



Bachelor Thesis

Europeanization of the Bulgarian Regional Policy

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1. Introduction

Problem context and problem statement

In the year 2005 the national survey of Eurobarometer in Bulgaria has reported that 84% of the population of the state supports the country's EU membership (Eurobarometer, 2005). This relative high support for the EU perspective in Bulgaria is not an accidental occurrence but is in fact an obvious indication for the expectations for the future of the Bulgarian nation.

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, Bulgarian political, economic, social and cultural spheres of life were faced the idea of democracy and respectively were object to an enormous transformation driven by the western ideal for prosperity. The whole Bulgarian reality was object to reforms, whereby the driving power was not an idea of the central party leader but a desire for change of the whole nation represented by its democratic legitimated government.

Unfortunately, an overview of Bulgaria's progress over the last twenty years gives an example of a poor state's development and an unsuccessful state's transformation under the democratic regime. At first, the permanent change of governments provided the leadership of the state to different parties with distinctive program plans for the transformation of the country. Under these conditions the privatization of state own properties was driven to a great extent by private interests, which led to significant rates of decline in the Bulgarian economy with employment and GDP declining by 30% and 25%, and inflation shooting from 20% to 100% in the first five years of the period of the state's transition (Monastiriotis, 2008). Although the establishment of Currency Board, pegging the Bulgarian currency to the DM (and later to the Euro), and speeding-up the privatization of state-owned properties, led the economy to a sustainable path of recovery, Bulgaria still has the poorest economical values among the EU member states. In the pre-accession period, Bulgaria had GDP per capita, annual growth rates and income levels drastic below the EU-25 average values (European Commission, 2004). Moreover in 2005, two years before Bulgaria joined EU officially, 10.7% of the Bulgarians were unemployed (US Department of state, 2011). In social aspects the people were unpleased with the domestic situation and the more they were disappointed with the national government the more they believe that Bulgaria's accession in the EU would lead to better living conditions in the country.

Based on this situation, the attitudes in Bulgaria represented a high dissatisfaction with the government on domestic and regional level as for the most of state residents the EU remained the last hope for a better development of the country. From a practical point of

view, it must be noted that in Bulgaria ‘the prospective access to the EU was viewed as a possibility to revive the national economies, bridge the gap in economic and social development with Western Europe and significantly improve the standard of living’ (Lajh,2004). In these context the EU was not seen only as a supranational actor, who could assist Bulgaria in financial terms, but also as an example of good governance, source of good practices and best model of 'ways of doing things'. These attitudes determine not only the opinion of the most state’s residents but also the recognition of the political leaders of the parties on the whole left-right political spectrum in the country (Dorosiev and Ganev 2007).

A further example of the poor transformations in Bulgaria after the communist regime was over, is the decline of the Bulgarian regional policy. The evolution of this important policy field for the state’s prosperity was researched by Monastiriotis (2008), who state that ‘under the turbulent transition phase, almost naturally, the emphasis placed on issues of regional economic performance was limited. At hindsight, this made a poor situation worse, arguably contributing to the widening of regional disparities and intensifying problems of asymmetry and backwardness for the less developed areas of the country’ (Monastiriotis, 2008, p.8).

Hence, to improve the entire economic and social situation, Bulgaria signed an Accession Partnership and opened accession negotiations with the EU in 2000. After its successful termination in 2005, the Accession Treaty was signed, and in 2007 Bulgaria become an official member of the European Union. In connection with the EU membership the accession-states had to make a lot of adjustments in all domestic policies and therefore in the particular field of regional development and regional policy as a whole as well.

Such appropriate adjustments lead to a successful Europeanization in the national regional policy, which means that Bulgaria is eligible for receiving funding from the EU structural funds and, hereby, has the possibility to develop an own regional policy on the model of the European one, which could effectively tackle the problems of disparities within the national territory.

For the most of the scholars the process of Europeanization means changing actions, routines, and even formal institutions and procedures (North quoted in Lang 2003, p.159), which mostly depends on the degree of adaptational pressure, applied by the EU. Furthermore this mentioned degree of adaptational pressure depends on the ‘goodness of fit’ between European institutions and domestic structures, whereby

'the lower the compatibility (fit) between the new requirements, on one hand, and (sub)national structures on the other hand, the higher is the adaptational pressure '(Risse, 2001,p. 6-7).

But as the EU do not prescribe a standard model for the regional policy and intervenes mostly on the basis of 'soft' methods of coordination by lack of direct pressure for implementation, the Bulgarian authorities in the regional policy were given of a lot of free space for managing the course of action under this issue. Having this in mind, the 'goodness of fit' approach could be not appropriate for the analysis of the Europeanization in the Bulgarian regional policy and an alternative method should be found.

Radaelli (2003) is one of the scholars, who do not prefer the 'goodness of fit approach' and considers the Europeanization not as a certain outcome of adaptational pressure by the supranational EU level but as an influence of predetermined EU logics and 'ways of doing things' and their incorporation in the logic of the domestic policies.

Following Radaelli, it could be mentioned that his interpretation of the Europeanization concept is appropriate for the analysis of the Bulgarian regional policy as on the one hand his concept can appropriately answer the lack of direct adaptational pressure within the mechanisms of Europeanization in the EU regional policy. On the other hand the concept contains the national attitudes in Bulgaria, seeing the prosperity of the state only achieved by following the EU perspective of development as mentioned earlier.

Objective and thesis outlook

On the basis of this logic, the bachelor thesis seeks to explore the question to which extend European mechanisms, logics and 'ways of doing things' in the European regional policy are actually incorporated in the national domestic policy. Furthermore, the effects of this incorporation are explored. Moreover, taking into account the fact that not every adjustment, development or change in the domestic policy is an outcome of the Europeanization, the specific characteristics, mechanisms and functionality patterns of the supranational regional policy are firstly determined and then compared to the functionality mechanisms in Bulgaria's domestic policy. Eventually, the results of this comparison explain the actual degree of Europeanization of the Bulgarian regional policy.

Therefore, the bachelor thesis examines the process of Europeanization of the Bulgarian regional policy and its conditional development based on predetermined EU logics. The paper first provides a broad review of the Europeanization theory. Then, an operational framework for the analysis of the domestic policy is built upon this review. Chapter 3 gives

an answer to the question, why the goodness of fit approach is not applicable for the analysis of the Bulgarian regional policy. Chapter 4 reviews the development on Europeanization based on two dimensions of the domestic regional policy, namely the *regionalization* and *actors' constellation and functionality*. The analysis of these two dimensions ends up with a conclusion about the degree of Europeanization of each dimension and, finally, with an overall conclusion for the whole regional policy. The very last section provides an overall analysis regarding the problems based on the development of Bulgaria's regional policy and highlights the main challenges for the future Europeanization of regional policy in the country.

2. Theory

To make theoretical ideas publishable, researchers have to distance themselves from the complexity of practice (Aken, Berends and van der Bij, 2007) and build their theories for a broader scope of cases. This notion should be taken into account for the theories in order to be contextualized and adjusted for the use in the particular research area. Referring to this general assumption, the theoretical framework of this bachelor thesis is strongly concerned with the reduction of a broad conventional usage and the variety of definitions of the term Europeanization. Conceptualizing Europeanization in such a manner will supply a useful tool in the analysis of the Bulgarian Regional Policy. By elaborating on the theory, its varying usage will be examined and reduction and specification of its meaning will provide the analytical framework for this thesis.

2.1 Reviewing the wide scope of the Europeanization

Featherstone (2003) discovers that the articles about Europeanization published in scientific literature between 1980 and 2008, have increased in number. The phrase Europeanization has developed into a modern term, which can be found in four major categories: historical process, cultural diffusion, institutional adaptation and adaptation of policy and policy process.

Historical process: Historians describe Europeanization as a transfer of cultural norms and patterns and also as the imposition of European authority in terms of imperial control, institutional practices, social and cultural beliefs, norms and behavior (Kohout, 1999). With regard to *cultural diffusion*, Europeanization has been used to explain the internationalization of different national behavioral and ideological patterns, like the shift in drinking hab-

its in Iceland (Olafsdottir, 1997), changes in political culture (Borneman and Fowler, 1997) and redefinition of citizenship (Joppke, 1995) on a cross-national basis within Europe.

In the analysis of the real impact of the European Regional Policy on the Bulgarian policy, the last two categorizations in which the Europeanization occurs, namely *adaptation of institutions* and *policy and policy processes*, adumbrate the preliminary contours of the theoretical framework of this thesis.

Europeanization as an institutional adaptation deals with the topic of how actors and administrative institutions have been affected by the European Union and how these adopted to the obligations of the EU (Wessels, 1998; Agh, 1999). Directly related to the Europeanization, this interpretation has been applied to the transformation of political parties (Holden, 1999), the legal system (Levitsky, 1994) and sub-national governance (Goldsmith, 1993, Goetz, 1995).

Regarding the adaptation of policy and policy process, the scholars interpret the Europeanization as constraints on domestic policy posed by EU regulation (Radaelli, 1997) and as the effect on the domestic regulatory systems or even as its fully replacement of the regulatory system by the EU. All these interpretations fall under the impact of EU policy competences on the national policy choices and the national orientation (Hix and Goetz, 2000).

In combination, the broad impact of both Europeanization categories can also be explained in a governance context, that denotes Europeanization as the ‘emergence and the development at the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal, and social institutions associated with political problem-solving that formalizes interactions among the actors, and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative rules’ (Risse, Cowles, and Caporaso:2001, p.2).

Literature has identified several mechanisms through which Europeanization can be interpreted and how it affects the member states. However, the questions that remain are how researchers can be able to work with this concept of Europeanization and how it can be applied for the purpose of a productive research.

2.2 Conceptualizing Europeanization

The strategy here is to research this contested literature in the hope that further clarification of the core meaning of the term will provide a useful operational definition and operationalization framework.

Most obviously, many of the categorizations in which Europeanization occurs in the political analysis, seems synonymous and overlapping with other theories or concepts that are already in use in the study of politics. In other words, the boundaries of Europeanization are very difficult to be determined but without this, it is impossible to define the term Europeanization.

For example, Europeanization, outlined as the transfer of different European modes of organizations, institutions and policies, would appear to be a particular example of the theoretical concept of 'policytransfer', which is described as:

'A process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place' (Dolowitz and Marsh:1996, p.344).

On the one side, literature is aware of possible ambiguity of the meaning of the term Europeanization. However, on the other side, considering Europeanization as a concept capable of producing certain outcomes for the development of the Bulgarian regional policy, has led to the motivation for justifying why Europeanization is preferred over other, more established theories.

In this context, Gerring (1999, p.368) comes up with a solution based on eight criteria, which could be relevant when it comes to judging the utility of a concept. On the basis of these criteria the Europeanization's boundaries can be distinguished from the analytical districts of other theories.

While the most of Gerring's criteria determine factors to clarify what the concept is and what it should be about, the criterion *external differentiation* focuses on what a term is not. It is about establishing the limits or boundaries beyond which a concept should not be extended and what the concept does not comprise. Concerning the fact that everything could be Europeanized to a certain degree this criterion avoids the problem of 'concept stretching' as with it the Europeanization could be distinguished from other congeneric concepts.

Therefore, an *external differentiation* of the term Europeanization from the terms European integration, Policy transfer, convergence or harmonization is conducted for the purpose of concept utilization and specification.

Europeanization is, at first, not European Integration. It could be stated that Europeanization is a second and a distinctive level of Integration, and Europeanization could not be reached without European Integration had took place in certain international relations. Co-

paraso (1996) distinguishes between ontological and post-ontological stages where the national states pool sovereignty as a symbol of Integration in an ontological phase and, then, in the post-ontological phase the nation states react and adjust to the existing EU Institutions. The post-ontological phase of Europeanization is concerned with the specific question about the role of domestic institutions in the process of Integration (Featherstone, Radaelli, 2003).

Börzel (2001) contributes to the distinction of Europeanization from the concept of Policy transfer, as defined by Dolowitz and Marsh, arguing that Europeanization is a two-way process including downloading and uploading of preferences from and to Brussels. Moreover, in relation to Policy making and transfer, Europeanization could be seen as a tool that focuses not only formatting or building of policies and their export but also on reaction or reverberation of policies in national arenas (Featherstone, Radaelli, 2003).

Furthermore, Europeanization is not equal to convergence as it is possible to produce divergence as well. Media markets regulations are an example of convergence, whereas transport policies are an instance of divergence. Both convergent and divergent policy areas are affected by Europeanization (Hertier, Knill, 2001). Besides, Europeanization does not fall under the notion of harmonization. According to Montepit (2000, p.590), 'Europeanization encourages domestic policy change' but not all member states undergo the same change. Hence, the Europeanization leaves the possibilities for change and the way of diversity open.

These differences clarify the advantage of the concept and define the scope the Europeanization, setting it away from being part of or doubling many older established concepts. Europeanization denotes the consequences of a process, which may have a variable impact at the national level. The concept transfers the analytical bias from the European to the domestic level, and allows the researcher to shift his focus towards explaining how national governments have adapted to Europe.

As up to this point, it has been exhibited what Europeanization is not and what the real borders of the term are. Determination of an operational definition that is on the analytical terrain of the concept and serves for the purpose of examining the Bulgarian Regional Policy, is the next step of this analysis.

2.3 Definition and Operationalization of Europeanization

Due to the fact that there is a danger of misrepresenting the supposed effects of Europeanization, it is necessary to create and apply a definition, which is suitable to outline the rela-

tion of the changes, effects, developments, adjustments etc. that had been observed, to their initial cause, namely the Europeanization, and not to some other generative force.

Following this, a process of *taxonomy*, defined as ‘simple process that organize research and makes complex concepts amenable to analysis’ (Featherstone, Radaelli:2003, p.34), will be conducted for focusing the whole theoretical information in an applicable operational definition.

Next, an operational definition will be given, which aims at summing up the main elements of the concept related to EU regional policy and provides an explanatory toolbox, which is necessary for the further analysis. Additionally, the operationalization process, in terms of putting together a set of indicators for research, constructs a guideline through the research and helps to make a connection between theory and concrete results of observation.

In other words, the task here will be to form a ‘denotative’ concept comprising an operational definition of Europeanization designed to ‘seize the object’ which should be explained (Sartori, 1984, p. 30).

Few authors, who have used the Europeanization as a theoretical framework in their analysis, have defined it in a more precise and comprehensive way. Ladrech (1994) provided one of the first definitions of the concept as he saw the Europeanization as ‘ a process of reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EU political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making’ (Ladrech,1994, p.69).

Although this definition refers to the researched subject of this thesis, it outlines somewhat loose explanations. It does not assign the Europeanization to further elements, which could be included in the concept and does not provide any ideas, within the extent of the concept, how national policies could be measured.

Risse, Cowles, and Caporaso (2001, p.2) go more in details and explain the Europeanization as ‘process based on development of the European level of distinctive structures of governance’ that ‘formalize interactions specializing in a creation of a formative rules’¹. As this definition elaborates mostly on policy formation and integration (directions which are not desired for the analysis), a definition of Börzel (1999) determining the Europeanization, basically, as a diffusion of the European dimension over the national arena of policy, seems to comply better with the purpose of this thesis.

However, another definition by Radaelli (2003) follows the idea of Börzel about the meaning of Europeanization. In addition, he delimits the scope of Europeanization and segments the term to separately observable components.

Europeanization is: *'a process of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public choices'* (Featherstone, Radaelli:2003,p.30).

In distinction to other definitions Radaelli decompose the Europeanization and explains not only what it should be as an effect in the domestic policies but additionally explains what it consists of.

The author stresses the treatment of policy process and the importance of change in the domestic structures and provides the researcher with concrete components for observation. Thus, it should not be simply concluded whether particular policy is Europeanized. Moreover, a research of determined components and the elaboration on their domestic performance are most important for the conclusion of this thesis. The definition by Radaelli is also suitable for the analysis because the author sets the borders in such a manner that his 'end conceptualization' has the scope to cover analyses on public policies, identities and political structures (Featherstone, Radaelli, 2003).

In the case of the Bulgarian Regional Policy, this theoretical frame gives emphasis to the impact on broad elements, which compose the character of the supranational regional policy. Hence, both informal parameters and existing institutional paradigms could be taken into account in the examination of the formation of the existing connections, relations and constellations on the domestic level.

In addition to the definition, mainly concerned with the differentiated existence of the Europeanization, Radaelli pays also attention to the observational part of the research and provides an operationalization framework for the concept. 'What exactly is Europeanized and to what extend' (Featherstone, Radaelli, 2003, p.34) are the most important questions on which the thesis should find the answer, in order to achieve plausible results.

For more precision in the analysis, Radaelli (2003, p.35) assigns the 'domains where the Europeanization is supposed to arise' and the 'extension and direction of the Europeanization' to two columns of a common table, as to every domain a measurement of direction and degree of Europeanization is allowed. The domains of the Europeanization determined by the question 'what is Europeanized' are districted in three major sub-domains called respectively 'macrodomestic structures', 'public policy' and 'cognitive-normative structures'.

The measurement of these domains could be done as their performance characteristics (extension and direction), showing the development of the domains in the domestic level of the particular country, should be assigned to a particular development and direction category (Retrenchment, Inertia, Absorption, Transformation).

In these categories the outcomes of the observations could be classified from Retrenchment, where the national policies become less European, through the category of Inertia, where no change could be identified, to Absorption meaning an adaptation without 'real modification of essential structures' and 'accommodation' comprising the 'fundamental change of the political behavior' (Featherstone, Radaelli, 2003, p.36-37).

However, taking into account that in the research on the Bulgarian Regional policy the issue is no longer whether Europe matters but how it matters, and where the outcomes of the positive change could be found, the operationalization took another way of realization. Börzel and Risse (2000) systematize the degree of domestic change within three new categories, which are all concerned with positive (existing) change. They differentiate the scope of the change within the terms of Absorption, Accommodation and Transformation. These are defined as follows:

Absorption: Low degree of domestic change where the member states incorporate European policies without substantially modifying existing processes, policies, and institutions.

Accommodation: Modest degree of domestic change accomplished by "patching up" new policies and institutions onto existing ones without changing the latter (Héritier 2001).

Transformation: High degree of domestic change where member states replace existing policies, processes, and institutions by new, substantially different ones.

The framework of this thesis builds upon these two measurement ideas of the scholars. It combines Radaelli's domains of the Europeanization as a guideline where the Europeanization takes place with the degree of Europeanization of these domains, specified by Börzel and Risse.

3. 'Goodness of fit' and the explanation of the Europeanization of the Bulgarian regional Policy

Once components of the Europeanization and the meaning of the concept had been clarified, the next step concerns the mechanisms through which the European policy penetrates the area of the domestic policy and accounts for changes.

Many scholars research the domestic effects of the EU using the three step approach developed by Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001, p.6). The so called 'goodness of fit' approach is based on the general idea that adaptational pressure is the only explanation of changes and refers to the degree of the institutional domestic compatibility with the supranational policy. The approach explains any change within a framework of three steps. At first, two steps of the process at EU level (Community level policy) that implies some domestic change and the compatibility or the 'goodness to fit' between the EU level process and the national arrangements are identified. According to the authors, the bigger the misfits between the identified EU level process and the national arrangements, the bigger is the adaptation pressure. The third step interrelates with the existing 'goodness of fit' with pro und contra factors, such as veto points in the domestic structure, institutions facilitating the change and the political and organizational culture that contribute to the degree and direction of change. The authors are of the opinion that the extent to which adaptation pressure lead to domestic changes, mostly depends on these three factors (Risse, Cowles and Caporaso, 2001).

Common institutions, practices and policies in the EU were mostly created by the older member states and until Bulgaria's ambition to join the EU is directly connected with the adaptation of all these practices and policies, adaptational pressure is in principle existing. However, the question is to which extent this adaptational pressure can explain all changes in the Bulgarian regional policy.

While the Bulgarian administrative division is not directly applicable to the EU administrative requirements and an upgrade of domestic administrative system for successful implementation of the EU regional policy is needed, it could be not mentioned that this change will be made only as an answer of the adaptational pressure. Furthermore the change could be seen also from the policy insiders as obligational reform which should be accomplished anyway, rather than response to pressure.

Moreover the 'goodness of fit' approach covers a broad range of elements. Within 'fit' a lot of domestic factors like actors, legal law, style of decision making et cetera could present own different ways of compatibility with their opposites on the supranational level. Hence there is no absolute level of 'goodness of fit' that could determine the performance of the Europeanization. Moreover the Europeanization is better elaborated within a framework, which analyzes its distinctive component dimensions.

Summarized, it could be mentioned that the 'goodness of fit' approach, could be used for the explanation of an individual case of analysis but not as a general explanation of the Europeanization of the Bulgarian regional policy.

Thus, further analysis is largely concerned with the individual characteristics of the EU regional policy and its own procedures and constellation.

4. Mechanism of Europeanization in the European Regional Policy

Here, the right questions should be raised in order to understand Europeanization in relation to European regional policy. The change and its direction, which could be associated with Europeanization of domestic policy depends on policy characteristics at European level. Among all specific policy characteristics, those should be taken into account, which possibly matter for the analysis of the domestic regional policy development.

Which properties distinguish the Regional policy from other policies of the Union? What kind of processes characterizes its performance on the supranational level?

From modest beginnings, European Community structural policy has grown to become the second most important spending policy of the Community. Nowadays, it roughly accounts for a third of its annual expenditures, which are transferred among the member states through a ‘system of side-payments’ where the governments of richer EU countries shell out for those of less-developed EU countries (Marks 1996, p.391).

The purpose of EU regional policy is to promote economic and social cohesion across Europe by reducing disparities between regions and countries. This purpose is carried out through three spatial designation criteria, which determine the regions eligible for the regional funds. For Criterion 1 (lagging regions), eligibility is based on regions having an average GDP per head less than 75 per cent of the Community average. Criterion 2 (industrial areas in decline) had three main eligibility criteria – unemployment rates, percentage of industrial employment and employment decline relative to Community averages – while Criterion 5b (rural areas) use the designation criteria of levels of socio-economic development, agricultural employment and agricultural income (www.inforegio.eu, 2011).

The main purpose of the funds is to reduce disparities between the regions, defined by the criteria regions, which is further divided into three operational goals (Convergence, Regional Competitiveness and Employment and Territorial Cooperation). This is pursued with the help of three financial instruments called funds. In the current program-period, 81.54 % of the total amount of the funds is spent on the “Convergence” goal, funding the poorest regions, which fall under Criterion 1. In the other regions determined by Criteria 2 and 5b, about 15.95 % of the Regional Funds aim at supporting innovation, sustainable development, better accessibility and training projects under the goal of “Regional Competitiveness and Employment” and 2.52 % are available for cross-border, transnational

and interregional co-operation under the goal “European Territorial Co-operation” (Inforegio, Factsheet, 2006) .

The foundation instruments are also strictly determined by three expenditure regulators, namely European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF), and Cohesion Fund (CF). These are set out for a program-period of seven years and finance variety of developmental projects, which are based on multi-annual programs, prepared by the relevant authorities in the member states and approved by the European Commission (Inforegio, 2011). The ERDF is the most important fund in terms of available finance, but the goals of the regional policy could not be achieved by the ERDF alone. Both the ESF and the CF contribute to the mitigation of regional problems.

4.1 How has regional policy evolved?

Although some objectives of regional policy can also be related to the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the EU regional policy was officially set up with the establishment of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in 1975. At the beginning, this remained mostly a disintegrated policy, financing predetermined projects in the member states with little supranational influence. The reforms of 1988 doubled the budget for the structural funds and established a number of principles for their common practical function and implementation. These comprise: *programming* (based on strategic, multi-annual plans instead of a project-based approach); *concentration* (on a limited number of objectives and focused on the least developed regions); *additionally* (to ensure that EU funding does not substitute for national expenditure); and *partnership* (the participation of national, sub-national and supranational actors in the design and implementation of programs) (Batchler, Mendez, 2007, p.537).

Since then, EU regional policy has extended its competences to a whole bundle of policies, which are relevant for spatial economic development (Conzelman, 1998) and has taken the function of a coordinator of ‘sectoral policy initiatives that are beneficial for developing a given territorial space’ over time (Hooghe 1996, p.10).

With regard to policy evolution, it can be mentioned that its formation had taken three main directions in the process of development: ‘the co-ordination of national regional policy measures to ensure their conformity with the treaties; the development of Community funds for regional development; and a slow series of moves towards a positive Community regional policy’ (Keating 2001, p.17).

4.2 Regulative vs. Redistributive

An overall focus on the policy regulations leads to the conclusion that the EU regional policy is to a certain degree redistributive rather than regulative. This statement is not fully correct at all. Although the Commission's guide to the negotiations does not prescribe an exact Commission model of regionalization and 'The Acquis under Chapter 21 (regional policy) does not determine how the specific structures for the practical organization of Structural and the Cohesion Funds should be set up' (European Commission quoted in Hughes, 2003), every candidate-country intended to receive a support from the structural funds, must fulfill a lot of prescribed requirements. These requirements are described and prepared for each individual member state in the acquisition phase before its accession to the EU. Conversely, the former member states cannot hope to be included in the distribution of the funds' resources before they accomplish these certain prescriptions. Namely, 'accession-states are also usually under pressure from the Commission to introduce a particular model of politically decentralized regionalization, embraced within the legal basis for a standardized NUTS-classification scheme' (administrative regionalization) (Hughes, 2003, p.73). This leads to the conclusion that the Regional policy has some pre-regulative attributes as well, contrary to the opinion of Hooghe (1996) who mentions that regional policy is , the 'only redistributive policy of importance in the almost exclusively regulatory project of European integration' (Hooghe, 1996, p.6).

4.3 Positive versus Negative Integration

Following Radaelli (2003), the likelihood of Europeanization of the domestic policy depends also on the type of Integration, which is advanced in the particular policy field.

Positive Integration and Negative Integration are two famous types for labeling the development process within the EU. While the Positive Integration is a term used by scholars to describe a process of implementation of direct regulations or adoption of a common model within the member states, Negative Integration is mostly concerned with the case of striking down of national barriers without prescribing common methods or rules for action. Comparing policies like the Consumer protection or the Environmental policy, where the EU aims at common standards within all member states, the regional policy could be assigned to the policies of Negative Integration.

If there is adaptation pressure for adjusting the domestic policy to the European model, certain directives should be implemented in a given period of time. Radaelli labels this as coercion, which is not the case in the regulative form of the EU regional policy. Rather, the

adaptation of the domestic regional policy fits more with the explanation of a tendency to become alike, provided from the theory of the new institutionalism in the organizational analysis and its form mimetism. Mimetism describes an alternative way of Europeanization and could be directed to the development of the Regional policy in the member states. The method refers to cases, where states are not obligated to do something but see the common way of 'doing things' attractive and join in by reason of benefits (DiMaggio, Powell, 1991).

Likewise the common European market in the EU, in terms of the regulation of the regional policy, had not been prescribed how exactly the policy should be regulated, and what kind of institutions are needed. The pursued target was only the mutual recognition and internalization of an operational system, which could guarantee better development possibilities for the regions. Within this process of Negative Integration ,existing' domestic equilibrium is challenged as the volitional result is not a new common regional model but rather a domestic opportunity structure, which gives new chances of the disadvantaged regions to prosper (Featherstone, Radaelli, 2003,p.42).

4.4 Vertical vs. Horizontal Europeanization

Furthermore, the *vertical* and the *horizontal* mechanism of Europeanization of the EU regional policy seem to be an important aspect for the analysis of the performance of the regional policy as well. *Vertical* mechanism refers mostly to the direction of the Europeanization within the superordinate-subordinate levels in the EU, in which the superordinate level includes the level where the policy is defined. In contrast, subordinate refers to the level, where the policy is integrated. The vertical direction between the levels has an obligatory character and leads to Europeanization through a mechanism of 'hierarchical chain of command' (Featherstone, Radaelli, 2003, p. 41). With regard to Regional policy, it occurs in the EU mostly in a pre-accession phase, where the acceding countries have to implement general foundations of the common policy like administrative divisions of the national territory.

In contrast, the domestic adjustment in the EU regional policy could be referred to *horizontal* mechanism of Europeanization, where super-/subordinate relation between the policy levels and actors is excluded and the process of change is based mostly on the diffusion of ideas and best practices between non-hierarchical actors (Featherstone, Radaelli, 2003). For example, the Regional Development Fund focuses on infrastructural development in disadvantaged regions and it could be mentioned that there are no restrictions in the definition of what 'infrastructures' and 'industrial investment' are (Armstrong,1995, p.46).

That poses only few restrictions as regards the specific measures of what should be supported by the fund and what should not be supported financially.

Hence, this extraordinary breadth of the ERDF has been used from the Commission to extend its powers into new policy areas, in a partnership with the member states and other actors at all the possible levels of a specific policy. Furthermore, these interventions in specific policies required cross-sectorial coordination within the European Commission across relevant Directorate Generals (DGs) and with other EU institutions.

Altogether, it could be mentioned that the example of the functionality of the ERDF could be seen as an example for vertical co-ordination and equal involvement of the distinctive Community levels and actors, and as evidence of a horizontal Europeanization, which determines another characteristic of EU regional policy.

4.5 Actor's constellation and networks typology in the EU regional policy

Council Regulation 1260/1999 sets up the conditions for the actors' participation in the formulation and implementation of regional policy. It requires the existence of a wide and effective association of all relevant actors in member states, stressing the obligational involvement of 'regional and local authorities and other component public authorities' on the one hand and 'economic and social partners' on the other (Eurolex, 1999). The gratification of this legal provision guarantees sufficient representativeness of relevant interests within the broad scope of decision-making process in the regional policy and assures the possibilities for involvement of all actors. Additionally, Gary Marks (1993) determines structural funds as 'the leading edge of a system of multilevel governance in which supra-national, national, regional and local governments are enmeshed in territorially overarching policy networks' (1993, p. 401). In addition to this, it could be stated that the interactions between actors in the EU regional policy are to a great extent determined by a flexible model of multi-level governance, where the jurisdiction of authority is task-specific and actors' responsibilities for distinctive issues are spread among the numerous territorial levels and may overlap (Marks, Hooghe, 2004). Being able to participate in this system and to interact with one another requires that every actor at every level has a specific function interrelated with the system of the common regional policy. This means that the actors in the policy do not perform their functions separately and, controversially, to the environmental policy, where technocrats work isolated on specific directives, in the EU regional policy coordination among levels of government, interest groups and EU institutions is obligational.

This mechanism of coordination among the EU institutions serves for better implementation and oversight. On one hand, the Commission's Regional Policy DG being responsible for 'delivering of efficient and effective structural policies' and for the observation and the guidance the member states in the absorption of the fund's resources (Inforegio,2011), coordinates with other Commission's DGs, in an effort to gain information about their goals which could overlap with the purpose of the regional policy and on the other hand coordinates with the Committee of Regions in order to know more about individual attitudes within the European regions.

Moreover, coordination with the European Investment Bank (EIB) is legally bound since regional capital investment for infrastructure or social concerns must be coordinated between the Regional Policy DG and the EIB' (Dudek,2010,p.10).

The European Parliament (EP) interacts as a coordinator in EU Regional policy carrying out an oversight function over regional policies through its financial control over the expenditures. Furthermore EP examines the annual performance of the Regional Policy DG within the regular Cohesion Reports of DG and additionally, on the basis of approximately 400 parliamentary questions regarding structural funds (Dudek, 2010).

Consultation rather than coordination is organized with the Committee of the Regions (CoR). This commission of representatives from each region has some kind of 'connecting channel' function. It generates opinions containing their points in favor and against a particular topic or initiation and transmits these to the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. And besides that, the CoR basically goes along with initiatives from the supranational level and supports and represents them to the member states and domestic regions (Dudek, 2010).

Additionally to the representatives in the Committee of the Regions, regional governments have established lobbying groups in Brussels. These lobbies have the purpose to gather information about current issues, events and programs in the EU and to reflect on this information on the basis of the region's own interests. Accomplishing this function lobbies provide a direct link between the regions and the EU level and represent 'small-embassies' at the supranational level. Their exact influence and coordination possibilities could not be assessed, but despite of it could be said that they intensify the relationships within the vertical coordination, and respectively the process of Europeanization.

Considering the relative influence of the member states and the Commission over the EU regional policy, Bachtler and Mendez (2007) analyze the political conflict and divergences of preferences between these two actors in the process of policy formulation and define their premium functions and interdependences. In their analysis the function of the Coun-

cil, an actor who represents the association of the member states, has been determined within the role of an ultimate arbiter on the financial and legal basis for regional policy. And the role of the Commission respectively, has been associated to an ‘architect of reform proposals- in terms of the structure of the budget and the design of the cohesion policy regulations’. The Commission is also responsible for the process of reaching agreements among the Member States and for the control of the area designation and financial allocation methodologies (Bachtler, Mendez 2007, p.556).

The phase of coordinative interaction between Councils and Commission, concerned mostly with the formulation process of the policy, is direct linked to the phase of involvement of sub-national actors. In procedures of creation, negotiation, implementation and monitoring of regional development plans the domestic actors are indispensable. In general these sub-national co-players have the function to form and determine the performance of the EU regional policy within the borders of the member states.

Being aware of the fact that the sub-national actors and domestic arrangements vary enormous among the different countries, and that European regional policy, has to be interned in different regional and national contexts, the Europeanization could not be seen as process which occurs in the same matter in every environment. Hence the Europeanization of the regional policy depends on every specific policy characteristic and its reflection by the unique domestic composition of actors. And on the other the same composition of national actors is also influenced by the broad EU actors’ constellation, which operates at the supranational level of the EU regional policy. This complicated linkage of interdependences should be further elaborate on the common decision making process and overall functionality of the policy.

4.6 Decision Making Structure and functionality in the EU regional policy

The answers of the fundamental redistributive questions of regional policy : ‘where is the money spent?’ (concentration) and ‘how is it spent?’ (programming), provide the framework of all that what regional policy is about. In deriving to the answers of these questions for the every next program-period, all involved actors are struggling in a broad decision making process within a legal frame providing the functionality system (law) and development direction (goals) of the regional policy. What is pursued as primer goal, what are the budget constraints or how can particular state appoint for a certain resources are questions which should be answered on a common supranational level, but are also of a great importance for the performance of the regional policy on the domestic level in each member state. Hence the Europeanization or the ‘way of doing things’ on the domestic level is

direct connected with the preconditioned decision making process and functionality of the policy on the EU level.

The concentration and programming functionality of the EU regional policy, for the current program-period, reached between the Commission and Member States are a product of a long bargain process and an outcome of number of regional policy reforms.

Considering the decision making process over the concentration of regional funds to the European regions, the Commission has sought to reduce the Community regions and population eligible for structural funds, while each Member State has tried to maximize the share of its national population eligible for support (Bachtler, Mendez 2007, p.545). Every individual member state strived for maximization of its own benefits, and in the same time all member states in an association aspire for more influence by the decisions concerned with the determination of eligible for the funds regions. In this conflict of interest, the EU methodology for determining spatial coverage and financial allocations was challenged by a series of 'additional provisions' requested by individual Member States in the June 2005 and December 2005 European Council meetings (Council,2005).

As a result, the Commission responded to this challenge by re-packaging' the areas eligible for funding from Objective 2/5b, giving member states the possibility to determine the spatial coverage of the regional competitiveness and employment objective by their own.

The solution of this conflict of interest could be described as a mutual compromise between the actors where the responsibilities of the Member States have increased becoming the power to determine the spatial distribution of regional competitiveness and employment funding within their territories. However, the majority of regional policy expenditures is still being spent in regions/countries determined by a strictly applied EU-wide criterion under the convergence objective (Allen, 2005, p. 237).

Furthermore, the Commission has been able to maintain a single Community criterion (75 per cent of GDP per head) as the main indicator for designating Objective 1 regions, on which most of the EU cohesion policy resources are focused and continues to have responsibility for appraising and adopting the operational programs (Council, 2006), which is also an instrument to influence the spatial allocation of funding.

Taking this example into account it could be mentioned that the decision making process on the supranational level of the regional policy is often designated by multi-sided conflict of interest whereby frequently distinctive associations for achievement of periodical common goals are not excluded.

The second principle of functionality of the EU regional policy is programming (approval and planning of programs).Originally, under the 1988 reforms, spending on struc-

tural funds required Member States to submit development plans, which were then negotiated with the Commission as the basis for community support frameworks (CSFs), implemented through operational programs (OPs) or other instruments. Later on in the 1993 Regulations, the CSF and OP was combined in a single programming document (SPD) who should be negotiated with the Commission. In the present as an answer of the development of the decision making process concerned with the expectations for decentralization and simplification of operational programs, the Commission established a new strategic system of planning. This system describes the functionality and every step of the decision making process. According to these new system guidelines proposed by the Commission and agreed by the Council should be taken into account from the national governments by the composition procedure of their own national strategic reference framework (NSRF), specifying the intervention of the funds . Furthermore the NSRF has to include the overall national strategy as well as a list Operational Programs for intervention in the regions, emphasizing strategies and fields of intervention. Generally, the Ops and NSRF are the final source for selecting and funding projects within the domestic regions. Moreover a periodic reporting on the achievements of the funds in each Member State is also obligatory in the mode of the operation of the EU regional policy (Inforegio, Fachsheet, 2006).

Elaborating further on this prescribed functionality, it could be mentioned that the obligation for acknowledgment of the NSFR by the Commission, could be seen as mechanism within the Commission examines the direction of the national state's intentions and indirectly downgrades the borders within the member states should carry out the evolution of the domestic policy. The Commission's guidelines and NSFR are the both direct elements through the Europeanization in the EU regional policy is being advanced and moreover a pathway for a providence of norms and beliefs, which should prepare the ground for a successful convergence.

4.7 Legal Instruments of the Europeanization mechanism in the Regional policy

Being aware of the fact that the functionality and the decision making process in the EU regional policy to a certain degree influence and alter the domestic structures of regional policies within the member states, the instruments of direct or indirect prescriptions are those who are responsible for certain attributes desired by the Commission in each member state.

Hard instruments including directives, regulations, decisions of ECJ or common standards for "doing things" or controversially soft-non-compulsory instruments comprising intro-

ductions of a new solutions, opinions or rating rang lists prepare the ground of major policy change and deliver the preconditions for the diffusion of shared ideas and policy paradigms.

The derivation of The EU regional policy is embedded in the articles 158-162 of the treaty establishing the European Community. The Articles provide the overall direction of the policy as they obligate the Union to promote an overall harmonious development and reducing economic and social inconsistency by reducing disparities between regions. For the achievement of these goals in the program-period 2007-2013,a package of five Regulations adopted by the Council and the European Parliament in July 2006 set up the legal basis of the intervention possibilities for the pursuing the objectives (Inforegio, Factsheet,2006).

As the regulation principles define mostly the provisory functionality (Kap.111) of the regional policy, ideas and paradigms, which are of great importance for the distribution of effective work methods within the decision making process in the individual domestic policy are reached through an methods, which have not an obligational character. Thus, regional policy, as compared to other policy sectors does not have legal mechanism for coordination, but rather uses soft laws, rules and regulations (Dudek,2010).

These could be many different non-binding instruments referring to distinctive domestic practices or to new procedure desired by the Commission in the decision making procedures within the domestic governance.

The formal coordination work with the regions is not explicitly described in number of directives rather than combined within the mechanism of the open method of coordination (OMC). This new regulatory framework has a non-binding character and leaves most of the responsibility for a policy area within the nation states. Under the OMC the EU cannot obligate member states to particular implementations and subsequently cannot punish them in case of disproportions. Instead of this, OMC spreads best Practices and achieves convergence over the EU goals using the EU as a policy transfer platform rather than a law making system. Within the EU regional policy OMC consist of number of informal and formal occurrences and procedures. Examples of this are the permanent consultations between the Commission and member states, meetings of the member states with the Regional Policy DG, annual member state's reports distributed to the Commission and the new Internet platform composed by the Commission, including best practices from accomplished projects from the European regions. Additionally, to the exchange mechanism

within the OMC the Commission looks after the implementation of funds and programs through members of it who visit areas to evaluate, observe and guide current projects.

As a last innovation in the OMC, the Commission introduces new methods of harmonization based on task force work groups. The purpose of the task force groups is to interpret regulations and to ensure that there is harmonization between the purposes of the regional policy and interest and goals of other organizations in preordained common areas of activities (Org. BirdLife, 2011).

The way the task force interacts with the member states is based on the consulting principle. Once the member states propose or implement a program, this is presented to the task force, whereby the task force proves whether the policy is being handled appropriately. The permanent common work between the regions, member states and the Commission promotes models of “good practice” that lead to Europeanization through broad convergence and coordination without a pressure oriented instruments.

Generally it could be mentioned that the EU regional policy has to greet extend a redistributive character but its overall performance in the member states is also preconditioned within series of regulative requirements in the acquisition phase. In a process of an Negative integration and through the nonhierarchical Vertical channels of coordination supranational regional policy challenges the domestic policy structure , pursuing not a certain model for fulfillment of common goals rather than an states own new opportunity structure, which is able it build upon the new possibilities for regional development. In these policy boarders, the Commission, member states and broad scope of domestic actors strive for better realization of the European funds, whereby the interactions between them are set up in a legal determined functionality system and their convergence is overall driven by soft wall and non-binding instruments.

All these consider, a lot of scholars take this policy characteristics defined at the EU level as given, and adopt a ‘top-down’ research design in order to find out their effects over the domestic policy. This course of action could have advantages but it narrows most of the analysis to the point of direct absorption and the way of ‘put in practice’ of certain models (Featherstone, Radaelli, 2003).As a further perspective of the analysis , changes in the Bulgarian regional policy and its overall evolution are seen as a process of modification under the parallel and not hierarchical influence of the EU regional policy. The conclusions will be not made on the elaboration of the domestic responses of influence rather than on a policy development occurring in presence of supranational regional policy standard.

5. The Change in the Bulgarian regional policy

The first steps of the regional policy in Bulgaria date back to the early 1960s, whereby an peripheral backwardness caused by the strong urbanization trends were addressed with the initiative of policy relocation of industry to small- and medium sized towns in the periphery of the country. In the 1970s, regional policy trends preceded with a formation of number of planning committees at district level, combined under the superiority of the central State Planning Committee, which was responsible for the economic plans and the spatial distribution of productive forces (Hoffman, 1972).

On the one hand, this development connects, to some extent, the local needs of the regions to the overall process of central planning of the communist Bulgaria but, on the other hand, the requirements of the regions were not in line with the ideology of central planning and were not taken into consideration. On account of this the evolution of the regional policy in this period could not be rated as successful because of the fact that it was mostly influenced by the central, vertical concentration of production units and the needs of the regions were disregarded (Paskaleva, 1990).

In general, the central planning was mostly conducted on a sectorial basis for short-time periods and in fact, until 1996, the regional policy was largely build on a number of subsidies for local interventions, targeting projects on transport, environment, and employment but having no clear allocation formula (Kamenova, 1999).

Until the start of negotiations with the EU in the accession phase, long period plans for the development of the regions that lagged behind, in comparison to the rest of the country's locations, were not made. As a result of this, in numerous analysis and discussions for the Bulgarian readiness for EU membership (before the accession phase) between Bulgarian authorities and EU representatives, it was not unexpected dedicated that the country has no regional policy at all (European Commission, 2003).

It was not before 1999, until Bulgarian regional policy came in contact with the European regional policy and its actual objectives and began with the process of formulation and regionalization of national policy for and by the regions.

With the following dynamic generated by the perspective of Bulgarian's accession to the EU, the first Regional Development Act, including Regional Development Plans and the first Operational Program for Regional Development was adopted. With the introduction of important changes in the regional administrative structure, the institutions of regional policy, and the planning of regional interventions, a new approach to regional policy emerged (Bachtler, Mendez, 2007).

The whole bundle of these national initiatives was driven by the necessity of the national policy to comply with the Commission's accession requirements and, respectively, with the EU regional policy framework in order to be granted access to the EU and to the European funds.

In this context, the Bulgarian authorities (as with all other accession countries) were encouraged to develop any framework for regional policy, whereby the lack of specific conditions and guidelines had left a lot of space for creativity in the hands of the national authorities. In fact, the internalization and the adaptation of the regional policy had not to be mechanical and in spite of the fact that respondents had to follow some rules and provisions in embodiment of the policy, there has been always room for domestic interpretation, translation and editing. This room for states' interpretation of the rules had to be used in such a way that the decisions taken had to reflect the national problems in the domestic political context and build the new framework upon these (Mörth, 2003).

According to the Bulgarian minister of Regional Development and Public Works, this assignment of free room for the decisions relying on the policy was narrowed by two groups of provisory requirements, in the negotiation process of the regional policy.

The first group of requirements included:

Classification of the territory organization; Legislation framework, which to provide correspondence with the texts of the „European Accession Agreement“; Budget programming, aimed at provision of national co-financing of the Structural and Cohesion Funds; Determining institutions or bodies that will be responsible for the implementation of a specific financial control.

The second group of requirements included:

Provision of an administrative capacity, determining the tasks and responsibilities of the institutions and bodies; Establishment of partnerships at all levels of management with the business and the civil organizations (Cerovski, 2003, p.3).

It could be mentioned that exactly these requirements that set the borders within the Bulgarian policy, should develop in order to gain an access to European funds and in the same time downgrade the major operational principles of the supranational policy to the domestic mode of functionality. In this context the Europeanization of the regional policy in Bulgaria could be seen as a direction, which strives for certain adjustments and formations within a preconditioned policy dimensions, accepted on the base of the country willingness

to join the EU. And within that, as a practical example of the Vertical mechanism and as real-word case of mimentism, defined as typical for the Europeanization process in the EU regional policy.

Taking this logic in consideration, an observational analysis of single dimensions of the Bulgarian regional policy, which have incorporated the mechanisms of *a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms* of the European regional policy which are first defined and consolidated at the EU level, provide the actual evolution of the different dimension of the domestic regional policy. Furthermore the observed evolution of each dimension is assigned to one of the three Europeanization categories for the final outcome of bachelor thesis, which determines the degree of Europeanization of the regional policy in Bulgaria.

5.1 The new regionalization of the Bulgarian administrative territory

According to the Commission there is no common model of regionalization: 'The Acquis under Chapter 21 (regional policy) does not define how the specific structures for the practical management of Structural and the Cohesion Funds should be set up, but leaves it up to the member-states' (European Commission quoted in Hughes, 2003, p. 72). Nevertheless, each member states must agree a NUTS territorial classification and organize its territory on the basis of these administrative units of division. The NUTS units provide statistical classification system for shaping and standardization of the regional policy on the territory of Europe. The NUTS-Classification is built on a hierarchical principle and consists three levels (NUTS1, 2, 3), which divide the territory of the member states in regions upon the population, whereby each member state have the right to combine and classify districts on its own (Immig, 2007). Among the levels, NUTS-2 category is the most important because it provides not only the statistical information and analysis for regional development planning and programs, but also defines the administrative level at which structural funds and other regional and cohesion funds are managed (Hughes, 2003, 73).

In a process of Europeanization, motivated by the need of accommodation of specific Eurostat requirements and satisfaction of aspects of EU conditionality (Brusis, 2002), the classification system proposed by the EU for the European territory should be mapped onto the territory of Bulgaria.

Despite of its relatively small territory and only 7.9 Million inhabitants, Bulgaria includes extremely different, in their natural, cultural and socio-economic character, regions. The

country is characterized by a large number of natural regions, naturally formed by borders like Balkan Mountain and Struma River, and variety border regions, bordering on the Black sea the Danube River or Turkey, which include respectively diverse national minorities, social groups and types of municipalities.

In early 1991 this diversity was arranged in the Constitution of Bulgaria within the differentiation of two administrative-territorial units. The municipality (obshtina) represents the basic territorial unit of the local self-government (Art.136) and district (oblast) was defined as the administrative-territorial unit responsible for the conduction of the regional policy, implementation of the state government and for the keeping the harmony between the local and national interests (Art.142).The districts are administrated by a governor who is directly appointed by the Council of Ministers (Art.143).

In direct comparison of this initial Bulgarian administrative-territorial division, comprising 28 districts and 268 municipalities, with the NUTS classification system of the EU, it could be seen that the Bulgarian model for regional development is based on the NUTS-3(population 150000 to 800000) category instead of the NUTS-2 (over 800000) category. Therefore, regions in Bulgarian could be seen actually as sub-regions in the EU context. However, facing the fact that only NUTS-2 /-1 classifications define the administrative levels at which structural funds are managed individually, the Bulgarian authorities have established six NUTS-2 planning regions, comprising three to six districts (Law on Regional Development, 2004, Art.6), before in 2008 these ,by reason of population inconsistencies, were further combined in two NUTS-1 regions.

In accordance to this, the first Operational Program for Regional Development was designed on the basis of planning regions (NUTS-2), which were ‘the basis for the programming of pre-accession funding and later on of the regional funds’ (Totev, 2004, p.10). However, the NUTS classification was not the only unit of activities, as additionally to this classification, the National Plan For Development introduced a parallel spatial division, with explicit designation of ‘areas of purposeful intervention’ (areas for growth; areas for development; areas of industrial decline; backward rural areas; areas for cross-border cooperation), which covered around three quarters of the total population of the country (Totev, 2004). This further designation of the additional areas for intervention was at the municipal level, since it was at that level that problems and differences in performance could be identified (Marinov and Malhsan, 2003). This division of the administrative units and their empowerment through the both documents for national development, led to a combination of top down and bottom up approaches, whereby programs initiated by the municipalities were dependent on resources allocated on the basis of the NUTS regions,

wich actually were mechanical compositions of former districts created only on population reasoning.

The process of regionalization of the Bulgarian administrative system is to a great extent referred to the abovementioned process of Negative Integration. The EU regional policy challenge the 'domestic equilibrium as the aimed results were not at new common regional model but rather in domestic opportunity structure, which gives new chances of the disadvantaged regions to prosper (Featherstone, Radaelli, 2003, p.42). Furthermore the Commission's purpose to establish a system for an decentralized fund management. required regional administrative capacity and possibility for partnership with the Bulgarian administrative units. With the NUTS classification the Commission seek to organize the subnational partner among all member states, despite of their national differences , in a comparable units, possible to interact not only as a dependent national units but also as independent participants in the decision making process in the supranational EU regional policy. The ideology of Horizontal Europeanization should reduce the central influence of the national state and establish a partnership field, whereby Commission, national state and the new created NUTS units operate as equal partner in the bargain process referring to the European resources.

Although Bulgarian implement the new administrative-territorial framework and try to Europeanize its national regional division, the ideology of Horizontal Europeanization of the EU regional policy were not good understand and provided within the national borders. Although the domestic opportunity structure for the regions was changed and the new regions were implemented, the networks that occur were rather the results of exogenous factors than of the efforts of autonomous national actors to face the disparities among the Bulgarian regions.

In Fact 'the planning regions could be characterized as artificially created institutions that do not reflect a regionally differentiated domestic economic social or political infrastructure and that have been successfully designed to comply with EU requirement and ensure the absorption of EU funds'(Burna, 2005).

On the base of these analysis, it could be stated that regionalization dimension of the Bulgarian regional policy had developed in the process of Europeanization. However the Bulgarian authorities were not able to follow the idea for of the supranational regional policy and instead of building new independent administrative units, they simply mapped the NUTS units onto Bulgarian territory. Therefore, the idea of Negative Integration of the domestic policy was not realized. In General the Europeanization within the regional divi-

sion of the Bulgarian regional policy could be assigned to Accommodation category and described as "patching up" new administrative units onto existing ones without changing the latter.

5.2 Actor's constellation and relations in the Bulgarian regional policy

The NUTS II statistical units used in the EU regional policy framework have been mapped onto the 6 newly created Bulgarian regions. Moreover, according to Ferry and McMaster (2005), the influence of the EU on the domestic regional policy could be registered not only on the regionalization but can be also traced in the integration of responsibilities for the regional funds in the national regional policy regulations as well as the introduction of the so-called regional contracts concluded between the regions and the central government, which outlined the establishment of horizontal partnership bodies composed of various regional policy stakeholders.

Additionally to the horizontal partnership announced by McMaster (2005), the analysis of actors' constellation and the elaboration on the principals of cooperation between them in the supranational regional policy led to several conclusions. First of all the important founding of the elaboration of the EU regional policy was the principle of sufficient representativeness of all relevant interest. Every actor who is affected by any intended initiative, plans or goals of the supranational regional policy have to be involved in the decision making process and have to have the possibility to enhance its own preferences within its functions provided by European law.

Furthermore, the analysis have led also to the conclusion that the most of the agreements are reached in an intensive interaction process, whereby each actor hat its responsibilities complimentary to the responsibilities of the others.

In order to follow the Idea of the thesis the principle of cooperation and the constellation of the actors involved in the Bulgarian regional policy were analyzed and compared to the principles prevailing at the supranational level of the policy.

Taking into account the abovementioned conclusion, mentioning that the NUTS regions was to a great extend mechanical implemented and remain only artificially created institutions within the administrative organization in Bulgaria, it could be stated that the initial levels of administrative division had not been fully changed but only upgraded by the new provisory NUTS-2 level. Having this in mind the relevant actors that take part in the organization of the regional policy in Bulgaria could be seen as all various policy stakeholders on these three levels in combination with the central state.

In the Bulgarian administrative system the municipalities have the character of the regional self-government (Boev,2002).Their relative large size and the principle of direct election of their mayors, ensures the importance of the municipality mayors, being the only direct political legitimated actors within the regional policy. However, the individual municipality mayors are not influential actors in regional policy. Their functions of legitimated representatives of the municipalities are executed within the National Associations of Municipalities of the Republic Bulgaria (NSORB), which are common representative organs of the all 265 Bulgarian municipalities. By the conclusion of the Bulgarian regional policy the NSORB were acknowledged as a partner by the government of Prime Minister Stanishev and were responsible for the representing local interest at the national level. In particular the government agreed to include representatives of local governments in the planning, programming, management, monitoring and evaluation of programs and projects financed from the EU regional funds (Mediapool, quoted in Brusis, 2007). As this structure of involvement of the regional association of municipalities could be referred to the typical for the EU principle of horizontal cooperation, according to many Bulgarian observers the impact of the NSORB associations in the regional policy is rather limited. Due to the fact that the initial decentralization of power, which provides the municipalities with power to act in the regional policy as an independent actor was not backed up by a decentralization of the financial resources, municipalities were not successful in representing the local interest. Under these conditions the municipalities remain dependent on a central government budget and are still incapable to plan their actions independently, as they always have to take in consideration the financial limits constrained by the state (Brusis, 2007). Additionally Mollov (2004) have come to the conclusion that the associations of the municipalities cooperate mostly on a formal nature, for example in a common projects like a waste management, and in fact pay very little attention to the process of the policy formulation at national level. These two observations lead to the conclusion that the municipality level is underrepresented in the Bulgarian regional policy. The associations of municipalities were not able to play the role of an actor, who is independent of the central power and additionally their functions were not direct involved in the process of policy formation.

One level higher than the municipality level in the initial Bulgarian administrative division is the level of the districts. At this level the actors, who are involved in the Bulgarian regional policy are the district governors. The district governors in Bulgaria are not directly elected but are appointed by the government. They have the power to intervene in the functioning of the municipalities as they may suspend the execution of lawful acts of mayors of

municipalities and refer them to the court (Ananieva, 2002). Additionally to this function which mostly aims at coordination between the central and the local government the district governors are also appointed by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works for a 'advocates of regional interests in the framework of the regional development' (Brusis,2007, p.226). In order to accomplish this functions district governors exchange information with NSORB and work on an establishment of a better partnership between the district administrations and municipalities (Brusis, 2007).

Furthermore the district administrations assist municipalities in implementing delegated task of the central government, oversee the legality of the administrative acts applied by the municipalities and prepare regional development plans.

However this clear division of work tasks, the functions of the district administrations is somewhat problematic. On the one hand the district governors are representative exercising control function of the state over the regional level and on the other hand have to be an advocate of the local interest (MRRB, 2005). This dual functionality is completely out of accordance with the logic of actor's representation and participation in the EU regional policy. As the district governors have to represent states and local interest, this actor could not be seen as an actor with complementary function in system the Bulgarian regional policy but as a intermediary between the state and local levels. Although the principle of coordination between the district administrations and the municipalities have in common with the principle of soft coordination and partnership among the actors at the supranational level of the regional policy, the legal power of the district governors over the municipalities is pure mechanism of a principle for states centralization and have nothing in common with the logics of the EU.

In summary in could be mentioned that district governors as an integral parts of the Bulgarian regional policy, best function as proxy representatives for local and national interests as their positioning based on a direct government appointment best serves for the purpose of central state influence over the regional self-government and not for a representation of the regional interests.

In 2004 new regional councils for development attached to the NUTS requirement for administrative division were established. From this point, six new councils were responsible for the NUTS-2 planning regions as their main task include the preparation of a draft regional development plans and the preliminary evaluation of projects included Bulgaria's national Operational Program for Regional Development. The main purpose by the preparation of regional development plans was the specification of the policy objectives, where-

by concrete measures that should be financed by the regional funds are presented in the concrete Operational Program.

In contrast to the ambition of the Commission to define a common administrative level NUTS-2 at which structural funds and other regional and cohesion funds are managed by a powerful regional body, the regional councils in Bulgaria was only a mechanical composition of different actors who were already represented at the other levels on the Bulgarian territorial administration. Regional development council includes representatives from the central state ministries, district governors, one representative of each municipality of each district within a planning region and trade union representatives (Brusis,2007). The power of this new regional council was further diminished as the plans for regional development are only a draft version which should be approved by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works. This composition of the regional councils did not fit with the Idea of strong representative actor at the regional level and to a great extent constitutes the impact of the national state in the regional policy.

On the base of these analyses it could be concluded that the overall responsibility for regional and development policy in Bulgaria is shared between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry for Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW). These central state actors divide the responsibilities between them, whereby the Ministry of Finance have the responsibility for adopting the National Economic Development Plan (NEDP) and also the National Regional Development Plan (NRDP), which defines assisted areas and areas of priority and the Ministry for Regional Development and Public Works is responsible for the preparation of the NEDP and the approval of the NRDP and the design and implementation of regional policy. The coordination of the ministries with the sub-national actors is carried through two special bodies within these ministries. While the Regional Coordination Directorate take the responsibility of coordinating actions between central, regional and municipal authorities, Central Coordination Unit oversee the implementation of policy at the regional and sub-regional levels (Monastiriotis,2008).

Council Regulation 1260/1999 requires the creation of a wide and effective association of all relevant bodies in member-states, explicitly stating the need for the participation of regional and local authorities and other component public authorities. Based on this requirement regional governments or regional administrations in the EU accession-states have been subjected to essential changes while seeking to join the EU (Brusis 2003, p.89). In the case of Bulgaria the requirements for actor's participation and cooperation have been accomplished and a framework that was capable for the implementation of the EU regional

policy was provided. However, these were to a great extent mechanical innovations, which could not provide the desired by the EU effects. No of the principles of congruence, horizontal partnership or sufficient interest's representation which are symbolic for the cooperation between the actors at the supranational regional policy did occur between the stakeholders in the Bulgarian regional policy.

Instead of this the centralism remained in Bulgaria. The new institutional framework was staffed mostly by public servants from the main cabinet ministries and the administration directly under the prime-minister. Moreover, non-state actors were handpicked by the control and financial constraints from the state and could not participate in the decision making process. In Bulgaria the processes of Europeanization have actually generated different types of structural networks which, however, do not result from the efforts of relatively autonomous subnational actors but are determined by national-level actors. In other word, part of the old way of doing things remained. And although there were sufficient for the access to the regional funds change, and Bulgarian regional policy were to a great extent Europeanized, this Europeanization could not be described as successful and is determined as an insufficient Accommodation by the rules of the operationalization of the thesis.

6. Conclusion

In fact, the role of the EU for the further transformation of the state was very important in the Bulgarian society and the Europeanization of Bulgarian ways of 'doing things' was seen as crucial for the development of the country. The dynamic generated through strengthening Bulgaria's European perspective, in the context of preparations for the accession, led to the adoption of the first Regional Development Act in 1999. Furthermore, a new policy framework, administrative capacities and institutional structures were promoted within this initial plan for the development of the Bulgarian regional policy. These changes were considered a response to the requirements of the EU regional policy and should provide the structure necessary for the supranational policy implementation in the country.

Moreover, the development of the regional policy in Bulgaria and its Europeanization was not only based on administrative changes but stood for a completely new ideology of functionality. Concepts like redistribution, horizontal partnership, complementary functionality, convergence et cetera, which were put behind the EU normative requirements for the acquisition, needed to be incorporated in the regional policy. These concepts should induce important changes in regional administrative structures, in institutions of regional policy,

and in the planning of regional interventions in the domestic policy, giving Bulgaria the chance to solve problems of polarization, peripheral backwardness and spatial localized (sub-regional) inequality within its territory by means of a European way of ‘doing things’. This seemed to happen as Bulgaria entered its post-accession period with a regional policy framework that appeared to be consistent with the EU acquis. ‘Funding was increased and the inflows of much-needed resources should trigger the development of the main agglomeration / target areas and eventually the diffusion of growth to the periphery’ (Monastiriotis, 2008, p.34).

Despite this conclusion, the analytical framework, analyzing the outcomes of domestic changes in response to the processes of Europeanization provides considerable evidence that ‘the emerging regional policy framework in Bulgaria reflects strongly the EU influence and shows little sensitivity to, and appreciation of, the main regional and spatial problems that policy in the country’ (Dabrowski, Yanakiev, 2009). Within the two domains of national regional policy, on which the thesis elaborated, the innovations were provided in a mechanical way, which transform the policy consistently to the EU acquis requirements but was not able to incorporate the essential logic of the operational methods of the EU regional policy.

Although Bulgaria implemented the new administrative-territorial framework and tried to Europeanize its national regional division based on the NUTS regions proposed by the Commission, this EU method for regionalization was completely misunderstood by the Bulgarian authorities. Instead of new regionalization, serving the optimal absorption of the regional funds in Bulgaria, artificially composed institutions were created, which were simply mapped on over the old administrative units. This course of action upgraded the Bulgarian administrative division to the one desired by the European Union but completely failed to incorporate the logic of Negative Integration, meaning the striking down of national borders.

Concerning actors’ constellation in the Bulgarian regional policy it could be mentioned that broad spectrum of participants typical for the EU regional policy was available. However, the problem in the domestic policy was not the presence of the actors at different levels of the domestic administration but rather their cooperation. Although administration apparatuses at the municipal, regional and NUTS level have existed, the partnership principle, according to which administrative actors at different levels of government beyond the state apparatus needed to be included in the process of formulation of the programs, their implementation and monitoring, was completely misinterpreted. The Europeanization in this domain in Bulgaria does not induce the principles of horizontal partnership, congru-

ence and complimentary for the coordination and functionality between the actors in the regional policy. In spite of this, no elected regional authorities who would play a role in administration regional funds, independent financing of the stakeholders of sub-national level and underrepresentation of local interests and state's possibilities for influence over all regional actors, are facts in the Bulgarian regional policy that lead to the conclusion that 'old ways of doing things', which can be defined with a single word, 'centralism', still dictate the performance of the regional policy in Bulgaria.

The research and analysis of these two broad dimensions of the Bulgarian regional policy provide evidences that there is strong path-dependence, which determines the Europeanization of the regional policy. Elements and logics typical for the government of the central state hinder further regional development of the country. Moreover, the free interpretation space, which should be used by the domestic authorities to generate a framework that follows the operational logics of the supranational regional policy, was not used appropriately. In fact, the Europeanization in Bulgaria could be described as 'change in continuity' that is 'emergence of change on the margins, implying local rule transformation within basically unchanged institution that does not challenge the dominant characteristics of the mode of governance' (Bruszt, 2008, p.620).

With regard to the question of the incorporation of European mechanisms, logics and ways of doing things in the European regional policy, the bachelor thesis concluded that Europeanization in the Bulgarian Regional Policy led to modest degree of domestic change accomplished by 'patching up' new policies and institutions onto existing ones, without changing the latter. These changes were mostly a product of mechanical interventions, which fail to reflect on the domestic situation. As a result of this, Bulgaria remains the state with the lowest absorption level of the EU fund for the year 2010 (Obretenova, 2011) and was not be able to tackle the problems of its regions.

In Respect to the future, it will be useful for the Bulgarian regional policy to look into its own domestic limitations and constraints, mostly concerned with the dominant role of the state, and to find new appropriate institutional and socio-political functional mechanisms. As the European regional policy cooperates intensive with the domestic regional policies, authorities of Bulgarian regional policy can use this cooperation to learn more about the operational mechanism of the supranational regional policy, and implement these into a framework capable for better absorbing EU funds. Finally, Bulgaria will be able to make its own experiences within the program-period 2007-2013. For the future, it should elaborate on these experiences and follow the course of Europeanization.

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