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Environmental Implications of Eastern Enlargement: The End of Progressive EU Environmental Policy?

Petr Jehlička and Andrew Tickle

In the years immediately following the fall of the communist regime, Central and Eastern European (CEE) governments paid significant attention to environmental policy developments, both at home and abroad, as a consequence of domestic environmental mobilisation. However, after 1992 the nature of environmental policy reform changed. Legal and institutional change could no longer rely on its domestic base and instead policy development became a function of the 'structural imperative' of reform in CEE countries [Sloccock, 1996]. In other words, reform was an unwelcome, but necessary part of EU environmental harmonisation. By the late 1990s, an overriding concern in CEE states was to minimise the impact of these EU reforms on economic growth and competitiveness. Thus, in contrast to the initial proactive approach to environmental policy, CEE countries have become passively compliant with EU requirements and a strictly national perspective in this policy arena has been eclipsed by EU hegemony.

The 'Europeanisation' perspective of CEE national environmental policy has generally focused on the one-way process of CEE adaptation to EU requirements and on the management of this process by EU institutions, predominantly the European Commission. Most scholars, regardless of their analytical approach, conclude that enlargement will have an adverse effect on progressive EU environmental policy. In these considerations, the impact of eastern enlargement on the EU is seen as a function of EU-related variables such as its administrative and financial resources and strategies of their deployment in the process of CEE integration with the Union. A topdown mode of analysis is thus essentially maintained. However, little attention has so far been paid to the interests, preferences and priorities of CEE countries themselves.

Using the four Visegrad countries (V4)¹ as a case study, this study offers some preliminary observations on the possible implications of eastern enlargement for EU environmental policy from the applicant states' perspective. To that end, 29 in-depth interviews were carried out with environmental policy experts in the V4 countries in 2000,² supplemented by five interviews conducted at the end of 2000 and at the beginning of 2001 with experts from EU countries who have substantial experience with environmental policymaking in CEE candidate countries.

We begin with a discussion of insights from the existing academic literature on the implications of eastern enlargement for future EU environmental policy. We then outline some of the theoretical difficulties in exploring future environmental policy implications of CEE accession to the EU. Primarily following Andersen's and Liefferink's [1997] approach to studying the influence of individual states on EU environmental policy, this study then presents the domestic and international policy activities of the V4 countries in the 1990s that may be indicative of their attitude towards future EU environmental policymaking. The ensuing sections provide an overview of the V4 states' involvement in international environmental politics and present expert ideas of future strategies for the V4 countries in an enlarged EU. We conclude by discussing the extent to which the patterns revealed in this study challenge commonly held views of how eastern enlargement will impact on EU environmental policy.

The Need for an Applicant States-Centred Approach

Analyses of the environmental policy dimensions of eastern enlargement, by both West [e.g. Connolly *et al.*, 1996; Sloccock, 1999] and East European authors [e.g. Stehlík, 1998; Kerekes and Kiss, 1998; Zyllicz and Holzinger, 2000] mainly focus on adaptation to the environmental *acquis* in a narrow 'technical' sense (namely, the effectiveness of the transfer

of these norms to the domestic context). Other authors are more critical of the power relations between the EU and applicant states. Caddy [1997], for example, describes EU–CEE relationships as ‘hierarchical imposition’ while Baker and Welsh [2000] emphasise the undemocratic character of the harmonisation process in contrast to previously positive impacts of environmental policy on legitimation and governance, both in the EU and in Central and Eastern Europe.

Authors who discuss the implications of eastern enlargement for EU environmental policy commonly assume that the accession of CEE applicant countries will lead to a ‘downward pressure on environmental policy’ [Baker, 2000]. Pellegroni [1997: 55] expresses this view when she suggests that, ‘within only a limited number of years, environmental policy will be subject to many more conservative positions than the progressive ones’. In a similar vein, Holzinger and Knoepfel [2000: 15] more recently have argued that: ...

CEECs do not have a tradition of strong environmental policy and in the future they will probably give economic development priority over stringent environmental policy. Hence, most of them will presumably join the group of environmental ‘laggards’ within the European Council of environment ministers.

Much of the existing literature on enlargement is dominated by past and present debates on the Europeanisation of policy in candidate states (that is, the ‘top-down’ approach) and only rarely adopts an alternative perspective that focuses on the ways that enlargement will affect EU environmental policy. Those authors who do discuss the future implication of enlargement [Homeyer *et al.*, 2000; Carius *et al.*, 2000] pay only cursory attention to CEE-related variables other than the number and length of requested transition periods. CEE country strategies, priorities, resources and interests in the post accession period are accorded little attention within these analyses. In other words, most analysts consider the applicant countries as passive subjects of the EU’s governance in the post-accession period. This implies that their domestic base of environmental policy will be weak and incapable of transferring domestic environmental policy concepts to the EU level.

Concurrently it is also assumed that the new member states will maintain a negative approach to progressive EU environmental policy after they join the Union. In practice, this would mean that they would either try to block the adoption of new legislation or press for lower standards. However, as Aguilar Fernandez [1997] points out, passivity in EU environmental policymaking can be ultimately disadvantageous for a given member state because if ‘leader’ states succeed with their policy proposal, passive states will still have to adopt new legislation in whose formulation they had little or no influence. Further the expectation that the accession of CEE countries will lead to the downward pressure on EU environmental policy is based on the assumption that the CEE states will coordinate their conservative stance not only among themselves but also with the current group of ‘laggards’.

Other arguments qualify such conclusions and suggest instead the possibility of CEE countries taking a more progressive and proactive approach to EU environmental policy. As Homeyer [2001] suggests, despite unfavourable economic, administrative and political factors, there are incentives (for example, reducing EU-sourced transboundary pollutants, geographical and cultural proximity to ‘leader’ countries) for CEE countries to take an active part in EU environmental policymaking. Furthermore, there is the historical lesson of the UN-based ‘Environment for Europe’ process that was instigated by CEE countries in 1991. There are also several specific pieces of legislation (for example, the Czech law on strategic environmental impact assessment or SEIA) adopted in the early 1990s that were more progressive than extant EU legislation. In addition, Thorhallsson [2000] argues that, despite their limited resources, smaller member states can be effective in pursuing their interests at the EU level owing to special features of their administration and the necessity to prioritise between sectors.

Nonetheless, it is true that it is almost impossible to identify EU integration-related interests of CEE countries other than full membership in the Union. As Agh [1999] observes in the Hungarian case, this means there are still many non-articulated interests currently subsumed within the accession process with some potential for unpredictable outcomes. This lack of articulation clearly distorts the policymaking process. Our research provides abundant evidence that the environment is a prime example of such a policy area of non-articulated interests.

This study searches for evidence supporting an alternative view of the approach of V4 countries to EU environmental policy, compared to the model of reactive and passive adaptation. We make the idealised assumption that once the current process of V4 countries environmental adaptation is concluded and these countries become full members, they will have an equal opportunity to follow their interests as other member states. We also assume that the European Commission's high degree of influence on the candidates and its insistence on their full adoption of environmental *acquis* with only a limited number of transition periods will lead to a relatively high degree of harmonisation when CEE countries join the Union, thus considerably reducing the threat of re-nationalisation of environmental policy in the future.

On this basis we formulate two sets of questions. The first set is: what is the domestic base of environmental policy in the V4 states? Are there signs indicating that in some areas of domestic environmental policy, the strategy of passive adaptation to the EU has an alternative, more proactive approach, either now or in the future? The second set of questions is: what capacity do the V4 states have to shape EU environmental policy? Are V4 countries likely to pursue – at least in some areas – proactive environmental policy at the EU level? What is the likelihood that they will coordinate their efforts to slow down the development of EU environmental policy among themselves and with the group of 'laggards'?

The Lack of Theory of National Integration

When analysing the implications of eastern enlargement on EU environmental policy from the applicant states' perspective, one is confronted with a paucity of suitable theoretical frameworks, viz.:

Integration theory has focused on describing and explaining integration processes and the role of supra-national actors such as the Commission and the European Parliament. On the other hand, the role of the policies, interests and actions of its most important actors, the nation-states, has been neglected by theory; existing efforts are mainly empirical and a-theoretical, concentrating on national peculiarities rather than on establishing a theory of national integration policy [*Petersen, 1998b: 87*].

Thorhallsson [2000] also notes the neglect of smaller states and their impacts in international relations. He observes that the highest priority has been given to the study of the adaptive policy of small states in regard to the power politics of superpowers and not to the participation of small states in integration processes [*Thorhallsson, 2000*].

Elsewhere Petersen [1998a] formulates a general theory of national integration in the EU that is based on the premise of adaptation theory. This assumes that foreign policy consists of policymakers' actions to manipulate the balance between their society and their external environment in order to secure an adequate functioning of societal structures in a situation of growing interdependence [*Petersen, 1998a*]. Depending on the balance between the degree of control over the external environment (influence capacity) and the degree of sensitivity to it (stress sensitivity) a state can pursue four types of integration strategies. The first is dominance (high influence capacity, low stress sensitivity), under which the state is able to

make demands on partner states in the integration process without giving concessions in return. The second is policy of balance (high influence capacity and high stress sensitivity) that describes an ideal form of national integration strategy. The third is a policy of acquiescence (low influence capacity, high stress sensitivity), essentially a subordination of domestic priorities to external pressures and the fourth category is a policy of quiescence (both low influence capacity and stress sensitivity), which is typical for low-influence countries.

Petersen's typology enables us to make an initial assessment of the approach of V4 countries to policymaking in an enlarged EU. In line with general expectations, it seems likely that, owing to their lack of both tangible resources (such as a strong economy and military power) and intangible resources (such as diplomatic skills, policy expertise and willpower) for influence capabilities, after accession, V4 countries will oscillate between acquiescence and quiescence. The former, which presupposes a limited degree of influence capability and high stress sensitivity, is typical for applicant states that make numerous concessions as they adapt their policies to membership. The latter indicates a preference for a low-participation strategy aimed at limiting concessions in the integration process. It is also a strategy of reduced commitment such as having loose ties to the integration process, perhaps with a concentration on particular goals or aspects.

Thorhallsson's [2000] analysis of smaller member states also suggests that in certain areas, even those with limited resources can exert an influence on the EU. Despite its different sectoral perspective (CAP and regional policy), Thorhallsson's [2000] work on the behaviour of smaller states in EU integration is pertinent to this study as it provides a framework for consideration of the behaviour of CEE countries in the area of environmental policy. With the exception of Poland, the other V4 countries (and all other CEE countries invited to join the EU) fall into the category of smaller states. Thorhallsson's [2000] argument is that small and large state integration behaviours differ owing to the size of their administrations, with small states not having sufficient capacity to address all negotiations owing to their lack of staff, expertise and other resources. As a consequence, while they behave reactively in most sectors they adopt proactive behaviours in the most important sectors. This is enabled by certain features of their administration such as informality, flexibility and greater room for their officials to manoeuvre. Owing to their smaller range of interests they tend, unlike the larger states, to prioritise between sectors.

One of the few attempts to develop a more theoretical approach to the question of influence of member states on the EU, specifically in the area of environmental policy, is that of Andersen and Liefferink [1997]. Recognising the reciprocal nature of EU policymaking, they examine the domestic politics of environmental policymaking of different member states and analyse how links are made to Brussels' politics. However, the applicability of this approach to CEE countries is subject to several limitations. First, their work is partly concerned with the 'domestication' of EU environmental policy in connection with countries that are already member states, although in the cases of Sweden, Austria and Finland they also analyse the pre-accession period of environmental policy. Second, the countries that were analysed are usually environmental policy 'pioneers' with highly developed domestic policies that they then seek to transfer to the EU level. In contrast, literature on the adaptation strategies of 'laggard' countries' to European environmental policy and their attempts to influence EU level is much rarer (but see Aguilar Fernandez [1997]).

However, the concepts from which Andersen and Liefferink [1997] derived their analytical tool were developed neither specifically for the group of 'pioneer' countries, nor in fact for the purpose of EU studies. Thus, in the absence of a theoretical framework that would better match the dynamic discussed in this contribution, we loosely utilise their approach by analysing the past developments of V4 countries' domestic environmental policymaking that may be indicative of their attitude to future EU environmental policy as well as the past

record of V4 states' international (extra-EU) environmental strategies. As the EU dimension of V4 states' environmental policy is overwhelmingly defined by the goals of harmonisation and as instances of their own strategies are almost invariably ruled out, we therefore analyse areas of environmental foreign policy that were not constrained by the EU integration process. The future implications of V4 accession are then discussed on the basis of the Regional Environmental Center's document summarising the suggestions of CEE countries for the 6th Environmental Action Programme [REC, 2000] and expert interviews conducted for this study.

Domestic Factors Influencing V4 Countries' Approach to EU Environmental Policy

The enthusiasm of the immediate post-1989 environmental reform in V4 countries was partly a consequence of the role of environmental protests in overthrowing the previous regimes. In some cases this led to adoption of progressive environmental legislation that went further than the existing EU legislation, such as the SEIA legislation in the former Czechoslovakia. It is symptomatic that such legislation is now subject to 'downward' harmonisation. This is also a reflection of the view commonly held in V4 states that many environmental problems were resolved by the end of the 1990s. For instance, there is a considerable degree of complacency in the Czech Republic, particularly in local government and industry, with regard to reductions in air and water pollution during the last decade. The prevailing feeling is that 'we have done too much for the environment'.

The demise of the socialist system in CEE countries broadly coincided with what some describe as the culmination of the most significant shift in Western environmental governance over the last 30 years, characterised by Bernstein [2000] as the convergence of environmental and economic norms towards 'liberal environmentalism'. This corresponded with pre-1989 domestic environmental (oppositional) discourse that stressed free markets and democracy as key conditions for successful environmental reform in V4 countries. 'Liberal environmentalism' thus found a ready niche in V4 states shortly after 1989.

Environmental Policy Actors

Despite the significant role played by environmental mobilisation in the 1989 revolutions, for most of the 1990s V4 countries lacked powerful domestic actors in environmental politics. Within two years of the fall of the old regime, relatively strong green parties disappeared almost without trace [see *Jehlička and Kostelecký, 1995*]. Thus in V4 countries, environmental groups are now the main source of political and social communication about the environment. However, after more than a decade of activity, the existence of these groups is still critically dependent on external (that is, Western) financial assistance.³ Despite substantial foreign support aimed at the development of civil society, combined membership of environmental groups in V4 countries was, at the end of the 1990s, still lower than in the late 1980s. While a significant part of their funding is EU-based, environmental groups in V4 countries have not showed much interest in EU environmental policy, mainly because the funding aimed to strengthen domestic capacity. Only recently has the availability of EU pre-accession funds to V4 states started to generate some interest in EU environmental policy, although still related mainly to implementation issues. The scale of these activities is still national at best:

We organised training for NGOs about EU integration, but our knowledge of integration is very weak ... We organised it, but we also (were) listeners, as the others ... Only (a) few speakers had the knowledge that we wanted. Their knowledge was also very narrow (Polish sustainability expert, interview 5 July 2000).

Policy Structures and Networks

According to experts interviewed in both V4 and EU countries, the most important (and often the only) environmental policy institution relevant to EU accession were the ministries of the

environment and more specifically their departments of EU integration. The only exception seems to be Hungary, where a powerful prime minister's office concentrates large competencies in the area of EU integration, including environmental policy. Elsewhere, departments of EU integration have a relatively short history and, compared to the scale of their task, an inadequately small staff.⁴ For instance, in 1997 only one person at the Czech Ministry of the Environment worked on environmental integration with the EU. Young people with knowledge of foreign languages, who in some cases have a background in environmental NGO activities, often staff these departments. Since their inception, their activity has quite understandably been limited to a passive adoption of the environmental *acquis*. None has developed a proactive policy agenda *vis-a-vis* the EU.

This weak institutional base is clear evidence of state and EU failure to use the process of accession as a stimulus for strengthening indigenous policy structures. For example, a recent report blames the Czech central state authorities for the poor capacity within regional and local public authorities to harmonise legislation [GA&C and UK, 2001]. Homeyer [2001] also emphasises the European Commission's overriding concern in the process of approximation with the formal requirements of transposing and legally implementing the environmental *acquis* and the relative neglect of administrative reforms needed for effective implementation and enforcement on the ground [see also Kružíková, *this volume*].

Given the weak position of environmental ministries within V4 governments, it comes as little surprise that ministries often used the process of approximation as a power enhancing tool by which they seek 'to out manoeuvre rival ministries in a "two-level" game' [Homeyer, 2001]. Agh [1999] argues in a similar way when he maintains that 'it is particularly true for Hungary that numerous interests are better represented in Brussels than in national capitals, first of all in the field of environmental protection'. This may also explain the rather uncritical acceptance of the existing environmental *acquis* by environmental policy communities in V4 states.

It seems likely that after accession, the ability of V4 countries to participate in Brussels' environmental politics will be undermined by a lack of experts with appropriate training and experience. This prediction is based on three factors. The first is the past and current educational structure of V4 societies, which mainly emphasise narrow technical and scientific disciplines. This has serious consequences for the way in which environmental issues are understood by experts in V4 states:

The root of the problem lies in [the] educational system. We lack people with an interdisciplinary background. We have specialists, but at the same time lack technically educated people and economists who would be concerned with the environment (interview, Polish sustainability expert, 5 July 2000).

The second factor expected to limit post-accession participation in environmental politics is the scant attention paid in the 1990s by social and political elites to the environmental dimension of the approximation process. The third factor is the fact that EU assistance programmes aimed at strengthening V4 states' environmental capacity have also neglected this area. Recent efforts by the EU to enhance the environmental policy capacity of the candidate states through various assistance programmes [see Carius *et al.*, 2000] are invariably aimed at strengthening implementation *per se*, rather than wider policy thinking. As noted by one official, '[A] lot of the capacity building is being done on implementation issues and this is not the same thing' (interview, British government official, 9 January 2001).

EU environmental policy communities in V4 countries were described by respondents as small and closed groups of experts that developed on the basis of expertise applicable at the sub-national or national levels. This community is usually centred on a single personality who has a strong influence on the way in which the discourse on EU environmental policy

develops. Thus, it seems that in Hungary and the Czech Republic, for instance, only one school of thought on EU environmental policy exists. This echoes recent suggestions that countries with centralised state structures and weak civil society tend to promote clientelistic relations that do not enhance social capital and thereby inhibit the capacity of networks for policy learning [*Paraskevopoulos, 2001*].

It does not seem likely that this situation could change significantly in the foreseeable future. At present, few institutions, whether research institutes, think-tanks or study and research programmes exist to address environmental policy research in V4 countries. Apart from the environmental component of a major Hungarian Academy of Sciences' project researching the effects of EU integration on Hungary, no policy research programmes in V4 countries have been initiated. Existing environmental research institutes, such as those affiliated with the Czech Ministry of Environment, have an almost exclusively scientific and technical orientation.

Policy Content

Environmental policy in V4 countries did not start from scratch in 1990. For example, systems based on fees paid by polluters, national environmental quality standards and pollution permits were – to varying extents – in place in V4 states in the 1980s. In the 1990s however, virtually all newly introduced policy concepts and instruments were imported from the West. The majority of respondents believed that the environmental *acquis* meets the needs of their countries in terms of the most pressing environmental problems, particularly in the areas of water and air pollution and waste management. Most of them also consider implementation of the *acquis* by their countries as a major innovation in environmental policy. Horizontal legislation aimed at public participation and access to information is regarded as an important means of opening the political system to a wider spectrum of actors. There are only a few areas that are regarded as being more developed in candidate states than in the EU. These include the system of nature protection, and land use planning and SEIA procedures, although this varies, depending on which country is examined.

By the mid-1990s, Caddy [1997] noted that the majority of CEE policymakers rejected wholesale the idea that pre-1989 policy was relevant within the framework of the EU–CEE policy dialogue. The interviews conducted for this study also confirmed little demand for an indigenous approach to environmental policy or for alternatives to EU concepts. In fact, most respondents see the current EU environmental policy model as optimal. Respondents were aware of some environmentally positive practices of V4 countries such as lower production of household waste per capita, recycling, wider use of public transport and, in some cases, less intensive forms of agriculture. These positive features were inherited from the socialist period. As such, they have mainly negative connotations, both for society at large and for most decision makers. Respondents were not aware of any domestic efforts aimed at their retention or even expansion.

Furthermore, these features do not correspond with the traditional perception of environmental issues such as industrial pollution endangering human health that can be relatively easily resolved by clean-up programmes. As a consequence, these positive practices (such as glass bottle recycling) have been marginalised and replaced by other products (aluminium cans and plastic cartons) that are usually environmentally less beneficial [*Gille, 2000; Gille, this volume*]. However, international institutions shaping the development of environmental policy in the region have also neglected these features. Sometimes the consequences of their involvement in V4 countries are also environmentally questionable, such as EU infrastructure support for road building. Such issues were seldom discussed by V4 respondents.

V4 International Environmental Strategies

Despite the neglect of international environmental policy initiatives during the socialist period, at the beginning of the 1990s the V4 countries developed a relatively ambitious foreign environmental policy agenda, at both the European and global levels. The development of a foreign policy agenda signalled a significant break from the perception of environmental issues commonly held during the socialist period:

[At the beginning of the 1990s] we realised how little we knew about global environmental issues, which we simply did not discuss during the socialist period, since until the end of the communist regime we were more interested in environmental issues at the local or national level (interview, Czech government official, 13 April 2000).

Partly as a response to this perspective, the initiative that led to the first ever set of pan-European environmental strategies came from within the region itself [Vavroušek, 1993]. But this initially strong, proactive approach to global environmental politics largely came to an end with the ratification of the basket of global conventions signed at the Rio 'Earth Summit' in 1992. After the signing of association agreements with the EU (between 1991 and 1996), the focus of V4 countries' international strategies shifted almost exclusively to the goal of EU harmonisation. In all four V4 countries this is underlined by the paucity of official documents on regional or global goals for the post-accession period. The dominant focus on the fulfilment of EU requirements has therefore led to the virtual abandonment of most other spheres of international environmental policy:

I estimate that 95 per cent of the Czech Republic's activity in foreign environmental policy is oriented to the EU, the remaining five per cent covers all the rest, including UNEP and UN conventions (interview, Czech government official, 6 January 2000).

It is an irony then that even in the 'Environment for Europe' process, V4 states are now perceived as merely passive participants as described by a British government official:

But there's a bit of a problem in the Environment for Europe process which is meant to be a pan-European, west-east cooperation, as not enough of the initiative comes from the east and they don't seem to set enough of the agenda as to what it is that they need (interview, British government official, 9 January 2001).

Since the mid-1990s V4 states' approach to global environmental regimes, most importantly to the climate change regime, has become fully dependent on the position of the EU. V4 countries do not have defined goals for their activities in the field of foreign environmental policy other than membership in the EU. For instance, the Czech Ministry of the Environment has an annual plan of action at the international level, but it resembles a list of forthcoming events rather than a programmatic document setting out short-, mid- or long-term goals. Hungarian and Slovak respondents in particular emphasised that in areas of policy unrelated to the EU approximation, it is the personality and field of expertise of ministers of the environment that define the country's activity at the international level. However, consistent with domestic policy, V4 environmental diplomacy is based in weak institutions and networks and relies instead on certain key individuals:

There are occasional individual personalities [in CEE] who do have an influence in other international conventions, climate change, and sustainable development ... but that is not the same as having a clearly defined foreign environmental policy ... that is just the case of an individual who is having an effect in some fora or another (interview, British government official, 9 January 2001).

Despite their similar history, common environmental problems, and the shared goal of EU membership, these have not prompted V4 countries to engage in systematic cooperation

either in the area of global environmental agreements or in the process of approximation with the EU. The lack of mutual information about the process of harmonisation within the V4 group and minimal contact between their experts is striking. With the growing distance from the fall of the socialist system and with the successes of some clean-up programmes, it seems that previously common problems are becoming less important. More diverse definitions of environmental problems are now emerging including, for example, differing attitudes within V4 countries to nuclear energy. Another example is Hungary's preference for framing environmental problems in terms of water policy, for which the optimal unit of management is the Danube basin. Several Western experts also noticed a certain degree of rivalry among CEE countries during the approximation process.

The pre-accession process was staged by the European Commission as a contest that promoted rivalry among the candidates. For instance, annual assessment reports on each candidate country's progress in adopting and implementing the *acquis* and the publication of subsequent tables ranking the countries according to the number of concluded thematic 'chapters' of negotiations fostered competition rather than coordination and cooperation among applicants. The purpose of the European Commission's assistance was to enhance the compliance of individual candidates with EU demands, not to encourage them to take joint positions towards EU requirements or even develop joint proposals.

Future Impact on EU Environmental Policy

In the opinion of the interviewed experts from V4 states, the ideal future EU environmental policy should build on its current trends. In their view, the ultimate goal of an enlarged EU environmental policy should be sustainable development. The key mechanism for achieving this goal is integration of environmental and other public policies [see *Homeyer, this volume*]. The area in which this is most urgently desired is the interface between the environment and transport. EIA and strategic environmental assessment (SEA) are perceived as the most promising means of effective integration. Rather than command-and-control legislation, the type of policy preferred by the V4 countries relies on new policy instruments including market based instruments such as green taxes and horizontal legislation such as access to information and participation of civil society and economic actors.

As Knill and Lenschow [2000] argue, new policy instruments assume a certain level of societal responsiveness and organisational mobilisation (supported by an appropriate resource level). Given the deeply unfavourable context for such policy styles in V4 states, including over-centralised state administrations and under-developed civil society, the seemingly unreserved acceptance of new modes of environmental governance by V4 states' experts appears striking. We argue that this can be explained by two self-reinforcing factors. The first is the connotation of concepts such as flexibility, freedom of information and market-based instruments as a symbolic break from the oft-criticised socialist model of bureaucratic environmental regulation. The second is the hegemonic power of Western institutions over environmental transition in V4 states as virtually the sole source of environmental policy innovation.

An analysis of the document synthesising the contribution of CEE countries to the 6th Environmental Action Programme [REC, 2000] corresponded closely with the views of the experts interviewed for this study, notably in the parallel advocacy of key concepts such as subsidiarity, adaptable policymaking, framework legislation and stakeholder involvement in response to the expected growing diversity of environmental problems. Despite this emphasis on a more flexible style of policy the document does not seem to confirm fears of the re-nationalisation of EU environmental policy resulting from eastern enlargement [Homeyer et al., 2000]. Rather, it is flexibility at the regional or sub-national level, rather than at the national level, which the document sees as crucial for effective implementation of EU legislation. Second, apparently disregarding the accession states' failure in the past decade to take advantage of environmentally favourable features of CEE countries (mostly inherited

from the pre-1989 period), the REC document suggests that applicant states' accession to the EU offers an opportunity to enhance sectoral integration. Third, the strengthening of the effectiveness of current legislation should be given priority over the development of new legislation. Particular attention should be paid to the strengthening of institutions in CEE countries. Fourth, the experts who contributed to REC [2000] believe that actions at the local level, such as better planning and local action plans, are key policy concepts on the path to sustainable development.

According to the experts interviewed for this study, possible innovative policy contributions in an enlarged EU could emerge in the areas of nature and landscape conservation and land use planning. This supports suggestions that the historic strength of networks in such policy areas can act as a buffer against asymmetric EU–CEE relations [Tickle, 2000]. Some respondents expressed an idea that the experience of harmonisation of CEE countries with stringent EU environmental directives may lead to more cost-effective approaches. However, these ideas did not go beyond general proposals, as the experts were unable to specify strategies and mechanisms by which they could be developed and promoted by V4 countries with the prospect of future EU-wide application.

The same holds true for some environmentally positive features of societies in V4 countries. Theoretically, all these features could become stimuli for innovations in EU environmental policy. Furthermore, these environmentally beneficial features of V4 societies could be best preserved and expanded through sectoral integration. However, despite being strong advocates of integration, none of the interviewed experts had suggestions as to how these positive features of V4 countries could be transformed into policy proposals applicable at the EU level. Instead, the experts tended to defer to the European Commission's initiative in this respect.

Most respondents did not expect active and innovative participation of V4 countries in the development of future environmental policy of the EU. There is clearly an absence of ambition concerning the post-accession period. Exhaustion from the demanding harmonisation process was indicated as the main reason. Another possible explanation was related to the lack of experience and will:

The barrier is little knowledge of environmental policy. In Hungary nobody expects Hungary to be able to do something important on its own (interview, Hungarian environmental policy consultant, 28 June 2000).

Among other reasons for the expected passivity and reactivity were the overriding priority ascribed to economic growth, a political culture that functions as a barrier for effective environmental integration, and also the ability of heavy industry to pursue vested interests.

The interviews also addressed the theme of V4 states' future alliance politics and revealed a fundamental discrepancy between the expectations of most Western commentators and the views of V4 country experts. First, contrary to Western analysts and apparently some southern European politicians [see Vinas, 2000], V4 experts unanimously ruled out alliances with south European EU countries in the Council of Environmental Ministers. Second, despite the declared similarities and shared interests among V4 countries, the experts did not reckon on coordination between them in the post-accession period. Third, all the respondents (V4 and Western) anticipated that a stable pattern of voting behaviour of V4 countries in the Council of Ministers was unlikely to emerge. In their view, individual V4 countries will behave in an *ad hoc* manner depending on specific opportunities and interests rather than on any systematic strategy.

The marginal attraction of south European countries as allies is explained by their negligible involvement in the CEE transformation process, including its economic and environmental

dimension as well as by minimal historic contacts between these two regions. Instead, if any discernible alliance pattern occurs, the respondents expect it to be generally oriented to north-western Europe states (such as The Netherlands and the Baltic states) and primarily to neighbouring countries such as Germany and Austria. This would likely stem from cultural and geographical proximity, from the intensity of current economic relations, and also from the environmental assistance of these countries to the V4 group. For example, throughout the 1990s it was Dutch and Danish styles and concepts that were cited most in terms of policy influence.

Conclusion

The December 2002 invitation extended to eight CEE countries to join the EU has initiated a new phase of interaction between the EU and the V4 countries. Post-accession, the strong leverage that the EU exerted on candidate states (hierarchical imposition) should recede and an altered set of relations may emerge in which the new member states will have more resources and political opportunities for pursuing their own interests and priorities. Thus it is now appropriate to try to identify the interests and priorities that may shape V4 states' approach to EU environmental policy in the future. Most perspectives on eastern enlargement of the EU are based on a top-down perspective and an assumption that the current mode of asymmetrical relations will be maintained in the future. We have attempted to extend the scope of existing accounts by adding the applicant states' perspective.

We now examine whether this extension may lead to potential changes in the conclusions drawn by existing studies. For several reasons this is a complicated inquiry. First, the articulation of many domestic interests has been suppressed by the one-way process of approximation. This holds true for the environment, despite some limited evidence of proactive policy initiatives. Second, the future-oriented perspective inevitably renders our conclusions at least partly speculative. Third, a serious obstacle is a lack of an appropriate theoretical framework for such an inquiry. Integration theory has focused on describing and explaining integration processes from a topdown perspective focusing on the role of supranational actors. On the other hand, the role of the policies, interests and actions of its most important actors, the nation states, has been somewhat neglected.

Despite initial evidence of a proactive approach to international environmental policy in the V4 countries, this model became quickly subsumed by the 'hierarchical imposition' of EU requirements, which has since become the dominant framework for the development of their domestic environmental policy. As a consequence, the preferred environmental policy outcomes in V4 countries correspond closely with the current trend in the EU towards flexibility, economic instruments, stakeholder participation and sectoral integration.

Owing to the weak domestic base of environmental policy and the acceptance of EU environmental policy as a hegemonic model, it is highly unlikely that V4 states are, in the short term, capable of adopting a proactive approach to environmental policymaking at the EU level when they become full members. Based on our interview data, V4 policy experts neither expected nor required any major changes – based on indigenous experiences – to this model. The conditions of asymmetrical relations in which the transfer of the EU policy model took place have thus reduced the scope of policy considerations to the national and sub-national level. The strengthening of their environmental capacity – facilitated by various EU assistance programmes – has also centred on policy implementation at the domestic level, rather than enhancing V4 states' ability to influence the EU.

We also found that V4 states have not, and do not seem likely to coordinate their strategies – either among themselves or with environmentally 'laggard' member states. Instead, it appears that they would rather align themselves with the north-western 'pioneer' member states that have been most active in transferring environmental know-how and have made environmental policy discourse in V4 countries largely compatible with their policy models.

Thus, we find that extant expectations about V4 states joining the current group of 'laggards' and putting a brake on development of EU progressive environmental policy may be premature and should be qualified. However, unknown variables and as yet unarticulated interests render such conclusions tentative.

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NOTES

1. The V4 comprise the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The term Visegrad refers to the location where the first summit meeting of the loose political alliance met in 1991. In December 2002, all four countries were invited to join the European Union in 2004.
2. Fifteen interviews were conducted in the Czech Republic, five in Hungary, four in Poland and five in Slovakia. Among interviewed experts were members of parliaments, former ministers of the environment, academics, NGO activists, civil servants and consultants.
3. In 2000 85 per cent of the annual income of the most active Czech 'new' environmental group *Hnutí DUHA* came from foreign grant agencies or Czech foundations that distribute foreign funding. Membership fees made up only three per cent of the income [*Hnutí DUHA, 2000*].
4. According to Wajda [2000], the Polish Ministry of the Environment is seriously understaffed with only some 300 staff members. In particular, there is a consistent lack of EU specialists.

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