AN ASSESSMENT ON CANDIDACY PROCESSES OF BULGARIA AND ROMANIA TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Extended Abstract

Enlargement policy is one of the significant policies and tools in transforming the member and candidate countries of the European Union. It was also useful for domain widening for the EU after the Cold War era. Southeastern European Countries (SEEC) were also keen on being closer to the West and eventually being a member of the EU. As it is well known the EU has some criteria for candidates. After all conditions are satisfied the candidate country will be ready to become a member.

Introduction: Candidacy process is related with the capacity of the states and the Europeanization ability of them. Furthermore, this process is a mutual interaction process. Both sides (The EU and the candidate state) might affect each other. Financial support, fund-raising, opening of new markets for productions, modernization of institutions, improvement of administrative structures and benefiting from the democratic values of the EU are the advantages for candidate states. In return of these advantages, the EU’s expectation is to ensure its conditions. Nevertheless, political, economic, cultural, social standards of the EU member states and the SEEC were quite different. Basic values of the EU are democracy, rule of law, respect for fundamental rights, minority rights and protection of minority rights; whereas, SEECs experiences were based on planned economy, anti-democratic regimes, and socialist administration. In order to eliminate these differences and to supply the compliance with the EU rules, accession strategies are prepared for member states. During their candidacy, states are monitored by the Commission, their progresses are recorded. Candidate states are responsible to fulfill the commitments of chapters of acquis which are consist of 35 different policy fields and called as negotiation chapters.

Methodology: Within the context of monitoring the candidate states and to make an evolution towards their accession, European Commission prepares the Annual Progress Reports. These reports are examined in the study owing to that they are primary sources to comprehend the candidate states’ improvements. So, in order to indicate the evolution of states’ candidacy processes, assessments of Annual Progress Reports are very crucial.

Results: It is worth examining the accession processes of two poorest and the easternmost countries of the EU: Bulgaria and Romania. Although, in Helsinki Summit they were announced among the candidate states which are planned to open negotiations by the year 2000, their membership were not on the same date with the other CEEC. The reasons of this delay are derived from the ingrained problems of both states such as corruption, organized crime, ill-treatment in custody, health care, protection of children, human trafficking, and integration of Roman minority. Crucial amendments were made in domestic law according to the EU Law; however, the Commission had found them slow, slight and insufficient in progress reports.

Main tasks that Bulgaria was appreciated by the Commission are respect for minority rights (Muslim-Turkish, not Roman), functioning market economy, structure of parliament, freedom of religion, restitution of agricultural lands and economic growth. Just as Bulgaria, Romania received applause roughly similar issues. In addition to those positive developments Romania is also found successful in, legal reforms, free labor market, environmental and agricultural policies.

In many progress reports the Commission declare that both states had made enough progress to join the EU although there were still ongoing problems and insufficiencies to fulfil the criteria. Notwithstanding, as it is predicted, Bulgaria and Romania became European Union member states in 2007. However, they achieved their purpose, they are still not accepted to the Schengen Area. Majority of the EU members are also the members of the Schengen Area, and they have right to veto any state’s membership in Schengen system. Despite the fact that they provided the political and economic stability and deserve the full membership of the EU, old member states of the EU do not trust Bulgaria and Romania both in border security and cyber security. Protecting the EU’s external borders is such a significant responsibility for both Bulgaria and Romania as being the easternmost member states. Immigrants, human trafficking, cooperation with border police,
strengthening border controls are the most indispensable responsibilities for the Schengen system. Moreover, Schengen Information System contain information of illegal immigrants, missing and sought-after persons, stolen vehicles, persons suspected of committing a crime, and third-country nationals whose entry or stay in the Union is unacceptable. France, Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Belgium regard Bulgarian mafia as a threat on this confidential and privileged information.

**Conclusion and Discussion:** To sum up, even though Bulgaria and Romania were regarded as low-level states that would compel the absorption capacity of the EU, they were accepted as member states. Enlargement is completed as widely, but what about widening? If these two states deserved their membership properly, they would already be the members of Schengen Area. Getting out of old experiences and having an old communist image were quite hard for Bulgaria and Romania, and the bad rumors about their political and economic systems do not clear up anyhow.