

# Integration and Non-integration Strategies: the Role of Ideas<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The traditional explanations of preference formation of the member states of the European Union stress the importance of structural (GDP, net incomes from the EU budget, level of economic development) and institutional factors (type of negotiation forum, level of negotiations, presidency of the Council, regional governance). In this paper we will focus on the third group of possible explanation, namely the ideational factors and their role in formulating the attitudes of member states' governments on the issue of European integration. Apart from short-term preferences, governments have long-term strategies on the European integration. In this paper we will introduce a model of explaining the integration strategies of new member states of the European Union on the basis of ideational factors.*

**Keywords:** *European integration, preference formation, integration strategy, idea of state*

## Introduction

This paper has three aims. The first one is to introduce the concept of integration strategies of the member states of the European Union (EU). This term is more suitable for describing long-term interests of the member states, which are of our principal concern here, than the commonly used term 'preference'. The second aim of this paper is to show different explanations of preference formation on the basis of structural, institutional and ideational factors. The third aim is to develop a theoretical model for explaining the integration strategies formation of the new member states of the European Union on the basis of ideational factors.

This paper focuses on ideational factors and their role in the formation of integration strategies. We intend to explain the influence of the idea of the state (the concept of the state) on the formation of integration strategies. Our assumption is that political representatives, the elites, have their concept of state, namely what state is, what it is not, what it wants, what are its priorities etc. Such a concept influences the decision-making process and, therefore, the formation of integration strategies.

The first part of the paper is given to explaining the terminology, which we are operating with in this paper. It explains the differences between preferences and strategies of the member states of the EU. The second part examines the three types of explanation of preference formation — structural, institutional and ideational. The last part introduces a model for explaining integration strategies formation on the basis of ideational factors.

## Preferences and strategies

It is quite difficult to define preference on the basis of the current state of art. Many authors do not define preference; it is understood as concrete decision or as a declaration before this decision. Aspinwall (2006) and Mattila (2004) define preference as concrete decision presented in the institutions of the EU, Aspinwall adds to the definition the position expressed at the intergovernmental level. According to Koenig-Archibugi (2004) and Hug and König (2002), preferences are positions presented in the official governmental documents before concrete decision on the EU level. Carruba (1997) and Copsey and Haughton (2009) do not connect preferences with the institutional framework. For them preferences are the attitudes of government.

Our main concerns in this paper are the factors, which go beyond these declarations. Governments have their preferences, which are the results of influence of several factors. We define preference as an *alternative which has the government chosen from several alternatives and which present on the EU level as its attitude on concrete question* and will use the term 'preference' in this paper with connection to structural and institutional factors, term strategies when dealing with ideational factors.

On the contrary, integration strategies are long-term attitude to the general direction of European integration, not only on concrete question of integration, such as the case of preferences. Tanja Börzel (2002) defines them as long-term opinions on the integration. On the basis of their integration strategies the member states do not only make one decision (as is the case of preferences), but their strategies decide on the preferred form and scope of integration. Preferences are partial opinions, decisions about concrete question of European integration. Strategies concern the basic questions of integration (intergovernmental vs. supranational, for or against deepening of integration and enlargement etc.).

Both preferences and strategies can change; the difference is in their flexibility. Preferences are more flexible, they change with the change of structural and institutional factors which shape them. They change more often than ideational factors do. Economical and institutional factors can change faster than ideational. Change in economic development,

increase of GDP or in institutional rules goes faster than the change of ideas, which are rooted in culture and the values of society. Therefore, strategies are more rigid than preferences. Elites construct integration strategies on the basis of what they consider to be the idea of the state. The representatives of the state create integration strategies on the basis of the perception of such an idea of the state. This is made of several components: history, area, religion, origin, customs, norms, symbols and myths.

## Three groups of factors

At the earlier stages of the European integration the preferences of the member states were treated as given and only their role in integration process was explored. But the beginning of the 1990s saw a growing interest in the factors that influence preference formation. The liberal intergovernmental approach (Moravcsik 1993) and neoinstitutionalism (Rosamond 2004) were traditional explanatory frameworks of preference formation. A common characteristic of these two frameworks is argumentation based on the rationality of actors and material conditions that set the limits of preference formation. Neoinstitutionalism is based on a simple assumption that 'institutions matter' (Rosamond 2004: 113) and play the main role in explaining what is going on in the EU and why.

Preference formation is explained by three groups of factors. The structural explanation focuses on economic and material factors, like GDP, the level of economic development, net income from the EU budget, personal gains from the EU membership, the influence of main economic sectors or the size of the government (Börzel 2002, Aspinwall 2006, Mattila 2004, Caplanova, Orviska and Hudson 2004, Ingebritsen 1998). According to this logic, actors behave on the basis of rational calculation of gains and losses, which result from their respective preferences.

The institutional explanation of preference formation focuses on norms that are results of shared agreement; preferences depend on institutions on domestic as well as European level. Important are also relationship between these actors and decision-making rules within the institutions. Institutions not only ease the formation of preferences, since they set limits, but preferences are influenced also by institutional structure and their functions. Among this group of factors are: the type of negotiation forum, level of negotiation, the presidency of the Council, etc. (Mattila 2004, Aspinwall 2006, Christiansen et al. 2002, Koenig-Archibugi 2004).

The third group embraces ideational factors. The basic assumption is that ideas, not only material conditions, are important for the formation of preferences of the EU member-states. Ideas are not based on the evaluation of gains and losses of preferences. In this paper we want to show how the idea of the state influences the formation of preferences. The idea of the state is composed of a notion of the state — historical experiences, norms, values, symbols etc. Ideational factors are long-term factors connected with culture, and, therefore, we do not include into this group of factors the ideological position of the parties in government. Governmental ideology can change with the change of the governing parties holding

various positions on the left-right spectrum, but the idea of the state is not influenced by this change.

## Structural factors

According to Tanja Börzel (2002), the governments of the member states are trying to minimize the costs of adaptation to the European legislation. The best way how to do this is to 'upload' domestic policies on the European level: 'The better the fit between European and domestic policies, the lower the implementation costs at the national level' (Börzel 2002: 194). She divides member states into three groups. The 'pace setters' shape the European policies according to domestic preferences; these domestic policies are exported on the European level and adopted by other member states. The states acting as 'foot-draggers' have the exact opposite strategy. Their aim is to stop or at least contain the attempts of other member states to upload their domestic policies on the EU level. And, lastly, 'fence-sitting' is strategy adopted by those member states which tend to take an indifferent and neutral position. Which strategy a member state chooses largely depends on its level of economic development. The economically strong countries are generally the pace setters, the poorer states are food draggers.

Another possible factor influencing preference formation is the level of transition. Caplanova, Orviska and Hudson (2004) are answering the question, why the citizens of Central and Eastern European countries, who have only recently achieved national sovereignty, want to become members of NATO and the EU. Their answer is 'that support for membership of both NATO and the EU depends critically on economic success both for individuals and at the macro level' (2004: 283). The successful individuals profit from integration as an integrated Europe presents them more opportunities. The less successful fear the increased competition in an integrated Europe. Sovereignty is, according to the authors, not as important for public support of the European integration as is the economy. The same is true for the countries. Another study dealing with the Baltic states came to similar conclusions, stating that support for the integration depends on the expectations of economic gains (Ehin 2001).

The net income from the EU funds to the member states is another factor that shapes preference formation. The analysis of voting in the EU Council showed that the governments of countries that benefit financially from the EU are less likely to vote against the majority in the Council than the governments that are net contributors (Mattila 2004). Clifford Carruba (1997) argues that financial transfers (the total income from the EU budget minus the total contribution to the budget) are important factors of integration. Governments that are in favor of deepening integration provide transfers to persuade less integrationist governments. Countries that are net contributors profit as well, since the transfers smoothen the market integration process. The analysis of the voting records of the Council of the EU showed that big countries vote more often against the majority in the Council than small ones (Mattila 2004). Small member states know that they cannot win every decision, so they

focus on those that are most important to them. Christine Ingebritsen (1998) developed 'sectoral approach' to explaining why some Nordic countries have become members of the European Union and some have not. The most important factor, according to her, is the influence of key industrial sectors. Manufacturers exert bigger pressure on the political elite of the EU member states than the exporters of natural resources. Therefore, the countries, which have manufacturing-dependent economy have become members of the EU, while those who export natural resources have not.

## Institutional factors

Mark Aspinwall (2006) tested five competing hypothesis about why governments support or oppose the deepening of integration in the EU. He compared two versions of government choices: an intergovernmental conference (Amsterdam 1997, IGC) and the decisions in the Council of Ministers. One of the findings was that different factors affect different negotiation forums. Intergovernmental conferences have a higher profile and tend to attract media. Therefore, their representatives are more careful in presenting their national interests and may act as 'guardians of history and tradition' (Aspinwall 2006: 107). Another possible explanation is different types of proposals considered — 'high politics' in the IGC and 'low politics' in the Council. IGCs play an important role in defining the overall scope and direction of European integration since such 'high politics' results in the basic treaties (Koenig-Archibugi 2004: 139). Another, but similar factor is the style of negotiations which depends on the settings (IGC, the Council) and participant (political elite, officials). IGC is more likely to be in 'bargaining mode' while the Council is in 'problem-solving mode' (Christiansen et al. 2002: 22–23). According to Mattila (2004), 'governments who hold the presidency vote less often against the majority in the Council than they would otherwise' (2004: 46). Governments are trying to make their presidency successful, to fulfill their goals and, therefore, they act as mediators between member states and the EU institutions, leaving their own interest behind. Politicians and civil servants of the member state, which holds the presidency, are trying to understand the arguments of other member states. In this way, they engage in a learning process, which can influence them even when their presidency is over.

Actors that can influence preference formation of member states do not have to be domestic. Permanent representations can also play a role in the formation of preferences (Christiansen et al. 2002) as was the case during the preparation of the Nice and the Amsterdam IGC. The analysis of the reforms of the treaties showed that beside the actors, the rules significantly influenced the final outcome (Christiansen et al 2002). When Koenig-Archibugi (2004) studied preferences of the 'old' member states on the reform of common foreign and security cooperation, one of the findings was that domestic regional governance played a role in setting agenda in this area. 'Governments of countries whose domestic constitutions reflect and reinforce a positive attitude toward a multilayered distribution of authority tend to support further integration in foreign and security policy more than countries where sovereignty is considered indivisible' (2004: 167).

Structural and institutional factors are not always sufficient to explain the behavior of member states. As Copsey and Haughton (2009) note, no single factor is able to offer the explanation for all countries and all policies. They create a model that identifies one or two factors for each major policy area. States do not always form their preferences in a rational way as arguments are often based on ideas. 'European Union is not merely an international regime intended to lower barriers to trade, reduce transaction costs of intergovernmental bargaining, or reap scale-efficiencies. On contrary, the EU is a polity in the making, and as such it threatens not only the decisional autonomy of national institutions, but core values of national sovereignty and national identity' (Marks and Hooghe 2003: 6). Other scholars argue that the objective factors like GDP or the size of the population have to be combined with the views of political elite and other relevant domestic and international actors (Thorhallsson 2006, Gstöhl 2002). Vetik, Nimerfelft and Taru (2006) claim that beside rational calculation of gains and loses significant are symbolic and psychological dimensions. These are the ideas that matter in forming governmental preferences (Aspinwall 2006: 89).

## Ideational factors

Several authors argue that ideas can be a source of influence of member states in the European Union (Maes and Verdun 2005, Marcussen et al. 1999, Wallace 2005). These scholars deal mostly with small member states, since their influence cannot be explained by structural or institutional factors (they are economically weak countries having small representation in the EU institutions). However, there is also literature on the role of ideas in the case of big member states (see for example Parsons 2002, 2003).

Ideas played an important role during the creation of European Economic Community (EEC), since 'within vague structural and institutional pressures, only certain ideas led Europeans to the EEC rather than to less extensive cooperation in much weaker international institutions (or without formal institutions at all)' (Parsons 2002: 48–9). According to this argument, the European Union was created because certain leaders chose the 'community project' (Parsons 2003: 1). Thomas Risse (2001) developed a model, which explains how elites form ideas about European integration. At first appropriate ideas are chosen. Then political elite promotes these ideas with the aim to gain power and succeed in the next elections. The process of socialization makes the elites percept these ideas as their own.

Helen Wallace (2005) argues that member states can exercise influence in support of their preferences in seven ways: through political weight, political practice, economic weight, social and economic practice, persuasive ideas, compelling demands and credibility and consistency. In this paper we are concentrating on persuasive ideas. States can influence what is going on in the EU through persuasive ideas when they create a concept from their own experience, which is applicable to other member states. Ivo Maes and Amy Verdun (2005) adopt the framework and explore the role of two small states, Belgium and the Netherlands, in the creation of the European Monetary Union. These countries offer their experience in

the area of political practice and social and economic practice from their cooperation in Benelux. In doing so they influenced integration with their persuasive ideas.

## The role of ideas in European integration

Constructivism is a theoretical approach, which is most suitable to explain the role of ideas in the formation of integration strategies. Contrary to other approaches and theories most frequently used to explain preference formation (neoinstitutionalism or liberal inter-governmental), constructivism focuses on ideational factors rather than on material ones (Wendt 1999, Checkel 1999, Marcussen et al. 1999). Constructivists claim that reality we live in is not given but socially constructed (Zehnfuss 2001). Actors behave on the basis of the logic of appropriateness and do not calculate costs and benefits of their actions. Identities, norms and culture are independent determinants of the behavior of state actors in the international system (Koenig-Archibugi 2004). Ideas can exist only in a culture, which has material basis (Wendt 1999). We do not, however, imply that material factors are unimportant in preference formation. What we mean is that they cannot answer every question and it is thus necessary to investigate the role of ideas.

Political elite creates integration strategies on the basis of a perceived idea of the state. The idea of the state comprises several components: history, area, origin, customs, symbols and myths. Elite can perceive state as a powerful and important or, on the other side, without ambitions and with no ability to influence integration. The elites of economically weak member states can perceive their states as strong partners of bigger countries (self-perception). The representatives of other countries do not have to feel the same way and can perceive it as a weak state (perception). This means that there can be a misfit between self-perception and perception that influence the ability of coalition building and pursuing one's own goals. Where there is a fit between the perception and self-perception, countries have a good ability to create coalitions and pursue their own goals. According to Helen Wallace (2005), states can influence the EU with credibility and consistency. Consistent states are predictable. 'Governments acquire reputations as more or less consensus-minded in general, or as, for example, more or less liberal or protection-minded on issues of regulation and trade, and similarly advocates of one or other position on recurrent generic issues' (Wallace 2005: 41). Baldur Thorhallsson (2006) studied how the size of state influences the behavior of state in the EU and added to the traditional factors measuring the size of state 'perceptual size' and 'preference size'. It is not only important how big (and powerful) state is, but also how domestic and external actors regard the state.

At this point we would like to introduce a model for explaining the formation of integration strategies in the new member states of the European Union. These strategies concern long-term integration goals of governments and are more difficult to change than preferences. The idea of state is rooted in culture, norms and values. The key assumption of the model is the importance of ideas in the process of strategies formation. At the beginning of strategy formation is the idea of state, what a state is, what its interests and its place in

Europe are. The idea of state is composed of several components, one of them being history. Historical experience is important for new member states. Their mutual relationships as well as relationship with Russia can play an important role in shaping their attitudes on several issues (energy, EU relationship with its eastern neighbors). Important is the problem of minorities and changing borders. Religion can also be a factor, as we have seen in the case of European Constitution. Customs, norms, symbols and myths are very similar factors, which involve informal understanding of appropriate behavior. These components create the idea of state, they influence the final strategy, whether it will be pro-integrationist or argue against further deepening of integration. Elites do not acquire this idea of state directly, but rather indirectly through perception. But although this perception is indirect, it is intense enough to influence the creation of integration strategies. The change of integration strategy is not very probable, since the change of one component of the idea of state change it only partial. Most probably, change will occur with a new generation of political elite. The idea of state is not connected with the ideological stance of government, but rather with the values, which are rooted in culture, so the changes of government (having different ideology) do not influence it.

Since their entrance to the EU new member states have been following rather than setting pace and have shown only limited ability to pursue their preferences in the EU (Goetz 2005). As most new member states are small, we can find for an explanation in the limited size of administration, as is the case with the old small member states (Laffan and Tannam 1998: 83). However, this trend is slowly changing. For example, Slovakia and the Czech Republic initiated the creation of European Nuclear Forum (Malová and Bilčík 2008) and Poland together with Sweden sponsored Eastern Partnership initiative. Slovak representatives perceive the role of Slovakia in the EU as a bridge between the East and the West, while Czechs are arguably the most eurosceptic nation among the new member states. Poland presents a special case. Since it is a big country, Polish representatives perceive their country as the most important among the newly acceded states and see themselves as a 'spokesperson' for the whole Visegrad group. Poles know that enlargement was not thinkable without Poland. Therefore Poland is 'generally regarded as having been the most assertive negotiator' (Goetz 2005: 270). Hungary often used arguments based on history. The Baltic states identify with Nordic countries, which heavily influences Scandinavian discourse on the EU (LeConte 2008).

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to introduce a model of strategies formation of the new EU member states. We have ascertained that structural and institutional factors can to some extent explain why member states have certain preferences but cannot shed light on the question why some countries are more pro-integrationist than other or explain their integration strategies. However, our proposed model does explain how ideational factors influence the formation of integration strategies.

# Note

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