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Measuring Sociopolitical Distances between EU Member States and Candidates:

A New Path

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Measuring Sociopolitical Distances between EU Member States and Candidates: A New Path

Kaloyan Haralampiev, Georgi Dimitrov and Stoycho P. Stoychev

Abstract

The next stages of EU integration in terms of deepening or in terms of enlargement imply the need for reliable knowledge about the compatibility of national cases either to enhance cohesion or to promote further Europeanization where it has been lagging so far. This is why measuring the sociopolitical differences between countries experiencing EU integration is a vital premise for maximizing the Union's capacity for enlargement. The cognitive challenge is to find a way to depict the national societies comprehensively, and in detail, whilst at the same time providing a basis for comparing the different countries. Arguably, the current approach of the European Commission has proved insufficient in providing strong analytical instruments to reflect the specific national contexts and potentials for European integration. In this paper we propose a new, complex quantitative approach to the problem based on cluster analysis of the indicators covered by the Open Society Catch Up Index over a period of four years from 2011 to 2014. The result of our analysis is a structural typology that splits the 35 European member and applicant countries into three sociopolitical clusters which do not coincide with the standard formulaic dichotomies regarding older member states (OMS) / new member states (NMS), Western / Eastern European countries and the like. Although the instrument registers some dynamics in time, the clusters remain stable. In order to illustrate the heuristics of the specially devised analytical instrument we carry out a comparison among four South-East European societies which are particularly significant from the point of view of the EU's enlargement policy. A detailed comparison shows that Bulgaria and Romania, which received a special, common conditionality treatment by the EC in the form of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM), are typologically similar. Croatia, which was spared the implementation of the CVM, outperforms the other three, while Turkey – which is still negotiating its EU accession – follows a unique development path, diametrically different from the rest. Therefore, we provide empirical support for the assumption that the EU should continue implementing a differentiated policy approach to the integration of the South-East European candidates.

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Contents

1. Introduction

Up to the fourth enlargement of the European Union (EU) integration through expansion was considered an overwhelming success story by policy-makers and analysts (Pridham 2002; Meyer-Ohlendorf 2006; Bureau of European Policy Advisers and the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs 2006; Noutcheva/Bechev 2008; Sedelmeier 2011; Phinnemore 2012). This process seems to justify the approach of the European Commission (EC) regarding a *sustained pattern of enlargement* coupled with some political innovations in each and every round of the enlargement (Phinnemore 2012, 2013; Papadimitriou/Gateva 2012). However, this regular pattern of enlargement is a product of political intuition, *ad hoc* analysis of the odds at the specific moment, and a trial and error approach rather than a well-planned strategy based on a strictly analytical methodology for assessment of the candidate countries' preparation process (Hughes et al. 2005; Grabbe 2006; Andreev 2009; Ivanov 2012; Dimitrov et al. 2014). The fifth enlargement is a divergent case because it encompassed the accession of Bulgaria and Romania but their membership proved to be inferior (Racoviţă 2011; Ganev 2012; Tanasoiu/Racoviţă 2012; Tanasoiu 2012), not least, according to the annual reports under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM).[1] The latter had to support the national governments in overcoming the deficiencies of rule of law in their societies. Yet its implementation ensured eight years of dubious progress at best and even some clear evidence of regression (Dimitrov et al. 2014; Toneva-Metodieva 2014; European Commission 2015). This unsatisfactory outcome implies the need for reevaluation of the EC's approach and a quest for enlargement policy alternatives. Within this framework of thought a key question becomes most pertinent: is the EU enlargement policy equipped with a powerful and reliable instrument for an assessment of the social potential for effective, not just nominal, EU membership of each and every national society? This is exactly where the methodological issues acquire policy relevance. Hence, the task we want to solve receives a three-fold specification – are we able, by using empirical quantitative evidence,

1 We are aware of the intense partisan debate among both politicians and academics over the inferiority of the Bulgarian and Romanian EU membership. As the works of the authors cited above (and many others – Kavrakova 2009; Papadimitriou/Gateva 2012; Phinnemore 2012), who are well acquainted with the empirical situation in the Bulgarian and Romanian societies, prove, accession to the EU did not translate into full-fledged membership not because of economic malperformance but because of structural flaws in the fundamental mechanisms of self-regulation of social life – namely, democracy guaranteeing responsible policy-making and the rule of law (Stanciulescu 2010; Smilov 2010). The superficial manifestation of these flaws is the systematic, endemic corruption in both societies which was not remedied by EC conditionality in the form of the CVM (Alegre/Ivanova/Denis-Smith 2009; Papadimitriou/Gateva 2012; Phinnemore 2012; Dimitrov et al. 2014). The latter was, as high level officials from the EC recently admitted, meant to be in use for a couple of years only to let the national government complete the unfinished far-reaching reforms. Those reforms did not occur and the situation worsened, especially in Bulgaria after 2013. Hence, the CVM is here to stay exactly because of its ineffectiveness. It is important to recall that the EC's report on progress under the CVM in 2012, which was supposed to provide an overall evaluation of the achievements up to that point, actually raised the issue of the reversibility of the results in both countries. (See both reports available at http://ec.europa.eu/cvm/docs/com_2012_411_en.pdf, http://ec.europa.eu/cvm/docs/com_2012_410_en.pdf, accessed on 29 July 2015). Essentially, as recent empirical studies have proven (Ágh 2015; Tomini 2015), Bulgaria and Romania appear to be just the avant-garde of a general tendency revealing the formality, shallowness and reversibility of the Europeanization of the latest EU enlargements. As will become evident from the analysis carried out by the new instrument, the political assessment contained in the EC's reports is actually correct – Bulgaria and Romania adhere more to the Western Balkan Countries (WBCs) than to the rest of the EU member states.

a) to prove the commensurability between the different social situations in different European countries while keeping control over their multidimensionality?

b) to track their transformations and the dynamics of their relations?

c) to make it possible for the EC to rely on something different than raw statistical data and the personal opinions of experts who are, on the one hand, to some extent biased and, on the other, have limited, one-sided (economic, political or legal) expertise?[2]

The present paper offers an answer to these questions by describing a new analytical instrument for assessment of the integrational potential of each European country.

2. Methodology of our analytical approach

Inspired by the 'thick description' approach (Geertz 1973) in social sciences and admitting that its overambitious program is unachievable in transnational comparisons we aim at comprehensive, detailed descriptions of the European societies that will help to draw up more relevant, case-specific EU policies. We assume that societies are not mere sets of numerous numeric factors but are specific systems of which the quantifiable facts of social life represent structural elements. The aim is to find a way *to rigorously compare systemic social entities using diversified, detailed and yet integral information which will allow us to measure the structural commensurability among the individual cases.* The latter task implies the necessity to

a) identify a structurally integrated entity of mutually dependent social elements/facts

and

b) measure the different levels of resemblance/differences of these systemic structures which would be representative of the social proximity/divergence of the respective national societies.

In our analysis we use the Open Society Catch Up Index[3] time series for the time frame from 2011 to

2 The current enlargement policy approach relies heavily on individual opinions of practitioners in the field which are used *without any clear and transparent methodology of interpretation*. While some of the indicators contained in our initial source of information, the Catch Up Index, (like the various Freedom House metrics, the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index, the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index and some of the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)) use 'expert evaluations' it is important to stress that *the methodology of expert evaluation analysis* is not a mechanical sum of individual opinions because it contains control tools and specific quantification techniques.

3 The index was first launched in 2011. For more details on its contents and specific methodology see http://www.thecatchupindex.eu/TheCatchUpIndex/. It goes without saying that our analysis could only benefit from a longer time series. Alas, the data for these four years is all we have at present. The four-year time interval is far too short to allow radical generalizations. Bearing in mind the unavoidable limitations of the validity of the research findings at this point, we aim to demonstrate only the heuristics of the analytical approach elaborated here. For this reason it is important to pay special attention to both the cases of persistence and of variations which are not random but socially meaningful as representative of respective systematic structures of the national societies. This is exactly why we cannot afford the use of other database sources with longer time record because these are monodimensional, i.e. they lack the most valuable methodological advantage of the Catch Up Index – its systematic complexity.

2014.[4] The major advantage of the index is that it is based on 47 *different empirical indicators* grouped in four dimensions: economy, quality of life, democracy and governance. More importantly, the values of these 47 indicators are obtained from various international official public sources with indisputable reputation such as Eurostat, the World Bank, the Economist Intelligence Unit, Transparency International, Freedom House, Reporters without Borders etc. They cover a large range of various economic, political and social characteristics of 35 EU member states, candidates for membership and potential candidates. Thus, we gain access to a large amount of primary quantitative information gathered in one place and coherent in nature because the author Marin Lesenski has re-calculated the initial data to make the values of the respective indicators commensurable with one another. Here we do not attempt to criticize the procedures used in creating the Catch Up Index, which could be a legitimate task for further advancement and refinement of this descriptive comparative instrument. We use its output as a mere data source for our analysis. We should make an important remark: we do not use the primary data but only the normalized scores calculated by Lesenski. The normalization of the primary indicators [in the range 0-100] provides comparable time series.

2.1. Cluster analysis with 34 indicators

Before we proceed with the analysis and the comparison of the countries of particular interest for the purposes of EU enlargement policy improvement, we ought to provide some brief clarifications. First of all, our major sociological assumption that national societies are systematically structured found empirical support based on the fact that a large number of the diversified variety of indicators in the four dimensions (economy, democracy, governance, quality of life) turned out to be mutually correlated. Out of the 47 indicators 34 proved to be of systemic quality and strongly correlate (we assume a strong correlation exists if Pearson $r \geq 0.665$). This is why we take only these as sufficiently representing the integrity of the respective national societies (notwithstanding the fact that other aspects of social life might be no less pertaining to the same system). This first finding allows us to reduce the number of primary indicators of the Catch Up Index. The reduction gives us two analytical benefits. First, we reduce the noise in the data by omitting all factors which do not cohere with the social system, i.e. which appear as arbitrary to the inner logic of the systematic social entity, and because of this any cross-country comparison based on them would be meaningless. Second, we simplify the future replication of the analysis by reducing the quantity of the input information.[5]

In the first step we take only those indicators that strongly correlate with the respective dimension and/or the overall index (Figure 1). We consider indicators weakly correlated with the end result as insignificant as it does not depend (or depends only slightly) on them and, therefore, we rule them out.

4 We took the data for 2011 and 2012 from the official webpage of the index. Data for 2013 and 2014 were kindly provided by Marin Lesenski, to whom we extend our gratitude.

5 The standard factor analysis is an alternative way for dimension reduction. Under this procedure we can reduce the space dimension by grouping the input indicators in latent factors. However, all input indicators remain (with different weights) in the latent factors. We reduce the dimensions by simply taking out part of the input indicators. Thus, the redundant measures are omitted completely and those remaining are preserved as they are without being incorporated into some abstract latent factor.

Figure 1: Reduction of the number of primary indicators

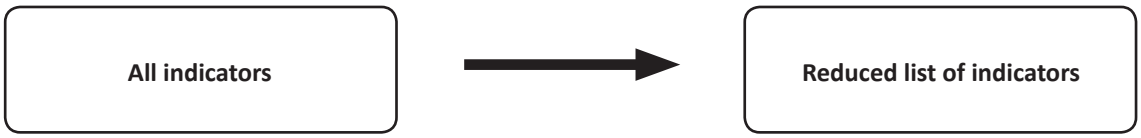


Table 1 (Appendix) presents 34 indicators that strongly correlate with the respective dimension and/or the overall index in at least three of the four years. It is quite telling by itself that among these we find very different indicators, such as employment as percentage of population (age group 15-64), trust in people, PISA scores, infant mortality by age of five, political instability, rule of law, e-government development, etc.

Having identified the important systematic characteristics of the national societies we proceed to the next step – measuring the typological similarity/divergence among the countries. For this goal we use an original methodological derivative of the standard cluster analysis.

However, 'cluster analysis' is a generic name for a number of particular procedures of operations, which are applied for obtaining homogeneous groups based on several quantitative variables. The point is to group the most similar observations (in this case – countries) in one cluster, while keeping dissimilar observations in other clusters. Thus we transform the social typological similarity/difference into a special proximity/distance. Since all variables are quantitative, each observation could be represented as a point in multidimensional space, therefore the proximity and remoteness between them could be measured in a systematic way. There are seven specific algorithms for hierarchical clusterization and one k-means algorithm for nonhierarchical clusterization which we use at the beginning.

Next we have to test the sustainability of the analytical results beyond the variations in the procedures, thus proving that the particular empirical result represents the quality of the subject matter studied but not an instrumental artefact. For this purpose we follow the analytical approach of Vicente and Reis (2007: 4-6). These authors have devised a testing procedure – first, they apply factor analysis to the input indicators and then clusterize the latent factors by means of four clustering procedures. Then, they compare the obtained results by referring to the contingency coefficient. As noted above, instead of factor analysis we use correlation analysis for the reduction of the initial set of indicators. This is why we apply only the second part of the cited approach and instead of four we compare the results of eight clustering procedures. The best matches are taken as 'best results' following the assumption that, if there is an objective reality approximately equally described by two – or more – different methods, these methods must be the right ones to provide realistic results.

The results suggest the exclusion of the nearest neighbor procedure since it clusters all countries in a single mega cluster and fails to split the population in homogeneous subgroups (it treats all countries as typologically homogeneous). All other seven algorithms (between-groups linkage, within-groups linkage, further neighbors, centroid clustering, median clustering, Ward's clustering and k-means clustering) show that there are three distinctive groups/types of countries.

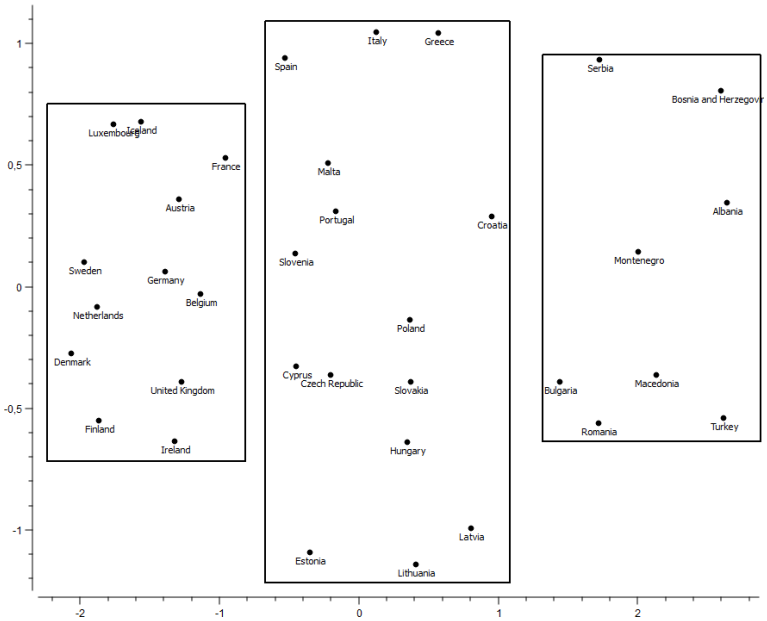
All these algorithms, when applied to the 2011 data, produce structurally identical results. This is why later on we use these seven clustering procedures remembering, however, that *the 'best result' is guaranteed by the structural identity of the analytical results of the application of two different algorithms.*

By using the 34 highly correlated indicators we identified three distinctive clusters of European countries in 2011. They are depicted in Figure 2 (A) by using multidimensional scaling with Torgerson initialization followed by optimization in Orange:

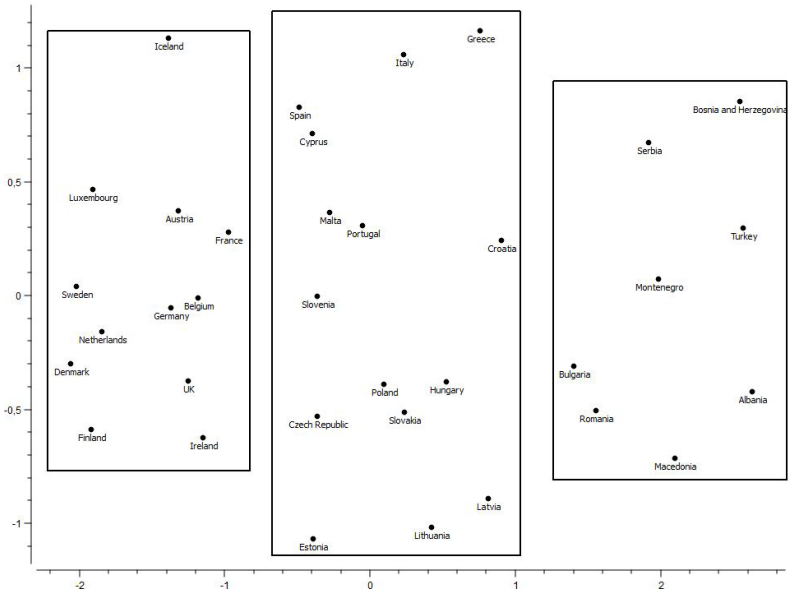
- *upper cluster* of 12 countries that score best on the 34 indicators: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom;
- *medium cluster* comprising 15 states with intermediate scores: Czech Republic, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain;
- *lower cluster* of eight states with low scores: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Turkey.

Out of the seven methods used for the cluster analysis for 2012, six yielded structurally similar results. The resulting clusters are presented in Figure 2 (B). The distribution of countries *among clusters remains structurally the same* as in 2011. Furthermore, *the structure within the clusters remains almost identical.* Yet, there is a change in the lower cluster: Serbia improves its score while Turkey's gets worse. The picture does not change significantly when we run the analysis for 2013 (see Figure 2 (C)).

Figure 2: Three clusters of countries 2011-2014



A (2011)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Czech Republic
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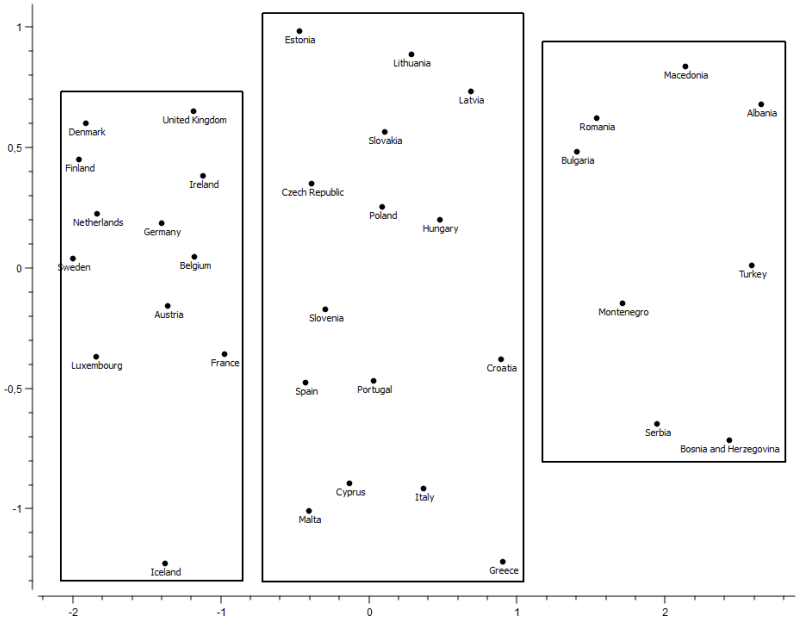
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Croatia
Spain
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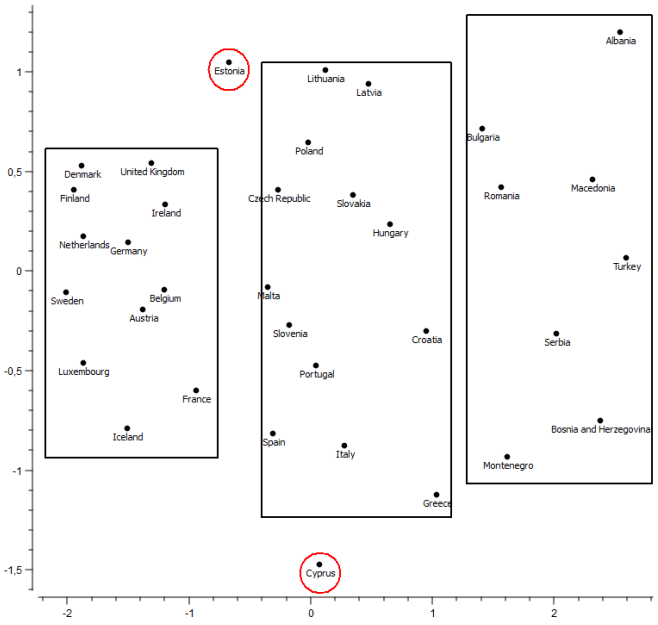
C (2013)



D (2014)

When running the analysis for 2014 we find that the seven methods applied provide somewhat divergent results. However, three of them demonstrate high congruence of the analytical products. The only difference among the results regarding their application is that Cyprus and Estonia are either in the medium or in the upper cluster. Therefore, we mark them as borderline cases. The distribution of the other countries remains the same as in the previous years.

In summary, the distribution of countries among clusters does not change in the first three years. In 2014 some of the applied cluster analyses yield similar results while others place Cyprus and Estonia in the upper cluster. The order of the clusters remains the same for the entire period. However, there is a certain change within the clusters. This is particularly important in view of the varying magnitude of the correlations over time (Table 1) which enables our tool *to sustainably measure both dynamics in the social context of every country* (including the shifts in the values of the integral metrics) and *the structural stability in typological differences between countries*. This implies *that the structural divergence empirically registered among the three types of countries is significant.*

2.2. Cluster analysis with eight indicators

In order to control the bias of the applied analytical instrument, which is inevitably imbedded in the results, and to verify our findings, we applied an alternative approach to the problem by further reducing the number of input indicators to those which strongly correlate with the largest number of remaining indicators (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Secondary reduction of input indicators

The logic behind this step is that given the strong correlation of the primary indicators with the others they most probably contain a large part of the relevant information which makes the remaining indicators redundant. Again we use $r \geq 0.665$ as a strength threshold for the relationship. We construct the new set of indicators by calculating the mean and the standard deviation of the number of strong correlations between every possible pair of indicators. Then we apply a threshold equal to the mean plus one standard deviation.

For instance, for the 2011 data the average number of strong correlations is 17.02, with a standard deviation of 11.5. Thus, the threshold is a strong correlation with 28.52. Hence, we extracted only those indicators that correlated with 29 or more other indicators from the dataset, in this case 11. The 2012 threshold is approximately the same, but the number of qualified indicators is nine. The thresholds we computed for the 2013 and 2014 data are lower: 26 strong correlations and the number of shortlisted indicators 11 and nine respectively. The procedure is summarized in Table 2 (Appendix). In our further analysis we take only those empirically identified *eight indicators that surpass the lowest threshold of strong correlation with at least 26 other indicators in at least three years.*

Before proceeding with the logic of our analytical tool we should pay attention to an important empirical finding in substantive terms. The data in the last column make evident that six of the primary indicators demonstrate a sustainable systematic relationship with a large number (more than half) of the remaining indicators throughout the four years. More substantial is the empirical finding that we see *the strongest correlation between rule of law (RoL) and the rest of the indicators*. In other words, rule of law appears to be the integral indicator of the quality of socioeconomic and political development of European societies and needs to be prioritized politically from the point of view concerning the advancement of achieving European standards of public life by the candidate countries. The question is very relevant because until now rule of law has been perceived as one of the fundamental values of European societies and, therefore, is taken for granted. As a political consequence there is a lack of deliberate EU policies with clear benchmarks for establishing and strengthening rule of law. At the same time, the 2014 EC initiative for establishing a *framework for safeguarding rule of law in the EU* clearly shows the increasing political gravity of this issue.[6]

Coming back to the empirical testing of the analytical tool we should report that while using the data the eight very highly correlating indicators identified above, four of the seven cluster analysis procedures show similar results for the 2011 data. The other three also show similar results, though different from the first

6 See http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-237_en.htm, accessed on 29 September 2015. We will come back to this issue at the end of this paper. The same political initiative is often referred to as "A New Framework to Strengthen the Rule of Law in the EU" (see for example Poptcheva 2015).

four.[7] This is why we use the results of the first, larger group of the four procedures. Again we end up with three clusters (depicted in Figure 4 (A) using multidimensional scaling):

- *upper cluster* including 12 states: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Iceland;
- *medium cluster* of 14 states: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia;
- *lower cluster* with nine cases: Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Macedonia, Turkey, Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

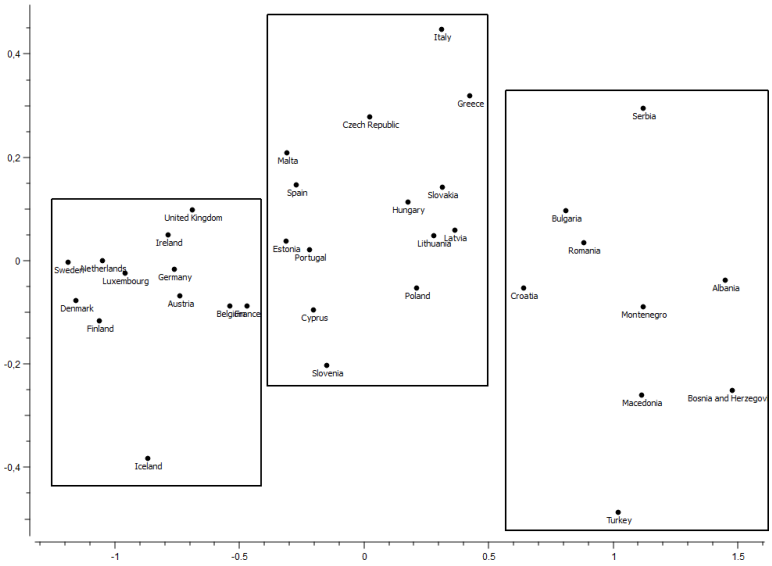
The cluster analysis of the data for 2012 shows that out of the seven methods, six split in two groups by three. In each group the results are identical and each group is different from the other. As there is an equal number of methods in each group we could not clearly define which one is better. *The only difference, however, is the positioning of Croatia either in the lower or in the medium cluster.* Therefore, the country is positioned at the margin (Figure 4 (B)).

The cluster analysis of the data for 2013 shows that out of the seven methods, six give identical results. The clusters have the same composition compared to those derived with the analysis of 34 indicators. Again, Croatia moves to the medium cluster (Figure 4 (C)).

In 2014 four out of seven methods yield identical results (Figure 4 (D)). The difference between the results of the cluster analysis with 34 indicators and the one with eight indicators is in a shift of the positions of three states. Cyprus moves from the margin between medium and upper to the medium cluster; Malta moves from the medium to the upper cluster; and Estonia leaves the margin between medium and upper and is already in the upper cluster.

7 There are two types of differences between the two groups of methods, namely a) six countries (Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Estonia and Slovenia) fall in the medium cluster according to the first four algorithms, while the other three classify these countries in the upper cluster; b) three countries (Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia) are classified in the lower cluster by the four algorithms, but the other three place them in the medium one. We take the results from the group with the larger number of algorithms (four in this case). The results of these algorithms' application are sustainable in the entire time frame of four years.

Figure 4: Multidimensional scaling by eight indicators for 2011-2014



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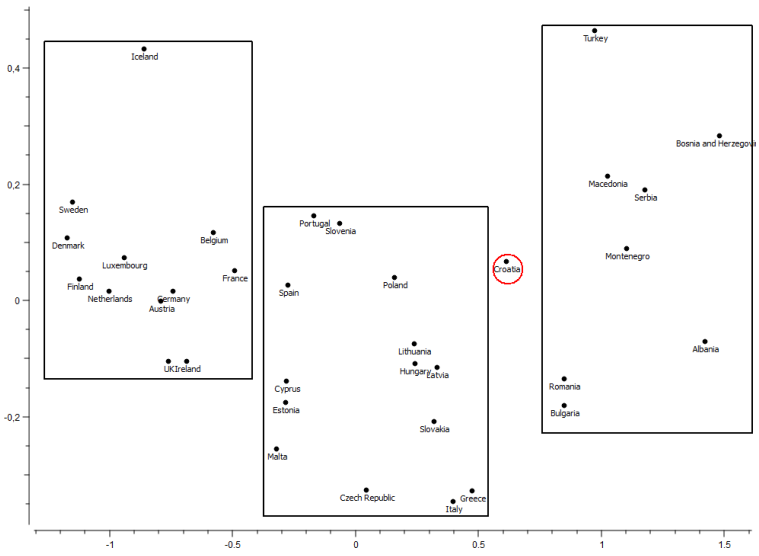

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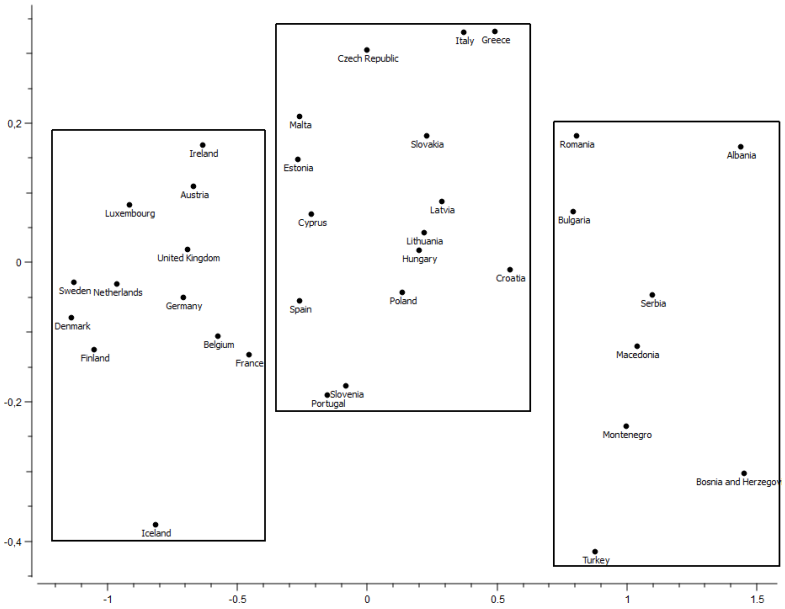

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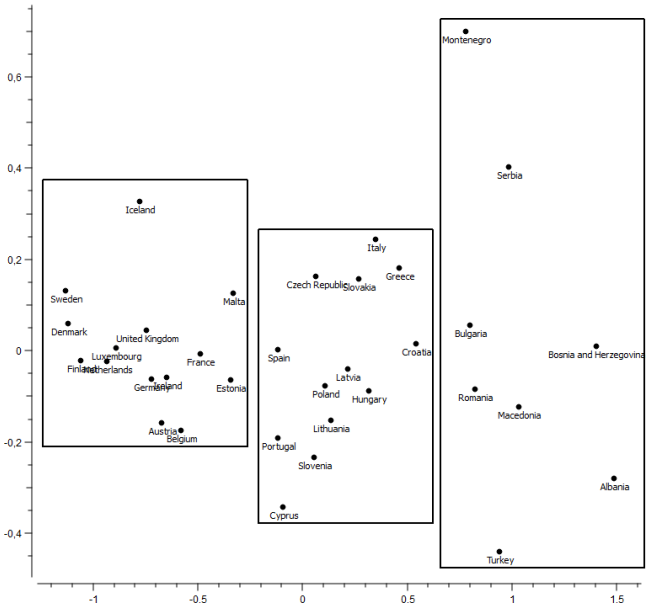


D (2014)

In summary, the difference between the results of the cluster analyses with 34 and eight indicators respectively is revealed in two effects:

a) in instrumental terms, analysis using a more detailed database proves more reliable since its application gives more stable results;

b) in substantive terms, the effect of the simplified procedure is manifested mainly in a distinctive

shift in Croatia's position from the medium to the lower cluster in 2011 and back to the medium in 2013. This finding corresponds with the general knowledge we already have from other sources (economic, political or anticorruption analyses) for the "borderline status" of Croatia as better than the rest, but still a Balkan country (Lesenski 2013: 53-55).[8]

The replication of the analysis with a smaller number of indicators justifies our expectations in two respects. It shows, first, that there is a certain methodological bias of the results, since the two forms of analysis do not classify the 35 cases completely identically, and logically the more detailed analysis outperforms the simplified version. Second, *there is only a minor overall structural difference which affects – at most – one out of 35 cases.* Hence, we *have sustainable results regarding the typological similarities and differences among the European countries observed*.[9]

No matter whether we use the more detailed instrument or its reduced version, in the end we come up with structurally almost identical pictures revealing substantial typological differences among the European countries that go beyond the clear cliché cleavages OMS/NMS, member states/applicants, East/West, post-communist countries/consolidated democracies, etc. The direct political implication of this analytical result is that thinking in formal 'blocks of countries', so typical for the mainstream literature on Europeanization and especially on EU enlargement, is wrong and, hence, dangerous when it guides EU policies. An important feature of the analytical tool proposed is its capability to register minute fluctuations in countries' placement in the European social, political and economic space, i.e. it can register and measure the advancement of a country's Europeanization or an eventual deterioration of the particular national society (and in a group of countries). The policy usefulness of such analytical findings will be demonstrated below with special emphasis on the lessons learned and the prospects of future EU enlargement(s). Yet the analytical tool proposed here could be used for a variety of different purposes when and where sociopolitical cohesion among European countries is at stake and the respective policies should be tailored to fit the particular national cases.

2.3. Comparative analysis of four South-East European countries

The typological differences empirically identified within the 'lower cluster' justify a more detailed consideration of four peculiar cases with specific EU integration potential which are particularly important in comparative perspective in respect of EU enlargement policy. For instance, Figure 4 (A) shows the positioning of Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Turkey with respect to each other in the multidimensional space. They are key marginal cases with respect to 'mainstream European integration' since their preparation for membership and their accession processes have followed distinctively different paths (Erhan 2009; Papadimitriou/Gateva 2012; Boduszyński 2013; Müftüler-Baç/Çiçek 2015). Therefore, it is important to find out whether there are any empirically identifiable socioeconomic and political conditions determining the significant

8 Compare with Boduszyński (2013).

9 Moreover, common knowledge of the Croatian case (Bartlett 2003; Ramet/Matic 2007; Boduszyński 2013) could help us find meaningful working explanations for its intermediate position, i.e. *even the variations within the results are substantially relevant* and should not be considered demonstrations of methodology faults.

differences in their respective integration experience justifying or disproving the relevance of the EC's political approach.[10]

To solve this problem we start from the findings elaborated above. Using the empirical database for the eight indicators we calculate:

- the distances between these four states in pairs,
- the distances between them and the cluster centers, and
- the angles formed by specific points in this conventional space. These angles are of two types. First, the angles formed by the vectors from the lower cluster center to each of the four countries and the ones from the same center to another of the remaining three countries. Second, the angles formed by the vectors from the lower cluster center to each of the four countries and from the same center to the centers of the other two clusters. The bigger the angle, the greater the sociopolitical difference.

The novel analytical assumption is that the smaller the above mentioned angles are, the more common the paths of these countries are with respect to each other or with respect to the cluster centers of the other two clusters. The greater the angles are, the more divergent these countries are to one another and to the centers of the other clusters. The eventual policy implication of such structural differences would be self-evident – *substantial structural divergence in this conventional 'four-dimensional social space' justifies the need for a deeply diversified EU integration policy* (Fagan/Sircar 2015; Phinnemore 2012, 2013; Elbasani 2013).

The results are presented in Table 3 of the Appendix. It summarizes several important findings illustrated in Figure 4 for each year's data:

- 2011
  - Among the four countries analyzed, the position of Romania is closest to the center of the lower cluster, while Croatia is the furthest away. Bulgaria and Turkey are almost equally away from the center of the lower cluster *but the directions differ*. Croatia is closer to the center of the medium cluster, followed by Bulgaria and Romania, while Turkey is most distant from it. The same order recurs in respect of the distances of these countries to the center of the upper cluster.
  - Bulgaria and Romania are closest to each other. The second closest couple of countries are Bulgaria and Croatia. *The countries most distant from each other are Croatia and Turkey.* The second

10 Bulgaria and Romania started the negotiations together with other eight post-communist countries but were soon left behind. Moreover, their membership was (and still is) conditional. This particular enlargement conditionality was broad and complex. The accession treaties for both countries envisioned that the actual accession could be postponed for a year. Within the first three years of their membership, a 'safeguard clause' could have been applied. Up to this day, we still have the unprecedented CVM aimed at a decisive breakthrough in the fight against corruption and establishing rule of law in both states. Croatia was accepted later on but with no safeguard mechanisms. After decades of delay, Turkey is already negotiating for accession, but the prospect for completion of the negotiations is not very likely in the near future. The important question is whether these differences in the integration processes are socially and politically grounded.

most distant two countries are Bulgaria and Turkey, followed by Romania and Turkey. As a whole, Turkey diverges distinctly from the other three countries.

- Bulgaria and Romania have approximately similar directions. To a lesser degree the same is true for Bulgaria and Croatia. *However, the directions of Romania and Croatia are not so similar, which indicates that Bulgaria is between Romania and Croatia.* Turkey's direction is very different from the directions of the other three states.
- Croatia is closest to the medium cluster, followed by Bulgaria. Romania's direction goes away from the medium cluster, while Turkey is both away and behind. The same conclusions are true regarding the upper cluster.

- 2012
  - Bulgaria, Turkey and Romania are almost equally close to the center of the lower cluster, while Croatia is most distant from it. Croatia is closest to the center of the medium cluster, followed by Bulgaria and Romania, while Turkey is furthest away. The order is the same regarding distances to the center of the upper cluster.
  - Bulgaria and Romania are situated closest to each other. The second shortest distance is between Bulgaria and Croatia, and between Romania and Croatia. The most distant from each other are Croatia, which eventually appears to be more integrated into the EU despite the belated start of the negotiations, and Turkey which is still far from completion of the negotiations. Bulgaria and Romania are almost equally away from Turkey, which is the farthest away from the rest.
  - Bulgaria and Romania share approximately similar directions. The direction of Turkey is very different from the directions of the other three states.
  - Croatia is (socially) closest to the medium cluster, followed by Bulgaria and Romania. Turkey's direction is orthogonally away from and behind the medium cluster. The same is true for the directions to the upper cluster.

- 2013
  - Bulgaria lies closest to the center of the lower cluster, while Croatia is farthest away from it. Romania and Turkey are at almost equal distances from the center of the lower cluster. Croatia is closest to the centers of the medium and the upper clusters, followed by Bulgaria and Romania, while Turkey is farthest away.
  - Bulgaria and Romania are the closest to each other. The second closest couple of countries are Bulgaria and Croatia. The most distant (as in 2011) from each other are Croatia and Turkey.
  - The two countries situated in most similar directions to each other are Bulgaria and Romania, followed by Bulgaria and Croatia. Turkey's direction is very different from the directions of the other three countries.
  - Croatia lies closest to the medium and the upper clusters, followed by Bulgaria. Romania's direction is away from these centers, while Turkey's direction is even orthogonally away.

- 2014
  - Romania and Bulgaria are close to the center of the lower cluster, while Croatia is far away from it. Croatia is again closer to the center of the medium cluster than the others, followed by Bulgaria and Romania. Among the four, Turkey remains furthest away. The order is the same regarding proximity to the center of the upper cluster.
  - The proximity remains closest between Bulgaria and Romania, then between Bulgaria and Croatia. Croatia and Turkey are again most distant from one another.
  - The directions of Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia are similar. Again the direction of Turkey diverges from the rest.
  - Croatia lies closest to the medium cluster followed by Bulgaria. The direction of Romania is further away from the medium cluster and that of Turkey is even orthogonally aside. The positioning of the four countries regarding the upper cluster is identical.

In sum, while applying the simplified version of our new instrument the location of the clusters with respect to one another remains unchanged – if there are any differences in the four years, they occur within the clusters. The results as a whole show the following shifts in positioning between 2011 and 2014: in 2011 Croatia was in the lower cluster, in 2012 – awaiting/preparing its EU accession – it moved to the margin between the lower and the medium cluster. In 2013 and 2014 the country was already in the medium cluster (and in the EU).[11]

With regard to the distances between the four states and the cluster centers during the four years Croatia has invariably remained farthest from the center of the lower cluster and closest to the centers of the medium and upper clusters (compared with the other three states). The other common feature is that Bulgaria and Romania are always closest to the center of the lower cluster while Turkey is always farthest away from the centers of the medium and upper clusters. As regards the distances between the four countries themselves, Bulgaria and Romania invariably lie closest to each other, while Croatia and Turkey are always most distant from each other. Bulgaria and Romania are always placed in a similar direction, and Turkey's direction is always very different from those of the other three countries. Regarding the directions of the four states with respect to the cluster centers of the medium and upper clusters, the common features are that Croatia always lies in the direction towards these two centers, followed by Bulgaria. Another sustainable trend is that Turkey is persistently situated orthogonally away from and behind these two centers.

Between 2011 and 2014 the distance between Turkey and the center of the lower cluster increases, but its proximity to the centers of the medium and upper clusters decreases. *This signifies the positive change in this country but does not alter the integral quality of Turkey's pro-European development.*

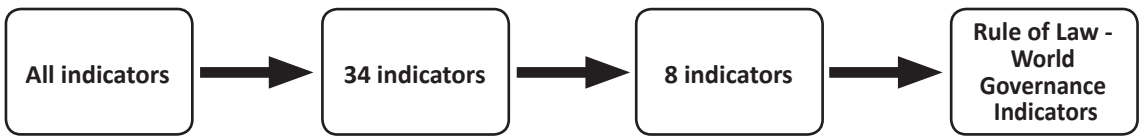
11 While Bulgaria and Romania 'vibrate' insignificantly in the multidimensional space they do not structurally change their positioning within the lower cluster. Importantly, the CVM monitoring does not register any substantive change in the promotion of rule of law either, except for some examples of worsening of the situation in the two countries (Dimitrov et al. 2014). The behavior in this conventional space is country specific. Within the same time span, for example, from 2011 to 2013 Malta and Estonia are in the medium cluster and move to the upper one in 2014.

In the context of these research findings *comparisons between the accession strategies of Turkey and Bulgaria, although very much desirable, remain problematic from substantive and methodological points of view.* On the one hand, *if* Turkey has to be compared with an EU member state, then Bulgaria should be the most likely case (or Romania, since both countries are very much typologically similar – as they are typologically different from the other member states and 'closer' to Turkey). Yet, on the other hand, the typological differences between Bulgaria and Turkey within the cluster of 'EU divergent states' should not be neglected or underestimated.

On the basis of our research findings we provide sound empirical support for the assumption that *the EC approach for a differentiated policy to the integration of new countries from South-East Europe genuinely reflects their significant structural-qualitative peculiarities* (Elbasani 2013; Chiva/Phinnemore 2012). Moreover, we argue that the applied analytical tool could have relevance in researching the future dynamics of socioeconomic and political development (or mere change) of each of the European countries (EU members or candidates). This diagnostic potential is especially important when making decisions about accession negotiations and while implementing policies of conditionality regarding membership, including the eventual change or discontinuance of some particular conditionality policies, such as the implementation of the CVM. *The availability of this new analytical tool is particularly important in light of the new EC initiatives for the implantation of proactive policies for safeguarding the rule of law in all EU member states* (Closa/Kochenov/Weiler 2014; Poptcheva 2015).

Here we again come to an intriguing question. On a purely empirical basis, we have found the great importance of rule of law as an integral, systemic indicator for the overall socioeconomic, institutional and political development of the 35 European countries under consideration. The results for 2011 show that the Rule of Law-World Governance Indicator (RoL-WGI) correlates with the greatest number of other indicators. In 2012, this indicator shared first place with two other indicators, while in 2013 it shared first place with one other indicator, and in 2014 it shared second place with one more indicator. As already demonstrated in Table 2 the RoL-WGI correlates with 30-33 other systematic indicators identified in the Catch Up Index database. This raises the question of whether the entire set of indicators could not be reduced to a single one (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Tertiary reduction of input indicators



The effect of this approach compared with the results from the cluster analysis with 34 and eight indicators as well as with the initial Catch Up Index Scores is presented in Table 4 of the Appendix.

The data summarized in Table 5 (see Appendix) reveal a clear tendency. Despite the weak dynamics of rule of law values in each of the countries studied over the four years – denoted by the total scores of the separate sub-indicator values in this integral index – the positioning of the countries in the overall ranking

remains comparatively stable. This affirms the significance of the integral indicator and indicates the nature of the ongoing processes in the course of the four years. No significant (qualitative) progress has occurred in any of these countries. At the same time *the empirical evidence shows that in this regard Bulgaria persistently has the worst results while Turkey moves ahead of Romania.* This implies that, although very important, rule of law scores could not offer an adequate substitute for the Catch Up Index as a complex metric of social development in European countries.

3. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to offer a new, empirical and quantitative approach for measuring the sociopolitical differences between EU member states and candidates. It can be used as an alternative analytical tool in the process of assessing the capacity of countries with typologically diverse social contexts to be involved in EU enlargement. We find this novel approach necessary, since the existing conditionality tools applied by the European Commission (such as, but not limited to, the CVM, benchmarking and the like) proved incapable of achieving steady progress as well as sustainable results and consequently deepened the integrational gap, which is clearly evident in the case of Bulgaria and – to a certain degree – in the case of Romania.

Our approach, based on the data from the Open Society Catch Up Index, ultimately produced an empirically derived typology that splits the European countries analyzed into three clusters conventionally denoted as upper, medium and lower. The upper cluster comprises European countries with highest scores on the systematically interlinked indicators, the lower cluster denotes the countries that underperform and the medium catches those which are in between. *The clusters seem geographically differentiated but actually what appears as a mere geographical factor is the history of European modernity, i.e. the proximity to the sea routes of East India Companies and the transcontinental commerce* (North/Thomas 1974) which implies a contractual character of the respective national societies with a centuries-long tradition of rule of law. Northern member states plus Austria and Iceland fall into the upper cluster. Southern old members and the Central European members fall in the medium cluster, while South-East new members and candidates remain in the lower cluster.[12] There are some limited dynamics in the course of time that have led to several symptomatic country shifts (most pronounced is the case of Croatia, accompanied by Estonia and Malta) from one cluster to another in the time frame analyzed from 2011 to 2014. The dynamics, however, *prove much greater within the clusters*, which implies that we have three sustainable societal types with tangible variations of the countries' social performance within each one of them.

The latter fact allows us to focus our analysis on a comparison of four Balkan countries which are of paramount importance when asking whether the country-specific EU enlargement policy is the right one: Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey. The EU integration histories of these four are substantially different and it is important to find empirical arguments whether the differentiated approach has been justified by

12 Nothing is that simple, of course. There is no easy explanation for the fact that Estonia matches Malta and Cyprus, while Latvia and Lithuania are typologically closer to Hungary than to Poland. Slovakia and Portugal appear 'very close' in terms of 'social space' and they both are typologically orthogonal to the sustained couple of Greece and Italy.

objective, qualitatively measurable differences in their behavior in the four-dimensional economic and sociopolitical space. By tracing their positions to one another and, relatively, to the centers of the three clusters, we found that a) Bulgaria and Romania are typologically similar; b) Croatia outperforms all the countries in the lower cluster otherwise being closer to Bulgaria; c) Turkey follows its distinctively different development path: in societal terms Turkey is diametrically opposed to the other states in the same cluster and thus is, to a great extent, incomparable with the rest of the Balkan cases.[13]

This finding is extremely relevant in the context of the Turkish negotiation process because it proves the irrelevance of past experience with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, not to mention Croatia. The latter was spared any post-accession conditionality in the form of CVM and that proved to be the right policy since the country routinely performs better. The implementation of the CVM did not bring the cherished progress in rule of law promotion neither in Bulgaria, nor in Romania (Toneva-Metodieva 2014). Yet the CVM happened to be useful since its implementation encouraged the EC to further innovate in search of more efficient conditionality refinements (Gateva 2015).

At present there are no grounds to believe that any of these – the quick success of Croatia or the flawed accession of Bulgaria and Romania – could be replicated in the Turkish case, especially if we presume that the point is to have a successful and not just another shallow, formal integration in the EU.[14] At present the EC is rightfully much more persistent in its efforts to find ample proofs for the accession countries' substantive and sustained compliance with the *acquis* and the fundamental values of the EU. This is exactly where the methodological novelty fits in because the new instrument is sensitive enough to register annual developments in the European societies whether they are moving forward in the process of Europeanization or experiencing stalemate or even backsliding. Our analysis provides support for the assumption that the EU should persist in the implementation of a differentiated policy approach to the integration of the South-East European candidates (Phinnemore 2013; Fagan/Sircar 2015) *in accordance with the significant socio-structural specificities at the national level*.[15] Even more important is the potential of the new analytical tool to be used for measuring distances and developments respectively under the new EU policies for strengthening the rule of law in EU member states.

13 Our findings suggest that sociopolitical, economic, cultural and historic peculiarities of the accession countries are too subtle to be underestimated in achieving regulatory homogeneity within the Union. The formal approach in the form of *acquis* adoption or even benchmarking has failed. The uniform negotiation scheme applied to the Visegrad and the Baltic states on the one hand and Romania and Bulgaria on the other produced substantially different results namely due to these neglected peculiarities. Given that Turkey is that much different from Bulgaria and Romania in a systematic way, its accession should be addressed with a carefully and sensitively tailored approach.

14 "[…] like in the CEE accession countries, EU pressure for adaptation and capacity-building mostly results in formal institutional changes, whilst it is not sufficient to transform informal institutions and behavioral practices" (Börzel 2013: 183).

15 By no means should this diversified approach imply differential treatment of the accession countries in political or legal terms. On the contrary, the fare political treatment means firm insistence on full compliance with EU standards of economic, political, judicial and social practices which necessitates the usage of country-specific policy measures for the deepened Europeanization of the respective national societies. (This is why there is the history of EU conditionality in first place (Gateva 2015)). The set of these measures, in order to be efficient and effective, should result from open European public deliberation among all stakeholders based on sound academic knowledge regarding national specificities.

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5. Appendix

Table 1: List of strongly correlated indicators (Pearson r) within the four dimensions - economy, democracy, and quality of life - of the Catch Up Index

Indicators	2011		2012		2013		2014	
	Correlation with the dimension	Correlation with the overall index	Correlation with the dimension	Correlation with the overall index	Correlation with the dimension	Correlation with the overall index	Correlation with the dimension	Correlation with the overall index
GDP per capita in PPS with EU27 = 100	0.920	0.900	0.814	0.902	0.907	0.904	0.900	0.913
Sovereigns credit ratings	0.894	0.882	0.865	0.820	0.867	0.792	0.914	0.836
Employment as percentage of population, age group 15-64	0.811	0.834	0.631	0.864	0.701	0.675	0.827	0.827
Information and communication technology	0.930	0.959	0.735	0.952	0.881	0.944	0.774	0.804
Doing Business ranking	0.724	0.699	0.549	0.679	0.689	0.667	0.650	0.641
Economic Freedom score	0.800	0.768	0.732	0.529	0.801	0.738	0.805	0.712
Economy composite score		0.970		0.821		0.953		0.950
Freedom House score - Freedom in the World	0.893	0.861	0.894	0.864	0.893	0.866	0.892	0.848
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index	0.955	0.955	0.950	0.952	0.940	0.942	0.945	0.933
Freedom of the Press score - Freedom House	0.957	0.922	0.946	0.914	0.954	0.928	0.858	0.805
Press Freedom Index - Reporters without Borders	0.845	0.780	0.897	0.855	0.908	0.874	0.889	0.853
Satisfaction with democracy (%)	0.800	0.844	0.785	0.819	0.772	0.801	0.768	0.816
Trust in people	0.717	0.712	0.726	0.721	0.713	0.720	0.700	0.734
Voice and accountability - World Governance Indicators	0.973	0.975	0.972	0.976	0.969	0.972	0.985	0.983
Disrespect for human rights - Global Peace Index	0.676	0.641	0.698	0.641	0.671	0.639	0.799	0.739
Democracy composite score		0.984		0.983		0.988		0.980
Actual individual consumption with EU27 = 100	0.943	0.908	0.932	0.898	0.944	0.921	0.944	0.922
Inequality - Gini coefficient	0.630	0.641	0.701	0.661	0.723	0.696	0.700	0.701
Share of population (%) with university degree	0.746	0.768	0.733	0.760	0.732	0.752	0.674	0.688
PISA score in reading literacy	0.800	0.804	0.796	0.793	0.808	0.788	0.773	0.800
PISA score mathematical literacy	0.823	0.852	0.828	0.849	0.851	0.855	0.764	0.756
PISA score in scientific literacy	0.774	0.803	0.768	0.798	0.793	0.803	0.722	0.741
Healthy life expectancy at birth in years	0.844	0.778	0.849	0.787	0.830	0.759	0.772	0.690

Indicators	2011		2012		2013		2014	
	Correlation with the dimension	Correlation with the overall index	Correlation with the dimension	Correlation with the overall index	Correlation with the dimension	Correlation with the overall index	Correlation with the dimension	Correlation with the overall index
Life expectancy in years	0.850	0.769	0.831	0.752	0.765	0.692	0.709	0.625
Infant mortality by age of five	0.893	0.841	0.873	0.826	0.831	0.773	0.796	0.736
EuroHealth Consumer Index	0.866	0.846	0.895	0.901	0.914	0.904	0.871	0.870
Human Development Index	0.979	0.938	0.963	0.922	0.961	0.928	0.928	0.878
Quality of Life composite score		0.971		0.968		0.974		0.974
Corruption Perceptions Index	0.920	0.918	0.913	0.913	0.908	0.910	0.923	0.914
Control of corruption - World Governance Indicators	0.964	0.958	0.951	0.944	0.951	0.946	0.949	0.927
Political instability - Economist Intelligence Unit	0.865	0.841	0.870	0.861	0.694	0.676	0.908	0.910
Political stability and absence of violence - World Governance Indicators	0.799	0.778	0.803	0.797	0.863	0.869	0.805	0.826
Government effectiveness - World Governance Indicators	0.969	0.963	0.965	0.958	0.953	0.943	0.968	0.949
Regulatory quality - World Governance Indicators	0.941	0.932	0.933	0.923	0.937	0.924	0.938	0.937
Rule of law - World Governance Indicators	0.974	0.967	0.967	0.958	0.979	0.968	0.979	0.967
Conflicts and tensions in the country - selected Global Peace Index indicators	0.865	0.832	0.854	0.829	0.813	0.798	0.811	0.801
E-government Development Index	0.862	0.877	0.888	0.897	0.895	0.896	0.834	0.854
Governance composite score		0.986		0.990		0.988		0.990

Table 2: Secondary reduction of the number of input indicators[16]

Indicators	**2011**				
Rule of law - World Governance Indicators	33	31	30	31	31.25
Government effectiveness - World Governance Indicators	32	31	29	31	30.75
Control of corruption - World Governance Indicators	32	31	29	30	30.50
Voice and accountability - World Governance Indicators	31	30	30	32	30.75
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index	31	30	28	29	29.50
Regulatory quality - World Governance Indicators	29	30	26	29	28.50
Information and communication technology	32	30	27		29.67
Corruption Perceptions Index	30		28	26	28.00
Human Development Index	29	29			
Freedom of the Press score - Freedom House	29		27		
E-government Development Index	29		26		
EuroHealth Consumer Index		29		26	
Actual individual consumption (Eurostat)			26		
Political instability - Economist Intelligence Unit				29	

16 The table presents the number of strong correlations of the respective indicator with the rest of the dataset.

Table 3: Distances and angles between states and cluster centers

Angles	Distances (points)															
	Year	Lower cluster center	Medium cluster center	Upper cluster center	BG	RO	HR	TR	Year	Lower cluster center	Medium cluster center	Upper cluster center	BG	RO	HR	TR
Lower cluster center	2011		73.6	132.3	24.5	21.4	33.8	26.2	2012		75.8	136.3	26.1	26.6	42.1	26.2
				61.4	53.5	59.5	42.5	79.0				63.3	55.4	57.0	41.4	76.5
Upper cluster center			10.5		113.6	118.7	101.7	134.5			10.4		117.5	118.2	100.7	133.6
BG			28.8	36.6		11.7	18.6	41.6			32.2	40.2		10.5	28.1	41.2
RO			42.0	46.8	28.7		26.4	40.0			37.4	43.0	23.0		31.9	41.1
HR			17.0	21.7	32.6	51.5		42.0			24.6	27.2	40.6	49.3		45.1
TR			92.2	89.0	110.3	114.1	88.1				81.6	78.5	103.7	102.2	78.9	
Lower cluster center	2013		72.0	135.2	23.9	26.7	42.5	26.9	2014		63.0	127.7	21.4	21.0	37.5	33.1
				65.0	52.5	55.3	35.9	68.0				67.0	47.1	49.8	28.6	65.4
Upper cluster center			9.0		116.1	117.4	98.2	127.7			11.0		112.8	115.0	92.5	126.1
BG			29.3	34.0		13.9	26.2	35.1			35.2	42.2		14.0	24.9	40.8
RO			42.2	43.8	31.3		32.4	37.5			43.2	49.0	38.5		31.4	36.0
HR			21.3	24.8	33.7	49.6		43.3			15.3	16.9	39.2	56.9		45.9
TR			70.6	68.3	87.4	89.0	73.4				79.1	79.7	94.6	80.2	80.9	

Table 4: Comparison of four approaches 2011 - 2014

Year	Country	Catch-up score points	Catch-up rating place	Score by 34 indicators	Rating by 34 indicators	Clustering by 34 indicators	Score by 8 indicators	Rating by 8 indicators	Clustering by 8 indicators	Score by rule of law	Rating by rule of law
2011	BG	34	28	33	28	lower	31	28	lower	26	31
	RO	32	29	30	29	lower	29	29	lower	30	28
	CR	41	26	40	27	medium	35	27	lower	33	27
	TK	24	33	22	33	lower	24	30	lower	30	28
	EU28 average	55		55			56			56	
	EU17 average	61		62			64			64	
2012	BG	35	28	34	28	lower	30	28	lower	25	31
	RO	35	28	32	29	lower	30	29	lower	29	29
	CR	41	25	40	27	medium	36	27	marginal	33	27
	TK	25	33	23	33	lower	25	30	lower	31	28
	EU28 average	55		55			56			56	
	EU17 average	61		61			64			64	
2013	BG	34	28	33	28	lower	30	28	lower	23	31
	RO	34	29	31	30	lower	30	29	lower	28	29
	CR	41	26	40	26	medium	36	27	medium	32	27
	TK	25	33	23	33	lower	27	30	lower	29	28
	EU28 average	55		55			56			56	
	EU17 average	60		61			63			64	
2014	BG	34	28	33	28	lower	29	29	lower	23	31
	RO	34	28	31	20	lower	29	30	lower	29	28
	CR	40	26	39	26	medium	37	27	medium	33	27
	TK	26	32	23	33	lower	26	32	lower	28	29
	EU28 average	55		55			55			56	
	EU17 average	60		61			63			64	

Table 5: Rule of law 2011 - 2014

	Score by rule of law	Score by rule of law	Score by rule of law	Score by rule of law		Rating by rule of law	Rating by rule of law	Rating by rule of law	Rating by rule of law	
Country	**2014**	**2013**	**2012**	**2011**	**Average**	**2014**	**2013**	**2012**	**2011**	**Average**
BG	23	23	25	26	24.25	31	31	31	31	31.00
RO	29	28	29	30	29.00	28	29	29	28	28.50
CR	33	32	33	33	32.75	27	27	27	27	27.00
TK	28	29	31	30	29.50	29	28	28	28	28.25
EU28 average	56	56	56	56	56					
EU17 average	64	64	64	64	64					

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