

Central European University
Department of International Relations and European Studies

**From Bright Light to Blackout: The Changing Influence of the
Europeanization Paradigm on Foreign Policy and Transport and Energy
Infrastructure Policy in Bulgaria**

by
Gergana Dimitrova

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisor:
Béla Greskovits

Budapest, September 2008

Abstract

This dissertation presents a constructivist account of the dynamics of the europeanization process in Bulgaria. It focuses on the interpretive frameworks that structure policymakers' approach to the europeanization agenda, on the interplay between the rival policy discourses that shape these frameworks, and on the manner in which political actors employ the symbolic power of these discourses in the process of political mobilization.

On the basis of in-depth case studies of two important crisis periods in Bulgarian policymaking, I trace the mechanism through which the Europeanization approach that emerged as Bulgaria's dominant policy paradigm in the late 1990s has impacted on foreign policy and transport and energy infrastructure policy. The first crisis followed Bulgaria's involvement in the Kosovo conflict and was caused by the government's decision to support NATO's air war against Yugoslavia despite heightened domestic controversy. The other crisis was caused by Bulgaria's resistance against EU nuclear safety conditionality that envisaged the premature decommissioning of four allegedly unsafe nuclear units at the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant.

The Europeanization paradigm emerged as a two-sided construction that joined a grand project of identity transformation with a grand project of economic development and social welfare. During the Kosovo crisis, it was deployed as the dominant policymaking framework. The leadership's Europeanization-inspired foreign policy doctrine started out by defining Bulgaria's identity as non-Balkan and on this basis determined the national interest as an interest in demonstrating Euro-Atlantic solidarity, determined the policy outcome, and delegitimized alternative policy options and domestic resistance. During the Kozloduy crisis, the Europeanization paradigm failed to perform any of these functions and to influence the elite or the public. It was outperformed by a discourse focused on national interests, sovereignty, national dignity, and economic development/prosperity, all of which were equated with the nuclear energy industry. Neither strategic calculations nor economic rationality dominated policymaking during the two crises. What accounts for the divergent outcomes is the divergent ability of the Europeanization paradigm and its rivals to influence the interpretive frameworks that guided policymaking.

The dissertation analyzes the factors that account for the changing effectiveness of the Europeanization paradigm. The paradigm's decline was partly due to the declining importance of its 'identity' elements under the influence of the changing domestic and international ideological environments. During the Kozloduy crisis, the paradigm became vulnerable to challenges also due to its failure to keep its identity project and its developmental project connected. Political mobilization mattered, too. The policy influence of the Europeanization approach and its rivals depended on how skillfully their proponents utilized their symbolic power to enframe policy agendas and to produce hegemonic constructions of the national interest. The waning policy impact of the Europeanization paradigm also reflected its waning ability to respond to Bulgaria's international marginalization and domestic socio-economic crisis in order to recover Bulgarians' sense of collective self-esteem. It also reflected perceptions of the paradigm's growing incompatibility with Bulgaria's agenda of transport and energy infrastructure development.