

Romania's Rural Development Policy - a policy significantly influenced by the European Union

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ABSTRACT

Over time, the impact of the European Union on Member states, neighbouring countries and even globally has been analysed and measured and, in some cases, the accuracy of the results was questioned, considering the adequacy of the research methods used.

At a time when there is a major debate about the EU's role as a global actor: on the one hand, about the decline of the EU's influence worldwide and, on the other hand, about the „Brussels effect” and „how the EU rules the world”¹, we shall analyse in a balanced manner and isolate as much as possible the impact of the EU in studies aimed at demonstrating the degree to which EU's preferences shape the action of actors and policies in Member States and worldwide.

KEYWORDS: *Rural development policies, Europeanization, Theory-based evaluation.*

1.Introduction

This study aims to establish whether Romania's rural development policy is one of the policies significantly influenced by the European Union, by means of measuring the impact of EU's preferences on shaping our country's rural development policy.

In order to validate this research hypothesis, we shall compare the strategic documents in the domain of rural development policy at the level of the EU and at the level of our country, so that we can identify common or possible divergent elements. Therefore, we shall analyse the state of affairs of rural development policy in Romania in the period prior to the accession procedure,

¹Bradford, A., 2020, *The Brussels Effect-How the European Union rules the world*, Oxford University Press.



in the pre-accession period and during the two programming periods our country has experienced as an EU Member State.

The structure of the study is based on four sections. In the first one, we shall define the concept of Europeanization and present its types, based on the degree of domestic change in Member States (MSs) as a response to EU's preferences. The section on Methodological Considerations describes two impact assessment methods: Counterfactual impact evaluation and Theory-based evaluation, their benefits and their limits.

The section dedicated to the European Union's Rural development policy describes how "since 1999, efforts to embed newer forms of rural development have given birth to a separate policy regime institutionalized in pillar 2" of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In this way, „a distinct policy-making method" was introduced, characterized by a more decentralized process and co-financing between the EU and MSs"².

In the fourth part, *Romania's Rural Development Policy- a policy shaped by the EU*, we shall compare the state of affairs of rural development policy in our country before and after the accession to the EU.

2.The concept of Europeanization

According to Wallace and colleagues, "The European Union is perhaps the most important agent of change in contemporary government and policy-making in Europe", and its decisions influence both the content of the policies of the Member States and that of the policies of the neighboring states"³.

Collective policies generated within the common European framework produce "differentiated results and significant variations" for Member States, determined by factors such

²Roederer-Rynning, Chr. in Wallace, H., Pollack, A. Y., Alasdair. M. R., 2015, (Eds), *Policy-Making in the European Union*, Oxford University Press, Seventh Edition, p. 198.

³Wallace, H., Pollack, A. Mark, Young, R. Alasdair (Eds), 2010, *Elaborarea politicilor în Uniunea Europeană*, Oxford University Press, 6th Ed., in Romanian, published by Institutul European din România, Bucharest, 2011, p.4 and Wallace, H., 2015, *op. cit.*, p.4.



as the framework of Union competence established by the Treaties, the degree of influence of bodies “at the intersection of public and private sphere” and “solidity and intensity” of wider transnational consultations and regimes”⁴.

Consequently, “EU processes are particularly important in some policy areas, but not in others”⁵. Page | 127

The term used in the doctrine to define the influence of the EU on other states' policies is Europeanization.

Ladrech explains the concept of Europeanization as an “incremental process re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EU political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making”⁶.

Radaelli defines Europeanization as the “processes of construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies”⁷.

We focused on these two definitions of Europeanization in order to present the concept from the perspective in which we shall approach it in our study, namely that of a process. For the purpose of our analysis, we shall consider Europeanization as the way in which EU's preferences shape Member States' internal policies.

Radaelli draws attention to the fact that Europeanization does not necessarily mean convergence, nor harmonization, given that the reaction to European Union’s influence can be one of divergence or a result of diversity⁸, which do not exclude Europeanization, but are forms of impact.

⁴ Wallace, H., 2011, *op. cit.*, p.8-9.

⁵ Wallace, H., 2011, *op. cit.*, p.9.

⁶ Ladrech, R., *Europeanization of domestic politics and institutions: The case of France*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 32(1), March: 69-88, 1994, p.69 in Radaelli Claudio M., *The domestic impact of European Union public policy: notes on concepts, methods, and the challenge of empirical research*, L'Harmattan, Politique européenne, 2002/1 n° 5, pages 105 to 136, p 108, available at DOI : 10.3917/poeu.005.0105.

⁷ Radaelli, C. M. in Featherston, K., Radaelli, C. M., 2003, *The Politics of Europeanization*, Oxford University Press, p.30.

⁸ Radaelli C. in Featherstone K. , Radaelli C. M., 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 33.



In measuring the degree of domestic policy change, Börzel and Risse distinguish between three situations: absorption, accommodation and transformation. In the case of *absorption*, MSs „incorporate European policies or ideas into their domestic structures without substantially modifying existing processes, policies, and institutions.

In the second scenario, MSs “accommodate Europeanization pressure by adapting existing processes, policies and institutions without changing their essential features”. In the case of *transformation*, MSs “replace existing policies, processes, and institutions by new, substantially different ones, or alter existing ones to the extent that their essential features fundamentally changes”⁹.

Type of Europeanization	absorption	accommodation	transformation
Degree of domestic change	Low	modest	high

Table 1. Degree of domestic change in response to EU's preferences;

Source: Börzel, T.A., Risse, T., 2003, *Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe*, Oxford University Press, p. 14.

Radaelli distinguishes “four possible outcomes” that „cover both the magnitude of change and its direction”. These are: retrenchment, inertia, absorption, and transformation¹⁰.

Retrenchment is “an example of *negative* Europeanization” and it “implies that national policies become less *European* than they were”¹¹.

⁹ Börzel Tanja A., Thomas Risse, *Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 14.

¹⁰ Radaelli C. in Featherstone K., Radaelli C. M., 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 37, drawing upon Börzel, T. *Towards Convergence in Europe? Institutional Adaptation to Europeanisation in Germany and Spain*, Journal of Common Market Studies 39(4): 573–96, 1999; Cowles, M. G., Caporaso, J., and Risse, T. (eds) *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press), 2001; Héritier, A., *Differential Europe: Administrative Responses to Community Policy*, 2001 ; Héritier, A. and Knill, C., *Differential Responses to European Policies: A Comparison*, 2001.

¹¹ Radaelli C. in Featherstone K., Radaelli C. M., 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 37.



„*Inertia* is a situation of lack of change”, when the EU models or policies are “too dissimilar to domestic practice”¹².

Absorption indicates “non-fundamental changes”. In this case, the policies respond to a demand for change, but not within their *core*. While, in terms of *transformation*, the institutions of that policy domain “*think and perform differently*”, in the European spirit. In this case, change occurs within the *core* of the policies¹³.

“The impact of EU public policy is contingent on whether a country is already involved in a process of reform or not”. Consequently, “the analysis of the effects of European public policy on national policy systems should be conducted in parallel to the investigation of domestic processes”¹⁴.

3.Determining the impact of Europeanization. Methodological considerations

Haverland argues that, in the absence of a control group of non-member states, it is difficult to isolate the effect of the EU's intervention and to demonstrate that the “domestic developments in the cases under investigation are indeed the effect of the EU”. And, in order to accurately capture and measure the EU's impact on MSs' policies, the most appropriate method is the Counterfactual impact evaluation¹⁵.

And “based on a counterfactual understanding of causality”, the hypothesis that the influence of the EU would generate a certain impact assumes that, in the absence of the European Union’s intervention, that particular impact would not be realized¹⁶.

Haverland considers alternative domestic or global explanations, arguing that a policy decision taken according to the EU's requirements at the level of the European Union could have

¹² *Idem.*

¹³ *Idem.*

¹⁴Radaelli C. in Featherstone K., Radaelli C. M., 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁵Haverland, M., *Does the EU Cause Domestic Developments? Improving Case Selection in Europeanisation Research*, West European Politics, Vol. 29, No. 1, 134 – 146, January 2006, p. 134.

¹⁶Haverland, *op. cit.*, p.135.

been part of the historical course of a MS at some point in the context of globalization, even in the absence of EU's influence¹⁷.

Preferred in assessing the impact of EU's policies, the Counterfactual impact evaluation is appropriate to determine the impact of the EU by the difference observed between the results of the group that benefited from the intervention and those of non-beneficiaries, at segment level (at the level of the priority axis or the measure within a program). We argue that, the idea of following this approach by using a non-member state to constitute the control group is not supported, given that it is not possible to identify states with common characteristics, similar historical developments and European neighbourhood that do not have been exposed to EU's influence.

Theory-based evaluation “can provide a precious and rare commodity”¹⁸: understanding the processes that take place during implementation and the change generated by “examining the assumptions underlying the causal chain from inputs to outcomes and impact”¹⁹.

Theory-based impact evaluation has as its essence “not a counterfactual (*how things would have been without*), rather a theory of change (*how things should logically work to produce the desired change*)”. “This approach does not produce a number, it produces a narrative” and therefore, it „appears to some observers less scientific, less *objective*”. However, „contribution analysis relies upon chains of logical arguments that are verified carefully by systematically identifying and investigating alternative explanations for observed impacts”²⁰.

Therefore, the issue of attribution is raised. We need to make sure that the causal relationships are correct and that the outcomes are generated by the inputs.

Starting from our research hypothesis - that Romania's rural development policy is one of the policies significantly influenced at the EU level-, we shall apply this type of impact analysis, by means of examining each stage of Romania's accession to the EU in order to validate or

¹⁷Haverland, *op. cit.*, p.136.

¹⁸*Evalsed...*, p.226

¹⁹White, H., *Theory-Based Impact Evaluation: Principles and Practice*, in *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, 1:3, 271-284, 2009, p.3, available at DOI: [10.1080/19439340903114628](https://doi.org/10.1080/19439340903114628).

²⁰European Commission, *Evalsed - The resource for the evaluation of Socio-Economic Development: Sourcebook - Method and techniques*, 2013, p.174-175, available at https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/guide/evaluation_sourcebook.pdf.



invalidate the hypothesis. For the purpose of this *before and after analysis*, we shall compare “the behaviour and performances” of our country before and after the accession. Extrapolating pre-accession performance provides “a proxy counterfactual and the difference between that counterfactual and the observed performance is then the net effect”²¹.

Consequently, we shall investigate the state of affairs of rural development policy in Romania in the period prior to the accession procedure, in the pre-accession period and during the two programming periods our country has experienced as an EU Member State.

4. European Union's Rural Development Policy

The European Union's rural development policy was originally created as an ancillary policy to the CAP and not as an autonomous policy with its own objectives in line with those of the CAP. In this way, the EU's rural development policy was set up in the first stage of its existence, corresponding to the 1980s and marked by an exclusively sectoral approach. In the second stage, in the 1990s, we are talking about a two-pronged approach, both sectoral and territorial²².

A distinct European rural development policy became operational in 2000, when the CAP has been reorganized into two pillars, and territorial and sectoral approaches have been integrated into the second pillar, that of rural development, together with a new approach - the one related to environmental protection. Thus, starting with this period, the rural development policy became more integrated and more coherent²³.

²¹OECD, *Approaches to Impact Assessment* p.6, available at <https://www.oecd.org/sti/inno/Approaches-OECDImpact.pdf>, based on OECD Directorate for Science, Technology and Innovation, *Assessing the Impact of State Interventions in Research – Techniques, Issues and Solutions*, 2014, unpublished manuscript.

²²Fonte, M.; Ranaboldo, C., *Desarrollo rural, territorios e identidades culturales. Perspectivas desde América latina y la Unión Europea*, p. 9-32, available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/40440986_Desarrollo_rural_territorios_e_identidades_culturales_Perspectivas_desde_America_Latina_y_la_Union_Europea and European Union, *A short guide to the European Commission's proposal for EU rural development policy from 2014 to 2020*, 2001, p.2

²³*Idem*.



The process of elaboration and implementation of rural development policy is decentralized- the EU defines the priorities and MSs detail these priorities in their National Rural Development Programmes²⁴.

For the second pillar of the CAP, a rebalancing of funding between the EU and the Member States is pursued, with an increase in national co-financing rates while maintaining the same level of public support for European rural areas, given the reduction in the CAP budget. Page | 132

5. Romania's Rural Development Policy- a policy shaped by the EU

Previous to Romania's accession to the EU, its rural development policy was identified with the agricultural policy and its support was limited to investments in agriculture and public utilities²⁵.

In 1998, a National Interministerial Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development was created, that had as its attribution also supervising and coordinating the elaboration of the Rural Space Development Strategy and of the National Program for Agriculture and Rural Development, drawn up as a basic document for the implementation of SAPARD²⁶. The National Program for Agriculture and Rural Development is the basic document that contributed to the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* in our country in the pre-accession period and was elaborated according to a set of Regulations of the EU²⁷.

In the same year, within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests²⁸, a Directorate for Rural Development was founded in order to „coordinate social, economic and infrastructure programmes in rural areas”²⁹.

²⁴Wallace, H., 2011, *op. cit.*, p.170.

²⁵OECD, *OECD Review of Agricultural Policies: Romania 2000*, 2000, p.142, available at <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264187825-en>.

²⁶*The Special Accession Programme for Agricultural and Rural Development*, financial instrument provided by the European Union to help the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that were in the process of accession to the European Union, as well as to prepare their participation in the Common Agricultural Policy.

²⁷Available at https://portal.afir.info/informatii_generale_sapard_pnadr

²⁸Its current title is *Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development*.

²⁹OECD, *OECD Review of..... op. cit.*, p.142.



*Regulation (EU) no 1305/2013 provides that each Member State should prepare either a national rural development programme for its entire territory or a set of regional programmes or both a national programme and a set of regional programmes. Each programme should identify a strategy for meeting targets in relation to the Union priorities for rural development and a selection of measures. Programming should comply with Union priorities for rural development, whilst at the same time adapting to national contexts and complementing the other Union policies, in particular the agricultural market policy, the cohesion policy, and the common fisheries policy*³⁰.

According to the Council Regulation (EC) no. 1698/2005, of September 20, 2005, regarding the support for rural development through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the National Strategic Plan for Romania was created, which is the basis for the implementation of the National Rural Development Program for the period 2007-2013³¹.

The measures of the National Strategic Plan take into account the Union Strategic Guidelines that refer to the rural environment. Depending on the analysis of the socio-economic and environmental situation, obtained on the basis of available statistical data, priorities and directions for rural development were established, in close connection with the EU's priorities.

Following accession, The National Rural Development Program 2007-2013 and The National Rural Development Program 2014-2020 represented the rural development strategy for Romania, being the documents generated by the Partnership Agreement with the EU.

Romania's Rural Development Strategy for the years 2014-2020 is part of the context of reform and development that the EU proposes through the Europe 2020 Strategy for a smart sustainable and inclusive growth³².

Another reference document is the *National strategic framework for sustainable development of the agri-food sector and the rural area in the period 2014-2020-2030 (The National Strategic Rural Framework)* whose priorities have been drawn upon the new partnership

³⁰*Regulation (EU) no 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 december 2013 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development*, p.2, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013R1305>

³¹Available at <https://www.afir.info/>

³²*Romania's rural development strategy 2014-2020*, p.1, available at <https://www.madr.ro/docs/dezvoltare-rurala/programare-2014-2020/Strategia-de-dezvoltare-rurala-2014-2020-versiunea-I-22-nov-2013.pdf>



between Europe and farmers, according to Common Agricultural Policy reform and the European agricultural budget for 2014-2020.

The institutions that manage rural development in Romania are institutions specifically created as a result of EU requirements. The Managing Authority, as the central organization for the implementation of the second pillar, is the General Directorate of Rural Development (DGDR), subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture. It has agencies at local level (Directorates for Agriculture and Rural Development) with main information responsibilities³³.

The National Agency for Financing Rural Investments (AFRI) was established as a result of the reorganization of the Paying Agency for Rural Development and Fisheries, taking over its patrimony and the monitoring attributions of the SAPARD³⁴.

AFRI also took over the tasks of technical implementation, payment and monitoring for the National Rural Development Program 2007-2013 and National Rural Development Program 2014-2020³⁵.

AFRI is composed of 13 specialized directorates at central level, 8 Regional Centres and 41 County Offices³⁶.

As we have shown, the changes observed at the national level and analysed in this section are originated by EU influence.

6. Conclusions

As we have shown, Romania's rural development policy was created and evolved alongside and under the influence of the European Union's rural development policy and it is a direct result of Europeanization. Our country took the first steps towards shaping a rural development policy,

³³Albu, L. L. (ed.) ; Călin, Adrian-Cantemir; Lupu Radu; Popovici Oana-Cristina, 2018 *Impactul aderării României la Uniunea Europeană asupra economiei românești. Analiză sectorială (industrie, agricultură, servicii etc.)*, Bucharesr; Institutul European din România, p.62.

³⁴Available at <https://www.afir.info/>.

³⁵*Idem.*

³⁶*Idem.*



in the pre-accession period, when it had to align to the EU standards and, during the accession procedure and as a Member State, gradually evolved in the domain of this policy.

Romania's rural development strategy follows the EU guidelines and the programmatic documents springing from the Partnership Agreement.

In the fourth section of the study, *Romania's Rural Development Policy- a policy shaped by the EU*, we have demonstrated how the strategic documents and administrative structures in the domain of rural development from the pre-accession period to the current one is the product of Europeanization.

A distinct rural development policy, a strategic vision of rural development and the changes observed at the national level are originated by EU's influence.



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