The Dynamics of Partisan Adaptation to Europeanisation
The Romanian Case of Regionalisation

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1. Introduction

This study aims at assessing the degree of regional and territorial reform in post-communist Romania in response to the EU conditionality in this specific field. It tries to give an account of post-communist sub-state institutional change in the double framework of domestic transition and adaptation to the requirements for EU membership. For doing so, I will mainly focus on the solutions adopted by the Romanian successive parties in government in regard to territorial and regional adaptation in response to Europeanisation.

The choice for concentrating on national governments and thus on parties in government is appropriate in light of several arguments. On the one hand, post-communist regional reforms have been introduced and clearly shaped by the ideas and interests of national executives, rather than by interactions and debates with other type of elites (for example the local and regional intellectual elites) or with popular movements based particular in sub-national territories. The participation of sub-national elites in the pre-accession process was rather marginal, without any involvement in the national policy-making. On the other hand, the focus on national executives is triggered by the fact that, in unitary states like Romania, the decision about how to implement European policies rests exclusively within national governments. The possible transfer of power and resources within unitary states in response to EU pressures depends on the readiness and inclination of national governments to allocate functions to the sub-national level. At the same time, it has to be mentioned that sub-national elites, though more disengaged with formal EU activities than the national core elites, brought forward different projects of regionalisation, which will be further detailed in this contribution.

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Furthermore, the value of analysing the terms of the Romanian process of regional reform in response to Europeanisation pressures is twofold. First, the investigation throws light on the Romanian regional development, which is far from being subject to extensive research. Additionally, the highly mitigated nature of this topic of territorial organisation and sub-national reform in Romania makes the case even more rewarding.

Secondly, this kind of investigation may contribute to put into evidence some of the political arguments, conflicts and formal decisions that have taken place throughout the post-communist process of incipient regional reform and that have led to an outcome of top-down decentralisation through controlled sub-state reform and lack of transfer of real competencies from the centre to the regions. The last couple of years saw an increasing but unresolved debate about possible solutions for Romania’s new formal regional tier. And precisely, this debate is shaped by ideas, interests and experiences developed during the last decade, which will be analysed in this research.

It will be shown that, notwithstanding the broad political elite and popular consensus in favour of European integration and domestic reforms in line with the principles and policies of the EU, Romania’s successive political parties in government delayed the process of regionalisation and regional reform fearing, on the one side, the decrease of their political support and on the other side, the rise of the extremist, nationalist parties.

The ideas, opinions and attitudes of national governments will be traced mainly through an examination of governmental declarations and issued documents related to sub-state reform and regionalisation. The close linkages between governmental parties – as actors involved in the process of state reform in response to Europeanisation - and the political, institutional and policy context require a broadly chronological presentation of the data gathered through interviews, texts of law, press releases, party documents and declarations since the 1990s onwards.

The study will be mainly divided in three sections. First, I will put together a short conceptual framework, in order to define my conception of Europeanisation and its
domestic impact. Secondly, I will briefly introduce the terms of the EU conditionality in the specific field of regional policy towards Romania. I will focus on the Annual reports of the European Commission and its guidelines for Romania’s road of accession in the EU. Thirdly, I will pass to examining Romania’s response to Europeanisation pressures and set of conditionality. Within this section, I will present two chronological periods, corresponding with the latest two governmental cycles: the 1996-2000 coalition government and the 2000-2004 one-party government. The immediate post-communist period will be briefly touched in order to set the historical background and to depict the high degree of centralisation of the Romanian system of government and state organisation. Between 1990 and 1996, the EU leverage was very weak and the prospect of EU membership very remote. This aspect impedes on a clear evaluation of the degree of Europeanisation and its domestic impact.

2. Europeanisation: a conceptual framework

This part of the study builds up on the main conceptual propositions developed in the strands of literature on Europeanisation\(^2\), regionalism and multi-level-governance\(^3\). In this research domain there is a vivid debate among authors about the extent of the EU’s impact on national systems of governance. The conceptual tools and definitions provided by the authors are very useful for the analysis of the impact of EU accession perspective on the regional and territorial governance of candidate countries such as Romania. In this


sense, numerous studies have analysed how the emerging European level of governance reshapes or redirects the domestic arenas in ways that reflect the policies, practices or preferences of EU level actors and institutions. The results of these studies lean towards either convergence or divergence in patterns of national change in response to the EU. Whereas some authors argue that the EU’s impact at the domestic level led to convergence towards regionalisation⁴, others stress the opposite, namely that it has led to divergence, either regionalisation or centralisation depending on the national existing structures⁵.

Bringing together the propositions for analysis from the related strands of literature can help in understanding the relationship between Europeanisation and regionalisation seen as the creation and emergence (formation) of regional governance institutions. From this perspective, Keating and Hooghe⁶ argue that Europeanisation and regionalisation both lead to a re-organisation and disaggregation of state functions. Europeanisation thus becomes a catalyst for this trend towards regionalisation. Linked to the context of enlargement, this debate suggests therefore that the accession process is expected to produce a growing political role for the regions in candidate countries. Nevertheless, in spite of the numerous studies concerned with the emergence of regional and territorial politics across Europe, there is still a high degree of ambiguity when it comes to assessing both the degree of influence of the EU on this regional governance shift and evolution and also its effective role in favouring the emergence of regional actors. If it is clear that the EU enlargement and the related EU conditionality had an impact on the timing and the nature of sub-state reforms in the central and eastern European countries,

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it is less clear to measure what was the EU’s impact on the content of these reforms and on the specific domestic outcomes of regionalisation.

In this context, Europeanisation became progressively a helpful tool for explaining the influence of the EU conditionality on institutional and policy reform in the candidate countries from Central and Eastern Europe. For the purposes of this study, Europeanisation refers to “the redirection or reshaping of politics in the domestic arena in ways that reflect the policies, practices or preferences of the EU level actors/institutions”\(^7\). The definition is very important for this study because in the field of regional and territorial politics especially, one could not talk about precise policies or practices, but more about preferences and trends of evolution and frames of mind due to socialisation and external and internal historical, economical and political developments.

Additionally, in order to understand the structure of this endeavour and the key steps followed throughout the study, it has to be said that I will use as tools for research three features of the Europeanisation literature: the presence of a "misfit" between European rules and conditions and domestic policies, which leads to pressures for domestic adaptation\(^8\), the mechanisms and the outcomes of Europeanisation.

For the mechanisms of Europeanisation, I will mainly use Heather Grabbe's proposal in order to assess the nature of the EU conditionality. I will focus on two EU conditionality instruments that the authors labels as benchmarking and monitoring through the annual reports published by the European Commission in assessing the progress of each candidate country and the provision of legislative and institutional templates, which corresponds to a legal transposition of the acquis communautaire and the domestic

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harmonisation with EU regulations and the requirements and the recommendations from the Annual Reports\(^9\).

Then, I will refer to the different outcomes of Europeanisation proposed by Héritier and developed by Radaelli in order to assess the degree of domestic adaptation in response to Europeanisation pressures for change and reform. These authors depict four different degrees of change: *retrenchment, inertia* (lack of change), *absorption* (accommodation without real modification of the domestic core values) and *transformation* (paradigmatic change)\(^10\).

These conceptual considerations will now be developed and tested against the Romanian case of regional policy adaptation by looking first at the type of external EU conditionality mechanisms and secondly at the response of the Romanian parties in government to the Europeanisation pressures for domestic adaptation in this policy field.

### 3. The EU conditionality mechanisms: The Europeanisation of regional policy

The European integration (through the 1987 Single European Act and the Treaty revisions at Maastricht and Amsterdam) led to the creation of a new administrative and legal arena for the local and regional actors\(^11\). Within this approach, Europeanisation is conceived as a process that triggers the transformation of the nation-state and opens new opportunities and channels of expression for other actors than those representing the

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central state organisation such as the regional ones, who led to the creation of a relevant sub-national level\textsuperscript{12}.

Extending the Europeanisation research to regional policy in the candidate countries, one can argue for the existence of a significant degree of misfit between European policies on the one hand, and domestic traditions on the other. In the specific case under scrutiny, Romania was faced, after the communist breakdown, with (1) a centralised structure and centralist tradition of state power organisation, (2) a rather weak capacity of state reform, (3) an underdeveloped capacity of regional actors to exploit the formal European institutions and opportunities, (4) limited institutional and legal basis for the emergence of regional policies and (5) pending territorial organisation issues. This domestic adaptation process did not correspond with the EU prerequisites for effective and efficient planning and implementation of the Structural Funds. Accordingly, this inconsistency led the EU to place considerable pressures on Romania in order to meet the criteria for accession in terms of regional policy norms and principles.

In the following lines, I will try to summarise the main lines of the EU conditionality in the field of regional policy by focussing mainly on the European Commission’s Annual Reports as mechanisms of monitoring and vague legislative and institutional templates.

3. 1. The description of the EU requirements in regard to regional policy

Agenda 2000\textsuperscript{13} is one of the first documents to set the main lines of EU conditionality as regards regional policy and cohesion. The measures that the Commission found very important to be taken and implemented in Romania in order to establish a regional policy were primarily linked with the areas of law, institution building and public administration at both national and local level.


\textsuperscript{13} Agenda 2000 – The European Commission’s Opinion on Romania’s Application for Membership of the European Union, Brusselsm 15\textsuperscript{th} July 1997.
The next evaluation of the Commission, the 1998 Regular Report on Romania’s progress towards accession saluted the adoption of the Law on Regional Development\textsuperscript{14}, as a step forward in line with the recommendations of the Agenda 2000 in particular, as regards “the creation of institutional structures and sectoral co-ordination mechanisms required for Romania’s participation in EU structural policy”\textsuperscript{15}.

After the generally optimistic tone of the 1998 Regular Report, the Commission adopted a mixed attitude in its subsequent Regular Reports, cautioning Romania that the future progress will depend on the successful implementation of this newly acquired legal basis at both national and regional level\textsuperscript{16}. Another important aspect of this external conditionality is that the Commission equally developed a more detailed and focused set of requirements for the preparation of the future accession. In its 2000 Regular Report, the Commission introduced several categories and principles to be followed in adopting and implementing regional policy measures: (1) territorial organisation, (2) legal and institutional structures, (3) legislative framework, (4) preparation for programming, (5) management capacity and financial control, (6) statistics, (7) the partnership principle, (8) supervision/monitoring and evaluation. The overall evaluation of the Commission when monitoring these 8 domains at the Romanian national and regional levels put forward Romania’s limited progress in regional development and the necessity for further allocation of competences and clarification of responsibilities in the regional field\textsuperscript{17}.

The 2001\textsuperscript{18} and 2002 Regular Reports followed the same path of monitoring and analysis of the degree of domestic change and adaptation of the Romanian regional policy. In terms of positive aspects, the Commission acknowledged the creation of the Ministry of Development and Prognosis in charge with the main responsibilities in the regional policy field, recommending a real allocation of powers and greater authority for to this


\textsuperscript{15} The European Commission’s 1998 Regular Report on Romania’s Progress towards Accession, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{16} The European Commission’s 1999 Regular Report on Romania’s Progress towards Accession, 13.10.1999, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{17} The European Commission’s 2000 Regular Report on Romania’s Progress towards Accession, p. 70.

\textsuperscript{18} The European Commission’s 2001 Regular Report on Romania’s Progress towards Accession.
newly created Ministry. It equally pointed out to the insufficient and delayed implementation procedures at the central and regional levels and asked for better “coordination and co-operation between ministries, as well as with relevant agencies and social and economic partners”\textsuperscript{19}.

The last regular report under scrutiny in this study is the 2003 one, which bluntly puts forward the limited progress of Romania in preparing for the implementation of structural policies\textsuperscript{20}. Furthermore, the Commission points out to the uncertain environment at the Romanian level as a result of the recent Government reorganisation and the dissolution therefore of the Ministry of Development and Prognosis. As a reminder, in its 2001 Regular Report, the European Commission recommended enhanced authority to be given to the Ministry of Development and Prognosis. Accordingly, confronted with the instability of the Romanian system of governance and government, the Commission pointed out that “\textit{Romania needs to review the feasibility of the system being designed}”\textsuperscript{21}.

\textbf{3.2. The analysis of the Commission’s recommendations}

As it results from these annual reports, the Commission has repeatedly emphasised the regional institutional weaknesses of Romania and the necessity to strengthen the planning and implementation of substantive regional policies. Nevertheless, the pre-accession funding and the dialogue of the Commission with its Romanian counterparts have been focused on the national level, without a real implication of the sub-national level. This trend has been reinforced by the fact that the Commission needed a way to control and monitor the mechanisms for the distribution of funds, and thus relied entirely on the national executives as locus for data centralisation\textsuperscript{22}.

At the same time, the above brief survey of the Commission’s regular reports indicates that in the regional policy field there is no blueprint, model of regional reform for

\textsuperscript{19} The European Commission’s 2002 Regular Report on Romania’s Progress towards Accession, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{20} The European Commission’s 2003 Regular Report on Romania’s Progress towards Accession, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Idem.}, p. 94
\textsuperscript{22} J. Hughes, G. Sasse and C. Gordon, op. cit., p. 77.
candidate countries in general and Romania in particular. As Michael Keating argues, “there has never been any question of imposing a single model of territorial government in new Member States, but there have been different views on the desirability of decentralisation and reinforcement of the intermediate level. These have reflected conflicting requirements for administrative reform, decentralisation, public-private partnership and the need to administer and absorb Structural Funds money in the short and medium term”\textsuperscript{23}.

The EU, through the Commission’s annual reports, identified several aspects that needed to be adapted at the Romanian national and sub-national levels in order to meet the requirements for accession. Nevertheless, Romania was not expected to follow any specific model already functioning in one of the EU member states. According to the Commission, “the acquis under Chapter 21 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”\textsuperscript{24}. Moreover, in April 2003, the Delegation of the European Commission in Romania issued a press release according to which “The Commission fully respects the Romanian government sovereign decisions in the matter of determining the most appropriate institutional and administrative arrangements”\textsuperscript{25}.

This implies that the effect of the EU conditionality in the field of regional policy is not the introduction at the Romanian domestic level of a model of regionalisation. In general, the Commission, in coordination with the member states, delivered a map of European regions at different scales, NUTS 1, 2, 3 and has pushed states with rather centralised organisation to adopt more regionalised systems of government. In this sense it could be said that the Commission “shares the general preference for decentralised policies and for partnership and has been an important factor in the diffusion of the new thinking”.


\textsuperscript{25} The European Union, Delegation of the European Commission in Romania, Press Release, Bucharest, 23 April 2003.
The overall result may be defined in terms of administrative regionalisation\textsuperscript{26} with the creation of a formal institutional regional layer corresponding to the EU structures of NUTS 2. However, the process of formal decentralisation was not followed by a real empowerment of regional actors and institutions. The internal shaping factors such as the centralist state organisation defended by the Romanian political parties in government (and in opposition) had a very important role in this process of sub-state reform, as it will be further presented.

4. The Romanian outcome in response to Europeanisation\textsuperscript{27}

I will illustrate the Romanian response to the EU conditionality by tracing the governmental induced patterns of regionalisation, focussing in particular on two periods: 1996-2000 and 2000-2004. The research finds that while there was a strong awareness at the Romanian level of pressure from the Commission to introduce a decentralised system of governance, there was a moderate effect of this conditionality on domestic political agenda and policy implementation.

4.1. General Background

The period between 1989 and 1996 was characterised on the one hand by a feeble EU leverage and, on the other hand, by inertia in terms of democratisation and liberalisation. At the outset it is important to note the absence of a strong democratic opposition after the breakdown of communism, which created a political vacuum. This situation allowed the organised unreformed communists to come to power by instrumentalising ethnic


\textsuperscript{27} In this part of the study, the concept of region will be used as referring to administrative or political regions formed by the interaction of social, economic, political and identity (cultural) forces, whatever their size, and supra-local in extent. Sources: M. Keating and J. Loughlin, \textit{op.cit.}; M. Keating, \textit{op.cit.}
nationalism and fear of economic reforms. Additionally, in order to have a complete picture of the situation after the end of communism, it is worth mentioning one of the first initiatives for Romania’s decentralisation, seen as a prerequisite for further democratisation and economic modernisation. This project came from the signatories of Timisoara Declaration (11 March 1990) who were calling, at the beginning of the 1990s, for ‘economic and administrative decentralisation’ in the Timis county (South-West of Romania).

In this context of bottom-up claims for national decentralisation, the ex-communist forces - renamed later the Party of Social Democracy from Romania (PSDR), under the command of Ion Iliescu - pushed for the adoption of a new constitution, which clearly entrenched the definition of Romania as a 'sovereign, independent, unitary and indivisible Nation State' (art 1 (1) Constitutia României – Romanian Constitution). As Judy Batt remarks, this measure was intended to exclude any kind of societal and political debates on this theme, "by exposing the proponents of decentralisation and especially of autonomy to the charge of anti-constitutional behaviour".

In general terms, the writers of the Constitution opted for a French centralised administrative model of state organisation, which equally informed the country’s pre-communist civil service. In 1991, a first Act on Local Government set the current structures of local organisation, which consists of two territorial layers. The first level is formed by local administrative units: rural communes, town and municipalities, which have an elected council by the population for a period of 4 years. The second level is composed of 41 counties, which “combine aspects of self-government and de-concentrated state administration. The prevailing aspect is self-government, materialised


\[29\] The Clause 11 from the Timisoara Declaration calling for decentralisation and territorial autonomy vis-à-vis Bucharest did not see any pursuit in reality. Nevertheless it was a very important historical document because the Romanian Revolution started from Timisoara, pushed forward by the signatories of this declaration.


by councils, proportional in number to and elected by the county population and headed by a president. (...) De-concentrated state administration at the county level is represented by the prefect. He/she is appointed by the Romanian Government after having been proposed by the political party, which has gained the majority with the last county elections.” 32. As in the Constitution, this Act on Local Government does not mention the region among the territorial-administrative units of the Romanian state organisation and does not put into question the centralised, unitary nature of the state.

Accordingly, in light of these arguments, it becomes observable that the ex-communists forces in government monopolised the formal institutions of the state and inhibited the process of regional development. The government from 1992-1996 (a coalition between the Party of Social Democracy (PDSR) and nationalist parties Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR), the Great Romania Party (PRM) and the Socialist Labour Party (PSM)) associated any demand for regional autonomy and decentralisation with irredentism and threats for the core national state. The government’s position was that “political decentralisation may impede on the effectiveness of administrative and economic decentralisation and that the resulting collision between different local interests and between local interests and the centre may threaten both the long-term reform programme and the integrity of the nation state” 33. They associated therefore, any demand for regional autonomy and decentralisation with irredentism and threats for the core national state.

4.2. The Romanian Government 1996-2000

The Romanian 1996 elections brought in office pro-western, reformist parties 34. This situation was perceived as a domestic choice for the European integration path.

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34 The composition of the winning coalition- its main actors: The Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR) – un umbrella political organisation reuniting all the democratic pro-Western forces, Peasants'
Nationalist elites were replaced with pluralist, democratic political parties. Additionally, the winning coalition of parties in government included in its composition the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians from Romania (DAHR), one of the main proponents of decentralisation formulas for sub-state reforms and state territorial re-organisation.

It is highly important to note that the EU’s positive public support of these reformist political parties had played a central role in the process of domestic power change. Nevertheless, the effect of EU conditionality and incentives was delayed due to several internal aspects. First, the winning parties of the governmental coalition, with the exception of DAHR, did not have a very distinct project of sub-state reform. Secondly, no real consensus over territorial autonomy and sub-state re-organisation was achieved among the political parties of the coalition. Thirdly, the newly elected in office political parties shared equally the same paradigm of governance, that of a centralised nation-state entity and feared the lack of popular support for reforms challenging the existing territorial organisation.

However, confronted with high Europeanisation pressures for regional adaptation and with emergent domestic regionalist actors, the predominantly right-wing parties’ coalition elected in office in 1996 complied with these demands for institutional reforms and introduced in 1997/1998 a formal regional layer. The Phare programme played an influential role in the drafting of the law on Regional Development that was passed in the summer of 1998. According to the law, a third layer is established through the creation of development regions. These regions are neither territorial-administrative units, nor legal persons; they are formal associations between four-six counties for regional development and planning functions. Accordingly, in 1998, Romania reformed the regional policy

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35 During the 1996-2000 period, the country had three different cabinets: Victor Ciorbea (11 December 1996-April 1998), Radu Vasile (14 April 1998-December 1999) and Mugur Isarescu (21 December 1999-27 December 2000), all three nominated by the Christian Democrats.
37 According to the European NUTS system, Romania is organised in 8 regions (groups of counties) (NUTS II) and 42 counties (NUTS III). In Romania, the regional development law n° 151/1998 establishes the institutional framework, principles, objective, jurisdiction and the tools necessary for the
and introduced a completely new institutional framework of regional agencies and a specialised ministry for regional development, in order to comply with the European NUTS system and to adequately prepare itself for receiving the EU structural funds. The launch of regionalisation is a result therefore of the EU pressures and the Romanian interests of having access to structural funds in the post-accession period. In light of these intervening factors, it is argued that the governmental actors pursued a strategy of adaptation by creating functional regional structures for administrative and statistical purposes, without devolving real competences to these new entities.

4.3. The Romanian Government 2000-2004

The 2000 elections brought the Social Democrat Party (SDP) into power - renamed later in June 2001 the Social-Democrat Party (SDP) - known, from its previous period in office between 1990-1996, for its centralist and nationalist vision of state organisation. The newly elected party stated from the beginning its determination to pursue with the path of European integration and compliance with the EU conditionality. The return of the SDP to government was thus accompanied by a series of formal and informal measures meant to respond to the EU requirements as regards Romania’s preparation for receiving the structural funds and for implementing the principles and rules of regional policy. It is precisely to this post 2000 development that I will turn now, which displays a mixed outcome in terms of implementation and consolidation of the regional institutional framework.

38 Gérard Marcou, "Les structures régionales dans les pays candidates et leur compatibilité avec les fonds structurels (Europe centrale et orientale)", Scientific and Technological Options Assessment Series, work document of the European Parliament, General Direction of Studies, May 2002
On the one hand, the pace of implementation for the provisions of the law on Regional Development diminished, in the sense that regional agencies were kept understaffed and financially dependent. Additionally, in between 2002 and 2003 legislation with regard to the registration of political parties was changed and a law was passed that raised the number of members a political formation needs to be eligible for registration as a party from 10,000 to 25,000. According to the new law, for a party to be formed, it needed 25,000 signatures, from 18 counties plus Bucharest. Under these conditions established by law, it becomes very difficult to create a regionalist party because the biggest regions in Romania (Transylvania and Banat) together only have 17 counties.

Another clear example of retrenchment vis-à-vis the Commission’s recommendations came in 2003, when the government initiated an institutional reform which led to the dissolution the Ministry of Development and Prognosis, the institutional central interface between the European Commission on the one hand and the regional authorities on the other hand. The Commission had welcomed the creation of this ministry in its 2000 Regular Report and strongly recommended the reinforcement of this institution. Nevertheless, in June 2003, the Ministry of Development and Prognosis was divided among a number of different governmental bodies (ministries or agencies), among which: the Ministry of the European Integration, the Ministry of Economy and Trade. The effects were rather immediate. First, it became very blurred which institution was in charge with the national regional policy formulation. Secondly the situation of the Regional Development Agencies became as well even more ambiguous and unstable because the “RDAs are managing programmes, projects, which are now under the responsibilities of several ministries such as the Ministry of European Integration (EU-ESC and Romanian programmes), or the Ministry of Administration and Interior (industrial parks, less developed zones)”.

These political measures led therefore to a fuzzy institutional framework in the regional field which practically slowed-down any

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41 The Emergency Ordinance for the Reorganisation of the Government, no 64, the Official Monitor of Romania, no. 464, 29 June 2003
42 Interview with Aura Raducu, Task manager ESC Programme, The Delegation of the European Commission to Romania, Bucharest, July 2003
further developments at the level of regional policy-formulation and policy-implementation.

On the other hand, in the context of EU negotiations, the SDP initiated several measures in order to demonstrate its commitment towards political and administrative reforms in the perspective of enlargement. In December 2000, the SDP signed a Political Protocol with the party of the Hungarian minority (DAHR), reiterated in January 2002; which stipulates a series of local agreements between the local DAHR and SDP. This event was perceived as a positive development in light of the accession perspective, demonstrating the domestic (partisan) capacity for change in response to adaptational pressures, knowing that the SDP was previously predisposed against the Hungarian minority group and their representatives.\(^43\)

Apart from the operationalisation of formal provisions for the regionalisation of Romania in the interest of receiving European structural funds, and concluding negotiations for the accession chapter on regional policy, another development was the emergence of new forms of bottom-up regionalist initiatives such as the recent creation of the Party of Transylvanians (PA), which proposes redrafting the current Romanian Constitution in order to encompass the regional layer and its political autonomy and self-administration. A second initiative reflecting this bottom-up regionalist development is the 2001 Transylvanian Memorandum\(^44\), drafted by a group of Romanian and Hungarian intellectuals from Transylvania, organised around the journal 'Provincia'. They proposed a regional re-organisation on the basis of new administrative and political structures such as regional councils or provincial parliaments in line with the European principle of subsidiarity and the concept of ‘Europe of the regions’.

These various regionalist actors visibly used the European framework of multi-level governance in order to endorse and justify their initiatives for territorial reforms, making a clear connection between regionalisation and Europeanisation. Nevertheless, any


\(^{44}\) Memorandum to parliament on Romania's regional construction, published by the Romanian newspaper Ziuva web site on 12 December, English translation from: BBC Monitoring Service - United Kingdom, December 12, 2001.
decentralisation initiatives, especially coming from Transylvania were easily labelled as "subversive and dangerous to the state unity". For example, the Prime Minister Adrian Nastase (the social-democrat government 2000-2004) dismissed the Transylvanian Memorandum. For him, the Transylvanian intellectuals’ project of state regionalisation was "an idea launched by minds gone off the rails, whose initiators want to take us back in time, by re-establishing the principalities that existed in the thirteenth century, making Romanians lock themselves up in their own provinces. (...) The Memorandum initiators want us to deny the Great Union and the 1859 Union of the Principalities". This represented therefore "an act of defiance addressed to the Romanian people's collective memory, a people that has shed blood to fulfil the ideal of national unity".

It therefore becomes interesting to observe the rather different, opposing attitudes of governmental representatives. On the one hand, they attacked the internal regionalist proposals for state reform, while on the other hand, in the context of negotiations for EU accession, they declared their determination to pursue with the project of regionalisation. According to the same prime-minister, who opposed the ideas lunched by the regionalist actors in 2001, "the European integration becomes more and more a domestic problem, and to a great extent, a local problem, which needs therefore a genuine implication of the representatives of local public authorities and citizens in general". Additionally, the representative of the Ministry for Development and Prognosis, the state secretary, Mihai David, declared that "regionalisation is one of the necessary European standards to be fulfilled in order to have access to the EU’s structural funds".

Driven by the necessity of adapting and preparing the country for receiving European structural funds, the government therefore adopted a path of formal adaptation, which further led to opening up a national debate about the feasibility of different schemes and reform proposals for the future envisaged territorial and administrative re-organisation of Transylvania.

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46 BBC Newsline, 11 December 2001. The indirect source of quotation is Judy Batt, op.cit., p. 171.
Romania. Confronted therefore with internal and external demands and proposals for regionalisation, the political party in government between 2000 and 2004 attempted to maintain however a certain degree of control over the process and started to launch its own proposals for sub-state reform such as the one coming from the minister of Public Administration in February 2002. The representatives of the executive declared that “the Romanian government will be able to propose, by the end of 2004, a system of regionalisation that introduces regions as administrative units of organisation with regional representatives, directly elected by the population and empowered with real administrative competences”\(^{50}\). Another proposal that came from the same minister of Public Administration advanced the idea of creating 8 regional governors by the end of 2003. They would have the role of monitoring the application and spending process of European funds and coordinating the activities of the Regional Development Agencies. The minister added that the eight regions will not become administrative regions. They will be regions for economic development (\textit{regiuni de dezvoltare economica}). The eight governors will not be directly elected, but they will be nominated by the central Government, after proposal from the Regional Development Councils\(^{51}\). It is clear therefore that the perceptible effort to assure state control over the new regional layer has brought the question of elected regional government on the political agenda since beginning of 2000, even though, the government’s position is still far from accepting such a prospect of reform.

A third solution, proposed by the representative of the Ministry of Development and Prognosis, Mihai David, was the suppression of the counties and the introduction of regions as the only recognised administrative and territorial units of organisation\(^{52}\). This position involves a state reform that would require the \textit{full-size regionalisation} of the country in order to replace the counties; which will lead to changes of the constitutional provisions and of the county-based parliamentary electoral system.

This idea was nonetheless rejected by the prime-minister, Adrian Nastase, who reassured the party members holding the county presidencies that there was no immediate threat to

\(^{50}\) \textit{Ziua}, România a facut descentralizare doar pe hârtie, 28.02.2002.


the counties. This position reflects the importance of domestic, short-term partisan interests in determining the pace and the content of sub-state reform, despite the complete awareness of the external pressures in this particular policy field.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of the present essay has been to analyse the degree of Europeanisation in Romanian regional policy, within the context of EU accession. The study investigated to what extent does Europeanisation affect the Romanian regional policy-making and policy reforms towards regionalisation?

To this end, the study proposed a conceptual framework, based mainly on insights from the literature on Europeanisation, regionalism and multi-level governance, with a specific focus on the concepts proposed by the authors writing on Europeanisation.

Secondly, attention was paid to the specific European Union conditionality as regards the regional policy approach. It was argued that the EU does not dispose of a model for regional reform for candidate countries, which allowed the Romanian political parties in government – as the key figures in rejecting or endorsing the Europeanisation process – to shape and influence the pace and the content of regional, sub-state reform.

This assumption led me into looking more closely at the domestic adaptation process in response to this type of vague external conditionality. For doing so, I particularly focussed on the role of national executives organised on partisan bases. The conclusion is that the effect of Europeanisation at the domestic level can be defined as an embryonic process of regionalisation. The 1998 regional reform introduced a formal institutional layer which corresponds to the EU structures of NUTS 2. The European Commission endorsed this formal measure and presented it as a positive development within the negotiations process for EU accession. Nevertheless, a closer analysis of these formal

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provisions and the process that followed after the adoption of the regional reform shows that the decentralisation on paper was not automatically followed by a real empowerment of regional actors and institutions.

The mitigated nature of governmental measures within this period, mainly after 1996 to 2004, draws attention to several important strands characterising the last decade of Romanian sub-state debate and process of reform.

First, even if the issues of decentralisation and local autonomy lost in intensity and have been incorporated in the process of domestic reform in response to Europeanisation, as long as these terms will be associated with the dismemberment of the nation-state, the prospects for territorial autonomy will be less likely to take shape in the near future.

Secondly, the prospect of regionalisation and sub-state reform was introduced mainly as a result of Europeanisation pressures for adaptation. Even though there is no EU model in this field, there were constant pressures for regionalisation through the annual monitoring procedures. Furthermore, the EU was used by both central and regional actors but not with the same extent and especially not with the same results. The sub-state promoters of regionalisation used the EU conditionality framework to strengthen their demands for autonomy and further democratisation and economic development. The successive governments, at their turn, justified the necessity for the regional and territorial changes by referring to the EU enlargement process.

Thirdly, it has to be mentioned that the Commission’s main partners for introducing domestic sub-state reforms were the national central governments, which legitimised their top-down approach to regionalisation vis-à-vis the regional actors’ related projects. Nevertheless, the presence of regional actors promoting different proposals of regionalisation led to opening a dialogue on a tabu subject and a demystification of the concepts of regions and regionalisation.
Finally, this mixed outcome equally shows the predominance of a centralist, statist perception at the level of domestic wide-nation political parties and it sheds real doubts on the EU’s effect towards more decentralisation and regionalisation. Drawing on EU demands for administrative competence and financial responsibility and blaming the weaknesses of post-communist sub-national government, the political parties in central government - from the beginning of the 1990s until the present - managed to secure control over any attempt of sub-state reform and further decentralisation. The research found that while there was a strong awareness at the Romanian level of pressure from the Commission to introduce a decentralised system of governance, there was a moderate effect of this conditionality on domestic political agenda and policy implementation.