

SÜDOSTEUROPA

Mitteilungen

Zeitschrift der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft

Summaries Heft 03/2007 47. Jahrgang

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The EU's Absorptive Capacity: Key Aspects and Questions

In the political debate on EU enlargement, "absorptive capacity" is gaining importance. For years, the term has been part of official usage (recently converted to "capacity to integrate") without being defined clearly.

In an attempt to help clarifying its notion, the term is being broken down into four objective components: institutional operability, economic compatibility, financial-budgetary capacity, and achievement of (strategic and energy) security requirements. On the basis of this distinction, perceived or actual problems must be resolved also in the Union of the 27 member states. With an increasing number of members, however, tensions may be accentuated, not created. If the scope for political lay-out is being properly used, future enlargement will also have the potential to be beneficial for both old and new members.

Miklós Losoncz

Nabucco or Blue Stream? Securing Europe's Supply of Natural Gas

The report analyses the security of natural gas supply of the EU by instancing two planned competing pipeline projects: Nabucco supported by the EU and Blue Stream initiated by Russia's Gazprom. The study perceives the security of supply in a broad sense; in addition to the availability of resources, it attaches great importance to the reliability of partners and the physical infrastructure.

One of the major conclusions of the paper is that it is of secondary importance which project will be completed as regards the reliability of sources and partners. With appropriate terms and conditions that are in line with the EU's market principles, Blue Stream too, may increase the security of supply, if the property rights of the pipeline are adequate, the access of third parties to the infrastructure is ensured and guaranteed, and natural gas originating in several countries is fed into the pipeline.

Elena Hristova Angelova / Georg Winkel

Bulgaria's Forest Policy between Planned Economy and European Harmonization

Addressing the Problematic Nature of Policy Transfer in Countries with Economies in Transition

The Bulgarian forest sector is presently in a state of drastic change. After the switch from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, the restitution of nationalised forests to the earlier owners or their heirs led to a change of ownership structure. As the newly established private forest owners didn't have any experience in the management of forests, the Bulgarian forest service assisted by international cooperation projects has developed a concept for the consulting and training of private forest owners. However, the implementation of this concept failed. Policy-transfer research provides an explanation for the failure of the implementation of solutions developed in other countries. This theory states that many policy-transfers are incomplete as the ideas or intentions forming the basis of a policy in its country of origin are not transferred correspondingly. The problems associated with the need for consultation and training in Bulgaria have not been considered sufficiently, eventually leading to the failure of the consultation and training concept.

Georgios Terizakis

Environmental Policy in Greece: Moving from Symbolic to Sustainable Environmental Protection?

Environmental policy in Greece is a stepchild of social science research. This is also true for the non-governmental actors in this political field. It is noteworthy because the environmental "scene" seems to be quite active and rich in tradition in Greece. In part the paper explains this by blaming older concepts to be blind towards new politics like environmental policy. Besides, a closer look at environmental policy opens up an interesting situation – civil society relation that turns some prejudice upside down: a weak state and a strong civil society. Nevertheless this does not mean that environment in Greece is protected well.

Michael Hein

Bulgarian Constitutional Politics: a *perpetual motion machine*

On 2 February 2007, Bulgaria amended its constitution for the second time within ten months. A financial decentralization was established, important parts of the parliamentary law were changed and the preliminarily enacted abolition of the military draft was fixed in the constitution. Above all, the Bulgarian coalition government repeatedly aimed at solving the problems of the separation of powers and the judiciary. In part, norms which had been amended just ten months ago were revised again. In the meantime, the European Commission had criticized the first amendments and parts of them were submitted to the constitutional court. The article observes the Bulgarian constitutional politics from March 2006 till February 2007. First, both decisions of the constitutional court are discussed. Then the process, content and impact of the most recent constitutional amendments are analyzed in detail. Special attention is paid to the role of the European Union. The article then comes to the conclusion that structural improvements both in the balance of powers as well as in the structure of the judiciary have been achieved only partly. Therefore, even in the near future, further amendments cannot be excluded.