Why No Backsliding?

The EU's Impact on Democracy and Governance Before and After Accession

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Abstract:

This paper documents and explains the puzzling lack of backsliding in political reforms among the new post-communist EU members, even though these countries are no longer subject to the powerful incentives of the EU membership promise. Using a combination of cross-national statistics, expert interviews, and public opinion data, we show that the new EU members have experienced at most a slowdown in reforms, rather than a genuine backlash. We attribute this finding to the fact that the loss of leverage after the countries joined the EU was balanced by a combination of alternative leverage and linkage mechanisms, including greater dependence on EU aid and trade, and greater exposure to the West for both elites and ordinary citizens. For the latter, expanded work and travel opportunities seem to be associated with higher expectations of government performance and greater political involvement, which may be crucial for future governance reform in the region.

It is now widely accepted that international factors played an important role in supporting democratization and democratic consolidation in the post-communist democracies of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Among the most important of these international forces was the European Union (EU), which used the strong incentive of membership and a system of democratic conditionality[i] to encourage political changes including the isolation of populist, nationalist, and other anti-democratic forces (Vachudova, 2004; Pop-Eleches, 2007a; Schimmelfennig, 2007), strengthened administrative capacity (Dimitrova, 2002), and minority protections (Kelley, 2006).

In 2004, the first eight post-communist CEE countries joined the EU, and Bulgaria and Romania followed in 2007. Given the prominence of EU accession incentives in driving the initial reforms, the logical follow-up question is what happens once EU leverage loses its bite in the post-accession period. Having achieved the end goal of "returning to Europe" by joining the EU, the new CEE EU members no longer have the same incentives to implement reforms. To the extent that EU enlargement conditions rather than domestic pressures were the key drivers of pre-accession reforms, the removal of the pre-membership conditionality can be reasonably expected to lead to a certain political backlash afterward. Such backsliding is a particular concern because the EU mechanisms for sanctioning members that violate EU democratic principles are relatively weak.[ii]

The extent and nature of post-accession backsliding is important for several reasons. In theoretical terms it may help disentangle the complicated interaction between domestic and international drivers of post-communist democratic reforms and the mechanisms through which external influence affects domestic policy choices. In practical terms, the post-accession political trajectory of the new EU members is important both in its direct impact on the lives of citizens in CEE and for the optimal design of EU conditionality for future enlargement waves.

Not surprisingly, therefore, backsliding has already received a fair amount of attention from policy analysts and policymakers. Freedom House's 2007 Nations in Transit (NIT) report proclaimed political backsliding in Eastern Europe, pointing to cases such as the Kaczyński twins' administration in Poland, the inclusion of far-right, nationalist parties in the Slovak governing coalition, and the 2006 riots in Hungary. The U.S. House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing in the summer of 2007 in which expert witnesses expressed similar concerns (e.g. Gati, 2007).

The issue has also been addressed by a small but growing number of academic studies, which have so far provided mixed results. A special issue of the *Journal of Democracy* in October 2007 asked a number of leading scholars of Eastern European politics whether CEE was backsliding. Most suggested that it was in some way or another, and some pointed to EU accession as an important reason for the change. Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2007) expressed the view of several of the issue's authors in pointing out that populism, nationalism, and other challenges to democracy and political stability do not end with accession. Jacques Rupnick (2007) noted a populist backlash against accession in much of the region, but did not expect it to go too far, since CEE countries are now embedded in the EU.

More recent studies also suggest a mixed post-accession picture: Pridham (2007, 2008) identified a number of problems in his case studies of Latvia, Slovakia, and Romania, but saw no clear evidence of backsliding. Falkner and Treib (2008) found that the pattern of non-compliance with EU law in the new post-communist member states fit a pattern similar to that of some existing members, and showed few signs of a *sui generis* reaction to any pre-accession overstretch. Sedelmeier (2008) even argued that compliance with EU law in the post-enlargement period was in fact stronger in the new members than in the old members.

Vachudova (2008) considered the possibility of a resurgence of extreme parties after accession, but found that these parties have so far made only modest gains.

Nonetheless, to date there has been no systematic, cross-national analysis of the potential backsliding phenomenon and the democracy and governance implications of the end of EU accession conditionality more broadly. While the empirical evidence of the first four years of membership is admittedly limited, it allows for a preliminary analysis of the post-accession political trajectory of the new EU members. This paper thus takes a step in this direction by testing the pre- and post-accession impact of the EU on several dimensions of post-communist democracy and governance.

The analysis first considers the statistical evidence for backsliding, by utilizing time-series regression to identify patterns in a number of democracy and governance measures from Freedom House, Nations in Transit, and the World Bank from the start of the post-communist transitions through the post-accession period. Next, we expand the statistical analysis to test the various mechanisms of EU integration influence, and help explain the pre- and post-accession reform trajectories identified earlier in the paper. Finally, we consider evidence from a number of interviews with leading policy-makers involved in the EU enlargement process and democratic reforms in CEE,[iii] and data from a recent Bulgarian public opinion survey about the domestic political implications of European integration.

We find that while post-accession reforms have slowed down for some governance aspects, there is no systematic evidence of post-accession backsliding among the new CEE member states, except for somewhat greater political instability. The findings also suggest that the loss of leverage due to the end of EU enlargement conditionality has been largely counterbalanced by the strong financial incentives of conditional EU funding to new member

countries and by the increased linkage with the EU that has strengthened socialization mechanisms and peer pressure to conform to the norms of the European "club."

Theoretical framework

To evaluate the reform impact of pre-accession EU conditionality and the potential for (and reality of) post-accession backlash, we have to address two crucial theoretical questions. First, in line with an older debate about the relative role of domestic versus international drivers of post-communist democratization (Kopstein & Reilly, 2000; Kurtz & Barnes, 2002; Vachudova, 2005; Pop-Eleches, 2007b), we need to establish the parameters of the domestic environment within which these political reforms took place. While the counterfactual of what post-1989 CEE politics would have looked like in the absence of EU influence obviously lies in the realm of speculation, we nevertheless have to establish a domestic baseline against which the EU integration impact can be measured.

This step is important for at least two reasons: first, these domestic conditions provide a benchmark for assessing to what extent pre-accession reforms were more ambitious than what we would have expected in the absence of EU conditionality and to what extent the post-accession performance qualifies as backsliding. Second, the temporal and geographic dynamics of post-communist political reforms pose significant methodological challenges for evaluating the EU impact both because EU integration happened in parallel to the region's fundamental political transformation following the collapse of communism, and because EU integration incentives were strongest in the countries whose domestic historical legacies were most promising for democratization. Therefore, it is conceivable that the significant democratic reform achievements of the new EU member states could be due largely to spurious correlation rather than a causal link between integration incentives and reforms.

To establish a comparative framework against which to judge the impact of EU integration incentives, we need to identify the relevant reference group against which to compare the trajectory of the new member states. Along with much of the cross-national literature on the subject, we chose the twenty-eight post-communist countries as our case universe, since doing so allows us to compare the reform achievements of the EU candidates to those of their former comrades undergoing the complicated post-communist transition without the benefit of comparable integration incentives. Given the long half-life of developmental differences (Janos, 2000) and their significant impact on post-communist politics (Darden & Grzymala-Busse, 2006; Pop-Eleches 2007b), our analysis attempts to capture the wide range of historical differences that separated the transition countries at the outset of reforms, despite their shared communist past. These differences, which are both temporally and theoretically prior to European integration incentives, include variations in socio-economic development, ethnic diversity, statehood experience, and cultural/religious heritage, and the length and intensity of communist rule.

Next, we need a better theoretical understanding of the mechanisms through which EU integration affected CEE democratization and governance reforms. The most prominent theme in the literature on the EU's political impact in post-communist democratic transitions in CEE is the importance of EU leverage (e.g., Grabbe, 2006; Kelley, 2004; Pridham, 2005; Vachudova, 2005). Even if most fundamental democratic institutions were in place earlier, most observers agree that it took the concrete *acquis* conditionality since the late 1990s to implement many important political reforms (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005; Vachudova, 2005; Kelley, 2004). In other words, the EU leverage inherent in the incentives of an increasingly coherent system of democratic conditionality drove a process of internal rule adoption by CEE governments on the basis of rational analysis of the costs and benefits of EU integration.

This brings us back to the question of the consequences of the end of EU democratic conditionality after accession. From a leverage perspective, since many EU laws were transposed but not effectively implemented in CEE, there are reasons to expect post-accession backsliding in political reforms, since the EU has lost one of the key sources of leverage over the CEE countries compared to the candidacy period. Without the membership incentive working to keep them in check, adoption costs, veto players, and resonance may become more powerful counter-forces to reform (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005).

However, when evaluating the political impact of European integration, we also need to consider a second aspect: the growing linkage between Western and Eastern Europe. While the role of cross-national linkages is not new in political science, it has only been applied relatively recently in the literature on post-communist reforms. Thus, Kopstein and Reilly (2000) demonstrated the importance of cross-border diffusion in economic and political reforms. Way and Levitsky (2007) argued that linkage, which they define as "the density of ties (economic, geographic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people, and information) between particular countries," is a critical complement to leverage in determining post-communist reform trajectories.

From a linkage perspective, the faster reform progress in CEE countries is less the result of EU leverage over applicant countries than a by-product of the closer ties between the countries of the Western tier of the former Soviet bloc and advanced Western democracies. These dense ties help promote the diffusion of democratic norms and practices at both the mass and the elite level. Since such linkages are likely to increase after EU accession, a linkage perspective suggests that the incomplete political transformations in the region do not have to be undermined by the end of accession conditionality after all. In interviews with policymakers at

the EU and in the new member states, there was wide agreement that, after accession, there is a sense of being part of the EU "club" and feeling required to adhere to the expectations of that club. A number of Commission officials called it a kind of "peer pressure" which determines political elites to adjust their behavior to avoid the embarrassment of being singled out as reform laggards in their interactions with their Western counterparts. This process operates not only at the elite level, but also at the level of the general populace. As more citizens in the new member states have the experience of working, studying, or traveling in Western Europe, they may be more likely to support a politics back home that fits the European mold and to make greater demands on their governments to reduce corruption and establish the rule of law.

Statistical evidence

To test the theoretical predictions discussed in the preceding sections, we analyze the democratic and governance reform patterns of the ex-communist countries since the start of the transition. First, let us briefly establish the scope of the present analysis: while EU integration has obviously affected a broad range of economic, political and social outcomes in the last two decades, for the present analysis we will focus on a somewhat narrower set of policies, namely the extent to which ex-communist countries have made progress towards achieving democratic governance. At the most basic level, democratic governance requires a reasonably open and competitive political process, which provides citizens with sufficient political rights and civil liberties to make meaningful political choices, and then aggregates these choices in such a way that elected officials are broadly representative of the popular will. To capture this minimalist aspect of democracy, we rely primarily on the *Freedom House* (FH) score for political rights and civil liberties, as well as on two comparable indicators *Electoral Process* from Nations in Transit (NIT) and *Voice and Accountability* from the World Bank (WB).[iv] Since basic democratic rights

are a precondition for serious EU integration progress, we expect significant early progress among EU-hopefuls, followed by more gradual later improvements under direct EU conditionality pressure.[v]

While free and fair elections represent an important starting point, democratic governance also requires that elected officials can form a sufficiently stable government, which can exercise political authority over its citizens. To capture this second requirement, we used the *WB Political Stability and Absence of Violence* indicator, which captures the likelihood that governments will be destabilized or overthrown by violent means. While political stability is not technically part of EU conditionality, it is an important precondition for effective governance, and the frequent pre-accession calls for political unity in the name of the shared goal of EU integration suggest that these previously masked political tensions could erupt after accession.

Beyond the requirements of a reasonably stable, democratically elected government, effective democratic governance requires a series of additional elements that are captured (albeit imperfectly) by several additional World Bank and Nations in Transit indicators: first, public officials need to be capable of passing the legal framework necessary for liberal democratic rule, an aspect captured by the *NIT Judicial Framework and Independence* indicator. While the ability to adopt such legislation played an important role in the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, the crucial challenges for most transition countries arguably came at the implementation stage both before and after accession (Falkner and Treib, 2008). Therefore, we used the *WB Government Effectiveness* indicator, which attempts to measure a range of governance-related phenomena, including civil service quality and independence, and the quality of policy formulation and implementation. Finally, we considered two additional aspects of governance measured by the World Bank—*Rule of Law* and *Control of Corruption*—which represent some

of the most difficult challenges faced by all transition countries and have figured prominently on the agenda of EU accession conditionality.

Table 1 here

As a first step, let us briefly review the broad temporal trends in these democracy and governance indicators at different stages of the EU integration process. Table 1 presents the mean annual change in governance scores for credible EU candidates[vi] during three periods: (1) pre-candidacy, (2) candidacy, and (3) the post-accession period. The dummy variables for these three periods include no overlapping years. For comparison, we also included the mean change in non-candidate ex-communist countries before and after 2004.

Judging by simple averages, Table 1 provides modest support for the post-accession backsliding hypothesis. Thus, in terms of basic democratic rights, the fairly large post-accession improvement in FH democracy scores is balanced by substantively modest declines in *NIT Electoral Process* and *WB Voice and Accountability* scores.[vii] While post-accession changes in other governance dimensions were indeed negative, the reform progress in the new EU members showed no statistically significant difference from non-candidates during the same time period, which suggests that these countries are not backsliding relative to their post-communist peers. The only more notable deterioration occurred with respect to *Political Stability*, which seems to confirm the hypothesis that pent-up tensions suppressed before accession may have led to disproportionate political instability after accession. While falling short of genuine backsliding, this performance does suggest a certain reform slowdown among the new EU members, especially compared to the much faster progress in the pre-accession period; indeed, compared to their performance during their EU candidacy period, the new CEE EU members not only experienced a statistically significant deterioration of *Political Stability*, but also a significant slowdown in *Government Effectiveness* and *Control of Corruption.*

However, such simple comparisons are ultimately limited in their explanatory power. These limitations are illustrated by the fact that, according to Table 1, it appears that the greatest progress during the pre-accession period was achieved during the pre-candidacy period, i.e. before the onset of consistent EU conditionality. While such a finding may be credible in the case of basic democratic rights, it is more questionable for governance scores, which figured prominently on the EU conditionality agenda. Moreover, comparing averages is problematic because it ignores the important temporal dimension of post-communist political reforms (e.g. the fact that one might expect greater leaps in the immediate post-communist period followed by subsequent incremental change or even reversals), as well as the important legacy difference between credible candidates and other transition countries.

Thus, we turned to time-series cross-sectional regression analysis of the drivers of post-communist democratic and governance reforms in the 28 transition countries between 1990 and 2007.[viii] Since we are interested in the reform progress in a given year, the dependent variables for the regressions are the annual changes in the democracy and governance indicators discussed above. The main independent variables are the two pre-accession and one post-accession dummy variables described above, while the excluded category is non-candidate transition countries.[ix] In line with the theoretical discussion, the regressions included several historical legacy variables, including urbanization, energy intensity, statehood history, minorities' population share, religious heritage, and pre-war membership in the Soviet Union.[x] Finally, to account for the fact that the prospects for further change are affected by temporal considerations and prior reform progress, the regressions include a transition year variable and the absolute level of a given democratic performance variable for the previous year.[xi]

Table 2 here

The statistical results in Table 2 indicate that once we control for historical legacies, temporal trends, and prior reform levels, there is even less evidence of post-accession backsliding. Instead, even after the end of EU accession conditionality, the new EU members significantly outperformed their ex-communist neighbors with respect to political and civil rights (model 1), electoral process (model 3), government effectiveness (model 6) and corruption control (model 8), whereas with respect to the remaining democracy and governance indicators the post-accession effects were still positive but failed to reach statistical significance.

However, with the notable exception of FH democracy scores, the generally smaller size and weaker statistical significance of the post-accession variable suggests a certain slowdown in the pace of reform progress, especially with respect to *voice and accountability* (model 2), *rule of law* (model 7), and *corruption control* (model 8). Therefore, rather than backsliding, the more appropriate metaphor for post-accession reform patterns is "coasting along." The only negative regression coefficient for post-accession status is with respect to political stability in model 4 and thereby confirms (albeit inconclusively given the modest statistical significance) the greater political upheavals of the post-accession period.

What about the evidence for the pre-accession reform impact of EU conditionality? The indicators for the pre-accession dummy are consistently positive but their statistical significance is uneven. It is worth noting, however, that the relative patterns of influence vary in systematic ways across different dimensions of democratic governance. With respect to the democratic rights indicators in models 1-3, the impact of the EU membership promise was stronger prior to accession negotiations, which confirms that, to the extent that the EU had an impact on the adoption of basic democratic principles, it was primarily because CEE political leaders were aware that such norms were a prerequisite for their countries' serious consideration as EU

applicants. The EU's impact on political stability was positive but fairly modest and failed to reach statistical significance, which confirms the anecdotal evidence that EU membership incentives were not always sufficiently powerful for politicians to overcome their partisan differences in a non-conflictual manner.

Even more surprisingly, none of the EU candidate status variables in model 5 were statistically significant predictors of the judicial framework indicator. While these results need to be interpreted with some caution—since the indicator captures both the quality of the legal and constitutional framework and judicial independence—they nevertheless run counter to the conventional wisdom whereby CEE countries were eager to adopt EU-mandated laws but fell short at the implementation stage (Falkner and Treib, 2008). By contrast, the quality of governance indicators in models 7-9 suggest a more consistent positive impact of EU conditionality not only in preparation for accession negotiations, but particularly during these negotiations, and thereby confirms the importance of the EU application process in getting CEE countries to implement governance reforms that go beyond what we would have predicted from a domestic legacy perspective.

It should be noted, however, that the regressions in Table 2 may overstate the impact of EU conditionality on post-communist political reforms because they essentially ignore the fact that EU candidacy is not an exogenous treatment applied randomly to some transition countries, but rather reflects the EU's confidence that some countries (and not others) have the potential to fulfill the EU political and institutional standards. From this perspective, greater reform progress among EU candidates may be due to the EU's ability to pick the countries with the best domestic reform conditions rather than its ability to persuade countries to adopt reforms they would not have otherwise chosen. Answering these questions conclusively in a cross-national statistical

framework requires the use of two-stage-least-squares (2SLS) regressions, which in turn require finding instrumental variables that drive EU candidacy but not political reforms. Once we take into account endogeneity, the statistical results suggest a much weaker causal impact of EU conditionality, especially for the governance indicators.[xii] However, the results with respect to post-accession performance are not affected by using the 2SLS procedure, and further confirm that there is no systematic evidence of political backsliding in the new CEE EU members.

Overall, the evidence presented in this section provides little support for the basic theoretical assumption of the backsliding argument, whereby new EU members would use their new-found freedom to push back against the external imposed reforms of the pre-accession period. Thus, even though the post-accession period did exhibit a slowdown in the pace of reforms, there is no evidence of backsliding for any of the basic democratic rights or quality of governance indicators. Even more importantly, the strongest post-accession performance occurred precisely in those areas—government effectiveness, FH civil and political rights, and to a lesser extent corruption control—where we should have expected to see the greatest potential for backsliding given the stronger relative effect of EU conditionality prior to accession. In other words, with the partial exception of the rule of law, it appears that the new CEE EU members continue to outperform their post-communist neighbors primarily in those areas targeted most effectively by pre-accession conditionality. To understand why this may be the case, we now turn to a closer examination of some of the mechanisms through which European integration affected institutional and policy choice in CEE countries both before and after accession.

Channels of European integration influence

To understand why the expected post-accession backsliding has so far largely failed to materialize, we need to understand in greater detail the channels through which the EU affects

the politics of CEE countries. The backsliding argument relies on the powerful incentives of EU membership prospects for Eastern European applicants. This logic is justified by the significant economic, political and psychological stakes of EU membership for the CEE applicants, and by the significant leverage inherent in the asymmetric power relations of the EU application process. The fact that the removal of this powerful incentive has not resulted in significant post-accession backsliding raises an important theoretical and empirical question about the role of alternative international drivers of democratic reforms which are related to European integration, but are nevertheless distinct from the narrower question of EU membership.

In line with the earlier theoretical discussion, in this section we analyze how alternative sources of leverage and linkage complemented the EU membership incentives during the pre-accession period, and may help account for the surprising resilience of democratic and governance progress after accession. Due to space constraints and limited data availability, our discussion focuses on only a few such additional factors, but the overall approach may be worth pursuing further in future research. The basic idea is that since the impact of the EU membership incentives is difficult to measure in an objective fashion, we can treat it as a residual category and try to identify to what extent alternative channels of influence can account for the democratic governance "surplus" of credible EU candidates at various stages of the application process as well as after accession. In statistical terms this means testing whether indicators for alternative channels of influence are (1) significant predictors of reform progress and (2) whether their inclusion in the regression models reduces the magnitude and statistical significance of the EU accession status dummy variables.

Given the scarcity of cross-nationally comparable statistical data with a reasonable temporal coverage for many of the potentially interesting indicators,[xiii] our analysis relies on four

indicators of leverage and/or linkage that are related to European integration but are distinct from EU membership. First, in line with arguments about the role of EU funding as a source of leverage over existing member states, we use an indicator of the amount of aid from the European Commission obtained by a country in the preceding year to test the impact of such financial incentives on the adoption of democratic reforms. Since such leverage primarily affects the government, we would expect its impact to be the strongest on those aspects of democratic governance over which the national government has the greatest influence. While the nature of EU funding shifts after accession, greater dependence on EU funding should nevertheless continue to promote governance reforms in the new members. This is most clearly the case in Bulgaria and Romania, whose accession treaties included safeguard clauses allowing for a freeze EU funding in the case of governance shortcomings, but it arguably applies to all new members given the strong link between governance and absorptive capacity of EU funds.

Second, earlier studies have identified trade openness as a potential channel of policy diffusion (Kopstein and Reilly, 2000). Since European integration usually leads to greater trade reorientation towards the EU, we tested the role of trade dependence on the EU as a potential channel through which EU integration promotes governance reforms.

Finally, European integration also means increasing linkage between old and new EU countries, which is reflected in the greater access of CEE citizens to Western Europe through a variety of channels, including travel, work and mass media exposure, which may contribute to the diffusion of democratic norms and values. For the purpose of this analysis, we used an indicator of the annual number of international tourist departures from a given country, and we expect that greater travel opportunities will primarily affect those areas of governance where citizen behavior has a greater direct impact, such as rule of law and corruption.[xiv] Since cross-

nationally comparable time-series data on labor migration from ex-communist countries to EU-15 countries do not exist, we are using the most-recent estimates from the World Bank bilateral migration matrix to estimate the stock of migrants from a given post-communist country in the "old" EU member states in 2005, and analyze their effect on governance changes in 2005-07.

Table 3 here

The statistical results in Table 3 confirm for the importance of these alternative linkage and leverage channels related to European integration, but distinct from EU membership conditionality itself. According to models 1 and 2, higher levels of financial assistance were associated with improvements in both FH democracy (marginally significant at .1) and government effectiveness (significant at .05), thereby confirming the role of financial leverage.[xv]

Moreover, if we compare the coefficients of the EU accession status variables in models 1 and 2 with those in models 1 and 6 of Table 2, there is a clear reduction in the size of these coefficients, suggesting that financial incentives explain at least part of the pre-accession reform "surplus." While the reduction was fairly modest for the early "potential candidate" period, it was more noticeable during the candidacy period (around 20-25%). Since structural funds from the EU are expected to increase significantly after membership, this finding suggests that the leverage of conditional EU funding is likely to fill in at least part of the leverage gap due to the end of pre-accession conditionality. However, it is worth noting that higher EU aid levels did not result in lower corruption or greater rule of law (results omitted for space reasons), which confirms research from other regions about the modest effectiveness of efforts to use foreign aid to achieve better governance in recipient countries (Knack, 2000).

We also found that strong trade ties with the EU were a positive contributor to post-communist democracy in model 3, which suggests that, at least in the post-communist context,

the economic engagement of non-democratic regimes can promote democratization. Moreover, unlike the more mixed blessing of aid, closer EU trade ties were also associated with significant progress in the fight against corruption (model 4) and even rule of law (results omitted for space reasons). However, the magnitude and statistical significance of the EU accession status variables were barely affected by the inclusion of the EU trade exposure indicator,[xvi] suggesting that, while trade matters, it does not account for better relative governance in EU candidates.

Table 3 also reveals a surprisingly strong link between international travel and democratic governance, especially for those aspects of governance where the active cooperation of individual citizens is more important, such as rule of law and corruption. Thus, according to the results in models 5 and 6, countries whose citizens traveled abroad more frequently made significantly faster progress along these two crucial dimensions of governance, especially corruption control. Even though the inclusion of the travel indicator only affected the substantive effects of the EU accession status variables in the case of corruption, these findings reveal an unexpected benefit of increased European integration through a channel which has so far received little attention and deserves greater consideration in future research.

Finally, the last two models in Table 3 indicate that, at least in recent years (from 2005-07), countries with a greater share of their citizens living in Western Europe made significantly faster progress in terms of both corruption control (model 7) and rule of law (model 8). While these findings need to be interpreted cautiously given the limitations in data coverage and quality, in conjunction with the similar results of foreign travel discussed above, they nevertheless reveal an interesting political side benefit of the increased mobility of East European citizens as a result of European integration.

These linkage-related findings were also echoed by interviewees at the European Commission and in CEE, who stressed the significance of greater mobility for democracy and governance, especially from the perspective of CEE citizens studying and working in the old member states, thanks to the EU.[xvii] Interviewees pointed to the powerful normative impact of both informal, mass-level interactions and socialization of the growing number of CEE officials interacting with counterparts in Brussels and elsewhere in the old member states. Such arguments align well with the growing literature (e.g. Checkel, 2001, 2005; Gheciu, 2005; Johnston, 2001) on the often hard to observe socialization effects of international organization, and particularly European Union, membership, through a variety of processes including social learning and what Jeffrey Checkel has called "normative suasion" (Checkel, 2005).

The effect of these interactions was especially clear, several interviewees claimed, in the 2007 elections in Poland. As the Kaczyński brothers' populist government challenged the EU consensus on a wide range of issues from homosexuality to relations with Russia, according to Pavol Demeš, director of the German Marshall Fund's CEE office, Poles came to be branded across the old member states as the Europeans with the "silly government." With some estimates suggesting that as many as two million citizens left Poland to work elsewhere in the EU since accession and a recent poll finding that 54% of all Poles have a family member who has already left,[xviii] it is clear that the potential impact is significant. The 2007 election results broadly confirmed that influence: according to Demeš, about 80% of Poles in Britain (the leading destination for Polish post-accession migration) voted against the Kaczyńskis' Euroskeptic coalition. And politicians, who understand that even a small minority of voters (e.g. voters abroad) can swing elections, are taking note. While running for Prime Minister, Civic Platform's ultimately victorious Donald Tusk took a British campaign tour. Moreover, even if we discount

the role of current diaspora voters, the temporary nature of much of the labor migration from Eastern Europe means that voters with foreign work experience account for a non-negligible and growing electoral bloc.[xix]

The benefits of Western linkage: Survey evidence from Bulgaria

The cross-national analysis presented so far suggests that the reason for the lack of genuine democratic backsliding among the new EU members is that the loss of leverage compared to the candidacy period is at least partially mitigated by other forms of leverage (e.g. through higher EU funding) and growing linkage among new and old EU members. This final section briefly presents evidence from a public opinion survey in Bulgaria, which confirms the cross-national results, and provides additional insights into the mechanisms through which Western linkage can help promote democracy and better governance in the new EU members.

The survey, which consisted of face-to-face interviews with 1200 adult Bulgarian citizens in July 2008, confirms our earlier cross-national findings that political reforms have slowed down but not been reversed in the post-accession period. Thus, when asked to evaluate the pace of post-accession reforms for the two most problematic areas – corruption and rule of law – the most common response (around 30%) was that reforms had continued but at a slower pace. The other respondents were fairly evenly split: slightly more than one-third thought that reforms had either been reversed or had stopped, while an almost identical proportion thought that reforms had continued at the same pace or even accelerated. Moreover, most Bulgarians seemed to disagree with the main premise of backsliding, given that only 8% of respondents thought that EU influence in Bulgaria had decreased since accession, and 54% actually noted an increase in EU influence.

The Bulgarian survey also offers an opportunity to test an alternative mechanism through which the greater cross-border movement of persons associated with European integration may affect democracy and governance in the new member states. Whereas the earlier discussion focused on the political influence of diaspora voters, the survey allows us to investigate how Western exposure affects the political attitudes of CEE citizens back in their country of origin. To evaluate the extent of Western exposure, we constructed an index based on four survey questions: two questions dealt with the frequency of Western travel for the respondent and his/her family members, while the other two questions established whether the respondent or someone among his/her family and friends had worked abroad.[xx]

Since we are trying to establish the impact of Western exposure on individual attitudes, the ideal empirical setup would involve panel data that measured attitudes of individuals before and after they or someone in their family traveled to or worked in the West. However, since such data are not available, our statistical tests control for the main observable characteristics that may affect the willingness and capability of Bulgarian citizens to work or travel abroad: age, education, settlement type, ethnicity, household income, an ownership index (based on ownership of nine types of consumer goods) and an affordability index (based on whether respondents can afford seven types of living expenses. Moreover, in our 2005 survey we found no significant political behavior and attitude differences between respondents expressing an interest in working abroad in the future and those who did not (as long as we controlled for prior Western exposure). This suggests that the attitudinal differences we discuss below are not due primarily to self-selection of more active and tolerant people into the labor migrant group.

Table 4 presents an overview of a number of dimensions along which Western exposure seems to influence political attitudes. First, while Western work and travel did not miraculously

convert everybody into liberal democrats, the first two models suggest that respondents with greater Western exposure were significantly more likely to agree that democracies were better than other forms of government in "choosing good leaders for office" (model 1) and "getting rid of incompetent leaders" (model 2).[xxi]

Table 4 here

Moreover, the findings in Table 4 also suggest that closer contact to Western democracies seems to have helped with Bulgarians' understanding of democracy. Thus, according to model 3, those with greater Western exposure were more likely to regard minority protection as an essential part of democracy, and model 4 reveals a similar effect with respect to the importance of "complete freedom for anyone to criticize the government." While the greater emphasis on minority rights may be partially due to the experience of being a minority in another country, the greater emphasis on being able to criticize the government suggests that the experience of Western democracies may actually foster a more assertive type of citizenship among Eastern Europeans long used to being treated as subjects rather than citizens. This greater assertiveness is further emphasized by model 5, which shows that greater Western exposure was associated with a higher likelihood of engaging in a variety of political activities, such as contacting a politician/public official, taking part in a protest or demonstration, or taking part in a strike.[xxii]

Finally, the surveys suggest an interesting mechanism for the earlier finding that greater Western travel and work rates were associated with faster corruption and rule of law progress. Given that model 6 finds no connection between Western exposure and respondents' evaluation of the pervasiveness of corruption across a range of public officials, it does not appear as though the experience of cleaner government in the West has made Bulgarians more cognizant of corruption in their own country. However, the last two models in Table 4 indicate a strong effect

of Western exposure on the likelihood that respondents were dissatisfied with their government's performance in fighting corruption (model 6) and fighting crime (model 7). In other words, Bulgarians seem to return from abroad with higher expectations of what their government should do in terms of fighting crime and corruption. Put together, these findings suggest that greater linkages with established Western democracy are likely to contribute to a more demanding and effective citizenry in CEE, and this is arguably the most important factor in long-term progress toward democratic governance in the region.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper provides more systematic support for the preliminary findings of recent research (e.g., Epstein and Sedelmeier, 2008; Sedelmeier, 2008; Vachudova, 2008) suggesting that EU influence has not disappeared, or even substantially weakened, after the end of pre-accession conditionality. We argue that, at least prior to the current economic crisis, backsliding is *not* an accurate blanket descriptor of the post-accession political landscape.[xxiii] However, it is worth noting that this may be due to the fact that we do not find very robust evidence that the EU candidates in CEE over-performed prior to accession, thus creating less of a backlash potential.

In considering simple averages, relatively modest post-accession decreases on some democracy and governance measures were balanced by modest gains on other measures. The most notable post-accession decline was in political stability, lending some tentative support to the pent-up tensions hypothesis. However, once we control for historical legacies, temporal trends, and prior reform levels in a regression framework, there is even less evidence of post-accession backsliding. Even after accession, the new EU members progressed faster in terms of democracy and governance than other post-communist countries. Nevertheless, with the notable

exception of FH democracy scores, the generally smaller size and weaker statistical significance of the post-accession effects compared to the pre-accession stages suggests a certain reform slowdown, i.e. "coasting along," rather than "backsliding."

The paper also suggests that the absence of clear post-accession backsliding can be explained at least in part by other international factors aside from the simple incentives of EU membership conditionality. Higher levels of financial assistance from the European Commission were associated with improvements in democracy and governance, and financial incentives seem to explain at least part of the pre-accession "surplus" in political reform. Greater trade was also associated with faster democracy and corruption progress. But perhaps most striking was the strong link between international travel and work and better corruption and rule of law achievements. These findings question the explanatory power of models of European integration that rely almost entirely on a rationalist response to EU membership incentives in explaining CEE reform trajectories in the pre-accession period. The absence of clear post-accession backsliding points towards the importance of other forms of EU leverage and linkage-based models of pre-accession rule adoption. As linkage between the CEE countries and the old EU members has increased after accession, the explanatory power of alternate channels of EU integration influence may have grown to fill in for the loss of the membership incentive.

We conclude with a quote from a Commission official, which may just as well have come from any of several others who all stressed the role of new mechanisms—notably EU law, post-accession EU funds, and social pressure to conform to the rules of the EU club—in counteracting the "rational" potential for backsliding after accession. Today, after accession, "there's this peer pressure… being part of the family… you don't want to be the one with the least influence." You don't want to be the one with the "silly government."

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Appendices

Table 1: Mean annual change in democracy scores before and after EU accession

	Credible pre-candidate	Candidate	Post-accession (2004-07)	Non-candidate (pre-2004)	Non-candidate (2004-07)
FH Democracy	.602	.049	.176	.010	.000
WB Voice and Accountability	.070	.021	-.022	-.003	.016
NIT Electoral Process	.157	.014	-.029	-.080	-.021
WB Political Stability	.046	.048	-.045	-.064	.056
WB Government Effectiveness	.086	.036	-.008	.006	.011
NIT Judicial Framework	.131	.016	-.015	-.084	-.029
WB Rule of Law	.038	.008	-.002	-.043	.015
WB Control of Corruption	.056	.021	-.020	-.006	.013

Table 2: Drivers of democratic and governance reforms

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	FH Democ	Voice & Accounta-bility	Electoral Process	Political stability	Judicial frame-work	Gov't effecti-veness	Rule of law	Corrup-tion Control
Credible pre-candidate	.647**	.081**	.264**	.078	.185	.109**	.101**	.084*
	(.208)	(.026)	(.082)	(.062)	(.275)	(.036)	(.032)	(.036)
EU candidate	.634*	.071*	.205*	.099	.255	.123**	.088**	.122**
	(.256)	(.031)	(.092)	(.073)	(.351)	(.038)	(.033)	(.039)
Post-accession	1.038**	.038	.211*	-.061	.332	.100*	.053	.086#
	(.310)	(.040)	(.102)	(.087)	(.412)	(.047)	(.038)	(.046)
Urban	.012	-.001	-.002	.002	-.000	.001	-.001	.000
	(.009)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.003)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)
Statehood	.289**	.014	-.034	.013	.083	.034*	.007	.010
	(.104)	(.014)	(.032)	(.027)	(.085)	(.015)	(.012)	(.016)
Pre-war Soviet Union	-.365#	-.008	-.090	.021	-.176	.046	.042	-.013
	(.230)	(.041)	(.085)	(.057)	(.194)	(.032)	(.034)	(.036)
Energy intensity	-.137**	-.012#	.002	.008	-.013	.001	.005	-.005
	(.048)	(.007)	(.011)	(.011)	(.017)	(.008)	(.006)	(.006)
Ethnic minority share	.012	.012	-.001	.003	.031	.017	.003	.020
	(.078)	(.010)	(.017)	(.022)	(.023)	(.014)	(.009)	(.012)
W Christian	.399*	.033	-.022	.152**	.416*	.217**	.117**	.185**
	(.199)	(.029)	(.062)	(.048)	(.180)	(.042)	(.028)	(.033)
Muslim	-.448#	-.037	-.100#	-.022	-.191*	-.072*	-.068*	-.060*
	(.233)	(.029)	(.066)	(.058)	(.099)	(.039)	(.034)	(.036)
Year	-.008	-.001	-.008	.016**	-.009	-.000	.007**	.001
	(.012)	(.003)	(.005)	(.005)	(.014)	(.003)	(.002)	(.003)
Lagged reform level	-.313**	-.070**	-.051*	-.132**	-.286**	-.226**	-.109**	-.254**
	(.028)	(.027)	(.025)	(.030)	(.103)	(.035)	(.029)	(.032)
Constant	1.717**	.069	.364*	-.435**	.714**	-.280**	-.205**	-.241**
	(.447)	(.079)	(.152)	(.130)	(.275)	(.094)	(.056)	(.077)
Observations	485	308	295	308	302	308	308	307

Standard errors in parentheses # significant at 10%; * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1% (one-tailed where appropriate).

Table 3: Alternate forms of leverage and linkage

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	FH Democ	Gov't effectiveness	FH Democ	Corruption Control	Corruption Control	Rule of law	Corruption Control	Rule of law
EU Commission Aid/capita	.076#	.022*						
	(.057)	(.011)						
EU trade/GDP			.082*	.019**				
			(.046)	(.006)				
Tourist departures per capita					.029**	.010#		
					(.008)	(.007)		
EU migration stock/pop. 2005							.007*	.008*
							(.004)	(.005)
Credible pre-candidate	.589**	.093*	.692**	.094**	.066#	.097**	-.055	.005
	(.215)	(.037)	(.208)	(.035)	(.035)	(.033)	(.072)	(.093)
EU candidate	.530#	.100*	.649*	.122**	.102**	.088**	-.006	.021
	(.270)	(.041)	(.258)	(.038)	(.038)	(.033)	(.055)	(.056)
Post-accession	.932**	.068	1.079**	.086#	.064	.051	.072	.112#
	(.327)	(.050)	(.315)	(.045)	(.045)	(.038)	(.071)	(.064)
Urban	.011	.001	.012	-.000	-.000	-.001	-.001	-.000
	(.009)	(.001)	(.009)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)	(.002)
Statehood	.313**	.036*	.250*	.001	-.003	.006	-.015	-.006
	(.106)	(.016)	(.106)	(.015)	(.016)	(.012)	(.016)	(.017)
Pre-war Soviet Union	-.310	.064#	-.404#	-.024	-.019	.052	-.014	.033
	(.234)	(.033)	(.230)	(.035)	(.035)	(.036)	(.047)	(.058)
Energy intensity	-.128**	.004	-.142**	-.006	-.003	.007	-.000	.014
	(.048)	(.009)	(.048)	(.006)	(.006)	(.007)	(.009)	(.013)
Ethnic minority share	.017	.016	-.033	.002	.018	.003	.016	.002
	(.078)	(.014)	(.085)	(.014)	(.012)	(.009)	(.013)	(.015)
W Christian	.459*	.237**	.336#	.167**	.160**	.111**	.009	.049
	(.203)	(.043)	(.204)	(.031)	(.032)	(.028)	(.049)	(.052)
Muslim	-.516*	-.087*	-.414#	-.051	-.065#	-.077*	-.065	-.071
	(.241)	(.040)	(.233)	(.035)	(.035)	(.035)	(.043)	(.063)
Year	-.008	-.001	-.017	.001	-.000	.007**	-.030**	.019
	(.013)	(.003)	(.014)	(.002)	(.003)	(.002)	(.011)	(.012)
Lagged DV	-.322**	-.239**	-.322**	-.262**	-.254**	-.109**	-.131**	-.110*
	(.029)	(.034)	(.028)	(.033)	(.031)	(.029)	(.045)	(.050)
Observations	485	308	485	307	307	308	83	84
R-sq	.296	.229	.298	.303	.31	.221	.332	.20

Standard errors in parentheses # significant at 10%; * significant at 5%; ** significant at 1% (one-tailed where appropriate).

Table 4: Survey evidence about Western linkage mechanisms

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	Democ better at electing good leaders	Democ better at getting rid of bad leaders	Minority protections key for democ	Freedom to criticize gov't key for democ	Political activism index	Corruption prevalence perception index	Satisfied with gov't fight ag. corruption	Satisfied with gov't fight ag. crime
Western exposure index	.103*	.122*	.084*	.125*	.151**	-.022	-.141**	-.146**
	(.051)	(.052)	(.049)	(.051)	(.031)	(.035)	(.048)	(.048)
Age	-.002	-.003	-.000	-.003	.004*	-.008**	.009**	.007**
	(.003)	(.003)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)
Education	.038	.046#	-.019	-.063*	.051**	-.051**	.008	.002
	(.027)	(.027)	(.026)	(.027)	(.017)	(.019)	(.025)	(.025)
Town resident	-.042	-.116	.218*	.050	-.085	-.108#	.051	.067
	(.089)	(.090)	(.085)	(.090)	(.056)	(.064)	(.085)	(.085)
City resident	.122	.047	.153	-.042	-.053	-.194*	.362**	.329**
	(.113)	(.113)	(.107)	(.111)	(.069)	(.079)	(.106)	(.106)
Ownership index	.461*	-.320	-.228	.322	.292*	.039	.141	-.099
	(.232)	(.234)	(.219)	(.222)	(.138)	(.160)	(.209)	(.208)
Affordability index	.047	.101	.170**	.232**	-.087*	-.209**	.068	.171**
	(.068)	(.069)	(.065)	(.066)	(.041)	(.047)	(.063)	(.063)
Household income (log)	.076	.112	.042	-.118	.092#	-.087	.089	.109
	(.091)	(.093)	(.086)	(.091)	(.055)	(.064)	(.085)	(.084)
Turkish	.032	.166	1.164**	.171	-.236**	-.383**	.428**	.290*
	(.182)	(.188)	(.167)	(.164)	(.090)	(.109)	(.150)	(.147)
Roma	-.116	-.326	1.255**	.063	-.118	-.163	.095	.119
	(.217)	(.220)	(.199)	(.185)	(.116)	(.138)	(.180)	(.180)
Observations	910	888	1027	1057	1143	1076	1069	1072
(Pseudo) R-sq	.02	.02	.05	.02	.08	.07	.02	.02

Regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses # significant at .1 * significant at .05; ** significant at .01 (one-tailed where appropriate).

[i] Democratic conditionality involves organizations such as the EU maintaining democratic conditions for membership, or for various forms of financial or political support, and in some cases requiring subsequent monitoring of domestic political developments (see Pridham, 2005).

[ii] Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union states that "a clear risk of a serious breach" by a member state of the EU's basic principles of "liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law" can set off a procedure that would allow for suspension of "certain of the rights" of membership, including European Council voting rights.

[iii] These interviews were conducted with officials in Brussels (at the European Commission, the Centre for European Policy Studies, and elsewhere), Budapest (at Freedom House, the Open Society Institute, Central European University, and elsewhere), Bratislava (at the German Marshall Fund), and Washington (at the State Department) between July 2007 and January 2008.

[iv] Post-communist period data was available for 1989-2007 for Freedom House, 1995-2007 for NIT electoral process and judicial framework, and 1996-2007 for all World Bank measures.

[v] For a more detailed description of individual indicators, and all the variables considered in this study, see the electronic appendix.

[vi] The countries considered credible EU candidates for the purposes of this study were all the CEE countries that have now joined, plus Croatia. One questionable case is Yugoslavia (now Serbia), which may have been seen as a credible candidate in 1990, but quickly lost that status.

[vii] The large FH democracy score improvement should also be understood in light of the fact that almost all of the new EU members received a score upgrade the year they joined the EU for no apparent reason except that they had joined.

[viii] Given their shared communist legacies and transition challenges, the other ex-communist countries represent the most obvious counterfactual for what the politics of the EU candidates would have looked like in the absence of EU conditionality.

[ix] The results in Table 2 are based on models using contemporaneous EU status indicators, since tests indicated that introducing additional temporal lags of these indicators did not improve the explanatory power of the models. Given the TSCS nature of the data, we ran Prais-Winsten regressions with heteroskedastic panels corrected standard errors and AR-1 correction for autocorrelation.

[x] We also tested a number of additional legacies, including GDP/capita, the distance from the closest West European capital, and the nature of communist bureaucratic legacies (Kitschelt 2003), as well as the vote share of non-communists in the initial post-communist elections (Fish 1998), but the results were modest and the variables were omitted from the final regressions to reduce multicolinearity concerns.

[xi] This approach helps correct for floor and ceiling effects, and more broadly for the fact that the likelihood of further progress may depend on the prior level of reforms.

[xii] Due to space considerations, a more detailed discussion of the instrumental variable analysis is presented in the electronic appendix.

[xiii] For instance, systematic cross-national data on the number of EU twinning projects and educational exchanges would be useful for such tests, but are currently unavailable.

[xiv] One may of course question to what extent foreign travel affords a sufficiently deep experience of Western governance to result in significant political attitude changes. However, given that some East Europeans make multiple such trips per year (and often combine them with

short-term work and/or business), they may nevertheless acquire sufficient foreign experience to realize that their country could be governed better.

[xv] We found similarly significant effects for the judicial framework indicator but results were weaker for areas of governance over which the government has less direct control (such as rule of law).

[xvi] See models 3 and 4 in Table 3 vs. models 1 and 8 in Table 2 respectively.

[xvii] Note that most interviewees preferred to remain anonymous.

[xviii] "One in two young Poles want to leave country – daily," PAP News, 4 September 2006.

[xix] According to our 2008 Bulgarian survey, 10.6% of respondents had worked abroad in the past, up from 9.3% in 2005.

[xx] The index had a Cronbach's alpha score of .71. For full wording of these and other survey questions, see the electronic appendix.

[xxi] Results for other indicators of democratic support (such as opposition to army rule or a return to Communism) pointed in the right direction, but were statistically weaker.

[xxii] The DV in model 5 is an index based on these three questions (Cronbach's alpha=.65) but similar results obtain for each individual question.

[xxiii] It is too early to tell whether the economic downturn beginning in late 2008, which raises fears about potential political instability and populist revival, will result in significant backsliding. From the perspective of the present analysis, the potential for backsliding will depend on the extent of generous but conditional funding for the struggling new EU members and on whether the crisis affecting Western Europe has a significant impact on East-West trade and migration patterns.