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## **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE EASTERN EU ENLARGEMENT: THE PERSPECTIVE OF A CRITICAL SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**

This paper claims that the assessment of the eastern EU enlargement depends on the adopted theoretical perspective. The practitioners of critical approaches in sociology claim that mainstream approaches to European integration suffer from neglect. Critical thinkers provide an alternative account of European integration claiming that it can be conceptualized as enforcement mechanism for the spread of neoliberal capitalism. The eastern EU enlargement should be analyzed on the basis of world-systems theory and post-colonial theory. From this point of view, the post-communist political, social and economic transformations based on the neoliberal economic theory have produced mixed results. Specifically, economic neoliberalism is a flawed economic theory that demonstrated its weakness in the post-2008 period. Transnational capital exploited EU spaces to force a neoliberal agenda on the candidate states by way of conditionality. Narrow sectoral interests took precedence over economic rationality and social policy goals. Hence, the relative failure of post-communist transformations in such domains as: EU cohesion policy, unstable democracies, or demography undermining future economic growth prospects. Moreover, the multidimensional crisis initiated by forcing the neoliberal agenda on the candidate states has initiated adverse social and political developments on EU-wide scale in such domains as anti-immigration backlash and the ascendancy of far-right political parties.

**Keywords:** EU integration, critical theory, East-Central Europe, transformation, EU enlargement, neoliberal capitalism.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The enlargement project with reference to post-communist states was presented by EU institutions as the process leading to economic prosperity, long-term stability, peace and security. This approach was reflected by most scientific accounts of EU integration. Academic circles focused on technical issues or macroeconomic data instead of on more

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nuanced socioeconomic data<sup>3</sup>. The authors of the paper submit that the assessment of the transformations in the CEECs (Central and Eastern European countries) depends on the assumed theoretical background for considerations.

The analysis is carried out on the basis of critical sociological approaches in sociology which have been applied to international relations forming the cornerstone of the reflexive paradigm. These approaches allow an alternative conceptualization of European integration and the eastern EU enlargement which produced to some extent adverse social and political effects. Sociological imagination makes it possible to reevaluate the post-communist transformations putting into context supremacy of Western culture, shedding the burden of Eurocentrism, and constructing an alternative body of knowledge related to the results of the eastern EU enlargement.

## 2. UNDERLYING TENETS OF CRITICAL THEORIZING IN SOCIOLOGY AND THEIR APPLICATION TO EU INTEGRATION

„A number of very different approaches are placed under the rubric of ‘critical theory’” (Humrich, 2014). They include postmodernism, postcolonial theory, neo-marxism, neo-gramscianism and constructivism. As a result, one can assume that there is a critical approach in sociology (Włoch, 2015). One of the underlying fields of enquiry within the critical theory consists in casting doubt on the objectivity of scientific knowledge. It is done by way of radical deconstruction of scientific texts seeking the motives behind their creation (Burchill and Linklater, 2005). Critical thinking is associated with post-positivist epistemologies. The opposition towards realist thinking is based on radical interpretivism and deconstruction revealing the “politics of knowledge”. It concentrates on the impact of social life and deep structures on cognitive processes concentrating on the critique of dogmatic thinking (Devetak, 2005). Critical thinkers aim at disclosing the hidden relations of domination and hegemonic interests behind the world order that structure world politics. Within this framework mainstream international relations theories were created to transform Western economic and military supremacy into intellectual hegemony (Pijl, van der, 2014).

Critical approach in sociology is multifaceted and it exceeds the tenets of the critical theory encompassing Marxist economic theorizing in the field of international political economy. Sociology forms the basis for the reflexivist paradigm in international relations which includes Marxism, critical theory and constructivism (Mateos and Morcillo Laiz, 2017). Sociologists contributed to critical thinking about the EU by way of Marxist (world-systems), Gramscian (neoliberal hegemony) and Foucauldian (discourse analysis) writings and their later developments, such as post-colonial theory, neo-gramscianism, or post-structural discourse analysis with the aim of deconstructing privileged knowledges.

Marxist underlying claims in the international sphere involve the existence of deep power structures rooted in the economic base which aim at ever growing capital accumulation. These forces shape international relations on a growing scale. Critical

<sup>3</sup> With reference to critical accounts of the eastern EU enlargement, see the following edited volumes: *The European's Burden: Global Imperialism in EU Expansion*. (2006). S. Engel-Di Mauro (Ed.), New York: Peter Lang Publishing; *Revisiting the European Union as Empire*, H. Behr, Y.A. Stivachtis (Eds), New York – London: Routledge and *Empire's New Clothes: Unveiling EU Enlargement*. (2001). J. Böröcz, M. Covacs (Eds.). „Central Europe Review”, Telford. Access on the internet: <http://aei.pitt.edu/144/1/Empire.pdf>.

thinking consists here in rejecting the state as the main unit of the analysis. Hence, its falling within the rubric of critical social science. On the global scale, invisible economic structures are more important than the official international relations. There were several stages of theorizing the relations between capitalist core and periphery. They involved imperialism, dependency studies, world-systems analysis and post-colonial studies (Wallerstein, 2005). In the course of time the analysis has been refined and it currently involves sectoral interests (transnational corporations and transnational ruling classes) and ideology as neoliberal capitalism is ideologically laden and its proponents refrain from outright violence preferring seduction. Therefore, the neoliberal agenda is promoted in a subtle way (Burchill and Linklater, 2005).

As for the Gramscian concept of hegemony, invisible forces which stand behind the emergence of the economic neoliberalism control the cultural sphere by way of producing dominant discourses validating the current economic model. This way of thinking was initiated by Antonio Gramsci who wrote about cultural hegemony enabling the dominant classes to retain power without resorting to violence. Robert Cox (the founding father of neo-gramscianism) said that even scientific knowledge is produced to support particular interests (Cox, 1981). That is why some topics are excluded from the sphere of the legitimate scientific inquiry. There are dominant and marginal discourses. Scientists should not rely solely on the former ones and postcolonial studies give priority to the voice of the weak (marginal discourses). It is, however, difficult as it amounts to coming into conflict with the prevailing power structures (Pijl, van der, 2014).

The same applies to thinking about the EU which means that only positive accounts of European integration are regarded as scientifically valid. According to its own narrative the EU is 'a community of values', i.e. a project aiming at spreading such values as democracy, free market (social well-being), human rights and peace around the globe. The EU's exceptionalism consists in its functioning as a normative power attracting external milieu or peripheral regions. This agenda is aimed at legitimization of the EU and it is spread by an elaborate and unique political system which is self-organizing and non-hierarchical implying the network approach within functional analysis. This official neofunctionalist-welfarist approach determines the acceptable interpretations of European integration (Walters, 2004) which results in the marginalization of critical accounts of the EU.

On the basis of critical thinking about the European integration and neoliberal capitalism, the EU can be conceptualized as an enforcement mechanism facilitating the spread of the neoliberal economic model (Cafruny and Ryner, 2019). EU agenda has been increasingly influenced by neoliberal interests (Haar and Walters, 2005). EU contributes to the spread of neoliberal world order by promoting democracy at its borders as democracy promotion is imbued with a neoliberal agenda (market democracy) (Kurki, 2011). Within this approach to European integration the EU policy of conditionality with reference to the Union's enlargement work as 'enforcement chain'. On a wider scale, the Union's neighbourhood and development policies serve the purpose of creating a 'non-imperial empire'. (Behr and Stivachtis, 2016). Sociological expertise allows for deconstructing knowledges related to the EU eastern enlargement by taking into account structural, cultural and ideological factors influencing knowledge production.

### 3. EASTERN EU ENLARGEMENT AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

Economic assessments of the post-communist transformations fail to account for cultural and ideological aspects of economic reforms which are central to the spread of the neoliberal agenda to post-communist states seeking EU-membership. It can be explained employing the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony and Western orientalism towards candidate states within postcolonial studies.

In the 1990s the West assumed that Central and Eastern Europe needed socialization to adopt the standards of the civilized West. When the great transformation was initiated Western experts and politicians adopted a paternalistic attitude toward the transition states. Western paternalism entailed a sense of obligation to look after the candidate states and monitor the situation in the CEECs with reference to economic freedom, human rights and democracy. From cultural point of view the applicant countries were 'othered' as a result of Western Eurocentrism (Covacs and Kabachnik, 2001; Kuus, 2006) and they were treated as a repository of Eastness. The transformation was carried out on the basis of "a blatant continental orientalism operating in the EU's 'eastern enlargement process'" (Hooper and Kramsch, 2007).

The transformations were 'managed' by the West. Western economists, politicians and institutions needed a convincing argument to persuade the elites of the candidate countries that the proposed neoliberal economic model was the optimal one. The argument belonged to cultural and ideological sphere as neoliberal capitalism has cultural and ideological underpinnings. Namely, the West portrayed itself as the ultimate achievement in terms of the form of civilization with respect to cultural, economic and political domain. This assumption provided legitimacy to the Western management of the post-communist transformations which was to result in the adoption of superior Western standards (Kuus, 2004). On the scientific level, it amounts to invoking the outdated modernization theory. Both societies and elites of the candidate countries succumbed to this view. In consequence, even though the societies of transition countries suffered enormously, there was virtually no resistance to the shock economic therapy forced upon the candidate states (Böröcz, 2016).

The West acted on the basis of the rule 'the West knows best'. The candidate states were subjected to 'external governance' which lasted more than ten years (Böröcz and Sarkar, 2005; Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier, 2004). The rules of integration were hardly negotiable for the EU *acquis* was regarded as sacrosanct which resulted in 'impositional Europeanization' (Jakubek, 2008). EU institutions evaluated progress with reference to economic Europeanization until each candidate state was recognized as a 'functioning market economy'. EU law provided the legal framework for the eastern enlargement. The *acquis* should be regarded as one of European spaces (Rumford, 2008) providing formal legitimacy to the process of eastern enlargement. In other words, neoliberal hegemony in the 1990s consisted in imposing EU regulations and standards as precondition for EU membership (conditionality). In this context Susan Silbey (2005) writes about legal hegemony which enables to shape people's consciousness. In practice the *acquis* is treated as 'standard of civilization' and free market in the form of neoliberal capitalism is part of Western superior civilization.

EU economic field was extended to post-communist countries before accession by way of association agreements. The candidate countries did not benefit from full membership, but they were subjected to the rules of EU economic field. Their economies were severely

affected (Murrell 1993) as state-owned companies were not able to compete with Western ones. The application of EU economic field amounted to 'structural violence' against the accession countries (Staniszki, 2009). Therefore, the network approach with reference to creating markets is not suitable at least until the enlargements of 2004 and 2007. As a result of Western cultural hegemony, the association agreements were asymmetrical in several respects which contributed to a multidimensional crisis in the candidate states in the 1990s but the ensuing socioeconomic problems were presented as transitional ones. (Böröcz and Sarkar, 2005). József Böröcz and David A. Smith (1995) argued as early as in the 1990s that 'the eastern boundary of Europe is thereby mentally manipulated'. Transnational capital exploited EU spaces to force the neoliberal agenda upon the candidate states. The acquisition of the most valuable parts of the CEECs' economies at fire sale prices in the 1990s serves as a good example of hidden sectoral interests which took precedence over the official EU agenda (Böröcz and Sarkar, 2005).

Western scholars largely present the economic transformation as a success story offering ample statistics in support of their views. However, constructivist sociologists underline that even statistical data can be distorted or picked selectively to support a thesis. Scientific data are produced according to culturally calibrated tools (Zybertowicz, 2001). During economic neoliberalism the accounting standards were changed as well as the methodology of creating statistical data to support the hegemonic economic system.

Academic resistance to this prevailing account is weak. In order to understand it one should turn attention to 'the geopolitics of knowledge production' (Hooper and Kramsch, 2007). In this context, currently a global network of businesses, think tanks, NGOs, scientists and politicians exploit their influence to put into practice neoliberal hegemony with the aim to promote mostly sectoral interests (Plehwe and Walpen, 2006). This network guides and if necessary disciplines (by way of marginalization) the practitioners of the other branches of economics for purportedly the only scientific branch of economics is the neoliberal one. Neoliberalism is, however, ideologically laden but it claims to be the ultimate achievement of social science and the West. (Maccartney, 2011). The neoliberal economic model was forced on the accession countries by way of Europe agreements and more broadly by membership criteria. Therefore, it is not possible to claim that Western renowned economists or the EU were mistaken as it would result in credibility loss putting in jeopardy Western supremacy.

The minority adherents of the critical accounts of European integration who do not subscribe to the success narrative, prefer invoking the lack of social cohesion and unstable democracies to support their skeptical opinions concerning the effects of post-communist transformations. Moreover, they point out that the new member states were middle income countries under communism and they have retained this status. Those CEECs which adopted the neoliberal economic model experienced a great economic decline in the 1990s while the East-Asian, state-run, mercantilist economies were far more successful. Thus, the application of the neoliberal economic theory in post-communist countries contributed to their underdevelopment and peripheral status in the framework of the EU (Böröcz, 2016). It is also pointed out that in The Czech Republic and Slovenia the social situation is better than in the other new EU member states which is ascribed to their resistance to neoliberal reforms.

#### **4. SOCIAL RESULTS OF THE TRANSFORMATION IN THE CEECS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WELFARIST EU NARRATIVE**

Evaluating the real state of the societies of the CEECs should include such problems as the level of unemployment, the employment rate, poverty, exclusion, social mobility, working poor, the provision of social services, corruption, nepotism, fragile political systems (the social dimension of EU integration). The above mentioned indicators should be analyzed in the context of disparities in regional development and income inequalities (the Gini coefficient) as economic benefits of the transition have been spread unevenly. In general, the reappraisal of The eastern EU enlargement should be based on broad-based socioeconomic processes discernible after 25 years of EU integration and not solely on GDP figures as system integration should not be confused with social integration (Boje et al. 2007). With this respect one can enumerate the following processes and problems which contradict the prevailing narrative with reference to the eastern EU enlargement:

- Uneven economic development and rising social inequalities (Heyns, 2005). Local economies in peripheral regions were based on state-owned enterprises employing whole local communities. The liquidation of such key enterprises brought misery for factory towns. Peripheral regions have never recovered from the crisis brought about by the 'shock economic therapy'. Private investors are not willing to invest in such regions due to transportation costs and problems with infrastructure. Economic growth is concentrated in the biggest cities. As a result, the distance between the richest and poorest regions is not narrowing (Casi and Resmini, 2012). EU structural funds can only alleviate economic divergences between the EU core and periphery. Regional economies are supported to a large degree by emigrants and their remittances, social benefits and money transfers from the richest regions. The economic collapse of peripheral regions puts them in the position of internal peripheries as they are the source of labor force for the most developed EU regions. Geographical inequalities are exacerbated by social inequalities. A substantial increase in wage inequality (Meardi, 2012) is corroborated by the Gini coefficient which rose dramatically during the transformation period (Heynes, 2005). The trend did not stop after the eastern enlargement (Meardi, 2012).
- Low employment rate and emigration. The most important EU-wide phenomenon which currently jeopardizes popular support for EU integration is a wave of economic migrants from the new member states who "flood" the richest EU member states. Economic transformation resulted in a steep decline in employment rate in the candidate states. Their employment rate is the lowest within the organization and it amounts to 55–60 per cent (Eurostat, 2019a). As a result, millions of dispossessed and impoverished workers seek a better life in the West as there is a correlation between life dissatisfaction and the willingness to emigrate (Otrachshenko and Popova, 2014). Immigration provokes a backlash in the richest EU member states for ordinary people see immigrants as a competition on the labor market. The phenomenon has been amplified due to the current economic crisis (Brochmann et al.). As a result, popular support for EU integration is waning in the West in spite of the fact that Western businesses profit from cheap labor force from the CEECs (Drinkwater et al, 2009). Approximately 2,5 million Poles have emigrated to the West in recent years which constitutes roughly 6 per cent of the population. In case of smaller countries the figure can exceed 15 per cent (Bulgaria, Lithuania).

- The problem of anomie. Critical economic situation in the candidate states in the 1990s resulted in anomie (Ådnanes, 2007) and innovative ways of coping with the crisis. Adaptation involved resorting to crime. Impoverished people engaged in petty crime to survive. Some of them set up organized crime groups which acted with impunity corrupting their societies as the police was initially not prepared to fight them. Generally, there was a 250 per cent increase in the incidence of crime in the candidate states following their economic collapse (Kornai, 2006). In numerous cases organized crime turned against Western societies (e.g. car theft) and the crisis involved trade in women. An anomic culture marked by risk, anxiety, distrust and hatred emerged in the CEECs in the 1990s (particularly those left behind by economic globalization were affected) (Shlapentokh and Vanderpool, 1999).
- The lost generation and falling birthrates. The economic collapse of the CEECs coincided with a steep rise in real estate prices. The oversupply of labor force, in turn, depressed real wages. People from the CEECs earn on average 50–67 per cent of EU average or one third of western wages (Eurostat, 2019b) but the prices of real estate have converged. As a result, even young people who had employment were forced to take tremendous mortgages which limited their consumption possibilities. In consequence, young people were discouraged from setting up families and having children. The population decline in the new member states (United Nations Development Programme, 2011) will result in subdued economic growth in the future due to labor force shortages and a high dependency ratio. The economic system in the new member states fails to reproduce the labor force which will result in the pension system crisis (particularly in Poland).
- Emergence of Dickensian capitalism outside of the state sector. The labor question influences the totality of social life and the quality of democracy, in particular (Meardi, 2012). New businesses offered disadvantageous conditions of employment in comparison with state companies. Wages were subdued, employment contracts did not provide adequate social security and employment without any contract was common (informal employment). The reality which set in with reference to industrial relations is reminiscent of 19th century capitalism or Third World capitalism. In spite of the fact that the rights of employees are protected from formal point of view by EU regulations, they were difficult to enforce due to unfavorable market conditions. Employees remained powerless and vulnerable. Thus, working very often did not shield from poverty. The provision of social services was inadequate and over 20 per cent of children suffered from poverty (Meardi, 2012).
- Corruption and nepotism. The transformational recessions triggered off cutthroat competition for resources. Dozens of millions found themselves in a precarious situation. Corruption and nepotism inherited from communism was reinforced by adverse economic circumstances (Miller et al. 2001; Vachudova, 2009). Illegal methods were used to get access to jobs. Meritocracy was limited by corruption and nepotism.

In the conditions of acute social crisis, the EU was unable to extend the European social model to the East. Josef Kornai (2006) writes that from the perspective of everyday life it is questionable whether the great transformation can be regarded as a success story for general well-being is strongly correlated to material well-being. The societies of the new member states expected a remarkable increase in living standards in connection with

European integration. Statistical data indicate the existence of convergence with respect to quality of life among EU member states (European Quality of Life Survey, 2016). The problem is that according to subjective expectations of the populations, the process of catching up is too slow. Hence, the feelings of frustration became increasingly visible leading to voting out of power pro-EU political parties.

##### **5. POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN THE CONTEXT OF IDEOLOGY AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY**

Applying sociological imagination one can come to a conclusion that people subjectively define their situation. Growing social inequalities and the economic collapse of peripheral regions resulted in quite widespread negative accounts of post-communist transformations. Gugliermo Meardi (2012) makes a claim that from social point of view the eastern EU enlargement has failed. Therefore, workers vote with their feet emigrating to the old EU member states and those who remain in the new member states are vulnerable and disgruntled putting Western liberal democratic order in danger. An anomic culture marked by risk, anxiety, distrust and hatred emerged in the CEECs in the 1990s (particularly those left behind by economic globalization were affected) (Shlapentokh and Vanderpool, 1999). The new socioeconomic order was marked by primeval struggle for scarce resources. The theory of traumatic sequence is plausible in the light of numerous pathological phenomena the candidate states faced from the 1990s onwards. The theory advances a hypothesis that the process of transformation was traumatic and did not lead to the adoption of Western democratic standards (Sztompka, 2000).

David Ost (2006) made a claim that the reliance on economic liberalism may be dangerous for democracy as it creates millions of dispossessed who would blame liberal democracy for their economic hardships. That is exactly what happened in the CEECs (Greskovits, 2000). Initial hardships were to be overcome as a result of a forecasted steep economic recovery. The recovery took place but still large segments of transition societies were left behind. Industrial workers who were at the forefront of anti-communist struggle became the main losers of the transformation. The CEECs were faced with “a radically shrinking public budget combined with increased demands on the state” (Grzymala-Busse and Innes, 2003). From sociological perspective people oppose rising social inequalities more than poverty as such. The economic transformation was marked by a steep rise in inequalities which explains why the economic recovery has failed to contribute to political stability (post-communist societies tend to be egalitarian ones). Economic hardships resulted in populations turning against anti-communist democratic oppositions.

The liberal elites of the new member states support the narrative of a successful transition from communism to western liberal democracy but in reality the political systems of the new member states are rigged, unstable and in danger of being overcome by radical political forces. Initially it was thought that pro-democratic elites would win establishing durable liberal democracy but the protracted and multidimensional crisis and the impossibility to solve such basic problems as poverty and unemployment undermined this assumption (e.g. Hungary and Poland). Dissatisfaction with the current distribution of resources is growing putting into jeopardy the legitimacy of the power structure in the new member states. The reaction on the side of the establishment was to brand those who question the existing order as losers lacking adaptive skills who incite subversive attitudes



out of political reasons. Western pundits and media discourses most often mistakenly ascribe this state of affairs to the political backwardness of Eastern Europeans who presumably failed to internalize Western values (the failed Europeanization of domestic politics) (Copsey, 2013). In fact, workers anger is channeled into destructive political choices (Vanhuysse, 2007). Millions of dispossessed people are easily swayed by populist political parties which can destabilize political systems (Baylis, 2007).

From political point of view the problem boils down to the legitimacy of the current power structures in the new member states. The success narrative is forced on their societies to retain the legitimacy of powers structures. Namely, both West and East European elites who benefited from post-communist transformations have to present them as a success to legitimize their hold on power and privileged access to resources. The legitimacy of both the EU and Eastern European elites with reference to the transformations can be maintained on condition that the success narrative is not questioned by post-communist societies. People are obedient to authority on condition that they regard it as legitimate. A social order is regarded as legitimate if empirical facts corroborate ideology on which it is based. If there is discrepancy between them the social order is challenged as legitimacy claims are based on a truth claim (Silbey, 2006).

The internal political dynamics in the CEECs is closely connected with the social effects of the post-communist transformations. The so-called pro-democratic and pro-European elites are supported by the EU as they contribute to the maintenance of the status quo. Currently every attempt at changing the system and challenging the success narrative is deemed an assault on democracy and thus provokes media moral panic. This attitude is, however, counterproductive as it has failed to prevent EU-sceptic political parties from seizing power.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Critical theorists within sociology and international relations frame EU expansion to the East as a case of the imposition of the neoliberal economic agenda on the candidate states by way of conditionality. Neoliberal capitalism is treated as a failed economic theory and practice. Hence, the claim that the eastern EU enlargement has brought suboptimal results in the social and political sphere, in particular. According to researchers working within the critical sociological tradition, impositional economic transformation in the candidate states can be assessed as a great success for western sectoral actors but it should be regarded as only a relative success from social and political point of view as it has led neither to the emergence of Western-style capitalism, nor to the creation of viable liberal democracies (Berend, Bugaric, 2015). Therefore, the invoked modernization theory should be discarded in favor of world-systems and post-colonial theories which offer a better explanation of post-communist transformations. The EU economic and social cohesion targets have not been achieved. The same conclusion refers to convergence with respect to quality of life (the social dimension of EU integration) and Western political standards as well. Rather, a hybrid political and economic system was created which can be referred to as semi-peripheral post-communism (according to world-systems theory) which clashes with the official neofunctionalist-welfarist narrative of the EU. The pernicious consequences of hijacking the EU agenda by neoliberal interests in connection with the eastern EU enlargement have turned against both the old and new EU member states affecting the whole organization in several domains. Its negative EU-wide effects include:

- Immigration backlash contributing to the vote on Brexit. This crisis was central to the discussion on the so called Brexit and it facilitated the ascendancy of right-wing, anti-immigrant political parties in numerous EU member states even before the influx of migrants from the Middle East and Africa<sup>4</sup>.
- The ascendancy of EU-sceptic political parties in the new member states swaying millions of dispossessed voters. This process has led to crisis on EU-level (particularly the case of Poland and Hungary which remain in conflict with EU institutions).
- Relaxed standards with regard to business activities (e.g. flawed accounting and bribes resulting in the acquisition of the most valuable enterprises in candidate states at fire sale prices).
- The concentration of EU companies on easy profit while taking over CEECs' economies brought about the loss of competitiveness on a global scale.
- Crime spreading from the crisis affected candidate states to the West feeding anti-immigrant sentiments.

The authors of the paper are of the opinion that one should qualify the above mentioned research results achieved under the critical approaches umbrella as the point of reference for assessment is decisive with this respect. The effects of the economic and social transformations in the Community of Independent States countries were far worse which may indicate that the EU-guided economic reforms should be regarded as a relative success. One has to admit that large sections of the CEECs' populations achieved economic success which they ascribe to the extension of the EU to the East. On the other hand, the populations had very high expectations which have not been fulfilled so far. What is more, people subjectively judge their standard of living comparing it to the well-off sections of the population acting on the basis of the definition of the situation. In view of growing income disparities, the fillings of frustration and disenchantment are easily explained. Even though the EU cannot be blamed for the adverse effects that were brought about by the neoliberal agenda, the organization bears the brunt of social discontent and runs the risk of credibility loss on EU-wide scale as economic neoliberalism developed within European spaces.

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<sup>4</sup> Goodwin and Milazzo (2015) claim that immigration is central to Euroscepticism in Britain and the ascendancy of right wing parties throughout Europe was based to a large extent on anti-immigrant electoral platforms.

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DOI: 10.7862/rz.2020.hss.14

*The text was submitted to the editorial office: January 2020.*

*The text was accepted for publication: June 2020.*

