

Re-Conceptualising Europe: Social Constructivism and EU Enlargement ¹

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Abstract

With the successful launch of the single currency the European Union (EU) is now focused intensely on the second great project of the post-Maastricht agenda – enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). After a decade of lofty rhetoric and continued prevarication, the EU committed itself, at the Helsinki summit in December 1999, to a full and inclusive enlargement round. Given the sheer scale of the challenge this represents it should hardly be a surprise that this enlargement has inspired a steady stream of academic publications. But the vast majority of those publications have been empirical. This has meant that analysis of the enlargement process has, as Schmitter has suggested, been taking place in a “theoretical vacuum”. This paper represents an effort to redress the balance in favour of theoretical endeavour. The paper begins by assessing the relative merits of IR theories applied to the enlargement process. Insights from Neorealism, Neoliberal Institutionalism and Neofunctionalism are tested with respect to core propositions on enlargement.

However, it emerges that enlargement represents a puzzle for all of these approaches in that, as Schimmelfennig has suggested, none of them can explain why a process characterized in its early stages by the rational pursuit of perceived interests by EU member states somehow has ended up in a normatively determined outcome with the decision taken by the EU at the Helsinki summit, to open negotiations with all of the candidate countries from CEE. The paper goes on to examine the claims of social constructivism as an alternative explanatory framework. In opposition to the methodological individualism and static conception of identity transformation in international politics offered by rationalists, constructivists emphasize the co-constitution of the material and social worlds and the significance of norms, rules, and values in the international arena. The EU as a densely institutionalized environment seems a natural entity for the application of constructivist theory. With respect to the enlargement process this analysis suggests that the constitutive values of the European Union, predicated on normative understandings of what ‘Europe’ represents, and manifested in the Copenhagen criteria, represent the key building blocks for this enlargement round. This is not to deny the importance of material phenomena such as the ‘national interests’ of the member states. But it is to suggest that constructivism provides a much more nuanced explanation of the enlargement process.

Introduction

The history of European integration has been one of successive and successful enlargement rounds.² Indeed, there is some evidence that there

¹ The term European Union (EU) will be used throughout with reference to the post-Maastricht period. Where a distinction with the old European Community (EC) seems necessary that will be made clear as with the European Economic Community (EEC).

² The first enlargement of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 saw Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom join; the second (Southern) enlargement brought in Greece (1981) and then Portugal and Spain (1986). In 1990 Germany's Eastern Landër

existed among the founding fathers an ambition to enlarge to "continental scale". For more than three decades after World War Two, the Cold War stood in the way of the realization of that ambition. But with the demise of the Soviet Union and the loosening of its post-War grip on its Central and East European (CEE) satellites in the wake of 1989's so-called 'geopolitical earthquake', Jean Monnet's ambition of a European construction stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals suddenly seemed possible. Thereafter, enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) gradually made its way to the top of the European Union's political agenda.³

The current enlargement round has garnered an amount of attention in the academic literature on European integration.⁴ Indeed, the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) which concluded with the Nice European Council summit in December 2000, was very much an enlargement IGC⁵, a constitutional conclave convened against a backdrop of rising concern at the institutional implications of enlargement and the failure to address these issues at Amsterdam⁶. Whether the focus is on reweighting of votes in Council, a

officially became part of the EC; the 1995 enlargement round saw Austria, Finland and Sweden join.

³ The EU is currently engaged in a negotiation with the 'Associated Countries' of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). These countries include: Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Romania. Cyprus, Malta and Turkey also have the status of accession candidates but they are not part of the focus of this paper.

⁴ For an overall summary of the major issues see: Henderson, K. (ed.), 1999. *Back to Europe: Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union*; Maresceau, M. (ed.), 1997. *Enlarging the European Union: Relations Between the EU and Central and Eastern Europe*; and Mayhew, A., 1998. *Recreating Europe: the European Union's Policy Towards Central and Eastern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

⁵ See: Hubert Védrine, the French Foreign Minister, on the priorities of the French Presidency with respect to the IGC agenda, *The Irish Times*, 3 July 2000. See also: Quentin Peel, "Mapping Europe's Future", *Financial Times*, 18 June 2000.

⁶ The EU has continually acknowledged the need for institutional change in preparation for enlargement without actually putting in place any reforms at all. The Copenhagen European Council of June 1993 set down, as a primary condition for accession of the CEE states the "capacity of the Union to absorb new members whilst maintaining momentum towards European integration" (Europe Documents, No.1844/1845, 24 June 1993. Conclusions of the Presidency, Copenhagen Summit). Further, the Essen European Council summit of December 1994 firmly asserted the importance of the 1996/7 IGC "securing the institutional conditions for the proper functioning of an enlarged Union" (Europe Documents, No.1916, 10 December 1994. Strategy for Preparing the Central and Eastern European Countries for Future Accession to the European Union, defined by the General Affairs Council and adopted by the European Council). The 1996 Commission Opinion on enlargement similarly stated: "The EU cannot commit itself to this round of enlargement without making sure that changes, some far-reaching ones, are first made in the ways and means of its operation" (COM (96) 90 Final, 28 February 1996. "Reinforcing Political Opinion and Preparing for Enlargement"). At Amsterdam postponement was the order of the day. Although in the Conclusions of the Presidency, the claim is made that the Treaty "opens the way for the launching of the enlargement process" the reality was very different. The institutional changes

reconstitution of the Commission, an extension of Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) and how to proceed with ‘reinforced cooperation’, the shadow of enlargement was *the* decisive feature. Thus familiar arguments about the relationship between ‘widening’ and ‘deepening’ were revisited⁷.

While there is acknowledgment that the current enlargement process differs considerably from previous rounds in terms of scale and diversity, academic literature and political commentary has tended to focus on the established preoccupation with widening and deepening. Some commentators claim that the two processes are interconnected while others question whether there exists any discernable relationship (Schneider, 1999:276).

Whatever one’s perspective, one has to concede that in broader theoretical terms, enlargement has been under specified and relatively marginalized in European integration theory. In effect, as Schmitter (1996:14) has suggested, analysis of enlargement has been taking place in a “theoretical vacuum” in that enlargement has remained largely outside the corpus of theoretical writing on integration. To the extent that it has been conceptualized at all it has usually been in relation to the broad process of integration or in specific policy domains such as agriculture, regional policy or foreign policy. Other approaches have focused on past enlargements and their impact on European integration.⁸

The current enlargement round has seen the usual cost-benefit analyses being propounded (Baldwin, 1994, Redmond, 1997). For the most part,

connected with enlargement (composition of the Commission, weighting of votes in Council) were the subject of a protocol which provided, first, that on the entry into force of the first enlargement, the number of members of the Commission would be reduced to one per member state, provided that, by that date, the weighting of votes in the Council had been amended; second, that at least one year before the membership of the Union exceeded 20, a comprehensive IGC would tackle these questions. Time did not allow the author to include outcome of the Nice Summit in this analysis

⁷The most decisive contribution to the debate being German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer’s speech concerning enlargement and the “*finalité politique*” of European integration at Humboldt University, Berlin on 12 May 2000. (Joschka Fischer, “From Confederacy to Federation – Thoughts on the Finality of European Integration”, Humboldt University, Berlin, 12 May 2000. The Fischer speech in its entirety can be accessed at www.theepc.be/ChallengeEurope/Communications/Fischerspeech.htm But consider also the recent contributions of Giscard D’Estaing and Helmut Schmidt and their call for a “core Europe” as part of a “fundamentally new institutional framework” and Jacques Delors’s ideas about an “*avant garde*” pushing forward their level of political integration within a looser and wider confederal structure. For a wide perspective on these debates see the Challenge Europe website at www.theepc.be/ChallengeEurope.htm On enlargement and reinforced cooperation, see: Eric Philipart, *European Voice*, 18-24 May 2000.

⁸For examples, see: Pederson, T., 1994. *The European Union and the EFTA Countries: Enlargement and Integration*, Pinter, London; Redmond, J. (ed.), 1997. *The 1995 Enlargement of the European Union*, Ashgate, Aldershot; Tsoukalis, L., 1981. *The European Community and its Mediterranean Enlargement*, Allen and Unwin, London.

these theory-neutral propositions are concerned with the implications of enlargement for certain policy sectors and the institutional terrain. Most present the widening/deepening relationship in dramatic terms; i.e. the current enlargement round dwarfs all previous initiatives (where incremental policy and institutional adjustment was the order of the day) and demands a decisively new approach on the part of the EU.

The common denominator linking these approaches is the absence of theory: this contribution represents an attempt to address this concern. As such, the key questions to be confronted include the following: What do the main theories have to say or predict regarding enlargement? Why does enlargement come on to the EU agenda? And, when it does, what forces sustain it and drive it forward? Is the process of enlargement driven by political or economic factors? Should enlargement be viewed as a purely material process inspired by implicit cost-benefit calculations of utility-maximizing state actors or as a normative process rooted in ideational factors? The current enlargement round will serve as a test case for the ensuing hypotheses.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first examines the literature on European integration and the dominant theoretical frameworks. It moves on to assess the merits of social constructivism as an alternative to the existing models. Finally, it applies insights from social constructivism to the current enlargement process in order to determine its utility.

Enlargement and Existing Models

The aim of this section of the paper is to posit the enlargement question within existing frameworks of integration theory and to determine the merits of each *vis-a-vis* the outlined criteria.

In recent years the academic literature on European integration has greatly expanded with a multiplicity of perspectives being employed to theorize developments. With the contributions of rational choice and game theoretical approaches (Braüninger and König 1999, Scharpf 1988, Tsebelis 1990, Laursen 1995); new institutionalism (Pierson, 1994, Mulé, 1999, Bulmer, 1998); multi-level governance (Marks 1993, Marks, Hooghe, and Blank 1996) and policy networks (Richardson 1996, Börzel 1998) a rich and diverse discourse has developed. Few, if any, approaches have attempted to conceptualise enlargement, despite the fact that over the past decade the EU has expanded twice and moved to embrace the CEE states.

The main bodies of theory under consideration are firstly, the neo-neo synthesis (neorealism and neoliberalism), predicated on rationalist concepts of social theory and methodological individualism, with special emphasis

on liberal intergovernmentalism; and models that privilege supranationalism, principally neofunctionalism. Together these competing conceptualizations of what the European construction represents have dominated theoretical approaches to integration, notwithstanding recent attempts to develop more sophisticated approaches.

Rationalist Theories of International Life

Rationalist models revolve around the importance of power and interest (or power and preferences) in international life and are essentially state-centric in approach. Rationalism is especially wedded to the premise of individualist social theory, which suggests that in the international states system structure is relatively unimportant and that identities and interests are more or less exogenous to structure. Variants of rationalist thought focus on the importance of physicalism, instrumentalism, materialism and individualism with respect to international life.

These approaches lead rationalists to make assumptions about global political processes. They assume that what exists is material, measurable and observable. Reality is therefore composed of perceptible things external to us; reality is 'out there' to be discovered. This ontological assumption is, in turn, predicated upon a particular philosophy of science (epistemology), which argues that one can only claim to know that which one can measurably observe. This kind of social science, informed by so-called 'logical positivism' makes it difficult – if not impossible – to consider a world that might, in fact, be socially constructed i.e centred on the importance of variables other than those outlined. No place here for consideration of ideas, norms and culture (Tonra 2000:8-9).

By emphasising market failure and incomplete contracting when explaining international cooperation, rationalists endorse a view of institutions as purposive-efficiency arrangements designed to overcome collective action problems (Wind: 1996:7). The EU is thus conceptualised as a facilitating regime that can help otherwise self-regarding states to pursue given national interests in a world without a leviathan. The two most important branches of the rationalist family to be considered here are neorealism and neoliberalism.

Neorealism and Enlargement

The international system, in the neorealist perspective, is characterized as a self-help system in which states hold security as their primary concern in order to protect their autonomy. Therefore, the crucial element is chan-

ges in the distribution of power in the international system. States worry about the relative gains of others and seek to defend their position in the international power structure. According to Hans Morgenthau (1960), the fundamental national interest of any state is always the protection of its physical, political and cultural identity against encroachments by other nations.

Logically one should assume from this that states prefer not to accede to international organizations as institutional commitments reduce their freedom of action. This entails the risk of long-term losses in autonomy and relative power (Schimmelfennig 1999). At this point one recognizes an obvious flaw in the neorealist approach to European integration – it cannot account for the deep levels of institutionalized cooperation that have evolved over time nor for that matter why states have been willing to make important concessions of sovereignty in the absence of serious threats to their survival.

Regarding EU enlargement, Schimmelfennig (*ibid.*) suggests that the core neorealist proposition revolves around expansion as a desirable option if it is perceived as a necessary and efficient means of balancing superior power or perceived threats. During the Cold War one could well have argued for a view of successive enlargements of this nature. However, with the collapse of the Soviet threat in the late 1980s and the disappearance of the bipolar world, this type of argument cannot explain why the EU sought to expand to CEE. With the rump Russian state visibly weak (economically and militarily) there hardly existed the type of threat that neorealism suggests would prompt an enlargement preference.

A second problem arises from the presumption of fixed interests. Neorealist thinking assumes away the possibility of EU member states endogenizing (even in a very limited way) the preferences of their partner states. The determination of what constitutes the national interest takes place in what amounts to an hermetically-sealed domestic environment. One important question arises as to whether states are capable of 'irrational' action. In other words, do states sometimes act in a manner that does not maximize their quantifiable power in pursuit of defined (and largely static) national interests? Again, in the context of enlargement one can evince a number of instances in which member states experienced difficulty in narrowing down their preferences.⁹

⁹ See: Lykke Friis 1998b, "The End of the Beginning' of Eastern Enlargement – The Luxembourg Summit and Agenda-Setting", European Integration online Papers (EIoP), Volume 2 (1998), No.7, www.eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/1998-007a.htm : On the negotiation process which led up to a key enlargement summit – that at Luxembourg in December 1997. She demonstrates that in the course of the negotiations many member states entered with ill-defined preferences. In this situation the Commission was "able to move the game along" by

Neoliberalism and Enlargement

In the neoliberal perspective the international system is characterized by complex interdependence. States are concerned about the implications of interdependence (primarily economic) and worry about welfare gains and losses. International institutions are, therefore, created for the purpose of functional management of the problems associated with interdependence.

Accordingly, again following Schimmelfennig (*ibid.*), the core enlargement proposition is that it will take place if the members expect net absolute gains from expansion. Specifically, enlargement preferences will depend on the perceptions of negative and positive interdependence with CEE. Enlargement is seen as a means to reduce risks and costs and to increase the benefits offered by interdependence. In this scenario, countries with a high overall level of interdependence with CEE are favorable to enlargement.

Take the example of Germany, however. In terms of potential trade increases and geographical position it is clear that it is Germany that should have most to benefit from this enlargement. A study by Baldwin, Francois and Portes (1997) demonstrates that, amongst EU member states, overall Germany has much more to gain in terms of increased trade than any other EU state with the exception of Austria. Management of the perceived negative externalities (environment, migration flows) associated with increased interdependence would also suggest proactive German advocacy of enlargement. Yet, notwithstanding these factors, German governments have consistently adopted a schizophrenic attitude to enlargement. This anomaly is understandable in the context of a balancing act between the 'high politics' and 'low politics' of enlargement but neoliberalism is clearly incapable of deconstructing the German position.¹⁰

Further, on the question of bargaining power, why is it that with the extraordinary asymmetrical advantage enjoyed by the EU (regarding material bargaining capacity) *vis-à-vis* the applicant states, the decision was still

framing the agenda in a specific way and forging alliances with key member states (Denmark and Sweden) on important issues, most importantly advocacy of incorporation of the Baltic States in the accession process. Therefore she determines that the outcome of the Luxembourg summit was not just determined by preferences and power (as an intergovernmentalist reading would suggest). The Commission's agenda-setting power, entrepreneurial activity by certain member states and uncertainty among others were all in evidence. This suggests a much more complex and sophisticated picture of EU negotiation processes than rationalist theories would concede.

¹⁰ For analysis of the paradoxical positions of both Germany and Austria see: Kirsty Hughes "A Most Exclusive Club", *Financial Times*, August 11 1999.

made to enlarge? Neoliberal theory would suggest that something short of outright enlargement, such as a preferential free trade arrangement or even Association status would be the EU's preferred option. Yet, the EU-CEE relationship moved quickly from trade and cooperation agreements (early 1990s), through Association agreements (mid 1990s), to advanced political dialogue and impending accession (late 1990s). This evolution cannot be accounted for by neoliberalism.

Moravcsik and Liberal Intergovernmentalism

In his seminal work *The Choice for Europe*, Moravcsik (1998:473) posits the notion that "economic (and) in particular, commercial interests have been the 'drivers' of European integration". How might one apply this argument to the enlargement process and what insights from liberal intergovernmentalism might be employed to theorize enlargement?

Liberal intergovernmentalism is predicated on the assumption of the crucial importance to state behaviour of domestic interests, principally domestic producer interests. The notion of an ideational dimension of consequence to the European integration project is not entertained. The perspective is narrow and micro-economically based which views international institutions as the creatures of states driven by strong domestic interests.

Dimitrova (1999:8) is correct in suggesting that enlargement is a paradox for liberal intergovernmentalism. In fact, the theory would predict that enlargement should not even be on the EU's agenda given that it implies a realignment of the structural funding regime in favour of the CEE states and against the so-called cohesion states of the present EU.¹¹ It also requires a substantial net addition to the budget funded by the net paying states. Thus the negative dynamic arising out of domestic dissatisfaction produced in member states such as Portugal and Spain, on the one hand, and Germany and France on the other, should, by now, have been enough to derail indefinitely the entire enlargement project. That this has not happened and enlargement more than ever dominates the EU agenda suggests the inherent inadequacy of the liberal intergovernmental argument.

One might also ask why has the EU been backed into a corner on agriculture reform? One would expect that, as one of the world's key agricultural players, the minnows of CEE would not exert much influence on such a key EU policy area, and yet one of the continued justifications for radical reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is eastward enlargement

¹¹ For some projections see: Mayhew, A., 1998. *Recreating Europe*. For the EU estimates see the Conclusions of the Berlin European Council Summit, *Bulletin of the European Communities*, No.6 of 1998.

(along with World Trade Organisation (WTO) pressures). Liberal intergovernmentalism projects a recalcitrant position from the big domestic agriculture concerns which in turn would decisively shape member state behaviour on the CAP and, by implication, on enlargement policy. Take Ireland as an example. Ireland remains one of the EU's states most dependent on agriculture where the agricultural lobby wields enormous influence on government. However, during the current enlargement round the big farming interests (who have gained so much under the CAP regime and stand to lose most from any radical reform connected with enlargement) have been almost silent. This indicates that large domestic producer interests have not dictated Irish policy on enlargement¹².

A further problem with liberal intergovernmentalism lies in its attachment to the so-called "grand bargain" model of European integration. The focus on the grand bargains (the Treaty of Rome, the consolidation of the Common Market, the founding of the European Monetary System, the Single European Act and the Treaty on European Union) tends to vitiate the role of everyday activity at EU level and means that liberal intergovernmentalism is consequently ill-equipped to account for the sheer density of issues and level of institutionalized cooperation. The enlargement process, characterised as it has been by concurrent bilateral and multilateral arrangements and the coordinating and proactive role of the Commission hardly conforms to the Moravscikian model. And even if one were to apply what one might call the Moravscikian 'logic' to the 'enlargement grand bargains' over the past decade – the European Council Summits at Copenhagen (1993), Madrid (1995), Luxembourg (1997), Berlin (1998) and Helsinki (1999) – the outcomes evince not the decisive import of domestic interests and unchanging national preferences but rather an ongoing process characterized by member state uncertainty and a managerial role played by the European Commission.¹³

The Helsinki European Council is especially important in pointing to the flaws of the Moravscik argument. The European Council there decided to open the way for an inclusive enlargement (the so-called 'regatta option'). That this seemed contrary to the interests of not a few member states seems apparent. Of course, a key factor in the decision was the outcome of the

¹² A senior official of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin, in an interview, confirmed this to me, 26 October 1999. See also: *The Irish Times*, 31 July 2000.

¹³ For analysis of member state uncertainty regarding preferences see Friis, L. 1998, *op.cit.* For commentary on the Commission's role during the negotiations see: Avery and Cameron 1998. *Enlarging the European Union*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield. For a critique of the Commission's international entrepreneurial role see: Moravscik, A., 1999. "A New Statecraft? Supranational Entrepreneurs and International Cooperation", *International Organisation*, Volume 53, No.2, Spring 1999, pp.267-306.

Kosovo War in 1999. Thus the inclusion in the negotiation process of the second wave of CEE states (Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia as well as Turkey) should be viewed as a highly symbolic political act.¹⁴

A third criticism of Moravscik centers on his approach to theory. In a commentary on the recent special issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy*¹⁵ (September 1999) devoted to social constructivist approaches to European integration, Moravscik (1999b:669-681) asserts that without a theory of the interaction between ideas and interests, it is impossible to confirm or refute the views put forward in that volume. This is surely correct. Yet, one suspects that he is really seeking a theory that privileges a causal mechanism over a constitutive one. Like many a logical positivist, Moravscik sees the business of all science (natural and social) as causal explanation.

In sum, rationalism cannot provide us with answers to the key questions posed in the introduction. Whilst it might offer a plausible general explanation for the initial enlargement preferences of the main actors in the process (membership applications tabled by the CEE states; initial reluctance to engage by the EU), it cannot account for what appears after Helsinki to be a normatively determined outcome. This is what Schimmelfennig (op.cit) refers to as the "double puzzle" of EU enlargement. Part three of this paper will seek to unlock the secrets of this double puzzle, using a social constructivist approach.

Neofunctionalism and Enlargement

Neofunctionalism, standing apart from liberal intergovernmentalism but also crucially influential in the evolution of academic debate on the European construction, argues for a view of integration as an incremental and almost automatic process. This is fuelled by functional (economic) and political (from national to supranational) spillover, ultimately leading to a "transfer of loyalty" to the new center. Sovereignty effectively migrates to European level as a result of the conscious efforts of technocratic elites and

¹⁴ The Helsinki decisions could well be compared to that took by the European Council in 1977 to override the Commission's negative assessment of Greece's ability to meet the criteria for membership. The justification then (as now) revolved around ensuring political stability in the transition states and in a normative sense, encouraging the "we feeling" among the candidate countries.

¹⁵ Christiansen, T., Jorgensen, K.E., and Wiener, A. (eds.), "The Social Construction of Europe", Special Issue, *Journal of European Public Policy*, Volume 6, Number 4, September 1999.

underspecified processes of “globalization” which encourage the spillover mechanism described.

It seems that on certain important points, the early neofunctionalists got it right. For example, they managed to capture the profoundly social dimension to European integration. That ideational element it will be argued in part three has certainly been present throughout the enlargement process.

So what exactly does neofunctionalism have to offer? Deutsch and Haas depicted increased transnational exchange leading to the development of new communities and this might well be invoked with respect to post-Cold War Europe. Certainly, the density of economic, diplomatic, social, political and cultural exchange between the EU and the transition states has mushroomed since 1989. In tandem has emerged an institutional apparatus supporting the new relationships, which was prefigured in neofunctionalism. Whether it represents a new community, however, or even a natural extension by spillover of the existing EU remains to be seen: there is every reason to suppose that economic activity and political contact should be viewed as a natural result of re-established relations and starting from a very low base.

Another potential avenue for investigation relates to the role played in the enlargement process by the Union’s supranational institutions, principally the European Commission. Certainly it is true that neofunctionalism (especially the Haas-Lindberg axis) suggested a very dynamic and directorial role for the Commission. And with respect to enlargement it could well be argued that the Commission has played the sort of role envisaged by Haas and Lindberg. Initially charged with responsibility for coordinating financial aid to the transition states¹⁶, it has subsequently succeeded in greatly expanding its remit. That role is now explicitly political. Neofunctionalist analysis would suggest that the Commission has used the enlargement process as a means of enhancing its power within the structures of European governance. This would seem to support the arguments of Schmitter (1996) and Sandholtz and Sweet Stone (1998), that over time, national governments become less and less proactive within the integration process.

Member states, although theoretically (and constitutionally) the “drivers” of the enlargement process have tended in practice to delegate more and more power to the Commission. This may be seen in the Commission’s role in framing the enlargement agenda before key summit meetings and in the ongoing negotiation process with the applicant states. Of special importance have been the Opinions on the readiness of applicant

¹⁶ At the G-24 Summit at Paris in 1989 the Commission was asked to coordinate what would evolve into the PHARE aid programme. The programme expanded to include almost all states in CEE and later would become a key “pre-accession” instrument.

states to meet the requirements laid down by the *acquis communautaire*.¹⁷ Member states have taken their cues from the Commission on vital questions in key policy areas and this has decisively shaped the negotiation process¹⁸. Similarly, the applicant states have focused most of their attention on the Commission and looked to it as “guardian of the Treaties” to ensure fair play in the negotiation process. Therefore, a case could be made that member states have lost control of key parts of the process.

Dimitrova (1999:20-21) argues that the Commission has garnered control over the timing of the process and simultaneously acquired more independence from the member states by creating an “increasingly complex system for the evaluation of the progress of the candidates”.

Most recently the case for a neofunctionalist reading of the enlargement process has been made by Niemann (1998) who argues that the evolution of the PHARE programme represents an example of induced spillover. The concept holds that member states of a successful integration project may be obliged to work out a common external position *vis-à-vis* third countries and become increasingly reliant on the central institutions to do so. In the CEE case geographic proximity is cited as especially important along with the sheer speed of events in the early 1990s.¹⁹ In short, extra-Community factors induced European leaders to hammer out a common policy for implementation by the Commission. Niemann also cites functional spillover arising out of the economic diktats of the *acquis* and political spillover arising from the increasing political contacts between the EU and the applicant states (bureaucratic and political interpenetration).

Certainly PHARE has developed in a way that could not have been envisaged in the early stages of its existence. After Copenhagen (June 1993) it became much more explicitly political in its orientation and operationalization and concurrently significantly expanded its range of sectoral competencies.

At first glance then neofunctionalism appears quite attractive as an explanatory vehicle. But on closer inspection one can evince some familiar problems. First, one confronts the notion of spillover being predicated on *prior* programmatic approval among governments. However, one would be hard pressed in the case of the current enlargement round, to come up with evidence of such approval or agreement. The initial Association process

¹⁷ The Commission's Opinions on candidate countries' applications for EU membership can be found on the following website: www.europa.eu.int/comm/dg1a/agenda2000/en/opinions/opinions.htm

¹⁸ See: Lykke Friis, op.cit 1998b: on the negotiations leading up to the Luxembourg summit, December 1997.

¹⁹ Delors' phrase is worth recalling. He referred to 1989 as the “acceleration of history”.

was characterized as much by confusion and ad-hoc response as solid resolution on the part of the EU.

Second, the teleological nature of the claims made by neofunctionalists not just with respect to the enlargement process but also to the wider integration process must be considered. This “achilles heel” of neofunctionalist theory applies to arguments about the supposed “transfer of loyalties” to the new center. There is reason to doubt that this has occurred over many years of European integration, much less that it has begun in the CEE states. In fact, recent opinion polls in larger states such as Poland and Hungary suggest some hostility toward the EU²⁰.

Therefore, it is difficult at this juncture to make judgments. The rhetorical blandishments of CEE politicians should be treated with caution, given the evident desire to become part of the western club. For reasons related to security and economic prosperity the candidate states are desperate to join. Consequently, their commitment to deep levels of integration should be assessed in such terms. In no sense can we speak of a tangible transfer of loyalty, though other elements of the transition process might point to neofunctionalist outcomes.

Christopher Preston (1997) makes the point that there is another type of spillover to consider – spatial or geographic. EU policies spill over to neighbouring states (or what Christiansen et al 2000 – term the EU’s “near abroad”). A growing literature focuses on the “fuzzy borders” (ibid 2000) and “extension of governance boundaries” (Friis and Murphy 1999), but these arguments are not, as yet, well developed. As Dimitrova (1999) notes, they cannot explain why EU policies seem to spill over into certain countries but not into others.

In outlining the main theoretical approaches to European integration and applying their insights to the enlargement process this paper has responded to Schmitter’s call to address the theoretical vacuum on enlargement. It has outlined the strengths and weaknesses of existing approaches and highlighted their general inadequacy. The question then arises as to whether there exists an alternative explanatory framework that might present fertile ground for investigation. This paper will attempt to evaluate the utility of social constructivism with such a question in mind. But first, it seems necessary to engage in some analysis of social constructivism’s positioning within social science thought.

²⁰See: the *Eurobarometer* figures. No.52, April 2000..

Social Constructivism, Social Science and IR Theory

Within the discipline of International Relations (IR) and indeed the broader social sciences there exist many different branches of constructivist thought. In this respect, Steve Smith (1999) is correct to point out that “there is no such thing as a (single) social constructivist approach or theory”. The broad church seems to be defined more by its opposition to rationalist modes of thought than any identifiable and coherent approach to analysis.

As such constructivists find it difficult to converge around a plurality of theories, some of which seem more inclined toward rationalist deductive explanation (so-called ‘moderate’ or ‘thin’ constructivism) and others which seem fundamentally about normative understanding of intersubjective meaning and relationships (‘radical’ or ‘thick’ constructivism, sometimes understood as reflectivism).

Whereas rationalists are in the main concerned with explaining, constructivists attempt to ‘understand’ the world. Rationalists thus privilege causal relationships over constitutive ones. These seek to explain “how” or “why” rather than “account for”. In place of a unified, parsimonious rationalist theory constructivists offer a looser framework of understanding.

Across the social sciences the deductive-nomological model is predicated on an implicit ideal of perfect understanding. The world is knowable and can be analysed and explained systematically. Theories take the form of axiomatic explanatory models rather than contextual attempts at understanding. Accordingly, logical deduction and the classical “correspondence theory of truth” are the significant theoretical testers.

In contrast to the dominant deductive-nomological model, which emerged from logical positivism and reductionist notions of human behaviour, constructivism is posited on a rejection of this demarcation between the natural world and the human or social world. Indeed, most constructivist approaches seek some sort of understanding between the natural world and the human or social world. Alexander Wendt (1999) tries to understand “social kinds” and “natural kinds”. Nicholas Onuf (1989:59) points to a “world of our making” and suggests that social relations make or construct people into the kind of beings that we are.

Constructivists also tend to agree with Mjøset (1999) that even the “hardest” of social sciences require at least a degree of imagining or cognition which at heart are profoundly based on social meanings and understandings that govern how we live. In part three, I will argue that these cognitive understandings of what the European construction represents crucially

underpins attitudes to enlargement both in the applicant states and in the EU member states.

Social Constructivism and IR Theory

The term 'social constructivism' within IR dates back to Nicholas Onuf (1989). Alexander Wendt (op.cit), however, describes how a constructivist worldview underlines the classical international theories of Grotius, Kant and Hegel. He identifies this with the much-maligned inter-war 'idealist' school of IR.

Although one's substantive approach to constructivism (whether 'thick' or 'thin', closer to rationalism or reflectivism), largely determines what one considers the principle features of the approach, there is tacit agreement that what we are talking about amounts to more of an approach to social theory than an explicit theory of international life. Wendt (op.cit) calls his approach a 'social ontology'.

Following Wendt (ibid) I identify the defining characteristics of the constructivist approach as follows: first, that the structures of international life are primarily ideational and not exclusively material; and, second, that the contribution made by intersubjective shared meanings between purposive state actors decisively determines identities and interests in the international system. Wendt refers to this approach as "structural idealism" (in opposition to existing structural realist theories such as those of Waltz). In a similar vein, Ruggie's (1998) classic description of constructivism notes "that ideational factors have normative as well as instrumental dimensions". Emanuel Adler (1997) further suggests that:

Constructivism shows that even our more enduring institutions are based on collective understandings; that they are reified structures that were once upon a time conceived *ex nihilo* by human consciousness; and that these understandings were subsequently diffused and consolidated until they were taken for granted (Adler, 1997:322).

The importance for the above with respect to our enlargement argument is clear. In the broader sense, of course, it should be applied to the historically evolved process of European integration. The collective understandings that produced the early attempts to integrate were underpinned by a certain vision of this new community; from there the process of reification has continued. Diffusion and consolidation can readily be evinced. So too will argue with the enlargement process.

The tacit agreement on these key points should not disguise the very real differences that exist between the variegated branches of the constructivist

family. In many ways, Wendt, Ruggie and Adler are classic “bridge-builders”, attempting to navigate the chasm that exists between the rationalist and reflectivist traditions (and the theorists within constructivism who are drawn to one extreme or the other).

Strands of Constructivism

Ben Tonra's (2000:10-11) recent classification of constructivist approaches seems useful for navigational purposes. Firstly, those closest to scientific rationalism argue that state actors employ ideas and belief systems only as calculated instruments in the pursuit of predetermined preferences. This is surely problematic, however, given the fact that even neoliberal institutionalists concede at least *some* role for ideas in international life. Indeed, Steve Smith (1999:684) argues that in its dominant (North American) mode this branch of constructivism is much closer to the neoliberal wing of rationalism. In this sense, he rejects the attempts by Wendt and others at bridge building.

Moving slowly away from this extreme, another constructivist approach concedes the importance of material structures but argues that these are invested with powerful social meanings. It is these social meanings that become the focus of analysis – how and by who are they constructed and how and from what do they evolve? The significance of these social meanings is that they crucially influence actor behaviour. Expectations and norms thus inform actions (Tonra, *op.cit*:11).

Alternatively, perhaps it is possible that actors are indeed engaged in rational choice and rational action but that such choices and action include ideas and belief structures as subsidiary decision-making variables. Ideas in such a context provide focal points of action/decision, offer road maps of alternative policy options or establish world views that underpin foreign policy decisions (Tonra, *ibid*:11).

Finally, at the extreme margin of the continuum lies postmodernism and poststructuralism which posit the idea that there is in fact ‘no reality’, no ‘out there’. Instead, what is created is a particular kind of knowledge that defines and thereby creates the world that we think we see and in which we think we act. The proper role of the analyst is as ‘deconstructionist’. Building on a relativist philosophy of science and interpretivist sociology of knowledge, the methodology employed here is that of a genealogy of knowledge. This allows us to situate knowledge in its proper context, to relate it to the centres of power, which created it at that point in time, and to avoid according any knowledge a privileged position (Tonra *ibid*.:11). In the social and interpreted world in which (as postmodernists and poststructura-

lists see it) we live, only ideas matter and can be studied – international life as “ideas all the way down” (Adler, 1997). Some postmodernists, such as Baudrillard (1989) suggest that not just truth but reality itself is simply a linguistic convention. With respect to recent debates on European integration, interpretivists such as Diez (1999) who use concept such as ‘speech acts’ and ‘performative sentences’ to suggest that ideas cannot exist independently of discourse. In short, postmodernists treat the world as an effect of discourse from which we have no access to an objective reality. Within the constructivist family however these approaches have in recent times been increasingly marginalised; in effect as Guzzini (2000:155) suggests, poststructuralism has been “increasingly emptied of any intelligible meaning” and thus jettisoned in favour of what one might term ‘Wendtian scientific rigour’.

The differences between and among the different streams of thought are significant. Nevertheless all constructivist approaches share the basic claim that the “neo-neo” synthesis (and by implication most IR theory) is “undersocialized” in the sense that it pays insufficient attention to the ways in which international life are socially constructed. Constructivist writing is replete with buzzwords such as “socialization”, “social learning”, “deliberation”, “norm-governed” and “rule-governed” behaviour (Caporaso and Jupille 1999). As Jeffrey Checkel (2000) points out, a continuing problem in the effort to theorize social interaction relates to the fact that a lot of this research activity emphasizes end states where the process of socialization is complete. This is a particular challenge for constructivists who need to develop more sophisticated models of the interaction processes whereby interests may be subject to change. This brings us to a point where we need to consider three important relational issues. These are those of ontology and epistemology, agent and structure and, finally, interests and identity.

Ontology and Epistemology

Questions relating to ontology and epistemology must be central concerns of efforts at conceptualizing the world we inhabit. Social scientists take implicit positions based upon the assumptions they make regarding what kinds of things are to be found ‘out there’ and how they can be studied.

As we saw in part one the methodological individualism and inability to view structure (particularly institutional) in anything but a dependent systemic sense meant that rationalism has little to offer with respect to an overarching theory of enlargement. These features of rationalism thus presup-

pose a particularistic consideration of the role of ontology and epistemology in social science.

A starting point for constructivists is the effort to offer a social ontology in opposition to the positivist ontology of the rationalist camps. It is on this basis that Constructivists claim to offer a much deeper and fundamental understanding of the world by virtue of the attempt to properly conceptualise variables such as culture, cognition and ideas and relate them to the physical world.

The arguments about ontology and epistemology are crucial to an understanding of what divides the theoretical schools. Where rationalists like to subordinate ontology to epistemology, constructivists are much more concerned with problem rather than method. Checkel (1998) and Wendt (1999), in arguing for a problem rather than method-driven approach, suggest that IR theorists have been far too concerned with epistemology and neglected the nature of the problems encountered. This is especially problematic when social scientists are dealing with unobservables like the nature of the international system.

Of course the dominance of the deductive-nomological approach has meant that IR theory has had a distinct positivist slant. But in recent years post-positivist (or what Wendt terms anti-realist or anti-naturalist) positions have been advanced that have a different premise. At the thick end of constructivism, postmodernists and poststructuralists argue that a post-positivist epistemology is as necessary as a post-positivist ontology as theories quite literally "construct" the world.

On the question of epistemology, Wendt (1999:90) argues that both sides are in fact "tacit realists". Explicitly his epistemological position is a rationalist one. In other words the substantive differences lie in the domain of ontology. Wendt argues for a post-positivist ontology which privileges intersubjective interaction and shared social meanings. It is this that leads Smith to conclude that Wendt is in fact much closer to rationalist than reflectivist models.

This brings us to the question of contradiction in the formulation and expression of hypotheses centred on opposing ontological/epistemological stances. Is it possible to adhere to a positivist epistemology whilst arguing for a post-positivist or intersubjective ontology? Does that not lead to a distorted substantive position – the charge leveled at regime theorists within neoliberalism in the 1980s?

Wendt sees little problem in the putative contradiction. His position is defended on the grounds that it is much less deterministic. He distinguishes between 'natural kinds' and 'social kinds'. The latter he regards as constituted by people's ideas about the world. This he claims vitiates the subject-

object distinction upon which the causal theory of reference depends. Social kinds, dependent as they are on interlocking beliefs and concepts are, in fact, human inventions. In making the claim for a post-positivist ontology he suggests that we cannot study society in the same mechanistic, rule-governed way that we study nature; rather we should seek a “hermeneutical understanding of actors’ subjective interpretations and the social rules which constitute them”. Crucially, Wendt suggests that because both sides are “tacit realists” when it comes to their substantive research, epistemological issues are “relatively uninteresting”. Post-positivism “reminds us that what we see out there is conditioned by how we see it. Constitutive and interpretive processes are thus extremely important.

The key element here is the view of an intersubjective structural environment where agents interact with each other against a backdrop of shared understandings, collective (as well as individualist) intentionality and ongoing socialization processes. The European Union institutional environment is manifestly an example of such. Part three will return to this theme.

Agent and structure

In tandem with the ontological/epistemological question, the issue of the relationship between agent and structure arises. Wendt (1999:26) talks of the “cottage industry” that agent structure resolution has become in sociology and IR. Like the questions tackled in the previous section, theoretical assumptions regarding relative privileging of agent-structure relationships are of vital importance to the nature of the problems and questions encountered. Rationalists tend to privilege agents and relegate structural factors in international life to no more than a secondary and insignificant role.

For constructivists a major challenge relates to what determines change within the system. Neither agents nor structures can define the other but they must exist in a relationship of mutual constitution (Ruggie 1998, Tonra 2000, Wendt 1999). Neither unit of analysis – agent or structure – is reducible to the other and rendered “ontologically primitive” (Checkel 1998). In this way constructivists question the methodological individualism, which underpins much contemporary theorizing.

Most structural realists are in fact tacit reductionists in that they cannot see that structures have any transformative potential in international life. Taking their cue from neoclassical micro-economic theory they compare the international political system to an economic market, which is, according to Waltz “spontaneously generated and intended” (quoted in Wendt 1999:15-16). What constructivists like Wendt aim to do is to sweep away what they see as the false demarcation between unit (agent) and aggregate

(structure). The world in which states interact is one where enmeshment in social interactions produces a blurring of the divide. This means that one can argue for constitutive rather than causal theorizing and relationships.

Wendt argues that the idea of social structure constituting agents goes back at least to Hegel and Rousseau, both of whom argued that thought was intrinsically dependent on language. Postmodernists like Derrida and Foucault have extended this to argue that thought *actually is* language and discourse.

In the final analysis, constructivists must come down on the side of structural idealist explanations. International life is primarily (though not exclusively) about social rather than material life. This leads Wendt to hypothesize a "distribution of shared knowledge" as central to everyday interaction of states. This is taken to encompass all of the complex norms, institutions, rules and shared practices that international life involves. Shared knowledge impacts on not only state behavior but state interests as well. And structural change has the ability to redefine state interests also. Think here also of the European context. Again, part three will analyze the importance of such for the study of the enlargement process.

Identity and Interests

The resolution of the agent-structure problem allows us to move forward and consider the question of how identity and interests are constituted in international life. This is perhaps the most disputed issue between rationalists and constructivists. Wendt (1999: 36) describes the rationalist view of identity and interests as "fixed objects that are in some sense outside of social space and time. In the latter view, the production and reproduction of identities and interests is not going on, not at stake in social interaction". As Wendt suggests, it has become commonplace to position power and interest as almost interchangeable factors in opposition to ideas in international life. But interests are surely predicated at the level of individual consciousness in what ideas we have about what those interests might be. In the constructivist view, Wendt argues in contrast, actions continually produce and reproduce conceptions of self and other, and as such identities and interests are always "in process".

Constructivists must ask questions such as to what extent is foreign policy constructed or regulated by collective belief structures? Also, and crucially, to what extent is a state's foreign policy built upon the rational pursuit of preferences as opposed to (or in addition to) being defined through a particular narrative of identity? (Tonra 2000:9). How does our conceptual

framework allow for such “embedded practices” as belief, desire, culture and identity?

For Constructivists identity is the context from which national interests are divined and interpreted by policy makers. Identity does not determine foreign policy but it provides a contextual template for the determination and pursuit of national interests. It thus defines the framework from which policy choice ensues. Identity sets an agenda for policy makers – and delimits or defines the policy choices that are then initially available to them (Tonra 2000:12).

It is important to emphasise that such identities are not immutable. Benedict Andersen (1983) in his much quoted work has theorized the creation of ‘imagined communities’. The assumption of this study is that such communities can be re-imagined and are the subject of constant reproduction and evolution (norms, values, identities). Part three of this narrative will put the European Union under the microscope and ask whether the current enlargement round represents a fundamental ‘reimagining’ of the existing construction.

Social Constructivism and Enlargement

The final part of this paper will seek to apply insights from social constructivism to the EU’s current enlargement process in an attempt to address the concerns laid down in the introduction to this narrative. As such, a central concern will be to try to provide answers to Schimmelfennig’s “double puzzle”. Why is it that a process which in its early stages seemed characterised by overtly rational calculation and self-interested positions is now heading toward what appears to be a normatively determined outcome i.e. an open and inclusive accession negotiation?²¹ The social constructivist answers to this stem in the first instance from the normative aspect to enlargement. In short, enlargement has been at the heart of the EU’s identity and self-understanding from the beginning (Fierke and Wiener 1999:722). This is not to say, however, that the enlargement process has not seen member states pursuing national interests in a determined manner. Indeed, Schimmelfennig is correct in pointing to the difficulties this produced in the earlier stages of the accession process.

Despite the rhetorical blandishments of EU politicians in the wake of the heady days of 1989, the initial euphoria was soon tempered by a confluence of negative factors. First, the onset of recession in the EU, exacerbated by

²¹ See the Conclusions to the Helsinki European Council, *Bulletin of the European Communities*, No.12 of 1999. For a summary of the key decisions see: European Commission MEMO 00/6, Brussels, 8 February 2000.

the costs of German unification and the deflationary policies employed to meet the EMU convergence criteria meant that there was little political will to embrace the idea of an early enlargement. Almost in tandem, the Union found itself floundering in a sea of political acrimony as the Maastricht controversies dragged on. Thus, the EU's initial response to the CEE states was to deflect the question of widening and instead to give priority to deepening the existing Community; the Treaties of Maastricht (the Treaty on European Union) and Amsterdam said very little about enlargement. Indeed, it could be argued that the paradox of 1989 lay in its disadvantaging the CEE states because of its triggering of deeper West European integration in response to German unification.

Throughout the mid 1990s, growing concern about the direction of EU policy towards CEE manifested itself on a regular basis. Headlines such as "The EU Goes Cold on Enlargement" were not uncommon.²² These seemed representative of the lack of priority accorded enlargement in EU circles. A European Commission official is quoted at the time as saying: "the level of seriousness about enlargement is not minimal; it *simply does not exist*".²³ Although member states were supportive of the 'value of' and even 'moral duty' regarding enlargement in their public rhetoric, national positions, especially on market access for CEE goods and competition in the so-called 'sensitive industries' were indicative of an approach which would seem to confirm some of the 'neo-neo' propositions regarding expansion.

So how have we reached a point where enlargement now appears irreversible, dictates the agenda of an IGC and appears, after the Helsinki Summit to have resulted in a normative outcome?

In the first instance, the social constructivist focus on 'shared understandings' can be invoked. These understandings include not just a spatial conception of what constitutes (or should constitute) 'Europe' but also, crucially, ideas about common cultural traditions and historical experience, as well as the common evolution throughout Europe of distinctly Western constitutional and political principles.²⁴ And as Risse et al. (1999:154) suggest collective identity constructions concerning Europe typically refer to not just a common historical and religious experience but also a definite sense of what constitutes Europe's 'others'. These include not just territo-

²² The *Economist*, 25 October 1995. See also: "The EU as a Force for Instability in Eastern Europe", *European Journal*, Volume 3, No.10, July-August 1996; "EU Braced for Enlargement War", *Financial Times*, 14 July 1997; "Split Over Accession Candidates", *European Voice*, 2 October 1997; "New Battle Over EU Expansion", *European Voice*, 27 November 1997.

²³ Quoted by Lionel Barber, *Financial Times*, 16 November 1995.

²⁴ See: Ivan T. Berend, 1999. "The Future Enlargement of the European Union in a Historical Perspective", *European Review*, Volume 7, No.2, 1999, pp.175-181.

rially (USA, Russia) and culturally (USA, Islam) defined entities but also, crucially, the continent's own past of internecine conflict and bloody wars. Although 'culture' is a difficult concept for IR theorists to grapple with, constructivists argue that without common perceptions regarding these and other variables, enlargement could not and should not have been contemplated. These include the development and interpretation of the *acquis communautaire*, the criteria laid down at Copenhagen with respect to accession, the idea of the CEE 'return to Europe' as well as the EU's "self-styled logic" (Ginsberg 1989) of what it itself represents. I will argue that all of these correspond to the constructivist framework presented in part two, in that they are rooted in ideational conceptions of European integration, which crucially depend on human agreement for acceptance and understanding.

On the CEE side, this interpretation of the past led to the introduction of a key rhetorical device – the 'return to Europe'. The argument is one that was used by both the applicant states and the EU in different ways throughout the 1990s. For CEE statesmen the argument was deployed strategically almost immediately following the collapse of communism as a means of accelerating accession to the EU. Rationalists would argue that the 'return to Europe' is simply a linguistic convention, hollow and without real persuasive force, invented as a mechanism for advancing the CEE cause of EU membership by utility-seeking CEE states. There seems little doubt that CEE officials in pursuit of geopolitical security and economic prosperity have sought to use the construction in that way. However, a constructivist view would point to the extraordinary layers of history and cultural connection, which manifest themselves as intersubjective understandings of that common past with the implication of a natural 'right to accession' for the CEE states.

On the CEE side, of course, the argument is also presented as a 'moral imperative' for the EU. It appeals to a certain sense of West European 'shame' at the 'surrender' to Stalin at Yalta when the CEE states were cynically consigned to the Soviet sphere of influence and the ensuing oppression which that entailed.²⁵

I would argue that the 'moral imperative' argument has had a very significant impact and that this partly explains the normatively determined outcomes at Helsinki. Joschka Fischer, in his Humboldt University speech of 12 May 2000, spoke of enlargement not just as a "supreme national interest of Germany but also of the "moral duty" of the EU to quickly accept new

²⁵ On the question of the CEE discourse on the 'return to Europe' and the moral and strategic dimensions, see: Neumann, I., 1998. "European Identity, EU Expansion, and the Integration/Exclusion Nexus", *Alternatives* 23 (1998). Pp.397-416.

members from CEE. The European Commission, although technically a programme manager of the enlargement process frequently resorts, in its policy documents and public pronouncements, to the moral argument in its efforts to accelerate the negotiation process (Mayhew 1998, Schimmelfennig 1999). A clear example is to be found in the Commission's latest composite report on the Candidate Countries' progress in meeting the accession criteria. The document presents this enlargement as one with "an unprecedented political, historical and moral dimension".²⁶

But the 'moral imperative' argument of itself is hardly enough. If one were to consider though that it feeds off of, not just the outlined arguments with respect to historical contingency and politico-cultural compatibility, but also a certain EU self-perception then it becomes much more tenable. This self-understanding is rooted in ideas about what the European project represents and includes a complex mix of the following: opposition to antagonistic nationalism and irredentism (and the need to 'use' Europe to guard against these); a determination to overcome the terrible historical legacy of the twentieth century; as well as the supposedly 'rational' membership criteria laid down at Copenhagen.²⁷

Thus one can readily acknowledge the salience of the Fierke and Wiener (1999:722) argument that the *acquis* provides the normative basis for enlargement. The 'self-styled' logic at the heart of this approach is reflected in Jochka Fischer's assertion that "following the collapse of the Soviet Empire the EU had to open to the East, otherwise the very idea of European integration would have undermined itself and eventually self-destructed".²⁸

In their examination of NATO and EU enlargement, Fireke and Weiner (ibid.) engaged in an examination of 'norm construction' within both organisations which preceded the 'critical juncture' of the end of the Cold War. They identify a complex relationship between identity, norms and practices in a transformative climate. They also point to the CEE post-1989 search for recognition being met by a EU that could hardly have departed from the ideals it supposedly stood for throughout the entire period of the Cold War. Fischer's observation is reflective of just such a logic. Of central import to Fierke and Weiner is the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the significance of

²⁶ European Commission, 2000. Regular Reports from the Commission on Progress Towards Accession by Each of the Candidate Countries, Brussels, 8 November 2000. The Regular Reports can be found on the Commission's Website at http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report_11_00/index.htm

²⁷ These include the need for a functioning market economy, creditable and transparent democratic institutions and respect for minorities and fundamental human rights. See: Conclusions of the Presidency, Copenhagen Summit, *Bulletin of the European Union*, No.6, 1993.

²⁸ Jochka Fischer, "From Confederacy to Federation – Thoughts on the Finality of European Integration", Humboldt University, Berlin, 12 May 2000.

which lay “less in the force of the law than in constructing a moral obligation. The goal was to translate the promise of Helsinki into reality.

One could invoke a similar argument with respect to the Copenhagen criteria in that they represent not just the ‘rational’ basis for the incorporation of non-member states into the EU but also a cogent representation of the EU’s own self-identity. As such, once the criteria are laid down they cannot be departed from as the basis for acceptance.

This brings us to the issue of ‘rhetorical entrapment’ of the EU (Schimmelfennig 1999). The very acknowledgment that there exists a right to accession allied to promises of membership from the EU (even if insincerely meant and mechanisms for temporary appeasement) create a framework where over time the EU becomes ‘locked in’ to an accession process that for short-term economic and political reasons might prove difficult. As Schimmelfennig suggests:

The CEE state actors have based their claims to membership on the constitutive values and norms of the European international Community. They try to demonstrate that these values and norms oblige the EU to admit their states and that a failure to do so would be an act of disloyalty to, and lead to the decay of, the European international Community.

Somehow Schimmelfennig suggests the normative intersubjective environment at EU level impacted on member state behaviour and helped generate outcomes unexpected by rationalist models of analysis. He argues that though there might have been differences on commitment (speed, ranking of candidates, policy and institutional issues) no member state openly *opposed* enlargement; secondly, public statements were laced with the *normative rhetoric* of European values; and third, progress although incremental has *identifiably occurred* with a deepening of economic and political contacts and an ever deepening public commitment on the part of the EU to enlarge, from the ambiguity of Copenhagen (note the caveat that enlargement can occur ONLY if the EU does not in the process impede integration “the ability to absorb new members whilst maintaining momentum toward European integration”)²⁹ to the inclusivity of Helsinki. The arguments put forward in this paper would suggest that these observations are indeed correct

²⁹ See: Conclusions of the Presidency. Copenhagen, op.cit 1993.

Conclusions

The central concern of this paper has been the underspecification of enlargement in the theoretical literature on European integration. It was suggested that the existing models – particularly those that subscribe to rationalist social science positions – are unable to account for such crucial developments as enlargement's appearance on the EU agenda, the movement in preferences of key state actors throughout the process and the consolidation of the process at the Helsinki European Council summit. Rationalist theories, predicated as they are on methodological individualism and dogmatic micro-economic concepts are woefully "undersocialized" in their conceptualisation of the European institutional environment. As such, they cannot account for the evolution of the enlargement process which itself is rooted in not just a densely institutionalized politico-economic setting but is also crucially underscored by normative understandings of what the European construction is about.

The argument presented here is a constructivist one in that it is argued that social structures do indeed endow material structures with substantive meaning. The 'geopolitical earthquake' of 1989 and the long accession process that has followed have led to a fundamental 'reimagining' of what the European Union represents. It was argued that constructivism offers a deeper and fuller understandings of the historical and cultural templates that facilitated the 'return to Europe'.

The paper does not propose a new theory of integration based on insights from the evolution of the enlargement process. What it does is point to a new direction for integration studies with social constructivism posited as an enabling mechanism. That challenge, as the paper has demonstrated, is now being taken up by a broad range of constructivist theorists. The latitude derived from interpretivist perspectives, combined with the attempt to view the material and ideational worlds in terms of mutual constitution rather than isolation is viewed as particularly useful. Having said that, one is also well aware of the need for sound empirical work relating to key concepts. As such the Wendtian emphasis on scientific realism should not be ignored.

Accordingly, the constructivist reading of the EU's enlargement process to CEE stresses the importance of shared understandings of what the European project represents. The constitutive values of the European political order, reflecting a common collective identity and manifested in the Copenhagen criteria, represent the key building blocks for this enlargement round. This is not to deny the importance to existing member states of pursuing so-called rational national interests. But it does suggest that enlarge-

ment is much better understood within a constructivist rather than rationalist analytical framework.