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Frank Schimmelfennig

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The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union

Frank Schimmelfennig

Why did the European Union (EU) decide to expand to Central and Eastern Europe?¹ More precisely, since it is still uncertain when and under which conditions Eastern enlargement will actually take place, why did the EU open the accession process with the ten associated Central and Eastern European countries in March 1998 and start concrete accession negotiations with (only) five of them (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia)?² My analysis is embedded in the current “great debate” between rationalist and sociological or constructivist approaches to the study of international institutions in the international relations discipline.³

I begin my search for an explanation with (liberal) intergovernmentalism, the most prominent and promising rationalist account of the major turning points in the history of European integration. This perspective accounts plausibly for most of the enlargement preferences of the member states and explains why the association of Central and Eastern European countries to the European Community (EC) was the initial outcome of the bargaining process among them. It fails, however, to account for the Community’s decision to go beyond association and offer these countries full membership.

This puzzle is solved through a sociological perspective in which enlargement is understood as the expansion of international community. If the EU is conceived of

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1. I use *European Union (EU)* when referring to the organization in general or to current events and *European Community (EC)* when referring to the organization prior to 1994.

2. I do not deal here with the decision in December 1999 to extend the accession negotiations to the remaining five associated Central and Eastern European countries (formally opened in February 2000).

3. For a recent effort to take stock of these approaches, see Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1999.

as the organization of the European liberal community of states, its decision to open accession negotiations with five Central and Eastern European countries can be explained as the inclusion of those countries that have come to share its liberal values and norms.

The problem, then, is to explain how a rational outcome (association) based on egoistic preferences and relative bargaining power was turned into a normative one (enlargement). I propose “rhetorical action”—the strategic use of norm-based arguments—as the intervening mechanism. In an “institutional environment” like the EU, political actors are concerned about their reputation as members and about the legitimacy of their preferences and behavior. Actors who can justify their interests on the grounds of the community’s standard of legitimacy are therefore able to shame their opponents into norm-conforming behavior and to modify the collective outcome that would have resulted from constellations of interests and power alone.

How did rhetorical action intervene in the process of Eastern enlargement? Since its beginnings, European integration has been legitimated by the ideology of a pan-European community of liberal-democratic states. This ideology is reflected in the membership rules of the EU. Since the Central and Eastern European countries and their supporters in the Community did not possess sufficient material bargaining power to attain enlargement, they based their claims on the constitutive values and norms of the EU and exposed inconsistencies between, on the one hand, the EU’s standard of legitimacy, its past rhetoric, and its past treatment of applicant states and, on the other hand, its policy toward Central and Eastern Europe.

As a result, the opponents of a firm commitment to Eastern enlargement found themselves rhetorically entrapped. They could neither openly oppose nor threaten to veto enlargement without damaging their credibility as community members. With the support of the EC Commission’s proposal power and the Council presidencies of pro-enlargement member states, the initial objections of the Community therefore made way for a principled commitment to Eastern enlargement. This commitment gained in strength until the accession negotiations were opened and, because of its undisputed legitimacy, has been effectively shielded from the “fallout” of the tough bargaining on the institutional and policy reforms required for Eastern enlargement.

A Puzzle for Rationalist Intergovernmentalism

In *The Choice for Europe* and earlier works, Andrew Moravcsik adapted the basic assumptions and theoretical propositions of rationalist institutionalism to the study of European integration.⁴ He claims that liberal intergovernmentalism explains the “major turning points” in the history of European integration more convincingly than alternative theories. Although Moravcsik’s case studies deal almost exclusively

4. Moravcsik 1998 and 1993.

with issues of “deepening,” the successive “widenings” of the Community also qualify as “big decisions” in European integration and lend themselves to intergovernmentalist analysis.⁵

Moravcsik suggests a tripartite analysis of integration decisions: the formation of state preferences, the outcomes of interstate bargaining, and the choice of international institutions. His central claim is that state preferences and international outcomes emerge from distributional conflict and reflect patterns of bargaining power at the domestic and the international level: Whereas state preferences in European integration are chiefly determined by international interdependence, opportunities for international economic exchange, and the dominant economic interests in national society, substantive integration outcomes result from hard bargaining among states.⁶ By contrast, I seek to show that, whereas the enlargement preferences of EU member states and the initial bargaining process largely conform to rationalist expectations, the international outcome—that is, the decision to enlarge the EU to Central and Eastern Europe—cannot be explained as the result of egoistic cost-benefit calculations and patterns of state preferences and power.

State Preferences

The decision to expand the EU to the East had two principal dimensions on which member state preferences diverged significantly. The first question was whether (and when) the EU should commit itself to Eastern enlargement in general. Simply stated, one group of member governments (the “drivers”) advocated an early and firm commitment to Eastern enlargement, whereas other member governments (the “brakemen”) were reticent and tried to put off the decision. The second issue concerned the selection of Central and Eastern European countries for accession negotiations. Here, one group of countries pushed for a limited (first) round of enlargement focusing on the Central European states; others favored an inclusive approach of “equal treatment” for all associated Central and Eastern European countries. Table 1 shows the distribution of these preferences among the member states.⁷

The distribution of enlargement preferences largely mirrors the *geographical position* of the member states. Except for Greece and Italy, the countries bordering on Central and Eastern Europe were the “drivers” of enlargement; except for Britain,

5. Given that enlargement is covered by the assent procedure, even Garrett and Tsebelis, who are otherwise critical of intergovernmentalism, concede that “it is reasonable to conceive of decision making in terms of the Luxembourg compromise period.” Garrett and Tsebelis 1996, 283.

6. Moravcsik 1998, 3–9, 26.

7. There is no room here for a detailed description of these preferences. My information is based on several largely mutually corroborative sources. See Friis and Murphy 1999, 225; Grabbe and Hughes 1998, 4–6; Holvêque 1998; and Institut für Europäische Politik 1998. In order to exclude effects of the negotiation process on the stated preferences as far as possible, preferences on the general commitment to enlargement were ascertained before 1993 (except for the 1995 entrants), and those on the inclusiveness of negotiations before 1997.

TABLE 1. *Member state preferences on enlargement*

	<i>Limited enlargement</i>	<i>Inclusive enlargement</i>
“Drivers”	Austria, Finland, Germany	Britain, Denmark, Sweden
“Brakemen”	Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands	France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain

the more remote countries were the “brakemen.” The countries of the “central region” of the EU preferred a limited (first round of) enlargement, whereas the northern countries, except Finland, and the southern countries favored a more inclusive approach.

The member states’ geographical position vis-à-vis Central and Eastern Europe can be understood as a proxy variable for, according to Moravcsik, “the imperatives induced by interdependence and, in particular, the . . . exogenous increase in opportunities for cross-border trade and capital movements” that should determine national preferences.⁸ First, it is reasonable to assume that, all else being equal, *international interdependence* increases with geographical proximity. Member states on the eastern border of the EU are more sensitive to developments in Central and Eastern Europe than the more remote member states.⁹ Crises and wars and economic and ecological deterioration in the region affect them more immediately and more strongly. Enlargement can be seen as an instrument to stabilize Central and Eastern Europe, to control the negative externalities of political and economic transformation in the East, and to expand the borders of the EU zone of peace and prosperity. Therefore, border states have a strong interest in enlargement.

Second, geographical proximity creates opportunities for economic gains from trade and investment, for instance, by reducing the costs of transport and communication. Member states close to Central and Eastern Europe therefore stand to gain more from economic exchange with the East than more distant states. This is roughly reflected in the member states’ shares of EU trade with Central and Eastern Europe as compared to their shares of EU economic output (Table 2). All member states with a disproportionately high share in exports (Austria, Germany, and Finland) are border states; all member states with a disproportionately low share (Britain, Ireland, France, Portugal, and Spain) are not. We can further assume that those countries that are closest to, and most highly involved in, the Central and Eastern European economies will also gain most from the membership of these countries (for example, through the further opening of markets and the better protection of their economic assets in the region).

8. Moravcsik 1998, 26.

9. On “sensitivity interdependence,” see Keohane and Nye 1977, 12–15.

TABLE 2. *Member state shares of EU exports to Central and Eastern European countries and EU economic output*

	<i>Export share</i>	<i>Output share</i>
Disproportionately high share in exports		
Germany	41.2%	27.4%
Austria	8.8%	2.7%
Finland	3.1%	1.5%
Roughly proportional share in exports		
Italy	16.1%	14.1%
Netherlands	4.5%	4.6%
Belgium/Luxembourg	3.8%	3.3%
Sweden	3.1%	2.9%
Denmark	2.0%	2.0%
Greece	1.4%	1.4%
Disproportionately low share in exports		
France	7.4%	17.8%
Britain	5.6%	13.4%
Spain	2.0%	6.8%
Ireland	0.6%	0.8%
Portugal	0.2%	1.3%

Note: A disproportionate share of trade is one that is 25 percent higher or lower than a country's share of the EU's economic output (my calculation is based on Eurostat data for GDP at market prices in 1996). For the shares in trade, see EU Trade in Goods with CEECs, *Weekly Europe Selected Statistics* 1047 (23 March 1998); data for 1996.

Finally, in light of this argument, member states should be most interested in the membership of those countries with which they share a border or are in close proximity. This explains why member states in the center of the EU were content with the Commission's proposal to limit accession talks to the Central European candidates (plus Estonia), whereas others wanted the talks to be more inclusive. It is also small wonder that France, Greece, and Italy, all southern states, gave their special support to Bulgaria and Romania, southeastern candidates; whereas Denmark and Sweden, northern states, most strongly advocated the cause of the Baltic states, the northernmost of the Central and Eastern European applicants.

The divergent state preferences are not fully explained, however, by different levels of gains from the control of negative and the exploitation of positive interdependence with Central and Eastern Europe through enlargement. In this case we would only see different degrees of enthusiasm for, but no opposition to, the EU's commitment to Eastern enlargement. To explain why most member states, including the border countries of Italy and Greece, played the role of "brakemen" in the enlargement process, potential losses from enlargement must be included in the analysis. The unequal distribution of these losses results mainly from differences in *socioeconomic structure* among the EU member countries.

Eastern enlargement threatens to create particularly high costs for the poorer, less developed, and more agricultural members. These costs result from trade and budgetary competition. First, because “less developed” member states specialize in the same traditional and resource-intensive industries (such as agriculture, textiles and leather, and metalworking) as countries in Central and Eastern Europe, they are likely to be more adversely affected by trade integration than more highly developed countries.¹⁰ And though rich border countries will, in turn, face migration pressures because of geographical proximity, high unemployment in the East, and high wage differentials,¹¹ in the history of the Community the movement of labor has been more strongly restricted and much lower than the movement of goods and capital.

Second, all Central and Eastern European members will become structural net recipients. For the foreseeable future, EU transfers to these countries will outweigh by far their contributions to the Community budget. Moreover, Eastern enlargement will seriously affect the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the structural policies that together comprise around 80 percent of the Community budget. According to Stefan Tangermann, the Central and Eastern European candidates produce only 3 percent of the EU gross national product but possess 44 percent of the EU productive land and attain 30 percent of the EU agricultural production. He expects that agricultural production will increase rather than diminish as a result of economic recovery and that participation in the CAP will give countries in Central and Eastern Europe an additional incentive for agricultural production.¹² Furthermore, because of their low levels of wealth and income, these countries will benefit greatly from the structural funds. If these policies remained unchanged, the Community’s budget would have to increase by 20 percent to two-thirds of its current volume, depending on the scenario and the calculation.¹³ Analysts therefore agree that a reform of the CAP and the structural policies is an indispensable precondition of enlargement. Any reform, however, will inevitably lead to transfer reductions for EU farmers and to fewer regions eligible for financial support, and thus it will disproportionately affect the present main beneficiaries of the budget: Spain, Greece, Portugal, and Ireland. Correspondingly, all of them were among the brakemen and later challenged the Commission’s opinion that enlargement could be funded on the basis of the current budget limit.¹⁴

A final factor that probably has affected the enlargement preferences of the member states belongs to the “geopolitical interests,” according to Moravcsik’s categorization.¹⁵ Proximity and (asymmetrical) interdependence not only give rise to economic gains but also to *influence*. Therefore, the more remote member

10. Hagen 1996, 6–7.

11. Weise et al. 1997, 26.

12. Tangermann 1995, 485.

13. See, for example, Baldwin 1994, 161–79; Baldwin, Francois, and Portes 1997, 152–66; and Weise et al. 1997, 258.

14. *Financial Times*, 15 September 1997, 2; and Institut für Europäische Politik 1998.

15. Moravcsik 1998, 26–29.

states had reason to fear that future Central and Eastern European members would side with Germany and other border states in EU decision making and thereby cause a power shift in favor of Germany and the northeastern countries in general. This is the standard interpretation of French reluctance toward enlargement.¹⁶

Thus the northern border countries not only expected to reap the highest economic and security gains from enlargement but also were little affected by trade and budget competition with future Central and Eastern European members. By contrast, that Greece and Italy were among the brakemen despite their geographical location can be partly attributed to their specialization in traditional industries¹⁷ and, in the case of Greece, to concerns over budget competition. In addition, both countries were preoccupied more strongly with Mediterranean security than with the Central and Eastern European region. Italy feared that the EU's focus on Eastern enlargement would divert its attention and funding from the Mediterranean region,¹⁸ and Greece concentrated its efforts on the admission of Cyprus to the accession negotiations. The disincentives were highest for those states that could not expect any significant economic and security gains from enlargement but were likely to incur major costs from trade and budget competition (Portugal, Spain, and Ireland) or from a "geopolitical shift" of the Community (France). The Benelux countries fall somewhere in-between—in economic terms, they had neither much to lose nor much to gain from enlargement.

Only the British preferences obviously deviate from this structural pattern, since Central and Eastern Europe is neither geographically close nor economically important to Britain. The early and strong British commitment to enlargement is generally attributed to the "europhobia" of the Conservative governments. It appears to have been based on the calculation that an extensive "widening" of the Community would prevent its further "deepening" and might even dilute the achieved level of integration.¹⁹

In sum, no single factor explains the member states' enlargement preferences. The economic conditions emphasized by liberal intergovernmentalism go a long way in giving a plausible account of state preferences, but in some important cases (Italy, Britain, and probably France) geopolitical or ideological interests seem to have been decisive. At any rate, the divergent state preferences on enlargement are best understood as *individual* and *self-centered*. As rationalism would lead us to expect, they reflected egoistic calculations of, and conflict about, *national* welfare and security benefits or *national* attitudes to integration, not a collective "Community interest."

16. See, for example, Grabbe and Hughes 1998, 5; and Holvêque 1998, 515.

17. See Hagen 1996, 6 and the studies cited there.

18. Bardi 1996, 163–65.

19. See Hayward 1996, 148; and Grabbe and Hughes 1998, 5.

Intergovernmental Bargaining

In liberal intergovernmentalism the constellation of national preferences is the outcome of the first part and the starting point for the second part of the explanation of European integration. In the case of Eastern enlargement the member states were not only divided amongst themselves but, in the EC-12, the “drivers” were in a clear minority, with only Britain, Denmark, and Germany advocating an early and firm commitment of the EU to enlargement and a speedy preparation of the Community and the candidates for this event. According to intergovernmentalism, this situation did not necessarily block a decision to enlarge because intergovernmental bargaining intervened between the constellation of national preferences and the international policy outcome.²⁰

There are basically two ways in which a state that does not reap net benefits from enlargement can be made to agree to the admission of a new member. On the one hand, enlargement will be possible if the losers are fully compensated through side payments and other concessions by the winners and if these concessions do not exceed the winners’ benefits from enlargement. On the other hand, the losers will consent to enlargement if the winners are able to threaten them credibly with exclusion and if the losses of exclusion exceed the losses of enlargement. I argue, however, that neither the Central and Eastern European countries nor the “drivers” among the EU members possessed sufficient bargaining power to change the balance of costs and benefits for the “brakemen” in favor of Eastern enlargement.

Interdependence between East and West is highly asymmetrical in favor of the EU. For example, trade with the EU accounts for approximately 40–65 percent of the total trade of most Central and Eastern European countries,²¹ whereas trade with Central and Eastern Europe does not amount to more than 5 percent, on average, of the total external trade of EU members. Capital and foreign aid flow almost entirely from West to East. The Central and Eastern European countries therefore did not possess the bargaining power to make the reluctant majority of member states accept their bid to join the EU. On the one hand, the Central and Eastern European countries could not credibly threaten to close their markets to the West and thus deprive the EU of the benefits of trade integration. By shielding their economies from integration with the EU, Central and Eastern European countries would harm themselves more than the Community.

On the other hand, the governments of Central and Eastern Europe could not argue convincingly that, without the prospect of EU membership, their countries would become politically and economically unstable, threatening Western European security and welfare with illegal migration and organized crime.²² First, “self-inflicted chaos” is no credible bargaining strategy, because it is in the self-interest of the reform-minded governments in Central and Eastern Europe to develop stable

20. Moravcsik 1998, 60–66.

21. Eurostat data reported in *Weekly Europe Selected Statistics* 1037, 12 January 1998.

22. See, for instance, Kawecka-Wyrzykowska 1996, 97; and Saryusz-Wolski 1994, 24–25.

political and economic systems. Second, given its resources, why would the EU not be able to defend itself as efficiently against the spill-over of Eastern European instability as it has done so far? This analysis is corroborated by EU enlargement policy: Those countries that do not achieve internal stability on their own and export instability beyond their borders are the last in line for accession.

The EU's commitment to enlargement could still have resulted from the superior bargaining power of the "drivers" among the EU members. This was not the case, however, even though two of the most powerful members—Britain and Germany—were among the "drivers." On the one hand, they could not threaten the "brakemen" credibly with any attractive unilateral or coalitional alternatives (such as a northern-central European integration) because their preponderant interest is in EU integration. Even for Germany, clearly the greatest beneficiary of integration with the East, the economic (let alone political) stakes in the East are small compared to those in the EU.²³ This was a "suasion game," in game theory parlance, in which the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (and the pro-enlargement member states) had a dominant strategy of cooperating with whatever the "brakemen" saw in their best interests.²⁴

This situation explains the initial bargaining process between the EC and Central and Eastern Europe as well as its outcome: association. To begin with, the governments in Central and Eastern Europe, not the EC, raised the issue of Community membership and constantly pushed the member states for an explicit commitment to this goal. But in early 1990 the EC proposed to conclude association agreements without referring to, let alone promising, future membership. During the association negotiations, the EC did agree to a formula mentioning membership but only went so far as to recognize future membership as the associates', but not the Community's, "final objective."²⁵ The first agreements were concluded in December 1991 and went into force in February 1994.

Instrumental behavior and asymmetrical bargaining power also characterized the substantive negotiations about trade liberalization.²⁶ The EC offered the Central and Eastern European countries a fast and asymmetrical liberalization of trade in industrial products. However, it reserved protectionist "antidumping" and "safeguard" measures for itself and made an exception of exactly those sectors (agriculture, textiles, coal, iron, and steel) in which the Central and Eastern European economies were competitive.²⁷ Portugal blocked a further liberalization of trade in textiles, France vetoed any concession on beef, and Spain blocked agreement on

23. German trade with Central and Eastern Europe comes to 9 percent of its total trade, whereas its trade with the EU partners accounts for well over 50 percent (my calculation based on *Statistisches Bundesamt* 1998).

24. See Martin 1993, 104; and Zürn 1992, 209–11.

25. See Sedelmeier and Wallace 1996, 370; and Torreblanca 1997, 12.

26. For a comprehensive analysis of the EU's association policy in different sectoral domains, see Sedelmeier 1998.

27. See Mayhew 1998, 23; and Sedelmeier and Wallace 1996, 371.

steel trade, leading negotiations to the brink of breakdown.²⁸ As a result, Central and Eastern Europe ran into a permanent trade deficit with the Community.

Blocking tactics continued in later rounds of the association negotiations. For instance, differences of view over the safeguard clause and defense measures delayed the interim agreement with Bulgaria for more than half a year;²⁹ and Italy blocked the opening of association negotiations with Slovenia for almost a year between 1994 and 1995 and the signing of the agreement for more than six months between 1995 and 1996 because of problems resulting from the nationalization of Italian property in the 1950s.

Furthermore, the EC as a whole, and some of the reticent members in particular, used diverse *delaying tactics* to deflect the demands from the Central and Eastern European countries for full membership. On the one hand, they were offered alternative arrangements like French president Mitterrand's "European Confederation" or French prime minister Balladur's "Stability Pact" for Europe as well as several ideas of "membership light" (that is, excluding the more cost-intensive Community policies). On the other hand, the urgency of other issues (such as Maastricht or the 1995 enlargement round) has often provided a welcome opportunity to put Eastern enlargement on the end of the agenda.

Thus Central and Eastern Europe's initial bid to join the Community resulted in association, the applicants' acceptance of the highest level of cooperation the member states could agree on. This corresponds to the "Nash solution" in a suasion game. For the member states, association is an efficient, beneficial institutional solution for their relations with Central and Eastern Europe. The association regime enables the potential winners of integration to intensify their economic involvement in Central and Eastern European markets and, at the same time, protects the potential losers against the costs of trade and budget competition. Association allows the EU to protect the sectors in which it is particularly vulnerable to competition and denies Central and Eastern European countries the right to participate in EU decision making, the CAP, and the structural policies. Given the asymmetrical structures of material bargaining power, neither the "drivers" in the EU nor the Central and Eastern European countries were capable of turning association into enlargement. For both the Central and Eastern European countries and the pro-enlargement members of the EU, however, association was still preferable to a weaker or no institutionalized relationship.

From Association to Accession Negotiations

In a slow and incremental process the outcome of the first round of bargaining on Eastern enlargement was challenged and gradually revised. Almost immediately after the first association agreements had been signed, Commissioner Frans An-

28. See *Europe* (Agence Internationale d'Information pour la Presse, English edition) 5562, 7 September 1991, 8; *Europe* 5563, 9–10 September 1991, 9; and Torreblanca 1997, 40–41.

29. *Europe* 6079, 6 October 1993, 8.

driessen advocated a new strategy aimed at committing the Community to the goal of Eastern enlargement and preparing Central and Eastern Europe for this eventuality.³⁰ The Conclusions of the Presidency at the Lisbon Council (June 1992) mentioned that “The principle of a Union open to European states that aspire to full participation and who fulfill the conditions for membership is a fundamental element of the European construction,” but the member governments still kept to the formula that accession was something that “they [the Central and Eastern European countries] seek.”

In June 1993 the European Council agreed in Copenhagen “that the associated countries . . . shall become members of the European Union” and laid down the general conditions of admission.³¹ It did not, however, develop a strategy to prepare the associated countries for membership. This strategy was the subject of internal policy debate and negotiations throughout 1994. They resulted in a “pre-accession strategy,” a “structured relationship,” and a “White Paper” on the preparation of the Central and Eastern European countries for the internal market.

In spite of initial reluctance and subsequent incrementalism, the prospect of membership became more concrete with each decision-making step. At the Madrid European Council in December 1995, the heads of state and government asked “the Commission to expedite preparation of its opinions on the applications made” and “to take its evaluation of the effects of enlargement on Community policies further” so that accession negotiations with the Central and Eastern European countries could begin after the 1996–97 Intergovernmental Conference (IGC). These tasks were completed in the summer of 1997 when the Commission presented its “Agenda 2000” for policy reform as well as its “Opinions” on the ten applicant countries. In spite of the poor results of the IGC on institutional reform and strong interest group and member government opposition against Agenda 2000, accession negotiations with the first group of five countries began in March 1998.

This process cannot be explained by the structure of material bargaining power within the EU or between the EU and the Central and Eastern European countries. It also offers no evidence for the alternative mechanism that, in the absence of credible threats, the “drivers” offered the “brakemen” sufficiently sizeable concessions to turn them into winners of enlargement. The accession negotiations opened *before* the outcomes of the necessary policy reforms were even calculable because the IGC had left the crucial issues undecided. If anything, Agenda 2000 and the fierce opposition of the major net contributors to an expansion of the Community’s spending ceiling indicated that major financial compensation for the “brakemen” would not be forthcoming.

Of course, each member state still has the chance to veto the accession treaties in the end if it expects to incur net costs as a result of enlargement. Nevertheless, intergovernmental bargaining theory does not explain why the EU departed from the

30. Torreblanca 1997, 465–67.

31. European Council 1993.

association regime, embarked upon enlargement, and stuck to this policy in spite of a sluggish reform process. In sum, the divergent enlargement preferences of the Central and Eastern European states and the EC member states, the initial bargaining behavior of the “brakemen” within the Community, and association as the initial collective outcome conform to rationalist expectations. However, the incremental decision-making process, which began in 1992 and resulted in the opening of accession negotiations, is hardly reconcilable with either the process or the outcome predicted by rationalist intergovernmentalism. A solution to this puzzle therefore has to account for both the unexpected “enlargement” outcome and the process that upset the “association” equilibrium.

Explaining the Outcome: Sociological Institutionalism

Enlargement as the Expansion of International Community

Sociological institutionalist theories reject the basic metatheoretical and theoretical premises of (economic) rationalism.³² The central difference is ontological. Sociological institutionalists share a structuralist ontology according to which social phenomena “cannot be reduced to aggregations or consequences of individuals’ attributes or motives.”³³ Rather, the actors, their interests, and preferences must be endogenized, that is, analyzed and explained as the products of intersubjective structures and social interaction. Sociological institutionalists regard the international system as an institutional environment structured by intersubjective cognitions and norms.³⁴ Correspondingly, sociological institutionalists reject the assumption that international actors generally act egoistically and instrumentally. They view rationality as “constructed” or “context-bound”³⁵ and the actors as following a “logic of appropriateness.”³⁶

On the basis of these assumptions, sociological institutionalism posits that the goals and procedures of international organizations are more strongly determined by the standards of legitimacy and appropriateness of the international community to which they belong than by the utilitarian demand for efficient problem solving.³⁷ Consequently, states that share the collective identity of an international community

32. I use the term *sociological* in a generic sense for a variety of approaches in order to stress their departure from “economic” conceptions. Keohane distinguishes “rationalist” and “reflective” approaches; Ruggie draws the conceptual line between “neo-utilitarianism” and “social constructivism.” See Keohane 1988; and Ruggie 1998.

33. DiMaggio and Powell 1991, 8.

34. For the distinction between “technical” and “institutional” environments in organization theory, see Scott 1991, 167. For an application to the analysis of international organizations, see Weber 1994.

35. See DiMaggio 1998, 700; and Nee and Strang 1998, 706–707.

36. March and Olsen oppose this logic to the rationalist “logic of consequentiality.” March and Olsen 1989, 160–62.

37. See Katzenstein 1997, 12; Reus-Smit 1997, 569; and Weber 1994, 4–5, 32.

and adhere to its constitutive values and norms are also entitled to join its organizations.³⁸

The EU is the main organization of the European international community. It is based on a European and liberal collective identity. The belief in and adherence to liberal human rights are the fundamental beliefs and practices that constitute the community. They define legitimate statehood and rightful state action in the domestic as well as the international realm.³⁹ In the domestic sphere, the liberal principles of social and political order—social pluralism, the rule of law, democratic political participation and representation, private property, and a market-based economy—are derived from and justified by these liberal human rights. In the international sphere, the liberal order is characterized by the democratic peace⁴⁰ and multilateralism.⁴¹ Both institutions are based on liberal norms externalized from the domestic sphere. According to sociological institutionalism, then, we can hypothesize that the EU will be ready to admit any European state that reliably adheres to the liberal norms of domestic and international conduct.⁴²

Liberal Norms and Eastern Enlargement

The sociological conditions of enlargement closely correspond to those set up by the Community. Whereas Art. 237 of the original EEC Treaty accorded all *European states* the right to apply for membership, subsequent declarations and legal acts as well as Community practice have established several more precise prerequisites for a successful application.⁴³ First, the EU requires its members to be *democracies* that respect the *rule of law* and *human rights* (preambles to the Single European Act and the Treaty on European Union [TEU], Art. F and O TEU). Second, new members must conform to the Community principle of an *open-market economy with free competition* (Art. 3a EC Treaty). However, this principle offers members a lot of leeway regarding the degree of state involvement and intervention in the economy and does not specify any necessary level of economic development. Finally, new members must accept the entire *acquis communautaire*, that is, the entire body of EU law, as well as the *acquis politique* (mainly from the Common Foreign and Security Policy).

These general prerequisites have been reaffirmed with regard to Eastern enlargement. In June 1993 the European Council in Copenhagen explicitly established the accession of Central and Eastern European states as an EU objective, provided that they achieve “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law,

38. For similar arguments on security alliances, see Barnett 1996; and Risse-Kappen 1995.

39. Reus-Smit 1997, 558.

40. See, for example, Owen 1994.

41. See Ruggie 1993, 11; and Reus-Smit 1997, 577.

42. The requirement of being “European” restricts the liberal identity that is cosmopolitan in principle. The EU, however, follows a rather wide concept of “Europe” (Turkey, for example, is included) and refuses to clearly define where “Europe” ends.

43. Richter 1997. See also Michalski and Wallace 1992, 33–36.

human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities” and “the existence of a functioning market economy” as well as the ability to adopt the *acquis*. They must accept the aims of political, economic, and monetary union as stated in the TEU (but they do not have to meet the criteria of economic convergence required for joining the European monetary union).

If the sociological expectation is correct, the five Central and Eastern European countries selected for concrete accession talks in 1997 should, first, match the EU members and, second, distinguish themselves from the other five associated countries with regard to their compliance with the liberal norms that constitute the European international community. An analysis based on the Freedom House human rights indicators (Table 3) confirms this expectation to a very large degree. With the exception of Slovakia,⁴⁴ all associated countries are categorized as “free,” whereas all other Central and Eastern European countries were rated “partly free” or “not free.” Since all “free” Central and Eastern European countries are associated with the EU, a political system in which political human rights and civil liberties are guaranteed appears to be a sufficient (although not necessary) condition of association with the EU.⁴⁵

The more detailed figures reveal a distinction between the five countries that were invited to concrete accession talks and the other associated countries. First, all countries in the top group received the best rating for political rights (PR = 1) and the second-best rating for civil liberties (CL = 2), whereas Bulgaria, Latvia, Romania, and Slovakia scored only 2 for political rights and 2 or worse for civil liberties. Second, the top five countries rank highest with regard to their achievements of democratic and economic transition, as indicated by low values in the DEM and ECO columns of Table 3. Finally, the ratings for the invited countries match the ratings for current EU members. All EU members were rated 1 for political rights and 1 or 2 for civil liberties. (Only Greece scored 3 for civil liberties.) The sociological expectation is contradicted only by the fact that Lithuania was not invited to formal accession talks even though its record was as good as that of the first-rate candidates and the EU members.⁴⁶ According to the Commission’s “Opinions,” Lithuania’s comparatively poor economic capacity was the decisive factor.⁴⁷

To be sure, rationalist institutionalism would not expect the EU member states to be indifferent to the democratic credentials of the candidate countries and their adherence to the norms of peaceful conflict management and multilateralism. The admission of nonliberal countries to the EU would strongly increase the heterogeneity of the membership, the potential for serious intra-organizational conflict, and

44. Slovakia was rated “free” in 1994–95 and 1995–96 but downgraded in 1996–97.

45. Neither Romania nor Slovakia were “free” countries when they became associated with the EU.

46. A cross-check with Polity III data (last column in Table 3) reveals roughly the same picture including the observation that, on the basis of democratic merits, Lithuania rather than Estonia should have been invited to accession talks.

47. Commission 1997.

TABLE 3. *Data on the selection of Central and Eastern European countries for accession negotiations*

Country ^a	FI ^b	PR	CL	DEM	ECO	Polity
"In"						
Czech Republic	Free	1	2	1.38	1.88	10 (7)
Estonia	Free	1	2	2.06	2.13	8 (7)
Hungary	Free	1	2	1.44	1.63	10 (7)
Poland	Free	1	2	1.44	2.00	9 (6)
Slovenia	Free	1	2	1.88	2.38	10 (6)
"Pre-in"						
Bulgaria	Free	2	3	3.81	5.38	8 (7)
Latvia	Free	2	2	2.06	2.50	8 (1)
Lithuania	Free	1	2	2.06	2.50	10 (6)
Romania	Free	2	3	3.88	4.63	8 (1)
Slovakia	Partly free	2	4	3.81	3.38	7 (—)

Source: Freedom House data are from Karatnycky, Motyl, and Shor 1997.

Note: I chose the 1996–97 Freedom House data because they represent, by and large, the situation in the Central and Eastern and European countries shortly before the Commission prepared its Opinions on the candidates. FI is "freedom index," which is a combined measure of PR ("political rights") and CL ("civil liberties"). The "democracy" (DEM), and "economy" (ECO) ratings are specific to the organization's "Nations in Transit" evaluation. Freedom House ratings range from 1 (best) to 7 (worst). The "polity" column contains the 1996 "democracy" scores from the Polity IIIu database (all countries scored zero on the "autocracy" score); the highest possible score is 10. Numbers in parentheses are the number of years the country has continuously scored 8 or higher.

^aStatus as of 1997.

^bAbbreviations are defined in the note.

the costs of decision making.⁴⁸ In the rationalist perspective, however, a community of basic political values and norms is at best a necessary condition of enlargement. In the absence of net economic or security benefits, having common values and norms is not a positive incentive for expanding the organization. By contrast, in the sociological perspective, sharing a community of values and norms with outside states is both necessary and sufficient for their admission to the organization.

In sum, the sociological approach to enlargement gives a satisfactory correlational account of the main outcomes produced so far by the Eastern enlargement process. The available summary data on liberal democratic transformation in the Central and Eastern European region not only support the sociological explanation for why the EU is prepared to admit Central and Eastern European countries at all but also, to a large extent, how it differentiates between the candidate countries. Sociological institutionalism, however, must still provide a plausible account of the *process* that led to this outcome.

48. I thank the editors of *IO* for alerting me to this point.

Explaining the Process: Rhetorical Action

Any account of the EU's decision-making process on enlargement must be able to reconcile and causally link two apparently contradictory observations: self-interested state enlargement preferences based on mainly material conditions and an initial policy outcome that reflects the distribution of material bargaining power, on the one hand, and an eventual policy outcome based on the collective identity and the social norms of an international community, on the other. Insofar as liberal intergovernmentalism explains international policy outcomes as an effect of material bargaining power, it cannot account for the second observation. First, neither the incentive structure for the member states nor the structure of bargaining power changed in a way that could have brought about the policy change; second, liberal intergovernmentalism denies that collective identities and norms exert a decisive influence on policy outcomes. In contrast, sociological institutionalism cannot account for the national preferences and the initial bargaining behavior, insofar as it attributes state interests to internalized social identities and norms and the behavior of state actors to the conscious or habitualized choice of the appropriate action.⁴⁹

What we need to specify is a causal mechanism through which the EC's values and norms asserted themselves against self-interested national preferences and bargaining behavior. As suggested by the terminology of the "suasion game" that characterized the constellation of preferences and power between the proponents and the opponents of enlargement, some sort of moral appeal was needed to change the uncooperative strategy of the dominant actors. The mechanism I propose is "rhetorical action," that is, the strategic use of norm-based arguments.

Rhetorical Action

The causal mechanism of rhetorical action consists of several assumptions and causal steps. The assumptions are about agency and structure. Rhetorical action presupposes weakly socialized actors: On the one hand, the actors are assumed to belong to a community whose constitutive values and norms they share. This collective identity generates a general commitment to the community and a general interest in upholding and disseminating its values and norms. On the other hand, it is not expected that collective identity shapes concrete preferences. In specific decision-making situations, actors often develop and instrumentally pursue egoistic, material interests that compete with their commitment to the community values and norms. The causal mechanism of rhetorical action then describes how the actors are

49. For an overview of the normative and cognitive perspectives on institutional impact, see Scott 1995, 34–52.

brought to focus on their collective interests and honor their obligations as community members.⁵⁰

The medium of this influence is *legitimacy*. All polities have institutionalized a standard of political legitimacy that is based on the collective identity, the ideology, and the constitutive values and norms of the political community.⁵¹ The standard of legitimacy defines who belongs to the polity as well as the rights and duties of its members. It distinguishes rightful and improper ways of acquiring, transferring, and exercising political power, and it determines which political purposes and programs are desirable and permissible. In doing so, the standard allocates different degrees of legitimacy to the actors' political aspirations, preferences, and behaviors.

The weakly socialized actors assumed here, however, do not take the standard of legitimacy either for granted or as a moral imperative that directly motivates their goals and behaviors. They confront the standard of legitimacy as an *external institutional resource and constraint*.⁵² As such, it affects both the mode of interaction between political actors and their relative power over outcomes.

As for the mode of interaction, the legitimacy requirement allows and forces the actors to argue.⁵³ They are obliged to justify their political goals on the grounds of the institutionalized identity, values, and norms. In other words, the standard of legitimacy serves as a "warrant" or "backing" for the validity of arguments in political discourse.⁵⁴ Actors whose self-interested preferences are in line with the community norms have the opportunity to add cheap legitimacy to their position. They will argumentatively back up their selfish goals and delegitimize the position of their opponents. This strategic use of norm-based arguments in pursuit of one's self-interest is *rhetorical action*.⁵⁵

As for power over outcomes, in a community environment legitimacy strengthens the actors' bargaining position. By linking distributional conflict with the collective identity and the constitutive values and norms of the community, rhetorical action changes the structure of bargaining power in favor of those actors that possess and pursue preferences in line with, though not necessarily inspired by, the standard of legitimacy. Rhetorical action thereby has the potential to modify the collective

50. I thank the reviewers for helping me to clarify the theoretical relationship between collective identity and egoistic preferences on which my argument is based. For a similar perspective on the problem of compliance, see Shannon 2000.

51. For such standards in international society, see Gong 1984.

52. This corresponds to what Scott calls the "regulative" conception of institutions compared with the "normative" and "cognitive" conceptions. Scott 1995, 35–37, 50–51.

53. On arguing versus bargaining, see Elster 1992.

54. For use of the terms "warrants" and "backings," see Toulmin, Rieke, and Janik 1979.

55. Schimmelfennig 1995 and 1997. For a more general rhetorical perspective on political action, see Burns 1999; and Gusfield 1981. "Rhetorical" action differs from "communicative" action (Habermas 1981) insofar as rhetorical actors do not engage in a "cooperative search for truth" but seek to assert their own standpoint and "are not prepared to change their own beliefs or to be persuaded themselves by the 'better argument.'" Risse 2000, 8.

outcome that would have resulted from constellations of interests and power alone.⁵⁶

This argument still begs the question of why legitimacy and rhetorical action can have such powerful effects if actors have materially determined preferences that deviate from the institutionalized norms. In the regulative perspective on institutions, it is often assumed that actors comply with the rules in order to avoid coercive sanctions imposing potentially infinite costs on them. In the public choice perspective, political actors operate under the constraint that voters may not reelect them if they deviate from the standard of legitimacy. Both perspectives, however, do not capture the core of the compliance problem in international relations. On the one hand, the international system widely lacks a central authority structure that could enforce compliance. On the other hand, most international political issues are exempt from the reelection constraint either because the voters are not sufficiently informed about or interested in these issues or because they escape effective control by national constituencies and legislatures. These conditions also apply to Eastern enlargement of the EU. First, although the consolidated liberal-democratic Central and Eastern European countries were entitled to membership according to EU norms and rules, there was no way to legally, let alone coercively, enforce this right. Second, no member government has had to fear electoral defeat if it opposed enlargement. Public support for Eastern enlargement has been low and has waned over time.⁵⁷

Informal, “soft” mechanisms of *social influence* provide an alternative explanation for compliance.⁵⁸ Shaming is a prominent example; it means the public exposure of illegitimate goals and behaviors.⁵⁹ To be effective, shaming requires that actors have declared their general support of the standard of legitimacy at an earlier point in time—either out of a sincere belief in its rightfulness or for instrumental reasons. When, in a specific situation, actors would prefer to deviate from the standard because it contradicts their self-interest, members of their community can shame them into compliance by exposing the inconsistency between their declarations and their current behavior. Members that sincerely believe in the community norms but could not resist the temptation of self-interested behavior will feel genuinely ashamed and will change their behavior in order to straighten things out with themselves. Even members that have supported a norm for mainly instrumental reasons will be concerned with what the public exposure of their illegitimate preferences and behavior will do to their standing and reputation in the community.

56. On the effects of norms on collective wage bargaining, see Elster 1989b, 215.

57. See *Standard Eurobarometer* 38/1992, fig. 5.2; 42/1994, fig. 6.2; and 45/1996, figs. 4.4 and 4.5. Only the admission of Hungary and Poland gained the support of more than half of those asked in the member countries. Interestingly, public skepticism in such pro-enlargement countries as Austria and Germany is among the highest in the entire EU.

58. For an overview of such mechanisms and the relevant literature, see Johnston 1999.

59. See Johnston 1999, 21. For an application on the European human rights regime, see Moravcsik 1995.

Of course, the shamed actors also use rhetorical action in order to avoid or reduce the costs of conforming to the standard of legitimacy. They may, for instance, downplay community values and norms or reinterpret them to their advantage, question their relevance in the given context, or bring up competing community values and norms that support their own preferences. There are, however, limits to strategic manipulation. First, to the extent that the standard of legitimacy is clearly and unambiguously defined as well as internally consistent, it becomes difficult to rhetorically circumvent its practical implications.⁶⁰ Second, actors must be careful not to lose their credibility as community members when manipulating social values and norms.⁶¹ Above all, they must avoid creating the impression that they use values and norms cynically and inconsistently. The requirement of consistency applies both to the match between arguments and actions and to the match between arguments used at different times and in different contexts. If inconsistency is publicly exposed, credibility and reputation suffer. According to Jon Elster, the “joint impact of the constraints of impartiality and consistency can be considerable.”⁶² Thus, even if community members only use the standard of legitimacy opportunistically to advance their self-interest, they can become entrapped by their arguments and obliged to behave as if they had taken them seriously.

Like other mechanisms of social influence, rhetorical action and shaming do not fit either rationalism or constructivism neatly. On the one hand, rhetorical action would not be effective if the actors were not concerned with their credibility and legitimacy as community members, and they would not be concerned if they did not, to some extent, identify themselves and link their political existence with the community.⁶³ On the other hand, shaming would not be necessary if the intersubjective structure determined their interests and behavior as a result of internalization and habitualization. The shaming mechanism is not only compatible with but also logically depends on the assumptions that actors possess and pursue selfish, norm-violating interests and that they do not follow a “logic of appropriateness” except under social pressure. Finally, shaming through rhetorical action does not equal persuasion. The actors under social pressure (usually) do not change their interests; they only refrain from illegitimate behavior. Successful rhetorical action silences the opposition to, without bringing about a substantive consensus on, a norm-conforming policy.⁶⁴

I conclude this section with a methodological note. The rhetorical analysis of the decision-making process that brought about the commitment to enlarge the EU to the East will naturally be based on speech acts. In a situation in which direct, reliable historical sources on this process will not be accessible for a long time, rhetorical analysis has the advantage of being able to draw on an abundance of publicly

60. Franck 1990, 49.

61. Elster 1989a, 100, 103, and 1992, 19.

62. Elster 1992, 19.

63. Johnston 1999, 22.

64. I thank one of the reviewers for suggesting the term *silencing* to me.

available data for the analysis of argumentative behavior, such as official documents, speeches, declarations, and statements at press conferences. Moreover, whether these sources reflect the “true motivations” of the actors is irrelevant for a rhetorical analysis. First, as I have argued, rhetorical action will affect community members regardless of whether they have internalized a norm or simply fear for their standing in the community. Second, whether or not political actors really mean what they say, they will choose their arguments strategically; and both opportunistic and truthful arguments have real consequences for their proponents and the outcome of the debate.

The disadvantage of this method is that I cannot adduce direct evidence for the psychological effects of rhetorical arguments and for the primacy of credibility and legitimacy concerns in bringing about the enlargement decision. Moreover, since “silencing” is the main postulated effect of rhetorical action, the *absence* of certain speech acts will often be its most important indicator. I do think, however, that the main observable features of the enlargement process are consistent with the mechanism of rhetorical action and that they “make sense” in a rhetorical perspective.

In the following sections, I seek to show that the Community has committed itself ideologically and institutionally to the integration of *all* European liberal societies from its beginnings and has continually confirmed this commitment in its rhetoric. This rhetorical commitment created the prerequisite for effective shaming during the enlargement process. The “drivers” among the member states as well as the associated Central and Eastern European states regularly justified their demands for enlargement on the grounds of this commitment and of the Community’s collective identity. These arguments effectively silenced any open opposition to Eastern enlargement and ensured that enlargement policy has remained on track in spite of difficult practical problems and major distributional conflict. Rhetorical commitment led to rhetorical entrapment.

Rhetorical Commitment

The “founding myth” of European integration starts with a definition of the European situation after World War II. Europe was devastated by the apocalypse of fascism and war, removed from the center of the international system, and threatened by Soviet communism. This development called for a break with the traditional pattern of European international politics: Only a union of the democratic European states could create lasting peace among them, strengthen their domestic as well as international ability to resist totalitarianism, and make Europe’s voice felt in international relations.⁶⁵ European integration was thus based on a pan-European, liberal, both antifascist and anticommunist ideology and identity. The federalist congresses of the late 1940s appealed to all European peoples, rejected the division

65. See, for example, Lipgens 1982, 44–57.

of the continent, and accepted integration in the West only as a core to be joined by the rest of Europe “in a free and peaceful community.”⁶⁶ During the Cold War, however, the Central and Eastern European peoples were represented only by politicians in exile, and the membership of the first organizations of the European international community—such as the Council of Europe and the European Coal and Steel Community—had to be limited to Western European countries.

When the European Economic Community (EEC) was founded in 1958, the pan-European vocation was still present in the treaty in which the founding states declared themselves “determined to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the *peoples of Europe*,” called “upon *the other peoples of Europe who share their ideal* to join in their efforts,”⁶⁷ and accorded “any European state” the right to apply for membership (Art. 237 EEC Treaty). It also surfaced regularly in ceremonial speeches of Community representatives, such as when, in 1968, Walter Hallstein, the first president of the Commission, invoked a “sentiment of pan-European solidarity”⁶⁸ or when, in 1980, French president Mitterrand (who was to become the most prominent enlargement skeptic among the European leaders) stated that “what we term Europe is a second-best option which alone cannot represent all European history, geography, and culture.”⁶⁹ At the policy level, however, the pan-European orientation all but disappeared from the agenda. During the Cold War, to uphold their pan-European vocation was a cheap opportunity for the EC and its member states to reaffirm their allegiance to the community ideology. At the same time, however, this reaffirmation created a public verbal commitment.⁷⁰

The end of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe was initially greeted with enthusiasm in the West, since it signaled the victory of liberalism in the inter-systemic conflict and promised to boost the West’s international and domestic legitimacy. In line with their community values and their past rhetoric, the heads of state and government of the EC declared at their Strasbourg summit of December 1989 that “The current changes and the prospects for development in Europe demonstrate the attraction which the political and economic model of Community Europe holds for many countries. The Community must live up to this expectation and these demands: its path lies not in withdrawal but in openness and cooperation, particularly with other European states. . . . The objective remains . . . that of overcoming the divisions of Europe.”⁷¹

At the same time, however, the Community’s pan-European ideology ceased to be a low-cost legitimacy-enhancing device because the new Central and Eastern

66. Resolution of the Congress of Montreux of the Union Européenne des Fédéralistes (UEF), August 1947. This resolution and others are collected in Schwarz 1980.

67. Preamble of the EEC Treaty (emphasis added).

68. Speech before the “European Movement,” 20 January 1968, quoted in Schwarz 1980, 415.

69. Quoted in Sedelmeier 2000.

70. On the role of Cold War “promises” in the enlargement process, see also Fierke 1999; and Fierke and Wiener 1999.

71. European Council 1989. See the Conclusions of the Rhodes summit (December 1988) and the Dublin summit (June 1990) for similar statements.

European governments demanded massive support for their transition to liberal democracy. More importantly, they interpreted “overcoming the divisions of Europe” as the promise of membership that was not explicitly mentioned in any of the EC’s post–Cold War declarations.

Rhetorical Argumentation

Both the Central and Eastern European states and the Western supporters of Eastern enlargement counted on the impact of rhetorical action in order to achieve their goal. The Central and Eastern European governments have based their claims to membership on the standard of legitimacy of the European international community: European identity and unity, liberal democracy, and multilateralism. They invoked the community’s membership rules and took its ritualized pan-European liberal commitment at face value. They tried to demonstrate that these values and norms obliged the EU to admit them and that failing to do so would be an act of disloyalty to the ideational foundations of the European international community. They uncovered inconsistencies between the constitutive values and the past rhetoric and practice of the EC, on the one hand, and their current behavior toward the Central and Eastern European countries, on the other hand. In doing so, they have managed to “mobilize” the institutionalized identity and to make enlargement an issue of credibility. Finally, in order to advance their individual interests in accession, they have sought to show not only that they share the community’s values and adhere to its norms, but also that they stand out from other candidates in this respect. Some typical examples for these rhetorical strategies follow.

Manipulating European identity. The manipulation of collective identity consists mainly in the claim by Central and Eastern European countries that they belong not only to geographical Europe but also to the (informal) European international community. This claim is then linked to the formal membership rules of the EU in order to back up their demand for accession. These states argue that they have traditionally shared the values and norms of European culture and civilization, have always aspired to belong to the West during the years of the “artificial” division of the continent, and have demonstrated their adherence to the European standard of legitimacy during and after the revolutions of 1989 to 1991.⁷²

Thus, the “return to Europe” has become the battle cry of almost all Central and Eastern European governments, including some improbable candidates. For example, Hungarian foreign minister Jeszenczky justified his country’s official request for EU membership as the “return to this Community to which it has always belonged.”⁷³ Romanian ambassador to the EU Ene also asserted that “Romania has

72. See also Neumann 1998.

73. *Europe* 6204, 6 April 1994, 3.

always been part of West European traditions,”⁷⁴ and even the head of a delegation of the Christian Democrat Union of Georgia visiting the European Parliament expressed that Georgia hopes to “return to Europe.”⁷⁵ In their competition for accession to Western organizations, the Central and Eastern European states, furthermore, combine the assertion of their own European identity with the claim “that the next state to the East is not European.”⁷⁶

Finally, state actors in Central and Eastern Europe manipulate the European identity and the West’s ritualized commitment to “overcoming the divisions of Europe” in order to get a better deal in their negotiations with the EU. The Polish chief negotiator in the association negotiations with the EC, Olechowski, stated that “the ‘technocratic approach’ is not enough in these negotiations, which have a historic goal: give Europe back to Poland, and Poland back to Europe.”⁷⁷ Correspondingly, the Western demonstration of its superior bargaining power in these negotiations was denounced as an “economic Yalta” or a “new economic Iron Curtain.”⁷⁸

Manipulating accession criteria. Given that criteria of economic performance and the self-interest of most member states speak against Eastern enlargement, Central and Eastern European governments have pointed to the constitutive values and norms of the Western community and the intentions “of the forefathers of European construction” to support their demand that the member states base their decisions on *political criteria* and a *long-term collective interest* in European peace, stability, and welfare.⁷⁹

On the basis of these criteria, Central and Eastern European states incessantly argue that they are, or will soon be, ready for Community membership. One representative of Hungary, for instance, claimed as early as 1990 that Hungary would be able to catch up with EC members within a few years; the Hungarian government has repeated this claim ever since.⁸⁰ In their race to membership, the candidate states furthermore seek to demonstrate their individual merits and achievements. The same Hungarian representative, for instance, pointed to Hungary’s “pioneering role in the changes in central and Eastern Europe.”⁸¹ Reportedly, at a meeting with the EC in 1992, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia “would have liked the joint statement to establish a clear distinction between themselves” and other candidates: “They do not believe Bulgaria and

74. Ene 1997.

75. *Europe* 6065, 16 September 1993, 5.

76. Neumann 1998, 406.

77. *Europe* 5456, 21 March 1991, 4.

78. Saryusz-Wolski 1994, 20–21.

79. See, for example, Saryusz-Wolski 1994, 23.

80. See Foreign Broadcast and Information Service (hereinafter *FBIS*) FBIS-EEU-90-081, 26 April 1990, 46; and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30 March 1999, 45.

81. FBIS-EEU-90-081, 26 April 1990, 46.

Romania are able to establish the same links with the EC as they do at this time.”⁸²

Moreover, Central and Eastern European actors have sought to counter the Western strategy of postponing a concrete commitment to Eastern enlargement and its demands for the full adoption of EU norms ahead of accession. To achieve early admission and, possibly, water down the stringent admission criteria, they have claimed that, in the absence of a concrete timetable for enlargement, the West risked the Central and Eastern European societies turning away from liberal democracy. Full membership was the only means of securing liberal transformation and economic modernization.⁸³ The scenario for the decay of pan-European liberalism and the betrayal of the Community’s founding myth was most dramatically outlined by Czech president Vaclav Havel when he spoke about enlargement in 1994 before the European Parliament: “Anything else would be a return to the times when European order was not a work of consensus but of violence. . . . For if the future European order does not emerge from a broadening European Union, based on the best European values and willing to defend and transmit them, the organization of the future could well fall into the hands of a cast of fools, fanatics, populists, and demagogues waiting for their chance and determined to promote the worst European traditions.”⁸⁴

Exposing inconsistencies. One of the most important rhetorical strategies of the Central and Eastern European states is to disclose failures of the EU to honor past commitments, match words and deeds, and treat outside countries consistently. State actors in Central and Eastern Europe have repeatedly pointed to the mismatch between *political declarations* such as the Strasbourg declaration and *actual behavior* like protectionism and stalling tactics concerning enlargement.⁸⁵

Moreover, policymakers in Central and Eastern Europe compare the EU’s Eastern policy with its *relations toward other nonmembers* and its behavior in *earlier rounds of enlargement* and demand equal treatment. In the association negotiations, the Central European governments argued that a future-membership clause had been included in the agreements with Greece and Turkey in the early 1960s.⁸⁶ According to Peter van Ham, “in particular, the Spanish and Portuguese precedents have been major trump cards which could be played by the Central Europeans.” Already in 1990, Hungarian foreign minister Kodolanyi argued that the Iberian enlargement “had been the result of a political settlement” (pushing economic problems in the background) and “that the Community would do the right thing now to take a similar

82. *Europe* 5827, 2 October 1992, 7.

83. See *Europe* 6204, 6 April 1994, 3; and Saryusz-Wolski 1994, 21.

84. *Europe Documents* (Agence Internationale d’Information pour la Presse, English ed.) 1874, 16 March 1994, 3.

85. Saryusz-Wolski 1994, 23.

86. Ham 1993, 198.

decision.”⁸⁷ After the EU committed itself to Eastern enlargement, Central and Eastern Europeans still suspected that the Community would “discriminate against the transitional countries” by imposing *economic* conditions that would need to be met *prior to* accession negotiations, whereas “both Mediterranean enlargements were characterized mainly by political motives,” and, in the earlier cases, the prerequisites of membership did not affect the initiation of negotiations.⁸⁸

These rhetorical strategies and arguments were echoed by the “drivers” among the member states and the Community institutions. In his 1990 Bruges speech German president Richard von Weizsäcker first recalled the founding myth of European integration and the ideas of Schuman and Monnet and then appealed to the Europeans to follow their example under the present conditions. Like Havel he argued that Europe was then and now faced with a clear set of alternatives: either integration or a return to nationalist and authoritarian destabilization.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the German government sought to de-emphasize its self-interest in enlargement. Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, for instance, asserted that “we don’t concern ourselves with these countries out of national interest. We feel we should take the opportunity to create a complete Europe.”⁹⁰ British prime minister Margaret Thatcher proposed in her 1990 Aspen speech that “the Community should declare unequivocally that it is ready to accept” the Central and Eastern European countries as members and based this claim on both identity and consistency: “We can’t say in one breath that they are part of Europe and in the next our European Community Club is so exclusive that we won’t admit them.”⁹¹

Furthermore, members of both the Commission and the European Parliament invoked the standard of legitimacy against the egoistic preferences of member states. First, they emphasized *collective identity*. Already during his first visit to Prague after the “velvet revolution,” Commissioner Frans Andriessen stated that “no one who has made the short journey between Brussels and Prague can be unaware that Czechoslovakia is our neighbour; its history is part of our history; its culture and traditions are part of our common European heritage.”⁹² Willy DeClerq, president of the Parliament’s Committee on External Economic Relations, criticized those blocking the association negotiations by saying “he would have thought . . . that the Community was going to treat the countries concerned ‘as European.’”⁹³

Second, on various occasions, Commission president Jacques Delors publicly exposed the inconsistency between the Community’s rhetoric and its practical behavior toward the Central and Eastern European countries. During the coup d’état

87. Ham 1993, 196.

88. Inotai 1998, 159. See also Kumar 1996, 54.

89. *Bulletin* 114 (27 September 1990):1193–1197.

90. *Business Week*, 3 February 1997, 18.

91. *Financial Times*, 6 August 1990, 3. However, she could not help enlisting the Central and Eastern European countries for her own agenda: “They have not thrown off central command and control in their own countries only to find them reincarnated in the European Community.”

92. *Europe* 5206, 3 March 1990, 5.

93. *Europe* 5566, 13 September 1991, 13.

in the Soviet Union in August 1991, he “launched a vigorous appeal to the Member States to show consistency between their actions and their statements.”⁹⁴ “It’s no good making fine speeches with a sob in your voice on Sunday and then on Monday opposing the trade concessions enabling those countries to sell their goods and improve their standards of living.”⁹⁵ He further warned that “the perspective of the next enlargement is not clear,” and that “it is not enough to send encouraging signals to the East European countries.”⁹⁶

Third, the supporters of a generous policy toward the East have repeatedly addressed the *credibility* issue directly in order to exert pressure on the “brakemen.” Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan affirmed that the blockage of association negotiations by some member states “could affect the Community’s “credibility.”⁹⁷ Similarly, the European Parliament requested in October 1993 that the European Council intervene to end the blockage of the interim agreement with Bulgaria because “it is undermining the European Community’s credibility in Eastern Europe.”⁹⁸

The most systematic and formal attempt to rhetorically commit the Community to Eastern enlargement can be found in the Commission’s report, entitled “Europe and the Challenge of Enlargement,” to the Lisbon summit in June 1992. Prepared shortly after the signing of the first Europe Agreements, it marked the starting point of the Commission’s attempt to turn the association “equilibrium” into a concrete promise and preparation for enlargement. The Commission referred to the Community’s vision of a pan-European liberal order as creating specific obligations in the current situation: “The Community has never been a closed club, and cannot now refuse the historic challenge to assume its continental responsibilities and contribute to the development of a political and economic order for the whole of Europe.”⁹⁹ By stating that “for the new democracies, Europe remains a powerful idea, signifying the fundamental values and aspirations which their peoples kept alive during long years of oppression,” the report obviously meant to shame those members who betrayed “Europe” out of their narrow self-interest.¹⁰⁰

Rhetorical Entrapment

What indications do we have that these arguments stuck, and how did they influence the decision-making process? The evidence suggests that the rhetorical action of the “drivers” did not change the basic enlargement preferences of the “brakemen” but effectively prevented them from openly opposing the goal of enlargement and its

94. *Europe* 5549, 21 August 1991, 2.

95. *Financial Times*, 21 August 1991, cited in Ham 1993, 198.

96. Cited in Torreblanca 1997, 14.

97. *Europe* 5564, 11 September 1991, 10.

98. *Europe* 6094, 27 October 1993, 10.

99. Commission 1992, 2.

100. Commission 1992, 8.

gradual implementation. In other words, the “brakemen” became rhetorically entrapped.¹⁰¹

For the enlargement skeptics, it was difficult to attack the pro-enlargement arguments on legitimate grounds. Generally, rhetorical actors possess three strategies for undermining the validity of an argument: They can dispute the warrant on which the argument rests, call into question the credibility of the proponent, or doubt the argumentative link between the warrant and the claim.

The “brakemen” could not and did not directly *dispute the warrant* of pan-European liberalism because this would have meant rejecting the very values and norms on which their membership in the Community rested and admitting the hypocrisy of their former public pronouncements. They could and did, however, base their reticence on other, potentially competing values and norms of the Community’s standard of legitimacy. The most widespread counterargument was that “widening” might dilute the achieved level of supranational integration and impede its further “deepening.” Since 1990, France had insisted that work on the Maastricht Treaty be completed before the Community dealt with the question of enlargement;¹⁰² and in September 1997 Belgium, France, and Italy stated in a declaration to be included in the Amsterdam Treaty that a further institutional reinforcement of the EU was an “indispensable condition of enlargement.”¹⁰³ However, while this norm-based counterargument might have compromised the British enlargement objectives, it did not affect Germany and the Commission, since both “drivers” had, from the start, demanded both widening and deepening.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, shaming obviously had already left its mark in 1997: The signatories of the declaration were careful to allay suspicion that they wanted to block enlargement, and other states hesitated to subscribe to the declaration because it might identify them as adversaries of Central and Eastern European membership.¹⁰⁵

The strategy of *destroying the proponents’ credibility* was of limited use, too. Although it may have been possible to call into question the liberal-democratic credentials of, say, the Meciar or Iliescu governments in Slovakia and Romania, the reputations of President Havel and President Walesa were beyond dispute. And, as I argued earlier, whereas it may have been possible to unmask the British advocacy of enlargement as an attempt to dilute the Community, the integrationist credentials of Germany or the Commission were difficult to undermine.

The strategy of *calling into question the suitability of the warrant to support the claim* would have consisted in denying that the candidate states truly belong to “Europe,” adhere to Community values, and fulfill the accession criteria. This

101. For examples of rhetorical entrapment in human rights debates, see also Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999.

102. Deubner 1999, 96.

103. *Europe* 7058, 15–16 September 1997, 2.

104. See, for example, Commission 1992, 2.

105. *Europe* 7058, 15–16 September 1997, 2.

strategy was credible with regard to those countries that delayed reform or deviated from liberal transformation, and it was certainly correct that the Central and Eastern European countries were not ready for membership in the early 1990s. But the “drivers” never intended to admit authoritarian countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Nor did they propose to begin accession negotiations immediately. Most importantly, the argument that these countries were not ready to join the EU did not preclude the EU from supporting their quest for membership early on. As Thatcher said in Aspen, “It will be some time before they are ready for membership; so we are offering them intermediate steps such as association agreements. But the option of eventual membership should be clearly, openly, and generously on the table.”¹⁰⁶ And the Commission argued that “we must respond with a strategy that is inspired not only by practical considerations of what is possible in the near future, but by a vision of the wider Europe which must be imagined and prepared in the longer term.”¹⁰⁷

Under these conditions, the “drivers” were able to silence any explicit opposition to the general goal of Eastern enlargement and to make the “brakemen” support the eventual membership of liberal-democratic countries in Central and Eastern Europe—at least verbally. On various occasions, the “drivers” confronted the “brakemen” with the choice of either publicly subscribing to or openly opposing a step toward Eastern enlargement. These steps were usually small or involved no immediate costs or obligations, making them more difficult to reject. However, with each small or general public commitment, the credibility costs of nonenlargement rose.

According to the memoirs of President Mitterrand’s adviser Védérine, Mitterrand considered himself in a morally awkward situation as long as he resisted the pressure of the German and the Central and Eastern European governments to consent to enlargement. Therefore, the French government felt obliged—in its 1991 bilateral treaties with Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland—to declare its official support to their membership aspirations.¹⁰⁸ Although France continued to obstruct any official commitment at the EC level, this move allowed Hungarian prime minister Antall to publicly raise French credibility stakes: “I have confidence in the French President’s word.”¹⁰⁹ Later, the French government felt compelled to soften its stance because it found itself accused of being the main obstacle to a pro-enlargement policy and feared losing the sympathies of the Central and Eastern European societies.¹¹⁰

Rhetorical entrapment worked similarly at the Community level. Here, the Commission, in particular Commissioners Andriessen and, later on, van den Broek,

106. *Financial Times*, 6 August 1990, 3.

107. Commission 1992, 8.

108. Védérine 1996, 562; and Deubner 1999, 96.

109. *Europe* 5568, 16–17 September 1991, 7.

110. See Kreile 1997, 236; and Sedelmeier 2000.

played the most active role.¹¹¹ Already during the association negotiations the Commission went beyond its directives by inserting into the preamble of the draft agreements that “in the view of the parties these agreements will help this objective,” that is, accession. However, none of the member states formally objected to this unauthorized move.¹¹² In a similar coup, the Commission’s report to the Lisbon summit “talked almost in a matter of fact way about accession as if it was already agreed as a common objective.”¹¹³ The fact that the report was simply attached to the Conclusions of the Presidency at the Lisbon Council, “barely discussed” at the Edinburgh summit in December of the same year, and “hardly discussed by the Member States and certainly not disputed in the many hours of discussion and negotiation leading up to the” Copenhagen summit indicates that silencing was effective.¹¹⁴

The Community’s commitment to the objective of enlargement and the “brakemen’s” consent in particular were certainly facilitated by the symbolic quality of this commitment at the beginning and by the expectation that it would not have to be honored for a long time. However, each concession to the membership aspirations of the Central and Eastern European countries, from the very reluctant acknowledgment of these aspirations in the Europe Agreements by way of the general agreement to expansion at the Copenhagen summit to the pre-accession preparations decided in Essen, created a stronger commitment to enlargement—even if it was meant to be nothing but a tactical concession to accommodate the Central and Eastern European states. Once the decision to enlarge was made, each further step toward preparing for the opening of accession negotiations was presented as a logical follow-up to this decision and difficult to oppose.

So the “brakemen” turned to the accompanying negotiations on treaty and policy reform in order to pursue their interests and retrieve some of their expected losses. This led to one of the most conspicuous features of the enlargement decision-making process; it is reflected in Alan Mayhew’s observation at various European Council summits that “while there was little discussion or dispute on the common objective of accession, the minor trade concessions proved very difficult to negotiate.”¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the enlargement process gathered momentum and was kept on track, although the process of internal reform was delayed and has not met the objective of preparing the EU for the accession of the Central and Eastern European countries neither at the intergovernmental conference leading to the Treaty of Amsterdam nor at the Berlin summit on Agenda 2000. As a result of rhetorical

111. The Commission was not united either on its enlargement advocacy nor on its selection of candidates for the first round of negotiations, but both Andriessen and van den Broek managed to gain a majority for their proposals in the college of Commissioners. Torreblanca 1997, 468; and author’s interview with member of van den Broek’s cabinet, 20 May 1999.

112. Sedelmeier 2000.

113. Mayhew 1998, 25.

114. *Ibid.*, 25–27.

115. *Ibid.*, 164.

entrapment, the policy of Eastern enlargement appears to be safely locked in and effectively shielded from the “fallout” of the tough bargaining on internal reforms.

Finally, liberal membership norms and rhetorical action played an important role in selecting which Central and Eastern European states would be considered for accession negotiations. In order to justify its differentiation among these states, the Commission made every effort to present its “Opinions” on the applicants as an objective, neutral application of the norm-based Copenhagen criteria, which left it “without a margin of political or geo-strategic assessment.”¹¹⁶ However, since the Commission’s proposal strongly favored the Central European countries, most northern and southern member states were not satisfied with it (see earlier discussion). In an effort to change this proposal, Denmark, Italy, and Sweden did not bring up their national interests but acted rhetorically. They put forward an impartial argument that was both suitable to cover up the divergent subregional interests of their coalition and justifiable on the basis of the Community’s values and norms: The EU should open accession negotiations with all associated countries at the same time to avoid creating a new division of Europe and discourage democratic consolidation in the candidate countries it turned away. Minister Dini (Italy) pointed to “the responsibilities” of the EU to the “countries excluded,” Minister Lund (Sweden) urged that they not “let the chance of establishing pan-European cooperation go by,” and Minister Petersen (Denmark) warned “not to create new frontiers.”¹¹⁷ In the analysis of Lykke Friis, these arguments gained support, not because of Italian-Scandinavian bargaining power but because they “appeared more legitimate. These countries were . . . able to link their frame back to the core of the EU’s self-image—the very fact that the EU has always presented itself as a club for all Europeans.”¹¹⁸ In the end the accession process was formally opened for all associated Central and Eastern European countries.

Conclusion

From the theoretical vantage point of the current debate in the international relations discipline between “rationalism” and “constructivism,” I have analyzed the decision of the EU to expand to Central and Eastern Europe. Both theoretical perspectives were found wanting in their “pure” form: Although rationalism can explain most actor preferences and much of their bargaining behavior, it fails to account for the collective decision for enlargement. Sociological institutionalism, in turn, can explain the outcome but not the input. To provide the missing link between egoistic preferences and a norm-conforming outcome, I introduced “rhetorical action,” the strategic use of norm-based arguments. In the institutional environment of the EU, the supporters of enlargement were able to justify their preferences on the grounds

116. *Europe* 7019, 18 July 1997, 9.

117. *Europe* 7021, 22–23 July 1997, 8–9.

118. Friis 1998, 7.

of the Community's traditional pan-European orientation and its liberal constitutive values and norms and to shame the "brakemen" into acquiescing in enlargement. By argumentatively "entrapping" the opponents of a firm EU commitment to Eastern enlargement, they brought about a collective outcome that would not have been expected given the constellation of power and interests.

Rhetorical action provides one way of disentangling rational choice and ontological materialism and theorizing the context conditions of strategic action, as suggested in recent reviews of the rationalism-constructivism debate.¹¹⁹ In the institutional environment of an international community, state actors can strategically use community identity, values, and norms to justify and advance their self-interest. However, strategic behavior is constrained by the constitutive ideas of the community and the actors' prior identification with them. Once caught in the community trap, they can be forced to honor identity- and value-based commitments in order to protect their credibility and reputation as community members.

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119. See, for example, Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 910; and DiMaggio 1998, 701.

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