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AT THE CROSSROADS OF EUROPEANIZATION AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

A cross-country and cross-policy analysis
of organized interests in CEE

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1 Introduction

While scholars have enhanced our understanding of interest groups at the EU level (Warntjen & Wonka, 2004; Mahoney, 2007) and the impact of the EU enlargements thereupon (Pleines, 2011), less research has been conducted on the impact of enlargement on CEE organized interests. Scholars contend that EU integration has fostered processes of diffusion, learning, and adaptation, resulting in new repertoires and templates for interest groups (Klüver, 2011; Kröger, 2017; Maloney et al., 2018). However, there is a substantial deficit of research on the internal configurations of CEE interest groups after EU accession. Therefore, in this chapter, we explore one of the key features of organized interests – their level of professionalization – and how European integration affects it. This is crucial for understanding the development of post-EU accession advocacy groups and their evolution as a vital element of civil society.

Our comparative analysis covers Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, and Czechia and three policy areas: healthcare, higher education, and energy. We assume that the professionalization of interest groups is prone to vary across different sectors of activity. Some groups may be characterized by more active internal development, while other groups will focus less on professionalization. Some groups may cooperate closely with EU counterparts, while others may be much more focused on domestic activities. Bearing this in mind, we first explore how the EU impacts (e.g. through public funding) the level of professionalization of CEE interest groups, as understood in the classical top-down Europeanization approaches. Second, we examine whether other types of Europeanization (e.g. cross-loading through trans-border exchange with like-minded interest groups) affect their level of professionalization.

The data on professionalization and Europeanization were collected by means of our online survey of interests groups in all four countries (see Chapter 1 and Annex). A cross-country and cross-sectoral statistical analysis, both descriptive and inferential, provides a comparative perspective allowing us to identify, describe, and explain the policy-specific and country-specific similarities and differences at the crossroads of Europeanization and professionalization of organized interests in CEE.

The chapter proceeds as follows: after this short introduction, we reconstruct the main arguments present in the professionalization and Europeanization literature, which we find applicable to this analysis. Then we introduce our hypotheses and operationalize the dependent and independent variables, before looking at variations in the professionalization of interest groups across countries in the selected policy areas as a dependent variable. It is operationalized as a synthesized index based on survey responses collected in 2019–2020. In line with various theories established in interest group research, we expect numerous causal factors to condition the degree of professionalization. Focusing on Europeanization parameters such as available budgets (dependency on EU funds), membership in EU umbrella organizations (supra-national federalization), cooperation with partners from abroad (cross-border networking), we explore their impact on professionalization processes across the above-mentioned countries and policy areas.

2 Intersecting professionalization and Europeanization

Interest group research, in general, and in particular scholarly investigations on advocacy, lobbying, and civic society organizations have blossomed in recent decades. However, scholars have explored the role of organized interests in politics and the economy at least since the 1920s (Herring, 1929). The creation of the Common Market and thus the delegation of more and more competences to the supranational level increased not only the salience of European-level lobbying, but also academic interest in advocacy organizations, which have responded to the European integration process with varied adaptation strategies. Research has not determined a standardized pattern of interest group activity in the European multi-level setting, but rather a complex mix of tactics and strategies, consistent with diverse governance models (Constantelos, 2004).

Consequently, at least from the moment of enlargement, CEE advocacy organizations have operated in the multi-level system and therefore had to incorporate the EU dimension into their *repertoire* of activities. They act at least in the two inter-linked arenas: the domestic setting and in Brussels. An important issue is whether the same factors affect the organized interests' functioning at the sub-national, domestic and EU level. These questions are vital for the empirical and normative evaluation of the Europeanization processes within interest groups (Binderkrantz & Rasmussen, 2015). Accession to the EU entails participation in a new policy-making environment characterized by distinctive rules, norms, and values, which – in the process of Europeanization – have gradually become

internalized and impact on member states' domestic political, social, and economic settings. The dynamics, depth, and scope of this form of (European scale) internationalization depend on numerous factors. This evolving multi-level policy-making environment (with its multiple power centers) offers a novel opportunity structures for societal actors to pursue their own objectives and put forward their own agendas (Blavoukos & Pagoulatos, 2008, p. 1147–1148).

Scholarly definitions of Europeanization still differ substantially. In the most standard way, it is understood as a situation, process, or outcome in which distinct modes of European governance have transformed aspects of domestic politics (Buller & Gamble, 2002, p. 17). The concept of Europeanization has been used by some analysts to denote the process through which political actors such as political parties, governments, or civil society organizations adapt to European integration. Radaelli (2000) defined Europeanization as the processes of construction, diffusion, and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles of doing things as well as shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in EU decision-making and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies (2000, p. 4). Similarly, Robert Ladrech (1994) emphasized the adaptive processes of organizations due to a changing environment. Professionalization processes are one of the outcomes of these evolutionary changes.

The professionalization of organized interests has therefore also been the subject of intense research in social sciences in recent years (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013). However, in this chapter, we do not focus on the professionalization phenomenon itself, but rather on the relationships between two specific processes, which at some point may cross each others' paths, namely *Europeanization* and the *professionalization* of organized interests. The CEE region provides a particularly significant arena to deepen our understanding of the dynamics and intersections of professionalization and Europeanization processes of interest organizations.

Interest groups activities are always affected by the political environment in which they operate and the effective study of public interest groups must situate them in a larger political context (Meyer & Imig, 1993). In CEE, organized interests are burdened with a difficult legacy. Under socialism, civil society activity was largely channeled through communist parties, which in turn converted any pre-existing interest associations into their own appendages (Kubik, 2005). In fact, behind the iron curtain, no truly free civil societies were permitted without state control, and organizations were banned or operated only under the supervision of the relevant political bodies (see Chapter 2 in this volume). The processes of political transformation and EU accession aspirations in most CEE countries have led in parallel to significant changes in associational life. This process opened up new "fields of action" for various interest organizations.

Scholars employ a variety of theories when investigating interest groups' linkages with policy-making processes (see Chapters 4–7 in this volume). It is clear, however, that interest groups must act professionally in order to gain access to decision-makers and to effectively represent their interests (Beyers, 2008; see

Horváthová & Dobbins in this volume). This pressures interest groups to analyze and potentially transform their internal organizational structures (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013), thus incentivizing – among other things – the professionalization of their activities and strategies. But what exactly does the professionalization of interest groups mean and how is it understood in the scholarly literature? Theories rooted in the sociology of organizations emphasize professionalization as a structure and process that refers to the creation of positions that require a high degree of qualification in terms of education, training, and relevant working experience (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013). The phenomenon of professionalization in general is reflected in changes to structures, strategies, and core values. In a more direct way, professionalization describes the shift in organizational structure and may represent an increasing reliance on a paid workforce with specialized knowledge gained through formal education (Salamon, 2012). A professional workforce with its ability to create “professional culture” has a tendency to use specialized knowledge responding to social problems, which might change organizational behavior (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013). McGrath (2005) characterizes professionalization by four criteria: the adherence to professional norms, technical skills gained through training, body of knowledge, and membership in professional organizations. Some scholars argue that professionalization is a multi-dimensional process and might differ across different types of organized interests (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013). In the case of cause groups, it often involves the transition from volunteer-based organizations towards a workforce recognized as a profession. Yet there are existing theories suggesting that institutional pressure leads to similar patterns of professionalization, resulting in similar professionalization processes among different groups. However, as mentioned before, professionalization processes may move socially rooted organizations towards client-oriented service delivery, thus affecting their distance from communities. Taking into account the variety of existing theories, professionalization can be seen as a process of transformation of the internal structures of organized interests towards more professionalized features (Imig & Tarrow, 2001), including improvement of the professional knowledge and skills of individual members through formal training, hiring professionals, orientation towards internal development, and cooperation with other professional organizations.

Consequently, in this study, we operationalize professionalization in line with McGrath’s (2005) criteria for professional norm development, and increasing knowledge and technical skills gained through education and cooperation with other professional organizations. As indicated above, we define professionalization as a set of activities with a focus on human capital, i.e. membership growth and human resource development, and training of the lobbyists, which require a higher degree of qualification in terms of training and education. To fully capture the degree of professionalization, we also draw on several indicators that may give a broader view of general organizational development, such as fundraising development, focus on strategic planning and evaluation of efficiency,

and effectiveness, all of which stimulate and require the parallel development of members' knowledge.

It is recognized that the professionalization process is dependent on resources, including financial resources. Maloney, Hafner-Fink and Fink-Hafner (2018) argue that an important factor for professionalization processes is public funding (including EU-outsourced funding). They stated that public funding may not only stimulate professionalization, it may simply demand it. Governments may effectively require or even mandate groups to adopt a specific organizational structure by setting standards or rules leading to the development of their human resources capital.

Researchers have also examined the effect of EU funds on the level of professionalization. Vráblíková and Císař (2013) pointed out that the EU accession process brought professionalization and bureaucratization to Czech advocacy organizations. Interest groups began to operate with much bigger budgets, hired more employees, and resorted to more bureaucratic forms of management. However, other studies on Slovenian organizations (Maloney et al., 2018) show that in the post-accession period, there were differences between interest group types in terms of professionalization. Specifically, the differences in the levels of professionalization are lower in the post-accession than pre-accession period. Recent research acknowledges the impact of various levels of Europeanization on interest groups (Klüver & Saurugger, 2013; Kröger, 2017; Maloney et al., 2018). Klüver and Saurugger (2013) argue that both cause and sectional groups exhibit similar professionalization patterns, and the group type is not a factor that may differentiate their professionalization.

However, the impact of Europeanization on professionalization processes from a broader cross-country and cross-policy perspective has been over-looked. Having that in mind, we explore to what extent Europeanization or more precisely EU funding, membership in EU umbrella organizations, and strong ties with like-minded organizations from EU countries contribute to the professionalization of interest groups in four analyzed countries and three selected policy sectors. While these countries present four diverse and distinct environments for the functioning of organized interests, the forms and levels of professionalization may also vary by policy areas. Healthcare is conventionally meant to be a highly professionalized sector due to its sophistication and expertise needed when dealing with medical and related issues. It is also the least Europeanized sector analyzed here. In contrast, energy and higher education are much more strongly affected by Europeanization processes (see Chapter 3 in this volume), potentially exerting a differential impact on the professionalization of organizations operating in these areas.

Our focus on the dependency on EU funds assumes that Europeanization is a way of responding to external incentives (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2020). It certainly goes beyond the mere conditionality policy – driven by the prospects of EU membership – which dominated Europeanization scholarship in the pre-accession phase. Nowadays, almost two decades after the *big-bang* enlargement,

Europeanization has become a “business as usual” game in CEE. In parallel, the Europeanization literature evolved towards more detailed conceptualizations.

After a series of debates shaped the progress of Europeanization research (what Europeanization was, how it functioned, what it was determined by, what outcomes it delivered, etc.), we may understand Europeanization, for the purposes of this analysis, as the process and outcome through which the supranational norms and values become interwoven with domestic policy-making structures (Ladrech, 2010). This way of defining Europeanization fits very well to this study, where professionalization norms are under question. The professionalization of organized interests goes hand in hand with Europeanization no matter if we focus on bottom-up Europeanization when organized interests engage in the process of uploading national policies to the supranational level or top-down Europeanization, whereby organized interests cooperate in the process of downloading and implementing EU policies to the domestic level. We also test cross-border Europeanization – horizontal collaboration with other organizations from abroad – as an additional explanatory variable.

All above-mentioned Europeanization directions and mechanisms may incentivize professionalization processes. By conceptualizing Europeanization based on the availability of the EU fund flows as well as Europeanized associational life (belonging to EU umbrella organizations and dense collaborative networks with like-minded organisations from abroad), we place this study in the mainstream of Europeanization research. Undoubtedly, it is one of the main ways in which Europeanization is operationalized in studies on organized interests (Beyers, 2002; Dür, 2008; Klüver, 2011; Beyers & Kerremans, 2012; Cekik, 2017; Kröger, 2017; Maloney et al., 2018), and therefore a legitimate variable in analyzing advocacy in CEE. Being dependent on EU funds, belonging to supra-national umbrella organizations and being involved in vibrant cross-border associational life create a direct linkage with Brussels as well as other European partners across the EU and contribute to other various ways of interconnectedness. The EU perceives various types of civil society organizations as vital for the democratic decision-making process, and therefore it stimulates their involvement in policy-making as legitimate partners.

Bearing in mind the recognized ways of operationalizing Europeanization in the existing literature, we test dependency on EU funding, membership in supra-national umbrella organizations and cooperation with other like-minded European organizations as explanatory variables. As stated earlier, public funding may not only stimulate professionalization, it might demand it. It is a two-directional process, where – on the demand side – decision-makers may effectively require or even mandate advocacy groups to adopt a specific organizational structure by setting standards, rules, or codes of conduct leading to the development of organized interests’ “cadre”, e.g. as the EU has done. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: *The greater the access to EU funding, the greater the level of organizational professionalization.*

Moreover, Europeanization understood as networking emphasizes the cross-border exchange of knowledge, expertise, and experience as well as other resources as an additional factor determining the professionalization processes. This type of collaborative communication is recognized as one of the key cross-loading Europeanization mechanisms. Thus, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2 *The more organizations cooperate with other EU organizations, the greater the level of organizational professionalization*

At the same time, we recognize that not all cross-border collaboration may lead towards improved professionalization standards. Due to data availability, we hence more specifically test what kind of cooperation translates into higher levels of professionalization. Is it the mere membership in supranational umbrella organizations or more intense contacts with other like-minded European interest groups sharing similar interests and values? Thus, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2a *EU umbrella organization membership results in increased professionalization*

and

Hypothesis 2b *The more intense the cooperation with like-minded EU organizations, the greater the level of professionalization.*

These hypotheses connect to the selected elements of the three types of Europeanization logics identified by Börzel and Risse (2012), namely:

- 1 *Instrumental rationality or logic of consequences* – in line with rational-choice institutionalism assuming that actors are mostly self-interested utility maximizers who select their course of action according to cost-benefit calculations.
- 2 *Normative rationality or logic of appropriateness* – in line with sociological institutionalism which perceives actors as rule-followers who “do the right thing” because they want to be part of a particular community and have been socialized into certain rules.
- 3 *Communicative rationality or logic of arguing* – in line with constructivist approaches which see actors as deliberating and persuading (including arguing, reasoning as well as challenging these reasons and legitimacy norms) each other about the validity claims inherent in any casual or normative statement.

The normative rationality drives organized interest which acts in a certain setting in line with the logic of appropriateness. In our study, the EU standards of professionalization proliferate across all participating parties in the process of cross-loading, uploading and downloading Europeanization. In the process

of networking (cooperation with other like-minded EU interest groups), they become socialized in and internalize certain rules. “The right thing to do” – understood as a certain professionalization level – is also transmitted through the federalization process, in which new organized interests become members of EU-level umbrella organizations. Last but not the least, a more coercive mechanism plays a role, namely money conditionality: new member states comply with specific professionalization standards due to their dependency on EU funds which implies a certain course of conduct.

3 Analysis

This analysis includes responses from 420 organizations representing the energy, higher education, and healthcare sectors in Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia. We define our dependent variable – professionalization – as a processes of internal, structural changes of the organization leading towards higher professional standards in its functioning, e.g. creation of positions requiring higher qualifications in terms of education and relevant working experience, focus on internal development, and focus on a professional workforce. The operationalization of the dependent variable is based on seven questions regarding professionalization, measured on a 5-point scale. Our respondents were asked to what extent their organization focuses on the following activities as opposed to 10–15 years ago (or since its founding, if founded more recently): “organizational development”, “human resource development”, “training of lobbyists”, “fundraising”, “evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness”, “strategic planning”, with an added category “membership size growth”.

In accordance with our presented hypotheses, we begin with a short analysis of (our dependent variable reflecting) different dimensions of professionalization. As our summarized *Likert* items are scored in the same direction and on the same weight scales, for the descriptive statistical analysis, we decided to create one standardized professionalization indicator. However, to avoid measurement errors, we tested our data using *Cronbach's* alpha internal consistency reliability. With a standardized alpha of 0.784, we created a general professionalization index based on a general score of summarized values of our seven professionalization variables. Our general professionalization index, presented on a 0–30 degree professionalization scale, was prepared for analysis based on descriptive statistics, i.e. means, medians, and standard deviations.

The spacings between the different parts of the box indicate the degree of dispersion (spread) and skewness in the data, and show outliers. The distribution moderately differs among groups in each analyzed country, with outliers for Slovenia and Czechia. Data for Slovenian organized interests reflect a higher dispersion as well as more marginal values when compared to the organizations from Poland, Hungary, and Czechia.

We also analyzed professionalization for specific policy fields. Like before, we again observe differences between analyzed groups. The mean level of

FIGURE 9.1 Professionalization by country.

FIGURE 9.2 Professionalization by policy field.

professionalization for healthcare groups is higher than for energy and higher education, while the healthcare sector shows a lower degree of dispersion, without extremely dispersed outliers. The standard deviation is lower (closer to the mean) in the energy sector, but there is a much higher level of dispersion, which may suggest higher level of diversity between the groups operating in this sector.

In the next step, we tested our dichotomous variable of strong relations with other European organized interests. We asked our respondents if they have any strong ties with like-minded organizations from other EU countries, as like-minded organizations may be important partners for organizations and their professional development. Our descriptive analysis shows that in both cases, minimum and maximum values are dispersed. However, in the case of organizations with stronger ties with other EU organizations, there is a higher mean professionalization level and much lower values of standard deviation. Thus, we can conclude that organizations maintaining closer relations with their EU-level counterparts enjoy a higher degree of professionalization.

We also checked whether EU umbrella organizations play a role in the process of organizational professionalization. As we see, members of EU umbrella organizations are more professionalized than the groups that are not members of EU umbrellas. However, the differences are rather marginal.

To analyze the impact of our independent variables on professionalization, we conducted a linear regression. As outlined above, our main research question is the effect of Europeanization on the professionalization of organized interests.

FIGURE 9.3 Intensive cooperation with like-minded EU organizations.

FIGURE 9.4 Membership in EU umbrella organizations.

Following the same logic as above, we created a continuous professionalization variable based on the arithmetic mean of seven professionalization variables (i.e. focus on human resources development, lobbying activities, fundraising, evaluation and strategic planning, organizational development, and staff growth over the last 10–15 years) previously measured on five point Likert scales, which we combined into one scale and recoded into values from 1 to 100 to facilitate interpretation (Sullivan & Artino, 2013).

Regarding the “Europeanization” predictors, we applied several different variables related to the EU accession and the Europeanization process of organized interests, whereas in line with the literature, we focus on EU funding as the main explanatory variable (independent variable). Based on our hypothetical starting point, we created five models related to different types of Europeanization. We applied several dichotomous independent variables such as membership in EU umbrella organizations to test our second hypothesis and strong ties with like-minded organizations in the EU as a predictor to test our third hypothesis that close relations with like-minded organizations abroad are important for gaining organizational skills and achieving professional development. To indicate the absence or presence of the categorical effect that may be expected to shift the outcome, we coded organizations that are members of EU umbrella organizations with a value “1”, and those that are not members of any EU umbrella organizations with a value “0”. Sorting the data into mutually exclusive categories, we applied the same logic to our variable regarding strong relations with other EU

organizations. As an added value to our analysis, we also included interest group type in our models, enabling us to analyze whether being a “diffuse” or “concentrated” organization (Olson, 1965) impacts the level of professionalization. We created a dummy variable “0” for diffuse interests and “1” for concentrated organizations. In the energy and environmental sector, all civic organizations representing environmental groups, promoting sustainable and clean energy, and energy consumers were coded as diffuse organizations. Energy producers and suppliers, and workers’ unions were coded as concentrated interests. For the healthcare sector, we coded all the professional medical associations (doctors, nurses), organizations representing the healthcare and pharmaceutical industry as concentrated interests. All groups representing patients and patients’ rights as well as groups focusing on disease prevention and healthcare promotion were coded as diffuse. For higher education, all the student groups were coded as diffuse, while organizations representing the interests of the academic profession or individual universities were coded as concentrated. We also added categorical country and policy field variables to the model to check whether there are any variations across country and policy sectors.

The key research question, as outlined in H1, is to what extent EU funding directly affects the professionalization process of interest groups. We therefore applied the level of EU funds in organizational budgets as a main independent variable (predictor). To check how important EU funds are, we tested the EU funding predictor in each of the five models, in the first model as the EU funds only, then adding the group type variable, membership in the EU Umbrella organization, and cooperation with like-minded organizations across the EU. We analyzed the extent to which EU funding (independent variable) contributes to the professionalization of interest groups across four countries and three selected policy fields. As we see in (Table 9.1), contrary to our hypothesis (H1) regarding the direct and positive impact of EU funding on interest group professionalization, EU funds in organizational budgets do not affect professionalization in any tested model. The coefficient of EU fund variable ranges from 0.074 to 0.362, but is not significant. The expected predictive power of EU funding even marginally decreases when measured with other variables. Surprisingly, against our expectations, EU funding emerges as a statistically insignificant predictor of professionalization. Thus, we may conclude that organizations that are more dependent on EU funding are not significantly more professionalized than organizations less dependent on EU funding. We also found no statistically significant data for membership in EU umbrella organizations. In two of the tested models (III and V), we found that membership in EU umbrella organizations does not affect professionalization. On the contrary, the coefficient for membership in an EU umbrella organization in the last tested model that includes all the variables, changed direction and became negative.

Contrary to membership in EU umbrella organizations, our results show that our dichotomous variable “strong ties with likeminded EU organizations” matter. Importantly, our data also show that organizations that have developed

TABLE 9.1 Determinants of professionalization of interest organizations

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
EU funds	0.362 (0.571)	0.335 (0.570)	0.318 (0.578)	0.074 (0.592)	0.155 (0.598)
Country Slovenia (ref. category)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Hungary	-2.797 (1.990)	-2.223 (2.023)	-2.208 (2.039)	-1.963 (2.150)	-1.649 (2.177)
Poland	-0.049 (2.315)	0.378 (2.319)	0.406 (2.366)	0.675 (2.479)	0.135 (2.547)
Czech Rep.	1.057 (1.765)	0.497 (1.798)	0.510 (0.800)	0.718 (1.896)	0.815 (1.901)
Policy field higher education (ref. cat)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)
Health care	4.164*** (1.472)	3.647** (1.498)	3.668** (1.508)	3.624** (1.601)	3.829** (1.617)
Energy	-1.816 (1.714)	-1.833 (1.710)	-1.827 (1.719)	-1.633 (1.835)	-1.714 (1.838)
Concentrated / diffuse		-3.477 (2.282)	-3.471 (2.287)	-3.435 (2.407)	-3.447 (2.408)
Member of EU umbrella			0.461 (2.219)		-2.357 (2.538)
Ties with like-minded EU organizations				5.936** (2.443)	6.824*** (2.624)
Observations	242	242	242	219	219
R ²	0.0528	0.0618	0.0721	0.0867	0.0974
Constant	62.142*** (1.369)	64.217*** (1.928)	64.024*** (2.143)	61.061*** (2.555)	61.512*** (2.602)

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

stronger ties with other like-minded organizations from EU countries enjoyed higher professionalization growth over the last 10–15 years than those without stronger relations with like-minded EU interest groups. In our models, the coefficient for strong ties with like-minded organizations in other EU countries significantly and substantially affects professionalization varying from 5.936** to 6.824***, indicating a positive direction in the relationship between a predictor variable and our aggregated professionalization variable.

At this stage, we found no statistically significant difference between interest group types (diffuse vs. concentrated) in the four tested models (II–V). However, in every model, the coefficient of interest type is negative, which indicates that Europeanization processes may impact the professionalization of diffuse interest groups more than concentrated groups. Also, we observe statistically significant differences between organized interests in three analyzed policy fields. In every tested model, our data show that healthcare organizations seem to be much more

focused on professional development activities such as strategic planning, the training of lobbyists, human resource development, and fundraising. The health-care coefficient is positive and significant in every tested model. By contrast, energy interest organizations appear less focused on professionalization than the two other analyzed groups. The results for the other policy sectors results are not statistically significant. The country-specific analysis shows stronger growth in professionalization among Czech organizations, while lowest values are visible in case of Hungary. However, the country variation is not significant in any tested model.

4 Conclusions

This chapter explored the interplay between professionalization and Europeanization processes within CEE organized interests. Specifically, we used various parameters of Europeanization as explanatory determinants for professionalization processes in three sectors – higher education, healthcare, and energy. Many questions related to Europeanization in general and the Europeanization of CEE organized interests in particular are still open to debate (Kröger, 2017, p. 18). This chapter contributed to this debate by explaining the intersection of Europeanization and professionalization processes among advocacy organizations from four post-communist states – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia – which have been subject to strong Europeanization pressures both before and after EU accession.

We expected the professionalization of interest groups to vary across their different sectors of activity across four countries in question. This expectation was built on the general assumption in the Europeanization literature about the diversified reactions to similar pan-European processes and dynamics (Ladrech, 2010). Specifically, we first explored how the EU impacts the level of professionalization of CEE interest groups (e.g. through funding). Second, we examined whether other types of Europeanization (e.g. cross-loading – through trans-border exchange with like-minded interest groups) play a role and affect their level of professionalization. Finally, we tested whether professionalization parameters increase together with EU umbrella organization membership.

The key finding is that various types of Europeanization pressures produce diversified outcomes regarding the professionalization of organized interests. Membership in supranational umbrella organizations (which is a standard parameter of Europeanization) does not necessarily lead to higher levels of professionalization (Hypothesis 2a). Instead, strong ties with like-minded EU organizations correlate much more strongly with greater professionalization among CEE organized interests. In this light, the EU can be seen as a gigantic socialization platform which actively promotes rules, norms, practices, and structures of meaning to which member states (various actors, including the advocacy and other types of organised interest organizations) are exposed and which they have to incorporate into their domestic structures (Börzel & Risse, 2012, p. 1). At the same time, our results show that cross-loading Europeanization mechanisms (Hypothesis 2b)

seem to be more effective in CEE than top-down or bottom-up mechanisms. Participation in transnational networks matters and the communicative process of exchange correlates with improving professionalization levels across the organized interests.

Cross-border cooperation among various civic society organizations has increased substantially after 1989, together with the process of “opening orders”, but the phenomenon accelerated together with the membership in the EU (2004) due to the participation in the Single Market (free movement of people) and later in the Schengen agreement. This soft route of Europeanization, predominantly through transnational communication (Voegtle, Knill & Dobbins, 2011) occurred to be the most effective professionalization vehicle. Dense contacts and linkages with other organized interests of the region not only fill the gap between the traditional top-down Europeanization pressures or bottom-up (supranationalization mechanism) initiatives. They create a type of organic Europeanization that operates much more horizontally than vertically. Domestic interests groups’ environments interact not only with the EU level (Kendal, 2010), but they exchange knowledge, information, and resources across borders with their foreign counterparts. This analysis shows that this type of Europeanization provides an effective channel of professionalization among the post-communist organized interests.

We also hypothesized that professionalization processes are largely determined by classical Europeanization mechanisms, like dependency on EU funds (Hypothesis 1). However, we found that EU funds in organizational budgets do not affect professionalization in any tested model. Contrarily, we found out that organizations that are more dependent on EU funding are not significantly more professionalized than organizations less dependent on EU funding. This finding leads to counter-intuitive conclusions in relation to the assumption about the demand-driven professionalization of European(ized) organized interests.

Together with the growth of the European Union’s salience, advocacy organizations increasingly seek to influence supranational policy-making. For CEE organized interests, EU institutions became crucially important with the 2004 “big-bang” enlargement. While many indeed were present in Brussels beforehand, only through the process of EU accession did they become – together with other political, social, and economic actors of the joining states – legitimate agents in the legislative *apparatus* of united Europe. Their success in inserting themselves into the policy-making process depends on existing formal and informal ties with EU institutions (Thiel & Uçarar, 2014, p. 99). The literature predicts that policy fields with stronger EU competences will experience stronger Europeanization impulses and effects. Counterintuitively, our findings show that it is not the highly Europeanized energy policy sector, in which organized interests have become increasingly professionalized, rather the relatively less Europeanized healthcare sector. Other factors seem to play a stronger role here: healthcare organizations seem to focus on professional development activities such as strategic planning, the training of lobbyists, or human resource development without the additional impetus from Europeanization.

While contributing to the existing literature on Europeanization and professionalization, these findings open many windows of opportunity for future research. Further analyses are needed to examine other parameters of the Europeanization of organized interests (convergence, competition, and communication related factors) and how they interact with the structure and functioning of interest groups (including professionalization). Moreover, the previously assumed path-dependence of democratization, consolidation, and Europeanization is challenged by the contemporary processes of democratic backsliding and de-Europeanization, which may have significant implications for the environment of interest groups, their internal structures, and ways of operating.

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