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Czech Republic, 'Europe' and its farmers: How is agricultural interest intermediation affected by accession to the EU

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Abstract

Studying patterns of interest intermediation in the new EU member states is an important research topic as it provides us with the opportunity to observe interest intermediation at its early stage of development. This article examines how accession to the EU affected intermediation of interest groups in CEECs. The author demonstrates it through the observation of the Czech agrarian sector and competing associations representing the dual structure of Czech farming. Particular attention is paid to the influence of the mid-term reviewed CAP. The paper concludes on different patterns of usage of 'Europe' by the mediators, through the inclusion in domestic or transnational networks.

Keywords: *EU enlargement, Interest Intermediation, Lobbying, Agricultural Policy*

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1. Introduction

Studying patterns of interest intermediation in the new European Union (EU) member states is an important research topic as it provides us with a unique opportunity to observe interest intermediation and institutional change at the early stage of development. During the past decade, Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) have undergone dramatic changes. With the collapse of state-socialism, most of the countries became committed to the liberalization of their political and economic systems. However, during the period of communism, civil society had been prevented from developing, and the centralized state had prevailed. Very few researchers have been interested in organised professional interests in Central and Eastern European countries during the post-communist transition, or in their role as political actors during the accession to the EU. There are two types of approaches explaining this phenomenon. On the one hand, some consider that communist institutions have been replaced by Western European type of institutions which have to learn how to act under different external and internal constraints (Nielsen, Jessop and Hausner 1995). They emphasize the role of associations in consolidating democracy, as important barometers of political and economic change. According to corporatist theories, interest intermediation can contribute to political stability and economic growth (Berger 1981). Thus, some studies argue that weak civil society and lack of development of professional associations hinder consolidation of democracy and lead to pervasive type of corporatism (Crowley and Ost 2001). On the other hand, post-communist institutions have been created on the basis of previous structures, modalities, and culture. Even though conditions evolved during the liberalization of the political and economic systems, the development of interest representation in post-communist countries still remained highly influenced by communist legacy (Ost 1993; Fink-Hafner 1998; Padgett 2000). Previously, some associations were only allowed to exist because they were linked to the state apparatus with the goal to support the government policy and to communicate it. Transition to democracy thus made it possible to introduce new models and institutions, while still being heavily influenced by communist legacy (Perez-Solorzano Borrigan 2005).

Accordingly, preparation for accession to the EU has been considered as an indicator of the level of change of the regime and of the economic and social progress (EC reports, Council of Europe, OECD reports). The last EU enlargement towards CEECs has often been described as an unprecedented enlargement due to the various challenges it opened for member states, as well as for candidate states. For new member states, it has been dramatic in terms of greater impact, conditionality, and asymmetrical relationship (Grabbe 2003). Hence, accession to the EU is being presented as an incremental process, a tool for the reform and an objective for the candidate countries (Agh 2004). It has been considered as a 'return to Europe', towards a normative model in terms of economic and political system. A few studies also evaluate the impact of European norms, structures, models and paradigms on interest representation in post-communist countries² (Perez- Solorzano Borragan 2001, 2005; Agh 1999; Fink-Hafner 1986). An important role has been attributed to interest groups as main actors participating in the EU accession process thus allowing better participation of the citizens and better identification with 'Europe'³. Indeed 'Europe' has formed norms, institutions and identities, including in the field of organised civil society.

Our analysis on patterns of interest intermediation will focus on the Czech Republic, a country which belonged to the communist type of system before 1989. Czech agriculture, with its small share in GDP, dual farm structure and competing agricultural associations, is the most typical case for analyzing the Europeanization of interest groups in the agricultural sector, as the economic indicators are similar to those in the EU15 member states (see Annex 2). At the

² The notion of "post-communism" underestimates the internal diversity of the former communist bloc. Nonetheless, it allows us to indicate a common past of CEECs and a specific theoretical field. Even though the term is ambiguous, we will refer to it for the internal cohesion of the paper.

³ Johan Olsen (2002) compares different uses of the term Europeanization and the use of the notion of 'Europe' with reference to the European Union and its members. He argues that this understanding of the europeanization dynamics can be quite limited. However, EU integration is currently the core project on Europe. Having in mind this, by using the term 'Europe', we would analyse the European Union, in terms of judicial pressure, soft adjustment and dis-course, as the main frame of reference for this paper.

same time, Czech agriculture bears the legacy of a typical large collectivised sector. The Czech Republic is also a country with a strong tradition in industry. The population living in rural areas is mainly engaged in industrial activities and is not related to the agricultural sector. The Czech case can be approached with similar analytical tools as those used for analysing interest intermediation in industrialised Western European countries. The case study will allow us to question the idea of 'Europe' fostering modernization in the field of professional intermediation and simultaneously, of the controversial role of associations in the political and economic change in CEECs. It will thus allow us to contribute to a better understanding of interactions between actors and patterns of intermediation on a domestic and EU level.

The main objective of this study is to explore the 'usage of Europe' by mediators: why use 'Europe' and what the mechanisms of this usage are. We are interested in the time period before the official opening of EU accession negotiations (absence of adaptational pressure), and during the official negotiation process for accession to the EU (adaptational pressure). The question this paper tries to answer is about the extent of domestic change in the field of interest intermediation structures in CEECs as a result of external influences, such as the EU integration. We would like to explore how the EU factor interacts with legacies of the past thus building new resources for professional mediators. It can be broken into the following sub-questions:

- What is the influence of the domestic context?
- How are external ideas and models transformed into domestic identity and institutions?
- To which extent are European networks important for the learning process?

The main argument of this article is that domestic actors have used 'Europe' under EU pressure, but also even in the absence of adaptational pressure. Our feeling is that agricultural associations use Europe for promoting their interests and consolidating a new identity of the profession. During the EU negotiations period competing mediators have used the EU in order to strengthen their domestic identity, to mobilise resources and diversify repertoires of action.

Europe builds a resource for interest groups while the latter are being affected by legacies of the past. Specific domestic structures in the agricultural sector - a combination of social capital and size of farming companies – foster a specific path of development. Hence the influence of Europe can be found in the differentiated use of discourse on European multifunctional agriculture and the shaping of two competing agricultural identity paradigms.

The paper is divided into three sections; the following section presents the analytical frame of reference. The third section analyses the usage of European formal and informal rules, norms and procedures by the various actors chosen for the analysis. The final section provides a number of concluding remarks regarding the different effects of EU accession on interest mediators in new member states. The study also cautions against possible exaggerated uses of historical legacy approaches or teleological analyses in terms of ‘return to Europe’ or ‘reunification of Europe’.

The perspective linking external and post-communist influence, and new identities and collective images of the past, in terms of properties of the group brings the question of the theoretical framework used in this paper.

2. Theoretical Aspects

The topic of this inquiry is the usage of ‘Europe’ by interests groups in the agricultural sector and the impact on their structures and identities. Hence, the study requires an approach which accounts for the process of identity formation and the role of institutions. Consequently, it applies social constructivism and historical institutionalism as an analytical frame of reference. Examining the formative features - identity and interests - of agricultural associations, this theory is equipped to study the practices, symbols and meanings that are the properties of a group. So, it is particularly appropriate to study the process of change through the usage of ‘Europe’ within the agricultural professional identity. Thus, here we consider identity as a social and historical construction, based on perceptions and values embedded in an institutional system and developed by a discourse. Identity is produced and reproduced in an interactive and

cognitive process, where institutions, as the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity (Hall and Taylor 1996) are attributed a key explanatory role as promoters of norms, values, and aims. Through this interaction they affect the very identities, self-images and preferences of the actors (March and Olsen 1989). We combine two approaches, the analysis of the effect of the European variable on domestic organized interests, as Radaelli (2000) describes it (see below), and the impact of domestic social capital (Mihaylova 2004) in terms of legacy networks and path dependence (Stark and Bruszt 1998). This will help us better understand hybrid innovations within structures and identities of organized interest groups.

2.1 Professional Intermediation in Central and Eastern Europe

We define professional intermediation as specialised mediators invested in a monopoly of representation of collective interests. They take part in the decision making process as exclusive partners, and have the power to influence their members. Alan Cawson (1986) reminds us that interest intermediation is not equivalent to the notion of interest representation. The latter was used by Philippe Schmitter (1979) to explain reciprocity of relations between corporatist organisations and state agencies. As such, representation is not the unique objective of the action of the interest group; it can only be one part of its functions. By using the terminology of interest intermediation, Schmitter also insists on the fact that associations do not always translate their own interests and that often they do not respond to grassroots preferences while playing an important role in the learning process of their members of what their interests should be. As such, their role as mediators is crucial for the institutionalisation of formal and informal norms.

During the transition period the professional actors able to adapt to the system change from 1989 to 2004 were those who collectively transferred social capital towards new opportunities and resources. Consequently, they also had to adapt themselves to new rules in order to gain credibility. The analysis of structures of organized interests brings forward the question of their origin. During state-socialism, the most frequent types of organisations of professional interest were the corporatist organisations from the time of socialist

regime, i.e. groups of technocrats (*nomenklatura*), trade unions and old apparatchiks in the industrial sector. Their role was transformed into a function of negotiation agents, within the framework of the central planning (Haussner et al.1995). So, the intermediation of economic and social interests was not totally absent. Hence, under state-socialism, state-run associations held a monopoly position. Nevertheless, during the transformation period, it became possible to build new forms of institutions even though they were highly influenced by the legacy of the previous system. Simultaneously, the role of the state has always been 'implicit' as its relationship with interest groups has had an important impact on them, has organised their structure and has often determined their limited political access. However, during the economic liberalisation, applying the principle of state responsibility could not be accepted any more as links with state authorities have not been legitimate any more. The rapid changes which interest groups have undergone in the past decade not only showed their dependency on the state but highlighted their weakness of their structures, the lack of resources and capital. Moreover, new and old associations often compete with each other ideologically on the basis of their link to the state-socialist regime. However, theories developed for West-European states often have a limited explanatory power in the case of explaining why certain interest groups succeed in gaining access and why others do not. The paradigm of the 'path dependence' (Stark and Bruszt, 1998) could help explain how internal legacies recombine with new dynamics in order for the actors to adapt to new constraints. Thus, communist past could be used as a resource during the institutional change.

2.2 Europeanization or Usage of Europe ?

Europeanization is indeed a fashionable but contested concept, argues Johan Olsen (2002).The first usage of the notion of Europeanization for the study of Central and Eastern European countries has often been vague and normative (Dakovska and Neumayer, 2004). European studies have thus confirmed an incomplete image of Central Europe. The term Europeanization has described the transformation of a variable at the domestic level which is adapting to a European model, logic or a constraint. Hence, Claudio Radaelli (2000) defines it as:

“A process of construction, diffusion, and institutionalisation of rules, procedure, paradigms, styles, ways of doing and shared beliefs and norms, formal and informal, defined and consolidated first in the decision-making process of the EU and then incorporated in the logic discourses, identities, political structure and policies at the domestic level.”

However, it is often difficult to show whether Europeanization precedes domestic changes or not. To a great extent, this model insists on legal frameworks and does not take into account the role of actors in the process (Jacquot and Woll 2003). Accordingly, Europeanization is not automatic but is triggered by actors; it is an interactive process. It is both 'pressure' and 'usage' (Radaelli 2004). We will account for Europeanization of interest intermediation and specificities related to the agricultural sector while using the notion of usage of Europe. Usages are defined as “practices and political interactions which adjust and redefine themselves by seizing the EU as a set of opportunities be they institutional, ideological, political or organisational” (Jacquot and Woll 2004). In order to achieve a better understanding, it is necessary to identify temporal causal sequences (Radaelli 2004) which would show if and how Europeanization has had an impact on the domestic context. Within this framework, we would be interested in the process of response to the EU pressure and usage in different time periods of the EU accession process. Thus, Europe could be regarded as a specific instrument in fulfilling collective strategies and fostering identity change.

In the next section we will explain the specificities of our empirical investigation.

2.3. Empirical Investigations

Up to now, our analyses have been based on theoretical and empirical research performed in the Czech Republic and in Brussels, Belgium. We have endeavoured to achieve a strong empirical focus. We have been granted access to documentation and have been able to corroborate this material through interviews with different actors in the EU multilevel governance system. In the course of our fieldwork, we have concentrated on a number of semi-directive in-depth interviews with a great diversity of actors, such as farmers, NGO activists, lobbyists, regional officials, public and European adminis-

trators, researchers etc. These individuals have covered the full spectrum of opinions, mainly professionals and experts in agriculture as an economic activity. These semi-structured interviews have been conducted on three different levels of governance: local, national and European. The policy community dealing with the agricultural issues in the Czech Republic is a small and stable group of about fifty people, most of whom have been interviewed. The empirical work at the local level was also based on qualitative interviews. We have worked on five different regions in the Czech Republic representing the diverse territorial, geographical and agricultural contexts of the country⁴. We have also taken into consideration the functioning of the EU dynamic policy making and European agricultural associations' activity by performing the method of participative observation at the European Parliament, secretariat of the Agriculture Committee.

In order to better understand how identities were shaped and why 'Europe' was used during the process of change, we have analysed various internal documentation from each agricultural association, press statements, reports, brochures and seminar programmes revealing official discourse and identifications of members and leaders. A special attention is put on the context, targets and audience. These documents are one of our main support tools in analysing the identity change of different domestic structures. We have consulted specialised agricultural literature and websites, such as www.agroweb.cz, www.uzpi.cz, www.agronavigator.cz. The Euro barometer surveys from 2000 until 2006 have also been a useful source of information.

The second part of our empirical research is a questionnaire sent in 2006 to activists, professional farmers and at the same time representatives of their association in their respective regions. The survey investigates their attitudes towards the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) after the Czech accession to the EU and how this shaped a common identity of what a modern farmer should be in the Czech society. Our sampling group is farmers, active members of the two main general associations: Agricultural Association (big farmers

⁴ Sredecsky, Plzen, Olomouc, Pardubicky and Hradec Kralove.

and companies), Association of private farming (small family farmers).

In the next section, we argue that in order to remedy on the challenges stated above, professional associations have made use of the EU.

3. Usage of 'Europe' and Agricultural Paradigm Shift

First, we account for a transfer process which takes place in complex interactions of state, social and economic actors in domestic and transnational policy communities, i.e. we use the analytical tool of the 'agricultural policy community (Mazey and Richardson 1993). In our case study, an agricultural policy community would refer to limited hierarchical membership of administrative institutions (ministry, Parliament, research institutes, and Agrarian chamber) and interest groups, constant interaction between members through all aspects of a policy, high level of consensus on results and impacts, importance of the inclusion and participation, and exclusion of actors who do not share the same economic goals, collective images or experiences of the past. To illustrate this, we stem examples from the two leading agricultural associations and the Agrarian Chamber in the Czech Republic. We try to assess their strategies within the domestic agricultural policy community.

While being specialised mediators representing collective interests, agricultural associations have seen their role in society modified through the influence of Europe. They have become defendants of 'public services', i.e. their role as farmers in the global society has been transformed into a responsibility for agriculture as a public good. The possibility of adopting a 'European Agricultural Model' (Magné and Ortalo-Mahe, 2001) has been used by the professional groups in order to help them reconstruct their attitude towards the society through the production of a new identity paradigm of the profession during the process of mediation, i.e. building and promoting the image of what place and role in society agriculture and farmers should have (Muller, 1990). As such, has the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform been used as a new discourse in the domestic strategies, and if yes, how?

3.1. Professional Associations in Czech Agricultural sector

During the transformation process, new forms of ownership have emerged from the former co-operatives and state farms. Nowadays, farm land is distributed as follows: corporate farms - 44%, co-operatives -26.3%; individual private farms - 27.4% (Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic 2003). There are two main interest groups in Czech agriculture; the Agricultural Association (AA), which represents mostly large-scale agricultural enterprises (more than 500 ha), and the Association of Private Farming (APF), which represents smaller individual farms (approximately 100 ha). Even though these are the main professional associations, they do not encompass the majority of farmers in the Czech Republic. Some farmers are rather affiliated to sectoral production associations, or chose to stay independent. For example, the number of individual farmers who are registered in the “Agricultural Register” and who can be considered as market-oriented farmers, exceeds the number of APF members by ten times (Bavorova 2005, Lost’ak).

The Agrarian Chamber

In 1991, the Czech parliament passed a law on professional chambers of commerce, industry and agriculture. Membership in the Agrarian Chamber (CAC) is voluntary but it used to be compulsory during the first two years after its establishment. In 1993, an amendment to the law was introduced to change the clause on compulsory membership. The Chamber encompasses 71 district agrarian chambers and 59 professional organisations, which include approximately 77,000 physical entities and 7,600 legal entities. Under this law, the new Chamber took over many tasks distributed among various government agencies: such as registration, regulation, or training. The Chamber’s President is a member of the Economic Council of the Czech Republic, the Advisory Board of the Minister of Agriculture and the National Co-ordination Group for Regional Development at the Ministry for Regional Development. In cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, common commodity committees have been established to discuss the market situation in individual basic products and produce recommendations. The Chamber is also involved in the establishment of farmers’ marketing organisations (www.agrocr.cz). Furthermore, it was said that the

new Chamber was modelled on the Austrian/German system with compulsory membership and strong regional representation (CEA, COPA, COGECA, 1995). Another interpretation would be that it was actually a return to the more recent socialist model of top-down control of authoritarian/ state-corporatism (Ingleby 1996).

Table 1. Size of Farms and distribution of agricultural land in Czech Republic

Size of farms (ha)	% of farms	% of agricultural land
- 50	81,3	6,9
50 – 100	5,1	2,6
101 - 500	6,1	10,3
501 - 1000	2,9	15,8
1001 - 2000	3,0	31,0
2000 -	1,6	33,4

Source: Czech Agrarian Chamber 2001

The Agricultural Association

The Agricultural Association of the Czech Republic (AA) was founded in 2001. It is the successor to the Association of Co-operative Farming. During state-socialism the association promoted state policies among the farmers. The association was transformed several times in the 1990. Even though in the first years, it did not succeed in influencing agricultural policy making, the election of the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD) in 1998 made it possible for the association to shape the agricultural policies through the participation of Jan Fencel, former chair of the Association, in the cabinet as Minister of Agriculture. The Association is also a member of the Tripartite body for social partnership, thus representing employers in the agricultural sector. In 2004, AA members cultivated 1,349,000 ha of agricultural area, which represented 37% of the total agricultural area in the Czech Republic (www.zemsvazpraha.cz). The association has about 1018 members; half of them are co-operatives, approximately one-third is joint-stock companies and around 15 %, limited liability companies.

The Association of Private Farming

The Association of Private Farming of the Czech Republic (APF) is established in 1999 through the integration of three small associations. The aim of the association is to promote family farms and their role in modern agriculture and countryside. The APF has conservative orientation and ties with the right-wing Civic Democratic Party (CDP) and ODS members of Parliament. The APF members covered around 300,000 ha of agricultural area in 2003, which corresponds with 7% of the total agricultural land. It represented approximately one third of the area cultivated by individual farmers. The association has about 3,100 members, which means that the average cultivated area per member farmer is approximately 100 ha. Many small individual farmers are not even registered in the “Agricultural Register” as producing food. The APF farmers are mainly registered as ‘*samostatně hospodařící rolník*’⁵ before the local council otherwise they are not considered entrepreneurs and cannot trade or ask for subsidies. The association organizes a competition titled “best individual farms of the year”, which serves as an information source for the association, as well as for the government (www.asz.cz). The APF is not a member of the Agrarian Chamber. It left the Chamber and adopted a strategy of an outsider because of ideological competition between the leaders and rival interests in the policy making process.

How far did EU partnerships, networks and institutional transfer help shaping new identities and structures of interest intermediation?

3.2. Transnational Networks and Institutional change

From the very beginning, the process of adaptation to the EU has been highly asymmetrical. It basically implied institutional imitation or copying. First, the copying was conveyed by transnational networks. Second, the network members represented different sectoral and professional domestic cultures. This has been conveyed through the financial instruments of the EU external policy.

⁵ Literally, individual farming peasant.

Networks and Instruments

Until the official opening of negotiations in 1998, the EU instruments used for external relations with Central and Eastern Europe were such as economic association partnerships, aid programmes for democratisation and integration to the market economy. They covered technical assistance, expertise, organisation of conferences or professional training according to the interests of donors and recipients. Among other things, as part of EU's financial instruments, the PHARE/twinning programmes have been introduced in 1997⁶ as a mechanism not only for evaluation but as a system of horizontal networking between professional associations. When the negotiation process started, the theme on capacity building had become highly political as in the long run it legitimised and strengthened the partners while at the same time excluding other actors, evaluated as not suitable for the multi-level representation. The selection of reliable partners has been operated by the European agricultural confederation, the EU delegation in the Czech Republic and the Ministry of Agriculture. The mission stated was the support for capacity building in CEECs.

At the beginning, PHARE mainly recruited teams of private consultants in order to organise the transmission of know-how. Its goal was to help candidate countries in their preparation for accession, according to their need of consolidating institutions and implementing the *acquis communautaire*. The other two financial instruments ISPA⁷ and SAPARD⁸ financed, on the one hand, investments in the

⁶ The PHARE programme, initially created to foster reforms engaged in Poland and Hungary, had become the main financial instrument of the European Community in the field of external cooperation with Central and Eastern European Countries.

⁷ ISPA was designed to address environmental and transport infrastructure priorities identified in the Accession Partnerships with the 10 CEECs applicants. ISPA was established to enhance economic and social cohesion in the applicant countries of CEECs for the period 2000-2006.

⁸ SAPARD: Special accession programme for agriculture and rural development. This has helped 10 CEECs, prior to membership to prepare for their participation in the CAP and the internal market through a range of 15 measures intended to support the competitiveness of their agriculture and the development of their rural area and to prepare for application of the EU regulatory framework. The management of SAPARD has been fully decentralised. It is

environmental and transportation sector in order to ensure better conformity to the European legislation, and on the other hand helped secure the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* concerning the CAP and other agricultural priorities.

We argue that PHARE has been used for the transfer of informal norms from EU member states representing their sectoral and professional domestic cultures.

Transfer of Agricultural structures ?

Before the official start of negotiations for EU accession contacts with agricultural associations were organised through COPA-COGECA⁹, gathered around special events financed by the Council of Europe and the special commission on Agriculture. This initiative was later continued almost exclusively within the framework of bilateral programmes between different partners, national administration and experts in neighbouring countries.

Being the only legitimised partner to the European Commission (until 1980s when the European Farmers Coordination (CPE) was included in the dialogue) COPA-COGECA had a privileged position which it sought to keep after the 5th enlargement. Indeed since 1995, COPA has been anticipating it and has been interested in consolidating agricultural associations in Central and Eastern Europe in order to better integrate them later. The above mentioned associations were indeed in a crisis situation, threatened by the enlargement of the EU, while the Eastern Europeans were also facing a crisis of representation and reconstruction. We argue that the social learning of Eastern and Western associations through a common model of behaviour has been asymmetrical during the first years of transformation but that later, has become double sided and operated mutually from both sides.

administered by candidate countries providing them with the opportunity to gain experience of applying the mechanisms for the management of agriculture and rural development in advance of EU membership.

⁹ The Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations in the European Union, the General Confederation of Agricultural Co-operatives in the European Union; Recently the Employers Group of COPA – GEOPA – also joined the confederation.

The experts from various EU member states introduced their own agricultural professional structures according to their interests but also according to similar working habits and work culture. Hence, the model of the Agrarian Chamber has been influenced from the Austrian type of professional associations (corporatist and with compulsory membership, for the Czech Republic at least at the beginning - CEA, COPA, COGECA 1995)¹⁰. The Austrians were interested in presenting their model of agricultural intermediation and suggested it for implementation in the CEECs during several transnational conferences¹¹. Not only it reflected the conviction that corporatist structure better responds to the needs of these new free market societies, but this behaviour also showed the desire to introduce small scale family type of agriculture in CEECs. The creation of Agrarian Chambers in CEECs was also influenced by the German neighbours in a sense that a regional structure was created and local representatives were put into place where they had never existed before. At the same time, the institutional copying also corresponded to the need of the centralised state to better supervise and regulate these elites, without taking responsibility for agricultural unbalances.

Thus, after the official launching of EU negotiations, the transfer of national versus EU models of interest representation in the field of agriculture has been linked to the increased role of the European agriculture confederations during the twinning programmes, financed by PHARE programmes. Priority has been given to bilateral exchanges between two partners while the first selection of partners have been operated with the help of national ministries of agriculture and the European delegation in the country concerned. COPA-COGECA made the choice to integrate several associations per country. In the case of the Czech Republic, there have been four associations and the Agrarian Chamber which had been designated as representative partners. They had to represent the Czech agriculture under the umbrella of the Chamber or within the framework of a platform. In 1998, an agreement was signed between the European

¹⁰ This is also the case for Hungary.

¹¹ Within the meetings at the Council of Europe, these conferences have been organized by COPA-COGECA.

Commission and COPA-COGECA transferring technical assistance on institutional reform of the agricultural and agro-food sector in Central Europe¹². The Commission preferred to cooperate with the European agricultural confederation in order to accept later the national associations as a whole. However, the unified Czech Platform failed, as it happened in most of the CEECs. In the second programme of the twinning process, the Czech associations chose the Irish counterparts in order to learn techniques from a recent new member state and exchange know-how on the use of European funding in order to foster economic performance¹³.

To conclude, during the very first years of transition and before the official opening of negotiations for EU accession there has not been any institutional transfer of a proper EU model of interest group. There has not been adaptational pressure coming from the EU level either, but rather horizontal integration made possible through transnational networking. While after 1997¹⁴, domestic models of interest groups have been transferred through institutional transfer i.e. modern type of lobby group structures were being conveyed by transnational networks within the framework of the accession strategy of the EU, through COPA-COGECA¹⁵.

¹² Project organised within the agreement concerned, COPA-COGECA and two consultancy agencies, with in the framework of the "Business Support Programme", which organised exchange programmes, and foresaw the unification in one body of all the general professional associations in each post-communist country, Sabine SAURUGGER (2003). Source: interviews with EU officials and NGO administrators.

¹³ Interview with Dominique Souchon, Director for Strategies, COPA-COGECA, June 2004. Moreover, most of the European partners were more interested in the Polish or Hungarian agriculture rather than in the insignificant agricultural sector of the Czech Republic.

¹⁴ The Luxembourg European Council of 12 and 13 December 1997 decides to launch a comprehensive, inclusive and ongoing enlargement process, encompassing the ten countries applying for accession to the Union from Central and Eastern Europe, plus Cyprus. In addition, it decides to begin, in the spring of 1998, accession negotiations with Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia.

¹⁵ Empirical evidence from interviews with EU officials in Brussels and Prague and COPA-COGECA leaders.

How the domestic agricultural policy community organised the learning and framing processes in the context of change? In the next part, we would observe the agricultural identity paradigm shift.

3.3. The agricultural paradigm

We would like to have a closer look at the European Agricultural Model in order to see how it is being framed in the domestic context of the Czech Republic through interactions between the mediators and their environment.

As it is stated in article 39.1. from the Treaty of Rome which sets the objectives of the CAP, its goals are to increase agricultural productivity by promoting technical progress and by ensuring the rational development of agricultural production and the optimum utilisation of the factors of production, in particular labour; thus to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular-by increasing the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture; to stabilise markets; to assure the availability of supplies; to ensure that supplies reach consumers at reasonable prices.

Hence, since its very beginning, the Common Agricultural Policy has been placed under the sign of productivism. Even nowadays, in the draft constitutional treaty, which has not been ratified, the same objectives lay unchanged for the agricultural sector¹⁶. However, if we have a closer look at the EU agricultural model (in terms of current policy priorities, and economic incentives), it has been central to the Agenda 2000 reforms (European Commission, 2000). It has also been introduced in the mid-term Review of the CAP of July 2002 (European Commission, 2002) without a change of policy objectives even though making available financial support for its promotion (Cardwell, 2004). The difference in the new approach concerning the European agricultural model is:

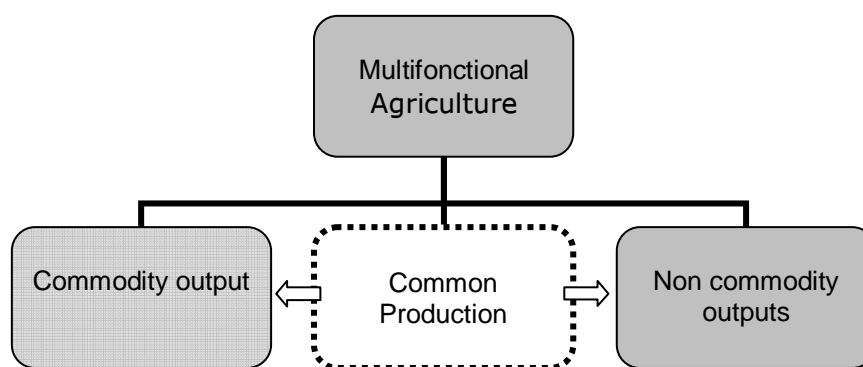
- firstly its aim to directly respond to the concerns of EU citizens about the effectiveness of the CAP,
- secondly, the necessity to urgently respond to the WTO pressure,
- and finally the EU budgetary restrictions.

¹⁶ Article III-123.

While the legal text stayed unchanged, the policy process was evolving. Thus, the focus of the EU Agricultural model was later shifted into the second pillar of Rural Development.

The main characteristics of the European Agricultural Model are its *multifunctionality*¹⁷ and the *specificity* of agriculture.

Figure 1. Multifunctional Agriculture



In Agenda 2000¹⁸, non-food outputs of agriculture have been expressed in terms of rural development, environment, food safety, animal health etc. Nevertheless, as it has been previously shown (art. 39.1.), the basic activity of agriculture has never been questioned. It has remained its core activity. In other words, it is a model of agriculture, defined by competitiveness on world markets, production and price concerns, where farmers are also portrayed as entrepreneurs, opposed to charity (Speech Franz Fischler, 2002). Secondly, claims about agricultural ‘*exceptionalism*’ still persist and range agriculture as a special economic activity, whose support is justified by the ‘public services’ that farmers should provide. Within the

¹⁷ “The key elements of multifunctionality are i) the existence of multiple commodity and non-commodity outputs that are jointly produced by agriculture ; ii) the fact that some of the non-commodity outputs exhibit the characteristics of externalities or function poorly.” OECD (2001).

¹⁸ Agenda 2000 is an action programme whose main objectives were to strengthen Community policies and to give the European Union a new financial framework for the period 2000-06 with a view to enlargement.

framework of this agricultural 'exceptionalism', rural development and environmental protection play a special role in defining what European agriculture should look like. The notion of European Agricultural Model is still very ambiguous. Because agriculture is so diverse in each European country, and because of its importance for traditions and cultural heritage, there has never been a unified model of European agriculture. It could have one meaning in Germany or France, but could represent a different reality in a Mediterranean or a Northern country. The various CAP reforms have also condemned it into being a 'moving target'. There are some trends, which are common though. Social and economic transformations in the agricultural sector have perpetrated the division between small and big farmers, between agricultural joint stock companies and individual agriculturalists. The current trend emphasizes this separation and condemns small farmers to disappear if they do not reshape their identity and repertoires of action. Thus, various national (member states) particularities have been implemented in CEECs according to domestic preferences, identities and cultures. The discourse on *multifunctionality* has thus been framed through domestic institutions according to different domestic contexts. In the case of the Czech associations, the EU policy on multifunctional agriculture serve them to redefine their interest and to shape another competing 'frame of reference'. The latter will serve these mediators to reconstruct their identity and interests, and to redirect their action within institutions (Muller, Jobert 1987).

Throughout interviews and analysis of official documents, we have identified that before 1998, agricultural professional identity has been longtime instable as associations have been granted access to the agricultural policy community through the ministry and the EU institutions. In particular, these institutions have been able to distribute power across groups and to structure the character and outcomes of the group conflict. During the negotiation process, from 1998 till 2004, the newly operated shift in the agricultural paradigm of the professional mediators has served them to legitimise interactions with state administration and members, through the consolidation of a new identity for modern farmers. After 2004 agricultural identity has been organized on the basis of exclusion or inclusion in the agricultural policy community. This has helped the various groups to auto-identify with the goals and aims of what agriculture

means in the global society, and thus to define themselves as members of the group sharing the same identity.

Each association has triggered different types of agricultural identity based on its positioning within (or out) of the agricultural policy community, local involvement and attitude towards the global society. Also, in order to attain identity cohesion, the group and its members define themselves by comparison with the other associations. This has been put into place through the following mechanisms:

Both Czech agricultural associations have created two alternative institutional paths for developing their identity, legitimising their political action, and organising their participation in the policy making process. Both used different mechanisms while at the same time making use of 'Europe'. The AA does support a competitive liberalised agricultural sector coupled with financial support measures to farmers, equivalent to the one given to the West European counterparts. In economic terms, it represents the biggest part of Czech agriculture. At the same time, the APF recommends a type of agriculture more related to rural life, protection of environment and social role of farmers at the countryside. Because of great free-riders effect, it does not represent the majority of individual and family farming.

Both of them, the AA and the APF, representing farmers as entrepreneurs and modern businessmen, fit into the global image of what the role of a competitive agricultural sector should be in the Czech Republic's liberal economy. Czech farmers portray themselves as managers and businessmen.

The Czech Agrarian Chamber (CAC) aimed at organising, uniting the whole agricultural profession and dealing with administrative management, registration and statistics, training and regulation of agricultural activities. It was also meant to represent the agricultural sector at the EU level in a unified platform. Nonetheless, from 1995 the political scene became more complex. Firstly, a new Chamber was created to defend the interests of the agro-food industry. Then, the Agrarian Chamber was divided because the Association of Private Farmers had left its umbrella structure. The Chamber could not

become the unique representative of farmers in Czech Republic, though its place as a mediator with the state is still exclusive. The conflict has developed in search of a mediation monopoly through the usage of different discursive images of the two main agricultural associations.

The Agricultural Association (AA) has strong historical roots before 1989. Its legacy comes from modernised cooperatives. Simultaneously it also tries to show an image of a modern interest group inspired by big farmers' associations such as the National Farmers Union (NFU) in the UK¹⁹. Success of the AA is guaranteed through the careful combination of domestic and external resources. The European influence has been used in combination with social capital, and ex-communist elite networking. The adaptational pressure coming from the urge to implement the CAP has been successful because the AA served as a mediator in the learning process of its members, and as a mediator to the State, helping to legitimise reforms which greatly benefited big farm structures and corporatist product chains. As the main beneficiary of SAPARD and direct aid support programmes, the AA placed itself as the main partner and mediator.

While the AA is the most influent member of the Agrarian Chamber, its adversary, the Association of Private Farmers (APF) left the Chamber because it refused to admit its representativity perpetrating the myth of the unity of the Czech farmers and the over-representation of big farmers. These concerns were also very much influenced by ideology. Thus, the organisation has chosen to be excluded from the agricultural policy community and to adopt a marginalised conservative strategy. At the same time, it also adopted a pro-European discourse, in order to comply with the new model of European agriculture. The APF used the European resources in a different pattern, which would help it to be more active on the political scene. It did not succeed in promoting an image based on peasants' identity (*rolník*), traditions and rurality but it transformed its discourse in favour of rural development policy, thus taking advantage of the rural development discourse, based and networked

¹⁹ Interview with the AA representative in Prague who asked to stay anonymous, 2002.

on the local level. Being excluded from the agricultural policy community and not being able to benefit from SAPARD²⁰, compels the APF to find alternative paths, such as:

- better EU representation;
- shift of the ‘frame of reference’: what role should small private farming have in the rural society;
- improve the value-added of farmers: defendants of ‘public services’, new role in the countryside;
- diversification of actions, broadening of the agenda, interest in other issues (environmental concern, local governance).

By using the med-term reviewed CAP model, the APF tries to introduce a new vision of their role: more related to the social value added, the rural development, and public role locally. Hence *multi-functionnality* of farmers has been introduced in the Czech context²¹. Even if this new paradigm is not winning through the mediation process of the agricultural community, it does not exclude the association entirely. On the contrary, it allows it to be an alternative mediator with regard to a later inevitable policy shift towards rural development policies.

Interest groups participated in transnational networking and have used the European agricultural model to operate an identity paradigm shift. Firstly, we argued that the EU integration process provoked soft adjustment through a mechanism involving new distribution of power among associations competing for access to state administration. Then we argued that in post-communist countries, the accession to the EU, used both as a pressure and usage, has had a differentiated impact on the consolidation of professional interests as the domestic structures fostered specific paths of development.

²⁰ Because of a limit in hectares for companies eligible to receive farmers’ financial support.

²¹ Interview with Michal Pospisil, Secretary of the APF, Brussels, December 2003.

4. Concluding remarks

This paper has suggested studying domestic change in the field of interest intermediation in CEECs and the influence of the EU integration process. Domestic actors have used 'Europe' even in the absence of direct EU pressure. The influence of Europe can be found in the use of the discourse on European multifunctional agriculture and the shaping of two competing identity paradigms. They show that the competing mediators use the EU pressure in order to strengthen their identity, to mobilise resources and diversify repertoires of action. Secondly, it has been argued that domestic conditions matter; they are as important in shaping structures and actions of the interest groups as the influence of transnational or EU networks because the domestic context has the capacity to transform external ideas to domestic beliefs, identities and interests.

Thirdly, it was suggested that in order to succeed an association has to combine external and domestic resources, i.e.:

- i) strong membership, good structure, linked with economic weight,
- ii) legitimacy carried out through institutional transfer and conveyed by transnational, European networks
- ii) elite participation in the integration of beliefs corresponding to cultural domestic preferences (agriculturalists perceived as businessmen and not as traditional farmers)
- iii) inclusion in the domestic policy community (i.e. in the field of agriculture, it is organised around the activities of the Agrarian Chamber and is empowered through preference links with political parties).

On the basis of this observation, we think that interest groups in the agricultural sector have used European norms, discourse and structures in order to transfer valuable capital towards a collective identity triggered by a 'European agricultural model'. In a constructivist approach of the agricultural interest groups, we consider that, in the EU context, these actors are embedded in and affected by the social institutions in which they act. Without coercive impact on the agricultural associations, the accession process has produced in itself a specific European agricultural identity which has had a differenti-

ated impact on the domestic level according to different domestic structures, their legacy and historical capital. This study can thus contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms of formation of a specific European identity within the EU.

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Annexes

Annex 1. List of Organisations

The Czech Agrarian Chamber (*Agrární komory České republiky*) referred here as CAC

The Agricultural Association (*Zemědělský svaz ČR*) referred here as AA

The Association of Private Farmers (*Asociace soukromého zemědělství ČR*), referred here as APF

The Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations in the European Union (COPA)

The General Confederation of Agricultural Co-operatives in the European Union (COGECA)

The European Farmers Coordination (CPE)

Annexe 2. Agriculture in the EU 25

Agricultural Sector							
(2000)							
	UAS		Brut Value Added		Agri Employ-		Food Ex-
	Utilised surface	Agricultural	In Agriculture		ment	penses	
	x1000 ha	% of total	million €	% PIB	x1000	% total	% total
Bulgaria	5582	50,3	2054	16	795	26,2	53,5
Cyprus	134	14,5	329	3,5	14	9,2	18,6
Estonia	891	19,7	254	4,7	46,1	7,6	37,5
Hungary	5854	62,9	1913	3,9	227	6,0	26,6
Latvia	2488	38,5	306	4,0	118	13,5	44,9
Lithuania	3489	53,4	836	6,9	262	19,6	44,4
Malta	12	38,1	78	2,0	3	1,9	
Poland	18220	58,3	4965	2,9	2698	18,8	36,9
Romania	14811	62,1	4564	11,4	4861	42,8	58,0
Slovakia	2440	49,8	560	4,5	119	6,7	31,8
Slovenia	491	24,2	847	2,9	81	9,9	23,5
Czech Re- public	4282	54,3	1846	3,4	208	4,5	26,8
Candidate countries-12	58808	54,1	18552	4,5	8950	22,0	39,1
UE-15	131619	40,6	167197	2,0	6767	4,3	17,4
UE-27	190427	44,0	185748	2,2	15717	7,9	19,5
New MS 2004	38301		11934		3776,1		
UE-25	169920		179131		10543,1		

Source: European Commission, Agricultural Situation in the Candidate Countries, Country Reports, July 2002.

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