



Compliance and non-compliance as sources of recognition: Slovakia and NATO



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ABSTRACT

This article argues that there is a difference in what constitutes the sources of recognition prior to countries' membership in the Euro-Atlantic community represented by NATO and after countries become its members. While prior to membership, countries are recognized for their compliance with NATO standards and policies, upon membership countries get the opportunity to promote specific interests legitimately and may seek recognition via non-compliance with NATO mainstream.

The paper explores this dynamic of recognition on the issue of Kosovo independence where Slovakia went from supporting NATO in its effort to protect civilians in Kosovo in the late 1990s to non-recognition of Kosovo in defiance of the majority of NATO member states less than a decade later. The crucial point proposed here is that there was a shift in *how* recognition by NATO worked prior to Slovakia's membership and upon membership in these frameworks. While prior to membership recognition was achieved by compliance and identification with NATO standpoints, policies and actions, upon membership, recognition is achieved by differentiation from these patterns. More generally, the study shows that NATO membership is a powerful source of conditionality in relation to future members and a powerful source of legitimacy in relation to current members' actions. While this has been discussed in the literature, the point here is that recognition in its various forms is an important driving force in these conditionality processes.

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1. Introduction

This article argues that there is a difference in what constitutes the sources of recognition prior to countries' membership in the Euro-Atlantic community represented by NATO and after countries become members. While prior to membership, countries are recognized for their compliance with NATO standards and policies, upon membership countries get the opportunity to promote specific interests legitimately and may seek recognition via non-compliance with NATO mainstream.

The paper explores this dynamic of recognition on the issue of Kosovo independence where Slovakia went from supporting NATO in its effort to protect civilians in Kosovo in the late 1990s to non-recognition of Kosovo in defiance of the majority of NATO member states less than a decade later. The crucial point proposed here is that there was a shift in *how* recognition by NATO worked prior to Slovakia's membership and upon membership was acquired. While prior to membership recognition was achieved by compliance and identification with NATO standpoints, policies and actions, upon membership, recognition is achieved by differentiation from these frameworks. More generally, NATO membership is a powerful source of conditionality in relation to future members and a powerful source of legitimacy in relation to current

members' actions. While this has been discussed in the literature (Gheciu, 2005), the point here is that recognition in its various forms is an important driving force in these conditionality processes.

In the first part, the paper outlines a theoretical perspective for studying the role of recognition in international politics. The second part then analyzes the dynamics of recognition in the Slovak quest for recognition by NATO and explores these dynamics on the changing Slovak standpoints on Kosovo. Conclusions follow.

2. Homogeneity and difference as sources of recognition

Recognition by others is constitutive of actors (Hegel [1807], 1977, Honneth, 1992; Ringmar 1996, 2002; Ricoeur, 2005). One cannot exist socially without others' perception and reflection of one-self. Identities of actors are hence reflexive – they are formed in the interaction between the narratives actors tell about themselves and the reflection of these narratives by others (Neumann, 1996). As Ringmar (1996: 80) argues, “we cannot be some-*one* except before others. [...] and identity is a feature of social interaction and not something a particular individual ‘has’”. Recognition of a particular identity by other actors is of key importance for any individual actor's sense of self. This is particularly the case for actors seeking to establish new identities and/or reformulate existing ones. It is not sufficient to come up with just any new self-description. The perception of others and their counter-stories about ourselves represent important limits for what we can become in the eyes of others (ibid. pp. 81). In other words, recognition by others is the precondition for our ability to start establishing and stabilizing a specific kind of identity. Seen from this perspective, being denied our interests is better than being denied our identity. In the former case, we can still seek redress by claiming our interests anew and finding alternative ways and situations when we would be able to promote them successfully. However, when we are denied identity, when we are overlooked and an *act of omission* or non-recognition is committed on us, we cannot even begin to measure the losses because the standard against which such measurement could work – the Self – is not even established (ibid., p. 82).

When we seek recognition it is not from just anyone, but most often from those whom we ourselves recognize. Ringmar (ibid.) refers to this as the *circles of recognition*. It entails the notion that only those actors have the power to provide us with (recognize) a certain identity who already are what we would like to become. Pizzorno (1986), who was the first to discuss the notion of circles of recognition, focused on the role of uncertainty about identity as the main driving force for actors' quest to be recognized and form a stable circle of recognition. As he points out, actors who belong into a collectivity constituting a stable circle of recognition are less worried about making decisions which may result in failure (ibid., p. 367). In other words, belonging to a relatively stable in-group provides actors with a more or less stable identity, decreases actors' uncertainty and enables them to promote interests even though they may be highly specific and with uncertain outcomes. On the contrary, actors not belonging to an in-group forming a circle of recognition operate without a stable identity and consequently with only limited certainty about their actions and possibly low legitimacy of their interests.

Actors forming a new identity necessarily seek recognition from others who already are what they would like to be seen as. Obviously, in such a process, actors seek to take on features and characteristics that are common among those who form the circle of recognition. Actors identify with such features and develop narratives about themselves, which seek to present them as meeting the criteria for membership in the in-group. The power of the circle of recognition over actors seeking to belong to it hence does not lie in the circle as such, but in the actors seeking to become part of it and readily self-imposing the criteria of the circle on themselves. Indeed, as Ringmar (1996: 82) points out, actors seeking to be recognized by a circle of recognition often need to change and refine stories they tell about themselves to meet the criteria that can provide recognition by members of the in-group. Circles of recognition hence bestow and possibly even force identities upon actors.¹

Yet what neither Pizzorno nor Ringmar discuss is what happens *after* actors themselves are recognized and accepted among those whose recognition they once sought. The quest for recognition does not stop once actors become part of a particular in-group. Yet, how does an actor achieve recognition once he or she became a part of an in-group? One possibility is that actors seek to maintain a self-understanding in line with the standards and criteria for proper behavior recognized by the peer group. This is shown in numerous studies of standardization after countries become members of various international 'meta-organizations' such as the International Postal Union (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2006) and international organizations promoting various kinds of governance reforms such as OECD (Jacobsson and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006). The Western community has also been a source of such socialization of countries into a common set of standards and norms (Checkel, 2001, 2005). Homogenization around a set of norms, procedures and even development of a common culture and identity has been crucial in the development of security communities (Deutsch, 1957; Adler and Barnett, 1998; for a somewhat different take see Kupchan, 2010). Perhaps the most pervasive effects of such socialization and standardization can be currently seen in the EU. As numerous studies of Europeanization (understood as downloading of standards and norms from the EU into the member states) show, membership in the EU has deep effects on member states' legal codes, public administrations, democratic governance and indeed on their identities (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004; Vachudova, 2005). In short, recognition in established in-groups may be sought by maintenance of the in-group standards and continued efforts to be similar to the peers within the group. Standardization and socialization may hence be a source of peaceful relations and stability of communities and indeed of identities of their individual members.

¹ Ringmar (1996: 82) sees the possibility of how actors can maintain their own self-description by acting in a particular manner and thereby expressing a particular identity. Apparently, this kind of behavior may not guarantee recognition by the chosen circle of recognition.

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