understand if Europeanization is perceived in a similar way by the employees of the Competition Council.

Towards the end of the book, we use the social constructionist perspective to study the role of the Competition Council in the Europeanization of other national institutions and of the Romanian society. Throughout this analysis we pay special attention to the mechanisms responsible for the settlement of Europeanization and the role of the Romanian Competition Council in catalyzing the process and disseminating EU values, ideas, and rules in Romania and beyond its borders.

### **The European context**

The European society developed and changed. Different from other types of organization it had before and the daily reality it lived, in the 21st century it reached a new level of development characterized by new processes, different working structures, other institutions, and all this since its transition to a new way of social organization, the formation of a totally new international actor - the European Union.

Although many saw this construct as nothing more than an international organization, those with a federal heart believe that Europe is finally getting closer to the idea of a United Europe, a federal Europe. This is because the political process characterizes a certain transfer of power from the nation states to the Union. With all this, the nationalists strongly argue that this is not a federation but a new form of international cooperation which brings advantages to each participant country and to the whole region. While each perspective seems right when looking at certain facts, the whole reality cannot be explained by these approaches separately. Thus, to explain and understand the European society of the 21st century we sustain the idea that the

way Europe looks describes a new social construct, invented by society in order to change the political order after World War II.

Because politics, ethnicity and religion are some of the things that make us different, they have been the main protagonists in triggering both social division and conflict. Considering this, the new social organization was meant to overcome these subjects that divided Europe, and to invent new values, ideas and principles on which society could organize and coexist. In this direction a new set of values was formulated, focused on social interests and common good, such as: equality, diversity, minority rights, etc. They were strengthened with a set of rights, to ensure the well-being and a peaceful development of society, on which all future policies were to be based.

The creation of these values came with the foundation and functioning of the European Communities which started a new process - a process of change which many authors call Europeanization. This process is continuous, it keeps going, and describes continuous change of the member states of the Communities and later of the EU, under the pressure or at the recommendation of the supranational structure.

This process has been analyzed from different perspectives, but there is a strong inclination of the existing studies on using the European integration theories more often, especially the neo-functional approach. Although the research brings novelty in any form, the use of the same perspectives leads to the same ways of thinking and brings similar results. For this reason, there is a need for new approaches in the study of Europeanization. Besides that, few of these theories explain pieces of social reality. So, to understand the present and project the future, we are interested in another approach to the reality of the European society.

With this in mind, we decided to focus on studying what is the role of Europeanization in defining the daily reality of the European citizens. Many of the Europeanization studies have focused on analyzing the impact of Europeanization on social constructs and not on society as the main actor which in the context of the XXI century has a tremendous role in reformulating and improving reality. In this context, it is necessary to approach Europeanization from a perspective that allows us to understand how Europeanization came to influence Europe and the daily reality of Europeans.

Considering the theories of Europeanization and the social research paradigms, we initiate our path towards understanding Europeanization by approaching it through a different angle that would contribute not only to building a different vision of the process but also to a different understanding of the European society in the 21st century.

### **The Romanian context**

The historical evolution of Romania shows a major change of the Romanian society since it came to interact more with the European Union. Romania made serious steps towards approaching the new Europe since 1989, when the communist regime was replaced by a democratic one. Since, in a fairly short time, Romania managed to meet the necessary conditions for becoming a member of the Union. In 2007 Romanian got the EU membership, and this way it proved that it managed to comply with the European standards and that it assumed to do so in the upcoming years.

The EU demands and pressures for change are addressed to the existing members, but also to those countries seeking membership.

So, to ensure a balance within the Union, all member countries live a reality they agreed too, one in which the EU formulates new policies, rules and laws according to the principles and values it promotes since its inception.

Although Romania complied quite fast with the European standards for the EU membership, as any change requires time, the replacement of communist practices with democratic ones took Romania some time<sup>1</sup> (Sotiropoulos and Pop, 2007). Nevertheless, Romania's first step towards approaching the European Union was to leave behind the dictatorial regime. Then, by dialogue, small changes were triggered, which represented domino pieces in a series of changes that Romania began to make with the intention of accessing the EU membership and integrating in the Union.

Since joining the EU, Romania proved to be a serious member, which sustained the EU initiatives all along unlike other countries in the region such as Poland, Hungary and others that have shown a high degree of Euro-skepticism. The Romanian evolution as a member of the EU with such a low resistance to the changes recommended by the EU, highlights its role as a faithful member of the Union, which highly embraced this new lifestyle in which it permanently reports its activity to the EU ideas, rules, principles, and ways of working.

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<sup>1</sup> The political, judicial, social, administrative system Romania had between 1965 and 1989 represented a boundary of the Romanian people to take the path of development the Western states did. Its development was strongly encouraged by "foreign governments, consultancy firms, NGOs, and the EU. The EU is sustaining Romania and providing the necessary guidance for change for framework legislation in the field of social policy". See Sotiropoulos D., Pop L. 2007. "Bulgaria and Romania" in "Social Policy and International Intervention in southeast Europe" by Deacon B., Stubbs P., Published by Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, Montpellier.

During Romania's path towards a new lifestyle, the EU has shown a major involvement. It all started with recommendations and all kind of help for building different structures at the national level, like the Romanian Competition Council.

Since its appearance, the Romanian Competition Council went through different changes, like its gain of power in the decision making, the gain of additional rights for involvement in the management of the national market, etc. Thus, RCC emerged as an institution under the influence of Europeanization, it changed to comply with Europeanization, but also it is an engine of Europeanization. A confirmation of its alignment with the EU was observed since 2013 by Italianer who sustained that the Romanian Competition Council was "in line with the EU model that helped to foster competition in the country. The Council is in permanent dialogue with the European Commission being committed to a well-functioning European Competition Network and permanent contribution to encourage the competition project to deploy its full potential" (Italianer, 2013, pp. 3-5).

This surface analysis suggests that from the beginning of this study we expect Romania and the Romanian Competition Council to have embraced Europeanization as a new social reality and disseminate it to the societies in its vicinity.

With this in mind, the present book concludes that Europeanization is a new objective social reality and that most Europeans perceive it the same way. In our way to find that, we understood that many national institutions appeared as a result of Europeanization, like the Romanian Competition Council, and that they became catalysts of the Europeanization only after they highly conformed to the new social reality. In this story, it is important to highlight that communication, socialization and