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OSSERVATORIO ISPI-BOCCONI SULLE OPPORTUNITÀ GLOBALI

Polonia e Repubblica Ceca tra consolidamento democratico e instabilità politica:

L'impatto della chiusura dei negoziati di adesione all'UE

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Executive Summary

This work analyses the political impact of the accession negotiations' closure on the political stability of the candidate countries which are expected to join the EU on May 1st 2004 (Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic and Hungary). EU's enlargement has been seen as the only way to accomplish Europe's unification and to overcome its division. This involves a difficult process of economic, political and juridical transformation within the candidates.

Since 1989, the former Soviet satellites have considered EU membership as the only path to "return to Europe". To achieve this goal, they have been required to reface their political and economic system in order to progressively converge with the European standards. Therefore, EU membership is the outcome of a gradual process of "europeanisation" and "convergence" which has brought to a democratic transition in the former communist countries as well as to the establishment of a market economy. The EU has played a crucial role in the post communist countries' re-structuring, since the only prospect of membership induced candidates to re-model laws, institutions and regulations in a EU compatible fashion.

The candidates have been called to fulfil the EU criteria and this has been the *conditio sine qua non* for membership. Moreover, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the EU has been able to offer Eastern States a new institutional model. In this way, the European Union has contributed to ensure political stability in this area: the EU perspective has been a strong legitimising factor for making painful reforms acceptable for candidates' citizens and it has strengthened cohesiveness among the most important Eastern European parties sharing the EU integration target.

However, since the closing of the accession negotiations several candidates countries have been characterised by a certain political instability: therefore, a close relation seems to exist between the growing of domestic political conflicts and the end of negotiations at the Copenhagen European Council (December 2002). Since then, in fact, the attitude of the opposition parties has become more assertive and intransigent. This seems to hint that the

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EU's membership perspective can help boosting national cohesiveness: the ruling coalitions of the new Member States will presumably refocus their national agenda, giving priority to national issues (social policies, healthcare, education) and take measures that might not ease convergence within the EU.

In this work we look at the case of Poland and Czech Republic and the effects of the EU membership prospect on the democratic consolidation of their systems. Since the beginning of 2003, political instability in these countries has grown and this could be seen as a relevant effect of the accession negotiation closure. The election of Vaclav Klaus (February 2003), the candidate of the opposition party, as President of the Czech Republic, and the ruling coalition collapse in Poland (March 2003), have shown a new emerging wave of euro-scepticism and a weakening of the Governments led by heterogeneous coalitions, after the EU membership goal was reached. Therefore, the political instability of new Member States could represent a danger for the European integration success. Until now, the European membership perspective has guaranteed the democratic consolidation and promotion of economic development of the former communist states. Nevertheless, it has now lost much of its initial conditionality power and new conflicts within the acceding countries are possible.