

The Influence of Cultural and Historical Factors on the Participation of Central and Eastern European Countries in European Integration: Poland and the Czech Republic as Examples

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Abstract: Along with the drastic changes in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union, countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) freed themselves from the control of the Soviet Union and began to join European integration. In fact, historical and cultural factors significantly influenced the process of joining the European Union. The artistic gene of being close to Western Europe makes European integration naturally attractive to the countries of CEE. At the same time, the strong nationalism makes the countries of CEE raise strong opposition to the policies of the European Union in many cases. This plays a severe role in hindering the participation of the countries of CEE in European integration. In addition, the economic assistance from Western Europe and the need for regional security after the Cold War were also practical reasons that pushed CEE countries to participate in European integration. In conclusion, the influence of cultural and historical factors on the participation of CEE countries in European integration has both positive and negative sides. It results from the combination of historical and cultural factors and practical factors.

Keywords: Central-Eastern Europe, European integration, culture and history, Poland, Czech Republic

1. Introduction

On 25 December 1991, the red flag of the sickle and hammer was lowered from the Kremlin. The Cold War ended with the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Since the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe, especially the collapse of the Soviet Union, many countries in the Eastern bloc, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and many other countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), successfully left the control of the Soviet Union and began to explore their future development path. At the same time, the 1990s was also a new period of European integration. Many CEE countries joined the wave of European integration in an attempt to “return to Europe” in the new era. However, the process of CEE countries joining the European integration has not been smooth. Sometimes, CEE countries are unwilling to submit to some policies and standards of European integration. They even question and criticize European integration in some cases. Polish Judicial reform and some voices in Poland and the Czech Republic against joining the eurozone are good examples. There are numerous doubts about the participation of CEE countries in European integration: Why did CEE countries

scramble to join European integration after the collapse of the Soviet Union? Why did the CEE countries raise objections to some of the policies and guidelines of European integration? These questions can be answered if we analyze them from a historical and cultural perspective.

To better analyze the impact of the history and culture of Central and Eastern Europe on its participation in European integration, it is essential to understand the definition of culture. Culture is how particular groups adapt to the natural and human environment [1]. The relationship between culture and the atmosphere is very close, as the climate of a society constitutes the basic perceptions of its members about reality and the world [1]. In turn, through these perceptions, the different ways are formed in which this group adapts to its environment and norms [1]. Although cultural norms encompass many things, such as clothing, food, tools, technology, and different works of art, the most basic artistic expressions are religious beliefs, language, and philosophy [1]. Culture gives humans a sense of identity and influences their behaviors and institutions, including churches, governments, and economic institutions [1]. This is the basic definition of culture. This basic definition allows us to analyze culture and its impact in Central and Eastern Europe. On a geographical level, Central and Eastern Europe is bordered by Western Europe, which makes the history and culture of Central and Eastern Europe seriously influenced by Western Europe.

2. Analysing the Positive Impact of Historical and Cultural Factors Using the Example of Poland and the Czech Republic

2.1. Brief Description of the History and Culture of Poland

Take Poland as an example, as an important country in Central and Eastern Europe. Western Europe profoundly influences Poland in terms of history and culture. Firstly, in terms of religion, Christianity in Poland was introduced from Czech [2]. In 966, Archduke Mieszko I of Poland led his court to accept the baptism of clergy from Czech [2]. In 968, a bishopric was established in Poznan [2]. Twenty-two years later, in 988, Prince Vladimir of Kyiv accepted Christianity according to the Greek rite from Byzantium [2]. Since then, Catholic Poland and Czech have been separated from Orthodox Russia. They belonged to Europe's two central cultural circles - Latin and Byzantine [2]. This was the beginning of Poland's proximity to Western Europe. Later, during the Reformation period, many of the religious forces in Poland came from Western Europe. Lutheranism was introduced to the cities of western Poland from Wittenberg, Leipzig, and Frankfurt, the centers of Lutheranism in eastern Germany [2]. The Polish Brotherhood also had close ties to the Anabaptists, popular in Germany, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Italy. Even the later Polish Counter-Reformation referred to French ways. This shows that Poland was deeply influenced by Western Europe religiously.

Secondly, regarding ideology, Poland was also profoundly influenced by Western Europe, and Western European ideas also promoted changes in Polish society. Since the creation of Poland, Polish education has been deeply influenced by Western European education. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Polish education was extensively developed under the influence of the Renaissance and the Reformation [2]. Numerous learning institutions were established, and the number of foreign students grew rapidly. Multiple young Poles went to study at the University of Paris in France, the University of Padua, the University of Bologna, and the University of Rome in Italy. Studying in Western European countries, these young Poles not only furthered their studies but also learned humanism and the Reformation, and on their return to their home countries, they gave a powerful impetus to the progress of Polish society [2]. Influenced by Western European education, Poland in this period emerged a large number of natural science talents, such as the astronomer Marcin and the famous scientist Copernicus. In philosophy and the humanities, Polish scholars drew strength from the Italian humanists and sought to rid themselves of the dogmas that hindered freedom of thought [2]. This contributed to social change and intellectual emancipation in Poland. In the 17th century, Poland

entered the Baroque period, while Baroque's homeland was Italy [2]. During this period, Warsaw, the capital of Poland, gradually became a major center of science and culture [2]. Three kings of the Wassa dynasty, Zygmunt III (1587-1632), Władysław IV (1632-1648) and Jan II. Kazimierz (1648-1668) and Jan III Sobieski (1674-1696) attached importance to the development of science and culture, pursued an active open-door policy, and hired several foreign scholars and experts to work in Poland [2]. These experts also significantly contributed to the development of Polish thought and culture. For example, Władysław IV hired the famous philosopher and physicist, Galileo's pupil Valeriano Magni. This person completed experiments on the continuum vacuum with Torricelli [2]. In the 18th century, Western European countries entered the period of the Enlightenment. However, Enlightenment Poland was still at the end of feudal serfdom [2]. Under the influence of the Western European Enlightenment and the French Revolution, Polish citizens launched a vigorous patriotic movement to save their country [2]. Numerous Polish thinkers of this period, such as Stanislaw, were deeply influenced by Western European Enlightenment ideas.

In literature and art, Poland was also heavily influenced by Western Europe. Around the 10th century, architecture, sculpture, and painting from Western Europe were introduced to Poland along with Christianity. In the 14th century, Gothic architecture rose in Krakow, the capital of Poland. While from the end of the 16th century to the middle of the 18th century, Poland was in the Baroque art period. The Italian, French, and German Baroque styles heavily influenced the Polish style, even into the 19th century and modern times. Numerous Polish artists also created brilliant Polish art as a result of the influence of Western art.

In short, Poland has long been influenced by Western European culture in many aspects of its culture, including religion, thoughts, literature, and art. Poland has been influenced by Western European culture for a long time. Western European culture has influenced the emergence and development of Polish culture through many direct or indirect ways of transmission, such as missionary introduction and school education.

2.2. Overview of Cultural History in Czech

There are similarities but also differences in the history and culture of the Czech Republic compared to Poland. Historically, the Czech Republic is also close to Western Europe and is more closely connected to the German-speaking world, as the German language has been at the center of the region's national entities for centuries, and a considerable German-speaking population has been living in the Czech Republic as a minority for centuries [3]. In addition, the Czech Republic is unique compared to other CEE countries in two ways.

Firstly, the Czech Republic has long been historically situated in the cultural zone of Western Europe. Whether it was the intense period during the Holy Roman Empire or the dark period of Habsburg rule. The Czech Republic was controlled by Western European civilization, especially Germanic culture, for a long time. From the Czechs' point of view, this may seem like a history of subjugation. But from an objective point of view, the long history of being controlled by Western European culture has also made the Czechs more adaptable to Western European culture and development models. This cultural gene enabled the Czech Republic to successfully Westernise politically and economically after the end of the Cold War. Secondly, the Czech Republic was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to achieve democracy. As a comparison, absolutism has played a role in the CEE countries of the Orthodox region. Still, it plays a historically crucial political role in various reformed forms. A traditionally significant political role was played, which was characterized by the absence of pluralist democracy and the existence of totalitarian and authoritarian political regimes [4] because of the historical development of Czech systems. Czech could quickly pander to the West in domestic and foreign policy after the Cold War.

2.3. Analysis of the Positive Impact of Historical and Cultural Factors on the Process of European Integration

The examples of Poland and the Czech Republic show that historical and cultural factors can play a positive role in the participation of CEE countries in European integration. Long-term contact with Western European culture has led to a high degree of identification with Western European culture in CEE countries. On the other hand, the culture and history of CEE countries have arisen and developed with the influence of Western European culture. This gives Western European countries a natural attraction to CEE countries. Combining their history and culture, CEE countries believe that CEE countries can only prosper if they are close to Western Europe. This identification with Western European culture is essential to why CEE countries participated in European integration after the Cold War.

However, also influenced by historical and cultural factors, CEE countries do not have the same attitude towards European integration. For example, some CEE countries, such as Poland and the Czech Republic, are close to Western Europe. These countries are more profoundly influenced by Western European culture, so after the Cold War, they quickly carried out political democratization and economic marketization reforms in their own countries. And they actively participated in European integration diplomatically. But in some countries relatively far from the Western European region, such as Bulgaria, Serbia, and other Orthodox countries, due to their own country's more extended history of authoritarianism and less influence by the Western European countries, the degree of integration of these countries into European integration compared to Poland and the Czech Republic will also be reduced.

3. Analysis of the Negative Impact of Historical and Cultural Factors on the Process of European Integration from a Nationalist Perspective

3.1. Overview

The history and culture influenced by Western Europe indeed made many CEE countries, like Poland and the Czech Republic, willing to take the initiative to participate in European integration after the Cold War. However, due to unique historical and cultural influences, CEE countries, especially Poland and the Czech Republic, have a solid nationalist ideology. This kind of ideology has gradually developed into a “sovereignty consciousness”. In a nutshell, sovereignty consciousness means that a country's policies should be based on its sovereignty and interests. This sense of freedom has also played a severe role in hindering the participation of CEE countries in European integration.

The nationalist ideology of CEE countries stems from the unique history and culture of CEE countries. Let us use Poland and the Czech Republic as typical examples—the reason why Poland and the Czech Republic have developed strong nationalism. The main reasons can be summarised as the longing for the “Golden Age” and the hatred and fear of being invaded and enslaved.

3.2. Historical and Cultural Reasons for Nationalism in Poland and the Czech Republic

Looking back at history, many CEE countries have had a “golden age” of national strength. Take Poland and the Czech Republic as examples. In the 16th century, the history of Poland underwent a significant change [2]. In 1569, the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania announced the merger of the two countries in Lublin and established the Republic of Poland [2]. Poland was the premier European power and a major world trading nation at this time. At the same time, the 16th century was the heyday of Polish Renaissance culture. Even in the 17th century, when it was in decline, the Republic of Poland was still the second-largest European country after Russia. In the 14th century, Charles IV became the Holy Roman Emperor and King of the Czech Republic, with Prague

as his capital. As for the Czech, in the 14th century, Charles IV became the Holy Roman Emperor and King of the Czech Republic. At this time, the Czech Republic was the center of the Holy Roman Empire, with a prosperous economy and culture. Charles University, the first university in Central Europe, was founded by Charles IV in this period [2]. During the reign of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Czech economy also grew as an industrial center. After the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dissolved, and the Czech Republic declared its independence as a state. The newly established Czechoslovak Republic concentrated two-thirds of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire's industry. It was one of the ten most developed countries in the world at that time [2]. In addition, other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, such as Hungary, also had their own "golden age". This pride in their "golden age" is also an important cultural source of nationalism in CEE countries.

Poland and the Czech Republic indeed had a substantial "golden age", but throughout their history, these two countries were under the invasion and enslavement of external forces.

In the 13th century, Poland was threatened by the Mongols' western expeditionary force. In the 16th century, the First Republic of Poland became a significant European power. However, the European powers of Russia and Prussia still seriously threatened it. Subsequently, the history of Poland's invasion and enslavement began. In the 17th century, Poland's economy declined, and its politics became increasingly chaotic [2]. Tsarist Russia took the opportunity to declare war on Poland, and Poland lost a large amount of territory. Later, Czarist Russia carved up the Treaty of Partition of Poland with Austria and Prussia, and the Republic of Poland fell. This was the first extinction of Poland. In the 19th century, the Duchy of Warsaw was established with the help of Napoleon. However, after Napoleon's defeat, the Duchy of Warsaw was quickly dismembered. Once again, Poland disappeared from the map. At the end of the First World War, Germany and Soviet Russia made concessions to Poland. And Poland was able to re-establish itself. But just a few decades later, in 1939, the Soviet Union and Germany partitioned Poland. Poland was extinguished for the third time.

Like Poland, Czechoslovakia was enslaved and subjugated for an extended period. In 1620, the Battle of the White Mountains (part of the Thirty Years' War in Europe) ended in a complete defeat for the rebellious Czech nobility. And the Habsburgs placed Czechoslovakia under their rule. The Czech nation lost its independence. And the autocratic dynasty and the Catholic Church dominated everything. The Czechs, including a large number of intellectuals, fled abroad. And the population was left at only 2.4 million [2]. Germanic people moved to Czechoslovakia in large numbers. Germanisation was carried out, and the Czech language was replaced by German [2]. This was the "Dark Ages" of Czech history [2]. For a long time after that, the Czech Republic was under the rule of the Habsburg dynasty. Even in the 19th century, the Czech capitalist economy was proliferating. Czechoslovakia was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dissolved. Czechoslovakia gained its independence. But it didn't last long. Czechoslovakia came under the control of Nazi Germany again in 1939 and became a vassal state.

In short, both Poland and Czechoslovakia have had periods of strength and dark periods of enslavement throughout their history. This has led both countries' citizens to long for the intense times of their homelands and the fear and anxiety of the dark times. These two emotions have gradually given rise to a strong nationalism among the citizens of these two countries. An important manifestation of nationalism in modern nations is the sense of sovereignty. The purpose of sovereignty has made the CEE countries reluctant to compromise on European Union (EU) policies to preserve their sovereignty. In addition, this sense of sovereignty has also hindered the participation of CEE countries in the process of European integration.

3.3. Some Examples of the Negative Effects of Nationalism on the Participation of CEE Countries in European Integration

In fact, Polish judicial reform and some voices in Poland and the Czech Republic against joining the eurozone are good examples of the negative effects of nationalism on the participation of CEE countries in European integration.

On 25 October 2015, Polish politics was well turned on its head [5]. After years of liberalism and increased European integration, the nationalist-populist Law and Justice Party (PiS) was elected with a majority in the upper and lower houses of parliament [5]. In less than two years, the policies of PiS have transformed Polish politics and the Polish state [5]. PiS has been boldly chipping away at the country's democratic institutions and undermining the separation of powers that allows for a functioning democracy [5]. Just a few months after PiS was elected, it reformed the Polish Constitutional Court, violating the constitution and effectively ending the Court's independence [5]. Of course, these policies caused resentment in the EU. However, rather than give up, PiS increased anti-Western propaganda in his country. The worsening of the conflict with Brussels and rising anti-Western propaganda in the media and from PiS themselves points to the most fundamental turnaround introduced by PiS since they came to power in 2015: the 'de-Europeanisation' of Polish domestic and foreign policy [5].

In addition to "de-Europeanisation", PiS actively promotes judicial reform. On 20 December 2019, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland approved The Polish judicial disciplinary panel law. The bill empowers the Disciplinary Chamber at the Supreme Court of Poland to punish judges who engage in "political activity", including questioning the political independence of the panel. Punishment of judges may be a fine, salary reduction, or termination from their position. The bill also changes how the head of the Supreme Court of Poland is appointed. In addition to this, the Polish government has carried out a series of judicial reforms. These reforms have made Polish law superior to EU law to preserve Poland's "sovereignty". Poland's judicial reforms have faced significant opposition from the EU since 2017. However, this has not significantly impacted Poland's central policies.

In addition to Poland's "de-Europeanisation" and judicial reforms, voices in Poland and the Czech Republic against joining the eurozone are also typical as the official launching of the euro within the EU Member States on 1 January 1999. The European integration entered a new phase.

Subsequently, among the EU member states in the CEE region, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have adopted the euro as their currency [6]. However, six countries, including Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia, have not yet adopted the euro [6]. Poland and the Czech Republic have always had a wait-and-see attitude towards joining the eurozone. This has economic reasons. Because the gap between their economies and the Western European economies is large, joining the euro will likely hinder their own economies' development. But apart from economic reasons, there are also historical and cultural reasons. As mentioned earlier, due to historical and cultural factors, Poland and the Czech Republic have a strong sense of sovereignty. In this issue, Poland and the Czech Republic see the national currency as a symbol of national sovereignty [6]. They think the euro is an external force controlling their national sovereignty. Therefore, in order to protect their sovereignty. The two countries do not support joining the eurozone.

All in all, these examples illustrate the role of historical and cultural factors in preventing CEE countries from joining European integration. Although the Central and Eastern European nations like Poland and the Czech Republic have a historical tradition of closeness to Western Europe, they also have a strong sense of sovereignty due to their unique history and culture. This sense of sovereignty makes these countries think that the European Union or some of the "common policy" in the EU is not in line with their own interests. So, they not only refused to accept the policies but also called for the other EU member states to have more policy autonomy, that is, more sovereignty from Brussels

back to the states' government [6]. This approach also hinders the participation of CEE countries in the process of European integration.

4. Reasons Affecting the Participation of CEE Countries in European Integration - Mainly Economic and Security Factors

Cultural and historical factors indeed play a vital role in the participation of CEE countries in European integration. However, it cannot be denied that there are many practical reasons for CEE countries to participate in European integration. The most important practical reason is the economic factor. During the Cold War, due to the rigid political and economic policies of the socialist camp, most CEE countries faced severe financial problems in the 1990s. When the economies of the CEE countries were facing collapse, the European Community provided help. In July 1989, a summit of seven Western industrialized countries was held in Paris [7]. The meeting tasked the Commission of the European Community with coordinating the international community's economic and technical assistance activities for Poland and Hungary [7]. This was the prototype of the famous PHARE program [7]. "PHARE evolved into a unique program of EC/EU assistance to CEE countries in their transition to a market economy and preparation for EU accession [7]. "The Phare Programme has been officially implemented since 1990 when the EC allocated 300 million ECU to assist Poland and Hungary. The Phare program supported not only the associated countries but also other countries of CEE in transition. From the mid-1990s, the geographical scope of the Phare program was expanded from Bulgaria, Romania, and Czechoslovakia to the three Baltic States, Slovenia, and the three Baltic States [7]. By mid-1997, the Phare program had a total of 13 recipient countries [7].

In addition, the EC also strengthened trade cooperation with the countries of CEE [7], and the Europe Agreement came into force on 1 February 1994 as a particular guideline for the accession of CEE countries to the EU [7]. It replaces the former East-West European Trade and Cooperation Agreement (EWETCA). It aims to encourage more comprehensive economic cooperation between the EC and Eastern European countries, more trade and investment, and economic, financial, political, and cultural cooperation within Europe [7]. The signing of the Europe Agreement signaled a shift from the aid-based to the trade-based mainstay of the EC's economic relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, thus constituting a long-term and structured economic and political relationship between the EC and the countries of Eastern Europe [7].

After receiving assistance and cooperation, the economies of Central and Eastern European countries have developed considerably. Though unevenly, central and eastern Europe has been powerfully re-industrialized in the years after 1995 [8]. It now serves as the premier mass-manufacturing site for the European Union and hosts various branches in transnational services such as call centers, retailing, media, software, and finance [8]. The "Visegrad countries" of north-central Europe and Slovenia have been reintegrated into Western European—above all, German—supply chains [8]. The Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary are now more open to trade and are more export-dependent than ever before and more so than most Western countries [8]. Until the mid-2000s, they had also received broadly similar amounts of foreign direct investment per capita as China [8]. With 70 percent of GDP generated through international trade, the smaller post-socialist countries close to the EU heartland even beat historical champions of economic openness in the West, such as Belgium and the Netherlands [8]. They are proportionally among the top exporters worldwide, including in such branches as automobiles and electronics [8]. After 30 years of transformation, the economies of CEE countries have developed [9]. The economic gap between member countries is gradually narrowing [9].

From this, we can see that while there are historical and cultural factors influencing the choice of CEE countries to participate in European integration, the vast economic benefits gained from

participation in European integration are the most direct reason for the active participation of CEE countries in European integration.

In addition to economic reasons, protecting their own security is another important practical reason for the CEE countries to participate in European integration. CEE countries were often threatened by the force of Tsarist Russia throughout history. During the Cold War, most CEE countries joined the socialist camp. In the socialist camp, the USSR, as the grandparent, provided economic assistance to the CEE countries. The gift objectively promoted the economic development of the CEE countries. However, at the same time, the Soviet Union also tried to control the CEE countries in many aspects. This approach resulted in events such as the Prague Spring of 1968. The “limited sovereignty theory” put forward during the Brezhnev era also caused significant damage to the sovereignty of CEE countries.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, some People in Russia proposed a “defensive imperialism” policy. This policy argued that Russia needed to set up “buffer zones” to safeguard Russia’s political and economic interests [10]. It is important to note that this theory did not gain widespread support in Russia but still caused much fear in Europe. Therefore, it is driven by a combination of historical factors and practical needs. CEE countries will choose to join the European integration to maintain their security in the new international situation.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the history and culture of the CEE countries, we can know that the particular geographic location makes the history and culture of the Central and Southeastern European countries to a large extent by the influence of the Western European countries, which creates the cultural genes of the CEE countries to be close to Western Europe. This is the underlying logic of the willingness of CEE countries to take the initiative to participate in European integration. However, at the same time, due to the longing for former glory and the fear of being invaded, CEE countries often have a strong sense of nationalism and sovereignty. This makes many Central and South-Eastern European countries reluctant to submit to some of the policies of the EU in many cases. At the same time, nationalism and sovereignty are often exploited by populist politicians. This resulted in a series of marches and even riots against European integration. This has created many difficulties for CEE countries to participate in European integration.

In addition, Central and South-Eastern European countries generally suffered severe economic problems after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These countries typically have significant concerns about their security. Under such circumstances, the Western European countries’ financial assistance and security guarantees are also realistic reasons for the active behavior of CEE countries in the EU.

In conclusion, the influence of historical and cultural factors on the participation of CEE countries in European integration has both negative and positive effects. Moreover, it must be clear that the involvement of CEE countries in European integration is not only due to historical and cultural factors but also practical factors such as regional security and economy. Therefore, when analyzing the factors influencing the participation of CEE countries in European integration, attention should be paid to the two sides of one aspect, and it is necessary to analyze it from multiple perspectives to have a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

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