Similarities and Differences between NATO and the EU Enlargement

Bilbil Kastrati

MA. Bilbil KASTRATI

Abstract

After the end of the Cold War the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) enlargement were two main political processes in the European continent. Both organizations since their inception, promoted the idea of integrated Europe without borders, which meant creating a Europe without divisions and bringing back all Central Eastern European (CEE) countries into the European family where they belong. However, after half a century of isolation in the totalitarian communist system the CEE countries (CEEC) had to undertake fundamental institutional, political, economic, military and other reforms in order to join NATO and the EU. In order to ease the process of accession, both organizations set certain criteria for membership for the CEECs. While NATO's requirements for membership were more general and flexible, the EU's requirements, on the other hand, were non-negotiable and closely enforced.

Therefore, this article will explore NATO's and the EU's enlargement process eastwards, its similarities and differences. In addition, it will analyse the difficulties and challenges with special focus on Russia's opposition to this process.

The author will identify the similarities and differences between NATO and the EU's enlargement and will argue that the eastern enlargement marked the final end to the Cold War

antagonism and it created conducive preconditions for more secure and prosperous Europe.

Keywords: NATO, EU, CEEC's, Russia, Enlargement, Similarities, Differences.

1. Introduction

The end of the World War II brought peace in the European continent and hope for a better future. Unfortunately, those who won the war, whilst pursuing their own national and ideological interest divided Europe into Western and Eastern spheres. While the Western European countries developed their democracy and market economy, the Eastern European countries remained under the Russia's influence with autocratic political system and a state controlled economy. The ideological division (Capitalism *vs.* Communism) between the Western and the Eastern European countries lasted for over fifty years. The end of the Cold War in 1989 and disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact in 1991 brought a perspective for CEEC's, and the integrated Europe was an idea whose time had come (Schimmelfennig, 2003).

After the end of the Cold War the CEEC's began their political and economic reforms for transition to the liberal democracy and open market economy. Therefore, they applied for membership in almost all western international / regional organizations, including NATO and the EU. Most of the CEEC's considered joining NATO and the EU as their central foreign policy goal. On the other hand, NATO and the EU, as main European regional organizations, were determined to give a perspective for better, secure and welfare to all CEEC's (Schimmelfennig, 2003).

Initially, NATO and the EU were careful not to promise quick membership for CEEC's. However, in light of positive developments in the Eastern Europe and firm and persistent request of the CEEC's for membership in NATO and in the EU, both organizations decided for eastward enlargement. The decision for the EU enlargement was made at the Copenhagen Council meeting in 1993, where the EU agreed in principle for eastern enlargement. The EU set out its accession conditions, which were later known as '*Copenhagen Criteria*' (Ross, 2002). The NATO made the decision for eastern enlargement at the NATO Summit in Brussels in January 1994 (Lieven and Trenin, 2003). A report was commissioned, *study*

on NATO enlargement, which was published in 1995; the report, among others, set out the criteria that CEEC's aspiring for NATO membership would have to fulfil in order to be considered for membership (Medcalf, 2005).

Both organizations NATO and the EU developed similar political criteria for CEEC's membership, notably requesting establishment of a stable democracy, respect for human rights and protection of minorities. However, these organizations also had different sets of criteria i.e. military criteria's for NATO; whereas EU had economic, social, technical and administrative criteria's (Bebler, 1999).

The eastern enlargement was made in a zone which was previously under the Russian influence; therefore, there were objections and tensions during this process. The EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe received, surprisingly, little attention in Russia, where in general the reaction was positive to the prospect of its Central and Eastern European neighbours becoming members of the EU, in marked contrast to them joining NATO. The NATO's expansion eastwards was perceived by Russia as a security threat and national humiliation; hence, objections and criticism among the general public in Russia was and remains high (Ross, 2003).

2.   NATO enlargement

The North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington on 4 April 1949, which brought NATO into existence. The twelve founding members of NATO were: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom and the United States. The aim of establishing NATO was to protect the Western Europe from external military threat posed by the Soviet Union, but also served as a mechanism for internal security in preserving peace and order in Europe (NATO Homepage).

NATO Treaty foresaw that other European states might be invited to join the alliance; where Article 10 of the Treaty stipulates that:

'The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty. Any State so invited may become a Party to the Treaty by depositing its instrument of

accession with the Government of the United States of America. The Government of the United States of America will inform each of the Parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession' (NATO Homepage).

The Treaty enabled NATO to conduct an open door policy towards enlargement. The NATO enlargement is an ongoing and dynamic process, and the provision of Article 10 ensures that there is a possibility of membership for all European countries, which share Western values and norms. The NATO's first enlargement occurred only three years after its inception in 1952 when Turkey and Greece joined the alliance followed by the West Germany in 1955 and Spain in 1982 (NATO Homepage).

In the Brussels Summit in January 1994, NATO made its first step towards enlargement after the end of the cold war. The *Finale Communiqué* of the summit stated that '…we expect and would welcome NATO expansion that would reach to democratic states to our East, as part of an evolutionary process, taking into account political and security developments in the whole of Europe' (Medcalf 2005, p. 130). The very same year NATO commissioned a report, the *Study on* NATO Enlargement that was published in September 1995 (NATO Homepage). This report provided justifications for post-Cold War enlargement process stating that NATO's Eastern enlargement would help achieve one of NATO's long standing aims of enhancing security and stability in the North Atlantic area. Shortly after, in the Madrid Summit of 1997 NATO invited Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary to start negotiations for membership. In the fiftieth anniversary of NATO in the Washington Summit in 1999, formal invitations for membership were extended to Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary (NATO Homepage).

Later on, in the Prague Summit in 2002 NATO started accession negotiations with seven other CEEC's, namely: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. These countries were extended invitations for membership on 29 March 2004 shortly before the Istanbul Summit, which was the largest enlargement in alliance's history. At the Riga Summit in 2006 the alliance showed its commitment to extend further invitations to countries that meet NATO's standards for membership (NATO Homepage). Hence, on 1 April 2009 Albania and Croatia joined the alliance (NATO Homepage), making NATO an alliance of 28 member states.

2.1 Russia's attitudes towards NATO enlargement

The biggest challenge to NATO's eastward enlargement was Russia's opposition and objection (Tymoshenko, 2007). Russia considered that NATO's enlargement poses a security threat and undermines its international credibility (Dannreuther, 1999/2000). Therefore, at the beginning, in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, the western governments were careful in making promises of immediate membership of CEEC's into NATO. There were even pessimists who opposed the enlargement claiming that they should not raise tensions with Russia and avoid any potential conflicting situations (Ross, 2003).

According to Lieven and Trenin (2003), in Russian's perception the role of NATO is the most acute problem of the emerging European international system, because of three reasons. Firstly, NATO is still very often perceived as a challenge to Russia's security interests, even if only a potential one. Secondly, Moscow wants to prevent the central security role in Europe from being played by a structure to which Russia has no direct access. And thirdly, Russia's reaction towards NATO enlargement is considerably influenced by some domestic forces which oppose the new approach between the West and East.

Even though the process of NATO's expansion eastwards is more or less completed, it is still perceived by Russia as a security threat and a national humiliation; therefore, the objection and criticism among the general public in Russia still remains high (Ross, 2003).

3. EU enlargement

The origins of the EU date back from the European Economic Community established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957 from six founding countries: Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, and Netherlands (European Union Homepage). The aim of the EU was to create a unity of the Western Europe through integration and cooperation and to avoid extreme forms of nationalism, traditional rivalries and bloody conflicts between European powers especially Germany and France, which had devastated the continent (Schimmelfennig, 2003).

The EU legal basis for the process of enlargement was initially foreseen by the Treaty of Rome, Article 237. Further the Treaty on European Union (TEU) Article 49.1 specifies that:

'Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall be notified of this application. The Applicant State shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the consent of the European Parliament, which shall act by a majority of its component members. The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be taken into account' (EUR Lex Homepage).

According to Ross the 'enlargement has been fundamental to the idea of European unification from the start…' (2003, p. 1); therefore, the EU started its enlargement since 1973 embracing new members. The enlargement process before the Cold War was made in three main groupings. The first group to join the original six members was: United Kingdom, Denmark, and Ireland in 1973. Then the southern or '*Iberian*' group joined Greece (1981), Spain, and Portugal (1986). The third group of new members joined in 1995 Austria, Sweden, and Finland (Poole, 2003).

After the end of the Cold War the CEEC's applied for the EU membership considering this as a way to overcome their economic misery and improve the welfare of population. The EU was not ready for this challenge at the beginning; however, in early 1990's the EU reaffirmed its general rule of enlargement. In the Lisbon Summit in June 1992 a report titled *'Europe and the Challenge of Enlargement'* was presented by the European Commission in response to the request of the European Council to examine the implications of a future eastward enlargement. The report emphasised that states that wish to apply for membership in the EU should satisfy three basic conditions: European identity, democratic status and respect for human rights (EUR Lex).

In the Copenhagen Conference in June 1993, the EU made a historical decision by giving the green light to such an enlargement (Schimmelfennig, 2003). The EU invited all potential member countries to start negotiations for membership. In order to prepare itself for the eastern enlargement the EU approved the Treaty of Amsterdam 1996/97 (European Union); which amended the TEU and made the necessary institutional changes to cope with the enlargement. In summer of 1997 the European Commission published a document titled *Agenda 2000*, where the EU made the assessment of the Central Eastern European candidates for EU

membership. The Commission ranked candidates according to three criteria: political, economic and the ability to adopt EU legislation in the medium term (Lieven and Trenin, 2003). Consequently, the biggest EU enlargement in its history occurred at a ceremony in Dublin on 1 May 2004, when the largest number of countries was admitted at the same time. The new members of the EU were: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Soon after, on 1 January 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined the Union. On 1 July 2013 Croatia became the newest member of the EU), which now comprises of 28 countries and continues to negotiate membership with other countries for further enlargement.

3.1 Russia's attitudes towards EU enlargement

The EU enlargement eastwards included mainly countries which were previously under Russia's sphere of influence. Similarly to the NATO enlargement, the EU was expecting Russia's opposition to such an enlargement, however there was little attention and so far Russia has generally reacted positively to Central and Eastern European countries joining the EU, in a marked contrast to them in joining with NATO (Ross, 2003).

The general public and the Russian government see the EU primarily as an economic organization. The EU eastern enlargement, which even included the Baltic States, was not perceived by the Russian's as either a security threat or a national humiliation in the way NATO expansion undoubtedly was. Even the Communist Party leader Gennadii Zyuganov told a group of members of the European Parliament that the enlargement of the EU towards the East is a positive and a very important element (Ross, 2003; pp. 77-80).

4. NATO/EU enlargement similarities and differences

The NATO and the EU are perceived by most of the Europeans as crucial to development of the European system as they allocate the most relevant political values in the area of security and welfare (Schimmelfennig, 2003). Even though their scope of enlargement is in the same direction eastwards and their activity might be complementary, they are nevertheless completely different processes. Therefore, NATO and the

EU's similarities and differences towards Eastern enlargement will be explored hereunder.

4.1 Similarities

The NATO and the EU are worlds most highly institutionalised and rule-constrained regional integration organizations, offering the greatest benefits of membership, security and welfare. Both organizations EU after the Cold War for the first time in the history created formal accession criteria for membership (Jonson Institute). The NATO was primarily focused and involved in security and defence matters of the CEEC's, hence, NATO has set political and military criteria for membership: Political - Democratic Control of Armed forces, settlement of borders and ethnic disputes; Military – Defence modernization, spending (at least 2% of GDP) and Operational and Doctrinal harmonization (Bebler, 1999). Nevertheless, these criteria were general and there was flexibility for some particular countries. On the other hand, the EU also imposed criteria for membership: establishing stable institutions, which can guarantee democracy, rule of law, human rights and protection of minorities. The candidate countries should also be able to cope with the EU open market economy and will be required to apply all *'acquis communautaire'* to their laws and policies. Compared to NATO, the EU requirements were more far-reaching, non-negotiable, uniformly applied and closely enforced (Poole, 2003).

The NATO and the EU enlargements are institutionally driven processes. Institutions of both organizations, the North Atlantic Council (NATO) and the Council (EU) respectively, are responsible for discussions and negotiations processes for the accession of each individual country. Therefore, all aspiring countries for membership in NATO and the EU have to develop close relations with the aforementioned institutions and be in line with their requirements (American Chamber of Commerce in Belgium).

The NATO and the EU are both regional organizations. Their scope of activity related to enlargements, at least for now, has been concentrated in the European continent (Schimmelfennig, 2003). Another similarity is that the eastward expansion of both organizations, namely NATO and the EU, was made in the territory, which was previously under the Russian influence.

Both organizations since their inception have been committed to enlargement with the aim to create a Europe as one and whole without

borders and divisions. With the end of the Cold War and the possibilities for eastern enlargement both NATO and the EU committed themselves to improve the prospects and return all the CEEC's into integrated Europe where they belong.

4.2 Differences

Beside similarities in the enlargement process, NATO and the EU have had their differences too. Reading different books, consulting different sources for information, journals, internet, etc. it can be concluded that the main differences between NATO and the EU enlargement can be grouped into six key differences as Jacoby (2004) described in his book 'The Enlargement of the European Union and NATO'. The CEEC's applied for immediate membership after the collapse of the communism in both NATO and the EU, but they had to wait until NATO and the EU were ready to embrace them. NATO's enlargement was quicker than the EU enlargement, since it was headed by United States and supported by Germany, which effectively overcame the resistance from Russia and France. Therefore, NATO expanded five years before the EU.

The disintegration of Soviet Union faced NATO and the EU with the challenge of the reform and adaptation to the new environment. After the end of the Cold War NATO's *raison d'etre* was questioned (Asmus, 2002). On the other side, the EU was seen to be more relevant than ever before which made the CEEC's to seek membership *first* in this organization.

Both organizations NATO and the EU have set accession criteria. While the EU developed well and precise criteria for fulfilment of the so-called *acquis*, on the other hand, NATO's criteria for membership were *general* and much more *flexible*.

The NATO and the EU differ also with regard to their *human recourses capacities*. The EU Commission had personnel who were employed to support and monitor the CEEC's in their path to membership. The NATO had less capacities and personnel to support CEEC's in membership process, even though they work jointly. The NATO insists is pressing CEEC's to develop their own capacities in order to cope with the process of transformation and adaptation in accession process.

The EU also differs from NATO due to its abilities to support the CEEC's with *financial resources*, which was not the case with NATO. Most of financial aid for military reform of the CEEC's came from individual NATO member states.

The requirements for membership in NATO and the EU were largely determined; however, the EU powers insisted in *high standards* for membership, where in some cases they increased the requirements to such a level that even the current members could not perform. Contrary to this, NATO was more *flexible* and in some cases they even lowered the level of criteria for membership, as they were initially determined.

5. Conclusion

The NATO and the EU Eastern enlargement meant a final end to the Cold War antagonism and the prospect for political stability in a wider Europe. It also created the prospects for a secure future and opening of new markets, promising long term growth and prosperity for both, Eastern and Western Europe.

The NATO was created to deter, what was then perceived as a security threat from the Soviet Union, and to maintain internal peace and order within Europe. The EU was founded to build the unity of the Western Europe through integration and cooperation, to avoid extreme rivalries and bloody conflicts between European powers, and to increase the welfare of their population.

Both organizations since their inception were enlarged with new members; however, with the end of the Cold War prospects of a wider eastern enlargement brought these organizations before a new and difficult challenge. In this context, and with the change of the environment in Europe, both organizations made a decision for eastern enlargement.

The EU in the Copenhagen Conference in 1993 gave the green light in principle for eastern enlargement; a year later in 1994 at the Brussels Summit, NATO did the same.

The eastern enlargement as a process was faced with difficulties and challenges: Initially, the CEEC's had to make fundamental institutional reforms in order to become members of NATO and the EU, and second, the enlargement was faced with Russia's opposition, especially for NATO, which required lots of efforts and involved huge risks so that the idea of an integrated Europe becomes a reality. Nevertheless, NATO and the EU enlargement after the Cold War occurred with NATO admitting additional new members in 1999, 2004, and in 2009; numbering now at a total of 28 member states, followed by the EU enlargement in 2004, 2007, and 2013; taking on board new members and now totalling at 28 member states.

The NATO and the EU in the enlargement process had their similarities and differences.

Similarities, NATO and the EU are the world's most institutionalized and rule constrained organizations, which offer their members security and welfare. Since their inception they have been committed to enlargement and creation of a Europe without borders and divisions. Both are regional organizations and enlarged in the Eastern Europe, which was previously an area under Russia's influence. The NATO and the EU enlargement was an institutionally driven process that imposed criteria for membership.

Differences, after the Cold War the reasons for NATO's existence were contested, meanwhile the EU was more relevant than ever; however, NATO enlarged eastward first. The EU had more developed and precise criteria, which are non-negotiable and closely enforced, whereas NATO criteria are general and much more flexible. The EU has much more financial power as well as human resources to support potential members in their accession processes; whilst NATO lacks both. Finally, the EU requirements for membership of the CEEC's were at a level that even member states could not accomplish, whereas NATO in some cases had even lowered its criteria for membership compared to how they were initially determined.

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