

On the EU-US Rifts at the Southern Political Science Association's 77th Annual Conference

Getnet Tamene*

The Southern Political Science Association (further SPSA) is a professional organization of political scientists who recognize excellence in scholarship and public service through various ways including publishing the journal of politics, hosting an annual conference, and presenting awards for outstanding academic contributions. SPSA's national, parent organization is the American Political Science Association.

This year SPSA hosted its 77th annual conference. The Conference was held at the Buckhead InterContinental Hotel in Atlanta Georgia from January 5-7, 2006.¹ Like most SPSA's conferences, which were held in the past, this too was devoted to professional development and personal renewal of about 1000 attendees, who were offered an opportunity of customizing their participation by choosing from among hundreds of panels, choice of fine restaurants, and possibility of joining its growing number of committees and interest groups. Faculty and Graduate travel grants were available as well.

This year, the writer of this article has had an opportunity to take part in this prestigious Conference, on behalf of City University Bratislava/Vysoká škola manažmentu,² and on his own behalf. The first among the four papers, which were individually presented on the panel, entitled

* Getnet Tamene, is a lecturer in international relations, international public law, and international politics at City University, Bellevue USA and Vysoká škola manažmentu Bratislava, Slovak Republic. He has been a part time lecturer at the Trnava University's Faculty of law. He has led various groups of students to VIC several times for interactive discussions on issues related to international politics, international public law and international relations. He has also taught African studies and comparative politics to university students at the University of Sts. Cyril and Method in Trnava.

¹ I will take this opportunity to express thanks to Prof. George H. Cox, SPSA's Staff Executive Director, whose warm welcome and support accompanied me from the beginning to the end of the Conference. Needless to mention the professional discussion I enjoyed with Dr. Thomas Doleys, chair of EU panel, as well as the hospitality accorded to me enormously by Dr. Michael Tkacik, coordinator for international politics and colleagues from Texas.

² I am very grateful to Prof. MUDr. Brano Lichardus, DrSc., rector of City University/VŠM, for his significant involvement while I was preparing myself to take part on the SPSA's Conference, and later on for contributing valuable suggestions, while I was working on this article. The administrative staff of CU/VŠM Bratislava including Vice President Ján Rebro, Dean Scott Mason, and many of the Faculty members has been very helpful; without their support, the realization of my project would have been pretty harder.

European Union was mainly his contribution at this conference. The four papers, which were presented were namely: The Rifts between EU-US Relation and The Position of Central and Eastern Europe; secondly, How the Psychology of Elites Matter in the European Union – The Psychological Foundation of the Policy Assertiveness of the European Commission; thirdly, Europeanization and the Impact of Enlargement on Regional Governance in the European Union; and finally, How Does Institutional Design in International Organizations Matter for International Compliance? Empirical Evidence from the EU (you may as well discover the papers on the SPSA web site: www.spsa2006.net).

The first paper projects the rifts between EU-US relations and the position of Central and Eastern Europe (further CEE) with regard to the rifts. It argues that the collapse of the bipolar system in general and 9/11 in particular have been moving the European and the United States (further US) farther and farther apart in their level of relationships. Cracks between Europe–US relations have started showing after WW II but the relations got worsened in the post Cold War period. Partially because US suddenly developed a perception that old-fashioned Europe is a weaker partner in their relationships. Europe too no longer wanted to be a region protected by US. Besides, they differed in their problem solving approaches to various world problems. For instance, Europe upheld negotiations, refused war as “a continuation in the foreign affairs of politics by other means”. Probably, due to lessons acquired from the two World Wars it had started. All these have caused resentment, and have widened rifts between the two blocs today.

On the other hand, one can observe pretty strong basement of common values encompassing diverse aspects like civilization, culture, religion, democracy, capitalism and even racial affinity that would narrow the gap and strengthen the relations between the two sides of the Atlantic. Nevertheless, rifts are still deepening.

As the idea of Europe moves as quickly as the idea of an expanding European Union, it's most likely that the winner, in terms of commitment, belief and popularity, will be greater Europe. This reality exists to matter what US initiatives seem to pursue.

The Position of CEE with regard to the rifts appears to be strange and very difficult as their national interest is to have high quality relations with both sides of the Atlantic, and this doesn't seem to be feasible if the rifts keep on deepening. Latest developments show that significant portion of the CEE public remain critical to US Foreign Policy, for instance on the

Iraq crises. Also, there is a feeling that American oriented Parliamentary democracies are not showing a sign of decrease in the level of corruption (mafia, bribery, crime, unemployment, and the like, are usual news) in the region. Support for US policy and similarities of interest appear only at the level of governing elites.

In his seminal study of political and economic patterns of post-communist CEE societies, the author leans towards the notion that the strange position, which the region enjoys in the rifts, is colored with corruption. He also sees little reason that inter-party coalitions would be durable and contribute to political and economic stability in the region. As to now, however, most coalitions have failed to last more than a single election cycle due to weak and unconsolidated party system, which generate favorable conditions for corrupt exchange to develop within multiparty coalitions.

Corruption is, after all, an illegal activity that is practiced not under the public gaze, where politicians can be reasonably monitored, but behind a veil of secrecy, in the realm of politics to achieve what cannot be achieved visibly among rival party elites, thus, probably possible to secure invisibly, via corrupt exchange.

In general, the transformation of elite politics from disunity to consensual unity is of momentous historical importance in the political evolution of states and regimes. Democratization paradigms in particular regard the shift from 'politics-as-war' to 'politics-as-bargaining' within the political class as a critical hurdle all transitions face. Corrupt exchange contributes to this political transformation by fostering an elite instrumental unity and a demobilizing regime.

Although the bonds that unify elites are based on short-term payoffs and not on a fundamental political or value consensus, in the long term, instrumental elite unity can contribute to elite structural integration, or the development of overarching networks of influence and communication among elites. In the case of ethnic party elites regular interaction, can bring about common norms and values, which lead towards forging friendships, and dispelling stereotype hostilities. In this way, corruption can tame nationalism.

The consensus in international community, today, is that corruption is overwhelmingly harmful and must be eradicated; however, it is thriving in developing and transitioning societies. Inter-party elite corruption seems to stem from the allure of material rewards, in transitioning and developing pluralistic post-communist societies. The means and opportunities emanate, mainly,

from underdeveloped public institutions. In the literature of corruption, it is widely recognized that low levels of accountability and transparency, and the poor articulation and oversight between branches of government, creates fertile conditions for corruption to thrive. When institutions are weak and lack functionality, political elites enjoy greater autonomy, and such situations enhance corruption.

Besides presenting his paper, the writer of this article had attended as many panels as possible, and was engaged with his colleagues in the give and take process that made the SPSA's meetings very exciting. He was honored to be one of the only two overseas scholars, who won the Walter Beach Scholar Award for outstanding scholarly contribution. Moreover, City University Bratislava/VSM was adequately represented at this conference, and was properly appreciated abroad. Presumably, sharing such experiences and achievements would encourage those who have been working on various similar academic projects in a number of institutions elsewhere across the country to take part in conferences of the like.

The second paper elaborates how the psychology of elites matter in the European Union. It emphasizes the psychological foundation of the policy assertiveness of the European Commission and attempts to bring the psychology of elites into the literature on European integration. Although European integration has been an elite-driven process, according to the paper, the psychology of elites remains a neglected side of the story about the integration. The main claim of the paper is that the psychology characteristics of elites, who exercise a disproportionate degree of power in the process of integration, systematically affect integration processes and policy outcomes. In order to test this claim, the paper looks at how the psychological characteristics of individuals charged with running the European Commission, affect the institutional dynamism and policy assertiveness of this institution. Specifically, the paper examines the impacts of the leadership styles and psychological characteristic underlying these styles of the commissioners of the Prodi cabinet on the policy assertiveness of the Commission in different policy domains from 2000 to 2003. The results of multivariate analysis are promising; controlling institutional and structural variables, some of the psychological characteristics of the commissioners, like self-confidence and distrust of others, seem to have significantly affected the degree of policy assertiveness that the Commission displayed across different policy areas under the Prodi cabinet. The paper argues that variation in the psychological characteristics and leadership styles of the commissioners responsible for different

policy domains systematically affects variation in the policy assertiveness of the European commission in those domains.

In the third paper, the presenter elaborates Europeanization and the impact of enlargement on regional governance in the European Union. He puts weight on the capacity of EU member states to create and at the same time adjust the European norms, as a driving force for European integration. This capacity is either boosted or hampered by the institutional structures of those member states. Over the last fifty years, European integration and regionalism have altered the architecture of the general western European political order, creating new spaces above and below the nation-state. Indeed, the establishment of stable frontiers and the easing of relations among European States following WW II allowed the development of political spaces beyond the sacred idea of nation states. Developing regions meant strengthening democracy especially in countries such as Germany, Spain or Italy. More naturally, there has been a general movement towards regionalization and decentralization spreading all over Western Europe: the 'long march' of European regions seemed all set to move ahead. The emergence of the region or of a third level is a product of historical, cultural, political and institutional developments. Region is narrowly defined as territorial authority, situated directly below the central state level, which has its own political representation. A region may be more (or indeed less) than a political space but it is regions with identifiable political institutions—elected assemblies, executive institutions—performing a public role that are of interest there.

Europe is then seen as a polity with actors at multiple levels who interact directly with European institutions on matters within their competencies. There has been a dynamic interplay of interests at three levels, among regions, the EU and nation states—a triangular relationship incorporating Supranational Institutions—Member States – Regions. 'Europe of Regions' is a provocative idea which states that regions would become so powerful that they would ally with other regions eliminating the intermediary level of States where regions become super regions made of different regions. The accession of ten members with different legacies, cultures and political systems significantly impacts the whole relationship. These new Member States are still in transition and their governance structures have not yet reached a stable form. Conditionality and accession process provided incentives for the creation of new regional bodies and the creation of sub-national institutions. The creation of regional bodies is for instance necessary to administer

the EU regional aid funds. The EU has also advocated greater decentralization and regional development in what had been strongly centralized states under communism. The combination of these two incentives, including the prospect of large regional transfers after accession has provoked some large-scale decentralizing measures across CEE.

After defining region, the paper tries to find out whether there is a true level of regional government and how the EU integration affects regions. It argues that the accession of new members will significantly affect the regions governance in the EU. It also suggests a design to assess whether regions in new member states have a significant power in four new member states: Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Estonia.

The last paper presents how institutional design matters in international organizations for international compliance; it uses empirical evidences from the EU to prove the assumption. This paper brings into attention that the existing EU scholarship has recognized the importance of institutional design and the trade-offs involved in choosing among different institutional alternatives, the focus has been almost exclusively on trade-offs at policy making process, i.e., efficiency versus democratic legitimacy. The paper suggests that there is another type of trade-off, which is that of efficiency at policy making stage versus effectiveness at policy compliance stage. It underlines on the fact that efficiency concerns, the EU policy making process has become supra-nationalized, in which the individual member states' control over policy outcomes has diminished. It argues that with declining influence of individual member states, distance between optimal policy choices of the member states and actual policy outcomes that they are supposed to comply with has widened, which is likely to create defection incentives at compliance stage. The paper gives an empirical support for the implication of the thesis that states losing policy battle at policy making stage may take advantage of compliance to re-fight the battle.

This article has tried to bring into the attention of readers, the spirit of SPSA's Conference of 2006. The main mission of the article is projecting the papers, which were presented on the panel entitled the European Union, where the writer of this article too had taken part. His paper describes the position of CEE in light of the EU-US rifts. The position is perceived to be strange and difficult in terms of comprehensive foreign policy formation, and in terms of attaining political and economic stability in the whole region.

This strange position is colored with favorable conditions that enhance corruption and nationalism. One important factor for this drawback is the existence of a weak, and unconsolidated party system. The bonds that unify pluralistic party elites, in the region, though based on short-term payoffs, seem to cause political and economic stability; nevertheless, the behaviors of current coalitions never confirm this assumption. Weak internal party controls provide party elites with incentives to join coalition government because they will enjoy considerable discretion over the distribution of patronage and other state assets. Associated with this may be the danger of mafias in the region, which 'recognize money, and nothing else.'

Availability of disorganization is a fertile ground for corruption, and main cause for feeble coalitions that last at an average a year or single election cycle. Under this kind of situation, it is not just power that is at stake, but also the benefits that power may bring, i.e., control over the distribution of modernity itself.

Corrupt exchange among party elites seems to foster durable multiparty coalition government and, there by reduces the possibility of inter-party violence. This corrupt exchange, however, is attempting to cause a gradual demise to parliamentary democracy. It thus seems to be a central point, which needs the attention of those who heed parliamentary democracy and its significance to human polity.

In sum, this article has attempted to portray, among others, an overview of all the papers, which were presented on the panel entitled European Union. The theme of these papers is intrinsically intertwined and very coherent. These papers generated sensible interaction and intellectual discussion on the panel. The Rifts between EU-US Relation and The Position of CEE; How the Psychology of Elites Matter in the European Union – The Psychological Foundation of the Policy Assertiveness of the European Commission; Europeanization and the Impact of Enlargement on Regional Governance in the European Union; and How Does Institutional Design in International Organizations Matter for International Compliance? Empirical Evidence from the EU, were all insightful contributions, which have had an opportunity to appear on this year's SPSA's Conference.