Our New Allies?

The Perception of the New Member States of the EU by the Old Members*

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Abstract:

This paper analyses the perception of the new Member States of the EU (the 2004 and 2007 entrants) held by diplomats from permanent representations of the old Member States in Brussels. The contention is that being aware of the perceptions within the EU decision-making process can foster our understanding of the mechanism, since the way in which representatives of individual Member States view other members impacts cooperation at EU level. To study these perceptions, the paper employs image theory, a foreign policy analysis approach, and asks what sort of image diplomats from the old Member States ascribe to the newcomers. The paper is based on 24 semi-structured interviews with representatives of old Member States at their permanent representations. It analyzes the three dimensions that make up the image (relative power, compatibility of goals and cultural distance) and concludes that the prevailing image is that of an ally. But the newcomers are not seen as a unitary group and there are fine-grained differences along each of the dimensions. Future research should therefore focus on amending image theory in order to shed more light on subtle differences in the mutual perceptions of EU Member States.

Keywords: perception; image theory; new member states; European Union

DOI: 10.5817/PC2014-3-234

1. Introduction

The eastern enlargement of the European Union (EU) of 2004 and 2007 brought 10 post-communist countries, or "new Member States", into the European community. Although there is a growing literature dealing with many aspects of their membership, including analyses of the pre-accession period (Caplanová et al. 2004; Lasas 2008; Schimmelfennig 2001 and many more), the preferences these countries pursue at the EU level (Copsey and Haughton 2009;

* Work on this article was supported by Slovak Research and Development Agency grant no. APVV-0484-10 and by Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava grant no. FG20/2014. I am grateful for the comments made by the anonymous reviewers. I would also like to thank all the interviewees for their willingness to take part in the research and for sharing their knowledge with me.

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Haughton 2009; Haughton 2010; Mišík forthcoming; Rybář 2011; Spendzharova 2012), their post-accession compliance with EU rules (Pridham 2008), the holding of the presidency by these countries (Drulák and Šabič 2010; Kajnč 2009; Pomorska and Vanhoonacker 2012), and their engagement in the EU decision-making process (Hosli et al. 2011; Mattila 2009; Naurin and Lindhal 2008) or in the EU in general (Copsey and Pomorska 2010; Copsey and Pomorska 2014; Láštic 2010), we still do not know much about many other aspects of their membership. One of the unexplored questions connected to the new Member States of the EU is how they are perceived by representatives of the "old members", i.e. those countries that had been members of the EU prior to the eastern enlargement. This is what this paper sets out to analyze.

The article assumes that the way representatives of individual member states view each other has an impact on cooperation at the EU level. We presume that states perceived positively are more likely to be included in like-minded groups, various coalitions and informal pre-negotiations than are those seen in a negative light. This is because collaboration with Member States perceived in a positive manner has a greater chance of being productive and effective than would collaboration with countries perceived in the reverse. Collaboration with a country viewed as a friend is much easier than with a Member State with the reputation of a troublemaker. Member countries trying to achieve their goals at the EU level will thus first approach positively perceived counterparts when they try to build coalitions or like-minded groups to help them pursue their aims. Only when necessary will they also approach other countries perceived in neutral or negative terms. For these reasons, this article contends that knowing the perceptions of individual Member States fosters our understanding of the decision-making process within the EU. If we are able to comprehend mutual perceptions between EU member states we will be able to shed more light on issues like coalition building or the creation of like-minded groups that are a very important part of decision-making process in the enlarged EU (Mattila 2009). The focus of the article is thus on the individual level of analysis and on individual agency.

In order to analyse the perception of the newcomers by the old Member States, this paper applies image theory, a foreign policy analysis approach. Image theory was originally developed at the very end of the 1950s to analyse Cold War relations between the two opposing blocs. It studies the perception of other states in the international arena held by decision-makers and the images which result from the characteristics ascribed to these states. The theory was introduced by Boulding (1959) and updated by students of International Relations (IR) and Political Psychology in the 1990s and 2000s to better suit the change in situation that came about with the fall of the Iron Curtain. Altogether five types of images have been developed to grasp different perceptions within IR. This paper uses the theory to analyze intra-EU relations and asks what kind of image representatives of the old Member States ascribe to the 2004 and 2007 newcomers. The paper is based on 24 semi-structured interviews with representatives of the old Member States at their permanent representations.

The article proceeds as following: In the first section, the literature on perception within IR and EU Studies is introduced. This section presents the variety of approaches used to examine perceptions at different levels and the surprisingly limited amount of literature utilizing image theory for this purpose after the end of the Cold War. This is especially puzzling because, in contrast to role theory (another foreign policy analysis approach that is more widely used), image theory offers better operationalization. Moreover, much of the literature on perception

is of an exploratory nature and lacks an explanatory dimension. The second section discusses image theory and contends that this analytical approach is able to shed light on the mutual perception of EU members, since it can capture different aspects of decision-makers' views towards the other countries within the Union. The data utilized in the article is also presented. The third section analyzes the images that old Member States ascribe to their newer counterparts. It shows that the new member states are viewed as allies, although there are differences among the perceptions of individual new members which are too fine to be captured by image theory in its current form. The paper therefore concludes by summarizing and discussing its main findings and proposes that further work should focus on additional development of the approach.

2. Perceptions: conceptual underpinnings

This section of the paper discusses the existing academic literature on perception within IR and EU studies. It should be noted first of all that the scholarship undertaken thus far is too complex to find full coverage within the present space limitations. There are existing literature reviews focusing on the perception of the EU within IR (Lucarelli 2014) and perceptions between states at the international and EU levels in general (Mišík 2013) that provide a fairly detailed overview of the more than 200 academic studies and papers written on the topic. In addition, there is also a review of scholarship on perception during the Cold War (Silverstein 1989). But at the very least, a concise review of the literature on perception is appropriate. This will give us an idea of how perception is used to study relations at global and EU levels and how it can help us to analyse the views of the old Member States towards the newcomers. This section focuses on work utilizing image theory as a theoretical concept which will then be applied to the study of the perception of the new Member States. However, since there is only a very limited amount of scholarship on image theory after the end of the Cold War, we will also discuss other approaches and frameworks used for the analysis of perception within IR as well as EU Studies. The aim of this section is thus to show that the research presented in this paper is based on existing studies of perception at the international and European levels.

Image theory was actually the first framework to introduce perception into IR scholarship. It was developed at the very end of the 1950s as a foreign policy analysis approach for examining the perceptions of the main actors in the Cold War (Boulding 1959). It was followed by role theory, another foreign policy analysis approach, at the beginning of the 1970s (Holsti 1970). While image theory deals with "external" perceptions and analyses the view of other states within the international system, role theory focuses on the "internal" perceptions of states and the characteristics held by their decision-makers that influence policies and aims pursued at the international level (Mišík 2013). Image theory was especially utilized during the Cold War to analyse the two main actors in the conflict. The theory has proved its utility for such analyses and demonstrated an ability to highlight factors such as different media biases that influence the image of the enemy (Silverstein and Flamenbaum 1989). The following section goes into this in greater detail. The approach lost popularity after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the main conflict came to a close and only a handful of authors continued to use the framework for international relations analysis. After the theory was "upgraded", however, to better reflect

the changed international environment after the Cold War, it was used to study issues such as the war against terrorism (Alexander, et al. 2005b), national security policy (Herrmann and Keller 2004), and the EU and its role in world politics (Castano et al. 2003). By contrast, role theory is used more often for the study of policy choices at the international and EU levels (studies include Aggestam 2012; Beneš and Harnish forthcoming; Catalinac 2007 or Chafetz 1997; for detailed information see Beneš 2010). But perceptions have also been studied using techniques which lie outside these theoretical approaches. Jervis (1976), for example, warns of the consequences of misperceiving the goals and interests of other actors in the IR context, something which may lead to armed conflict. In addition, the policies and activity of small states have also been studied using the concept (Tiilikainen 2006; Thorhallsson 2006).

There has been a palpable increase in interest in studying the way the EU is perceived in the international arena. This began in approximately 2006 and has continued since that time, although there were a few significant papers published before that date (among them, Gupta and van der Grijp 2000). The main question asked is how representatives of other (state and non-state) actors in the international environment perceive the EU, its behaviour and activities (Lucarelli 2014). Existing analyses have shown that while the EU is seen as an economically strong actor, it is also viewed as a politically weak player with a limited ability to influence policies at the bilateral level (Elgström 2006). This results from the complexity of its decision-making mechanism and the conflict between supranational and intergovernmental institutions, which equates to slowed reaction times and ambiguous outcomes. When it comes to international negotiations at the multilateral level, the situation is a bit different: the EU is here considered to be a strong actor politically. But in the eyes of other negotiators, it is still not able to lead international discussions (Elgström 2007). This limits the ability of the EU to shape policies and pursue its goals at this level. A concrete example concerns the United Nations negotiations on climate change, where the EU did play a leadership role to a certain extent. But this was perceived controversially, since the EU did not follow the rules it itself had championed (Gupta and van der Grijp 2000). For the very same reason, the EU is also viewed controversially at the bilateral level when trying to dominate other countries during negotiations. This is especially true for Asian and African countries, toward which the EU assumes an almost patronizing position (Mattlin 2012). Such perceptions then negatively influence cooperation between the EU and other states in the international arena. This shows how important the role played by perception in IR is, leading to the conclusion that the existing literature demonstrates the influence perceptions have on mutual relations between states in the international environment.

As an analytical concept, perception has been utilized within the EU Studies to analyze a variety of issues. The literature may be divided into (a) work which deals with the perception of the EU by national elites and the public, (b) studies analyzing the influence of perceptions on preference formation and the influence of the Member States on the EU decision-making process, as well as (c) literature focusing on the impact of perceptions on individual common EU policies (Mišík 2013). Although research on public and elite perceptions has found a fairly positive set of views held by these groups about the EU, it has also pointed out differences of perception when it comes to concrete areas of integration (Ilonszki 2009). These differences are rooted in "multifaceted social, historical [and] religious" diversity that has to be "calculated when we want to understand elite and mass opinion on European integration" (Ilonszki

2009a: 6). The existing literature also maintains that public support for integration may be influenced by the perceived satisfaction with developments at the national level (Ilonszki 2009b), the level of trust towards other member states (Genna 2009, although not everyone agrees with this argument – see, for example, White 2010) and perceptions of the legitimacy of the European project (Jones 2009). According to Matonyté and Morkevičius (2009), the attitude of national elites towards European integration is the result of the perception of external threats to the cohesion of the EU, which "convey[s] the national elites' feelings of belonging and concern for the EU" (Matonyté and Morkevičius 2009: 56). The authors studied three such threats: the enlargement of the EU to include Turkey, the relationship with the USA and interference by Russia in European affairs. They conclude that there is an "absence of a unified perception of external threats to EU cohesion among political and economic elites" (Matonyté and Morkevičius 2009: 59).

The preferences pursued by Member States at the EU level may also be influenced by the perception of strengths and weaknesses of these states held by their national decision-makers. Research has shown that this is particularly the case for the new Member States of the EU (Haughton 2009; Haughton 2010). For example, Polish preferences in the external energy area are influenced by a "sense of strategic vulnerability vis-à-vis Russia" (Roth 2011: 620), while within the internal energy market the perceived security of supply plays an important role (Pointvogl 2009). Nguyen (2008) argues that decision-makers who feel "secure" in office support long-term benefits stemming from integration at the expense of short-term costs, while those who do not perceive their position as stable pursue policies in line with public opinion. By contrast, politicians who do not feel they have "political insulation" pursue policies in line with public opinion to increase their chances of reelection.

Perceptions may also impact on the activity of Member States at the EU level. Governments of member states "require reputations as more or less consensus-minded in general", which influences their ability to pursue their goals on a community level (Wallace 2005: 41). In analysing Polish actions within the EU, Copsey and Pomorska (2010) came to the conclusion that other member states rely on "the reputation that Poland had built for itself in the Brussels village, much of which is filtered through the media – where the image of Poland was very negative" (Copsey and Pomorska 2010: 318). In addition, various EU policies have also been a subject of study in research into the influence of perceptions. In particular, security and foreign policy have been intensely studied using role theory (Aggestam 2012; Frank 2008), as well as by the use of other theoretical frameworks (Heller 2009). The literature stresses the point that the subjective perceptions held by political actors form an important determinant of security in Europe and the roles decision-makers ascribed to their own states on the basis of their perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses influence the security and foreign policy preferences of those states. Other policies, including the common fisheries policy (McLean and Gray 2009), energy policy (Mišík forthcoming), enlargement of the EU eastwards (Sedelmeier 2006) and relations with third countries (Browing and Christou 2010; Dostál et al. 2011), have also been analyzed using perceptions as the analytical feature of interest.

There are several common features of the literature on perception within IR and EU studies that are important for this paper. First of all, there is no common theoretical background to these studies as they are based on various approaches or are of an exploratory nature. This

prevents them from building on previous research from a theoretical standpoint and compromises the accumulation of knowledge in the field. Secondly, only a limited number of studies have used image theory in the post-Cold War period and the potential of this approach has been underutilized. Thirdly, there are, to the best knowledge of the author, no studies on perceptions among EU member states. An objective of this paper is to partially fill this empirical and theoretical gap. To this end, it analyzes the perceptions held by old Member States of the new Member States. The next section of the paper outlines image theory as the theoretical framework that will be used to analyze perceptions.

3. Theoretical underpinnings and data

Image theory, as introduced by Boulding (1959) maintains that "[w]e act according to the way the world appears to us, not necessarily according to the way it 'is'" (Boulding 1959: 120). We have a certain perception of the world and reality is only real to the extent we perceive it to be so. Image theory claims that we ascribe "images" to other actors (usually states) that represent our perception of these actors. Images may be defined as "patterns or configurations of coherent beliefs about the character, intentions, motives and emotions attributed to or associated with the out-group as a whole" (Alexander et al. 2005a: 782). According to Boulding (1959), images are historical constructs; they are based on great shared events, experience and a mythological past. We mostly use images if there is not enough information about the world we are trying to understand. To do so, we supplement objective facts with sets of beliefs (images). The theory therefore assumes that subjective beliefs (images) have a bigger impact on our activity than "objective" information. The chief concern of the theorists who built upon Boulding's ideas rests in how the differing images we hold of others influence our opinions about and relations toward them, and the effect of different biases on this process.

The literature on images was originally influenced by the psychological literature on prejudice, as well as writings about the role of cognition. Images can influence our perception and the evaluation of the members of other groups in society as well as of other nations and states (Silverstein and Flamenbaum 1989). This concept was also introduced into IR, where it was used to analyze the perceptions held by decision-makers of other states within the international arena. Images about others can play a crucial role in the international system since "people whose decisions determine the policies and actions of nations do not respond to the 'objective' facts of the situation, whatever that may mean, but to their 'image' of the situation" (Boulding 1959: 120). After its establishment in IR and its further development, the theory was also applied to the study of intergroup relations.

Images of the Soviet Union held by United States decision-makers were the subject of extensive study during the Cold War, since they "[might have] play[ed] a large role in perpetuating the nuclear arms race" (Silverstein 1989: 903). A number of studies have demonstrated that awareness among the American political elite of the Soviet Union was strongly related to policy preferences. Both sides had insufficient information about the other's intentions and therefore developed images which subsequently influenced their actions towards the other side. During this period, a large body of literature on image theory came into being (for a detailed review, see Silverstein 1989). The most studied image of this period was that of the

"enemy", the image held by American leaders and Americans towards the Soviet Union (the theory was mostly developed by American scholars).

Biases may play a significant role in the process of image creation. Studies have shown that if people perceive a group or an individual as a threat, i.e. as an enemy, the interpretation of their behaviour is marked by biases. During the Cold War, the American media represented a source of such bias. The image portrayed of the Soviet Union was often negative and biased. A great deal of media coverage was granted to people criticizing the Soviet Union. Such biases further strengthen the "enemy" image (Silverstein and Flamenbaum 1989). Images within IR influence expectations about the behaviour of others and the interpretation of their actions. The effect of images may moreover be influenced by entativity, i.e. the extent to which the other is perceived as a real entity (Castano et al. 2003). Societal groups may have different levels of entativity, which means that they may be perceived as real to differing degrees. This holds true for IR, as well. States may be perceived as more or less real. The more a country is perceived as real (high entativity) and also as an enemy, the more its behaviour and actions are interpreted in hostile terms and vice versa.

After the collapse of the bipolar world and the Cold War, image theory was revised in order to capture the changing world order. The enemy image forced scholars to examine relationships between states in the international system as security dilemmas (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995: 427). But image theory has much more to offer than a simple description of relations based upon threat and hostility. The overarching dilemma had already been resolved – that of the Cold War. Novel dilemmas required that the theory be modified. Other images were added to the original enemy image which was "popular" during the Cold War in order to explain the new situation: Ally, Degenerate/Barbarian, Dependent/Colony and Imperialist (Alexander et al. 2005a: 782–783; Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995: 426). This array of images enables us to describe not only hostility between states but also other types of relationships.

An image is the result of a combination of three types of perceptions: (a) a perception of relative power, (b) a perception of other states' intentions (goal compatibility), and (c) a perception of the degree of cultural distance between one's own state and others (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995). According to the theory, what matters within the international system is not the absolute amount of power, but its relative size vis-à-vis other actors. Relative power may therefore be lesser, equal or greater. The same holds for cultural status, which represents the perception of another state's culture in comparison to one's own state. Goal compatibility or perceptions of other states' intentions may take three forms: another actor may be perceived as threatening (since its intentions are seen to be so), there may be mutually beneficial cooperation, or the actor may be exploited (since its goals are perceived as easily diverted). Both the first and last possibilities amount to goal incompatibility, whereas mutually beneficial cooperation means goals are compatible. Different images of others are created by combinations of these three factors. Image theory specifies conditions under which these images are expected to emerge. If goals between states of equal power and cultural status are compatible, the states then mutually perceive themselves using the image of allies. An outgroup or other state may be perceived in a positive light as cooperative, trustworthy and democratic. This is the only type of image which is positive; the other four are negative in nature, owing to the goal incompatibility of the actors involved (Herrmann and Fisherkeller 1995). The enemy image is the mirror image of the ally. The only difference is that states of comparable strength

and cultural status now have incompatible goals. Under this image, others are direct competitors in the international system, perceived as threats and portrayed as hostile, untrustworthy and undemocratic. The ally and enemy images are based upon the assumption that both states have the same status and strength.

Three other images differ in more respects, but in all three cases, there is incompatibility of goals. These images are hence all negative. For cases in which a state perceives the other culture as weaker but its power dimension as higher, it holds a (degenerate) barbarian image of the other state. In this case, the other state is perceived as violent and destructive. When states have a dependent (colony) image of another actor, they see themselves as holding higher cultural status and more power than the other state. The natural thing to do is then to exploit the other state to the former's own advantage. However, the exploitation of others is not morally justifiable for a state with a higher cultural status, so to excuse the exploitation the members of the other state are seen as "lazy", "lacking discipline" or "incompetent". The state is therefore entitled to help the other and protect its people from themselves. On other occasions, an imperialist image is used, in which the other state is perceived to hold relatively more power as well as a higher cultural status. Since direct resistance is not reasonable given the lower relative power held by the state, resistance to the other is indirect, consisting in sabotage, revolt and rebellion (Alexander et al. 2005a: 782–783; Herrmann and Fisherkeller 1995: 425–427).

This article applies image theory to analyse perceptions of the new Member States of the European Union. Although the EU differs in many respects from other actors in the international system in being neither a federal state nor an organization and whose supranational dimension complicates the picture even more, we may nevertheless apply this foreign policy analysis approach to the study of relations among individual Member States. Mutual perceptions have an impact on the decision-making process and on policies towards other members within the EU, similarly as at the international level. Perceptions are an important factor in the decision-making mechanism of the EU since they support or hinder collaboration at the community level. It is assumed here that positive perceptions foster cooperation, while negative views hinder it. This is very similar to what takes place on the international level, where images also significantly influence the form of cooperation and the level of communication with other states, at least according to image theory.

The following section analyzes three perceptual dimensions, seeking the image that best characterizes the perception of the newcomers by decision-makers in the old Member States. To do so, a set of interviews with representatives from the permanent representation of the old Member States in Brussels is utilized. The interviews were conducted in May and June 2010 and were recorded. The analysis is based on a verbatim transcription of these recordings. 24 interviews were conducted in all with diplomats from permanent representations. These people were in daily contact with their counterparts from the new Member States and therefore were very good sources of information for studying the perception of the new members by the older members. The research was conducted after the new member countries had been in the EU for several years, giving representatives from the old Member States time enough to get to know their newer counterparts' strengths and weaknesses and allowing them to comment on their behaviour and actions in the EU decision-making process. The following section analyzes the images along three dimensions, while final sections discuss the results and summarize the main findings of the research.

4. Images of the new Member States of the EU

Images that decision-makers ascribe to other states consist of three types of perceptions. These are (a) the perception of relative power, (b) the perception of goal compatibility and (c) the perception of cultural distance. The type of image that is ascribed to a state depends upon the combination of these three dimensions. Image theory claims five different images may be formed in this manner. They are: Enemy, Ally, Degenerate/Barbarian, Dependent/Colony and Imperialist. This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the three dimensions of an image on the basis of interviews with respondents from the permanent representations of the old Member States.

4.1. Relative power

According to our respondents, there are no significant differences between the new and old Member States in their ability to influence the decision-making process. The new member states are comparably active at the EU level and their ability to push through their preferences is equivalent to that of their older counterparts. Although they started out passive in the early days of their membership, they have upped their activity and are currently comparable in these terms to the old Member States. In addition, in the areas in which they take an interest they are very active, sometimes capable of more ably pursuing their goals than are the older members. An important restriction, however, is the limited administrative capacity they possess, a problem particularly visible with small new Member States. In spite of this, some new members, particularly Poland, are very influential and able to assert their interests at the community level.

When it comes to the activity level of the new Member States, one respondent noted that he "see[s] no difference" between them and the old members (Interview 9). Many other diplomats have expressed similar opinions (Interview 27, 36, etc.). The newcomers were fairly quiet at the beginning of their membership. But this has changed over time and they are currently comparable not only in terms of their activity level, but also in the influence they wield over the decision-making process. As explained by an Irish diplomat, "The participation rate and understanding the dynamics of how the EU operates (...) was clearly an issue for the new member states at the beginning" (Interview 8). Although this has changed in most cases, some new Member States still do not "feel they have a say or they need to contribute to debate" (Interview 1), and they sometimes "won't come forward to advance their positions" (Interview 4). The newcomers have been quite successful in learning how to intensify their engagement at the EU level, and "with time they are all getting much more into [the decision-making process] and getting much more vocal and able to shape [it]" (Interview 24). One diplomat explained, "They learned quickly and their integration into the system was rapid" (Interview 15) Generally speaking, "The new Member States have adapted very rapidly to the working methods in the European Union" (Interview 17), and "they are learning fast" (Interview 10). Moreover, they have learned that cooperation is essential for those successful within the EU; they "quite quickly learned that it was in their interest to work with individual or groups of old member states" (Interview 10).

The engagement and influence of the new members very much depends on concrete areas; they are much more active in some areas than in others (for example, see Interview 1).

New member states are especially active in areas of their interest "when they have specific problems" (Interview 18). This also means that they are less active in areas which are not of primary interest to them. As explained by an interviewee, "The new member states are less likely to play a prominent role in general debate where there isn't a very particular national interest involved" (Interview 2). A Swedish respondent summarized this issue when she noted that "[i]n some policy areas new member states can be quite surprisingly inactive or silent, but then again I think in the areas where they have crucial interests they are very active and capable of pursuing their interests" (Interview 24). However, when it comes to the ability to influence the decision-making process at the general level, "[t]he old member states are a little bit more successful in influencing the agenda than the new member states" (Interview 24).

The main problem for the new member states in this area is their administrative capacity, especially the limited number of people working at the permanent representations and EU institutions. This lack restricts their level of engagement within the EU and hence their ability to influence the decision-making process. As recalled by a British respondent, representatives of the new members "could not give a position because they had to go to a committee and then had to go to another committee and then had to go another committee" (Interview 16). This was especially visible "in the early days in 2004 [when] a number of administrations perhaps were not able to put the sort of structures in place" (Interview 16). As noted by one respondent, the limitation of "resources in the capital or resources they have here in the representation (...) encourages selectivity in terms of the issues that they will take" (Interview 8). The problem is that "[...] the new member states still have a limited core of people who have been through Brussels, been through EU type assignments and then gone back to headquarters" (Interview 8). Besides these issues, the newcomers still do not have enough people in the EU institutions like the European Commission, and "suffer to an extent from not having as many co-nationals in senior positions in the institutions" (Interview 2). As noted by an Irish respondent, another issue is that "[...] a lot of new Member States' representations in Brussels tends to be at junior middle-ranking level and you don't have many seniors" (Interview 8).

Our respondents also observed that there were fairly significant differences in the "quality" of the diplomats at the permanent representations of the new members, which can significantly affect the influence of these countries in the decision-making process of the EU. There are "a couple of my colleagues (...) who seem to me to be rather weaker than it is likely any of the older member states would be, but equally there are others who are very good performers and well-briefed and so on, who perform effectively" (Interview 2). However, this has changed over time. There was a time when it "was more difficult to deal with the new member states simply because they did not have the routine in the working groups yet". But now, they "have diplomats who (...) are very experienced" (Interview 22).

Smaller members especially have problems with the capacity of their administrations, but this does not mean that they cannot be influential, as the example of the Netherlands suggests (Interview 7). As observed by an interviewee, "It takes a lot of strength to maintain a certain position and it is more difficult when you are a smaller Member State (...) it is very difficult to withstand the political pressure of 24 [to] 25 Member States" (Interview 17). However, whether a Member State is successful or not depends "on the quality of your proposals and the attitude of your negotiators" and is not just a matter of the state's size (Interview 7). Among the new Member States, Slovenia was seen as an example of a country that was influential

due to its ability to seek compromises (Interview 26). They tried to "broker a consensus and to find a compromise" (Interview 13). However, when Slovenia's conflict with Croatia prompted it to block the country's accession process into the EU, other members stopped perceiving Slovenia in such a favourable light. Slovenia has "paid for this [significantly] in the sense that it has lost the image of, let's say, an honest, well behaved country. It has lost good will. [And] you pay for that when you want to get something done. Countries have long memories" (Interview 17).

Among the new Member States, Poland is the most active as well as the most influential country, which "obviously and rightly sees itself as a large country" (Interview 2). The Polish are "very conscious about their historical positions in Europe and they have perhaps some higher [expectations of] the role they would play" (Interview 8). Therefore they are "very good at making a lot of noise" (Interview 21). Poland's increased engagement is a function in particular of its size; it is the largest state among the newcomers. In general, the larger members of the EU are more influential and more active. This is also true of the old members. Poland is a "bit louder than the others, but that's the same for the old member states" (Interview 20). As explained by an interviewee, "Size is definitely a criterion," although not the only one, and "you cannot do the same when you are in [terms of] population or in administrative and policy capacity a large country or smaller country" (Interview 12). On the other hand, some of our respondents noted that Poland could take on an even more active role at the EU level and is "one of those Member States that we are still waiting [...] to show their potential" (Interview 24). But Poland was not the only new Member State to receive a positive evaluation in terms of engagement and influence. Hungary was also mentioned as an active, well-prepared country (Interview 6 and 25) "particularly influential" within the EU decision-making process (Interview 10) and able to serve as a spokesperson for a group of countries (Interview 13).

4.2. Goal compatibility

When it comes to the perception of other states' intentions, that is the perception of goal compatibility, our respondents saw no significant differences between the old Member States and the newcomers. New members focus on different areas, such as Eastern Europe, but this does not mean that their general goals within the EU are incompatible with the goals of the old members. Their goals are not contradictory; it is simply that the new members are focused on different issues. Their common goal is to cooperate within the EU. There is, however, a difference between these two groups of Member States in terms of how they pursue their goals at the EU level. The new Member States do not yet know all the rules of the "EU game" and sometimes pursue their goals in a manner the old members find difficult to accept. Most importantly, representatives of the new member states quite often pursue their own national interests without taking into account what their proposals might spell for the EU taken as a whole. They also pursue their interests aggressively and are often not open to compromise. This is caused partly by the fact that they receive rather rigid instructions from their capitals, which are responsible in most cases for developing their national positions.

Our respondents cited three main differences between the ways old versus new Member States pursue their goals at the EU level. First of all, new members "are not ready to play the game of the EU" (Interview 3) and they sometimes have problems following common rules in

the decision-making process. This is especially the case with informal rules and procedures. As an Italian diplomat observed, the new members "still tend to perceive the mechanisms here in Brussels as a multilateral mechanism", and therefore their negotiating style follows a different logic (Interview 7). That logic is as follows: "So, I have a set of targets. This is my national interest and I have to negotiate with other countries in order to get them. It is a little bit more difficult to understand that you have to negotiate 10% in Brussels and 90% in your capital" (Interview 7). Thus while representatives of the old member states perceive cooperation at the EU level in terms of a "plus-sum" game, the new ones "very much [see] EU negotiations as [a] zero-sum" game (Interview 21). Such an approach limits the ability to cooperate with new members that sometimes view the decision-making process in terms of a realist approach to IR.

The second difference in negotiating style is in the strict following of national interests by the new Member States without taking into account the "European" dimension. As explained by an interviewee, they "are thinking more in terms of national interest than in terms of communitarian interest" (Interview 13). Another diplomat adds that new members "are trying very much to defend what they consider to be their rights" within the EU (Interview 21). And they are doing so very heavy-handedly. They "present really hard positions without opening the door for compromise" (Interview 3), which is definitely not the "European" way. The new members do not yet have the "compromise culture" that is necessary "if we want to continue the process" (Interview 3). On the one hand, thinking in terms of national interests is not specific to the newcomers, since "each member state (...) is trying to get as much as it can" (Interview 9). But there is a significant difference between the old and new Members, with the main interest of the older member countries being to ensure that "the European Union works as efficiently as possible" (Interview 13). This means that "the old member states see their national interests in a more European [light]" (Interview 21) and they support their interests with "European arguments". Promoting a proposal with arguments about how it is going to be "good for Europe (...) is something that often wins the argument" (Interview 21). And it is therefore important to "say you want this change in a file because it would be better for Europe and would be a good thing for all of us, instead of saying 'we want to change this because it will be better for Latvia or Hungary'" (Interview 21). Besides, it is good to "always keep in mind that if you do something good for Europe, it is also good for your country" (Interview 22). According to one respondent, the lack of "European" argumentation prevents the new members from "mak[ing] broader contributions (...) particularly in an area like institutional development" (Interview 8).

The third difference lies in the flexibility of instructions that permanent representations receive from their respective capitals. Diplomats from the new Member States receive very rigid instructions from home ministries that limit their ability to find compromise. One of our respondents was even "surprised (...) how rigid the instructions are from the headquarters" of the new Member States (Interview 8). By contrast, old Member States' representatives "have much more room to manoeuvre" (Interview 13). The governments of the newcomers want to "control the permanent representations in a much tighter way" and this can go as far as blocking negotiations (Interview 13). A consequence is that the entire EU decision-making process is slowed down. This practice is, however, changing to allow a more open approach because the new members learned "fairly quickly that this would make them losers" (Interview 10).

To summarize, we found that the new Member States are perceived by diplomats from the permanent representations of the old Member States as having similar intentions at the EU level In other words, there is goal compatibility between these two groups of states. What is different is the way these goals are pursued, what might be labelled "tool compatibility". Although these observations are generally applicable to all new Member States, our respondents claimed that there were variations between the Member States. A Danish respondent claimed that "it is really not fair" to say that all new members are similar (Interview 21). These differences are comparable to those between original members (Interview 9). As explained by a Luxembourgian diplomat, the differences between old members "are huge (...) they are far bigger than the differences" between new member states (Interview 18).

4.3. Cultural distance

Our respondents noted no significant cultural differences between the new and the old member states. They maintained that there are cultural differences between all individual member states, since each member has its own specific cultural attributes. If there is a cultural pattern among EU Member States of any sort, it centres on differences between northern and southern Member States, not between those of the western versus the eastern areas of the union. There is nevertheless a certain post-socialist historical legacy within the new Member States that influences their working methods and behaviour to some degree at the EU level. This is especially apparent in the lack of a compromise culture in negotiations, as well as these countries' position towards Russia.

According to our respondents, there are no significant cultural differences between these two groups of members. There is "no [cultural or political] wall between the new Member States" and the old members (Interview 9). As one diplomat observed, the new members "have their own traditions, their own culture. But there is a sense of sharing common values with the older Member States" (Interview 13). Interviewees agreed that there are differences among all EU members, but not between the two "generations". In fact, "The old member states in themselves are culturally extremely different" (Interview 2). The same goes as well for the new members, among whom there are also visible cultural differences (Interview 22). Another respondent noted that "in 27 Member States there are at least 27 cultural specificities and this is our value, our richness" (Interview 10). An Irish diplomat explained that "all the Member States are culturally different (...) so it is more diversity rather than division" (Interview 4). Most of our respondents came to the conclusion that any cultural pattern that exists centres on the division between northern and southern Member States, since "the South is completely different in comparison with the North" (Interview 5).

But there is something culturally different about the new Member States which may be labelled the "communist legacy". Representatives of the old members "see echoes from time to time from the new Member States that 20 years ago they were under […] Communist rule. But not an awful lot" (Interview 10). This communist legacy translates in particular into a lack of consensus culture, making negotiations within the decision-making bodies more difficult at times. Compared to the new members, the old members "are more ready for […] consensus" (Interview 3), while the newer members are not as open to compromise. The communist legacy also impacts on the representatives of the new members, who are younger than their

counterparts from among the original EU members. This is because "there is a new elite in the post-communist era" formed after 1989 (Interview 2) that replaced the old communist elite. Moreover, according to our respondents, some newcomers have "a different style" since they are "not really used to being open and sort of very frank amongst other people and tend to be more closed in a sense" (Interview 21). However, there is no reason to exaggerate this legacy since "it has been 21 years now and certainly in the political sphere there are very few traces of political transition" (Interview 21). The EU perspective has fostered "the process of political transition much like the economic transition" (Interview 21).

5. Conclusion

To complete the analysis, we must pin down the answer to our main research question: What kind of image is ascribed to the new Member States of the EU by decision-makers from the old Member States? The previous analysis points to a conclusion that the prevailing image is one of an ally. The new members are seen as allies. This means their engagement and ability to influence the EU decision-making process are seen as being on par with that of the old members – the issue of relative power. Their intentions within the EU are perceived to be in line with those of other member states, i.e., their goals are compatible. And when it comes to the perception of cultural differences (cultural distance) they are also perceived as equals.

While further research is necessary to provide a detailed explanation of the influence of perceptions on the EU and its decision-making process, the findings presented here allow for some general observations to be made about the importance of perceptions within the EU. Although there are some differences in perceptions of the newcomers, as discussed in the following paragraph, the new Member States are seen in a positive light. We may thus expect that cooperation between these states and the OMS at the EU level will be fairly smooth and not hampered by negative perceptions. Any potential conflict should be based in other issues extant at the EU level. In other words, perceptions of the newcomers by the old Member States are not likely to create a source of tension within the EU decision-making mechanism. However, we must also study the perception of the old Member States by the newcomers to be able to discern whether cooperation between the EU Member States is fostered or frustrated by their mutual perceptions.

The analysis also reveals two primary challenges to such a positive conclusion. First of all, while the ally image is certainly applicable at the general level, the situation becomes a bit more ambiguous at the level of concrete details. The new Member States are restricted in terms of activity and influenced by problems to do with administrative capacity. They pursue their goals in a manner which is not always seen as acceptable by the other members of the EU and in many cases lack the "compromise culture" essential for smooth decision-making, at least according to diplomats from the old Member States. The second challenge stems from the fact that examining the perceptions of diplomats from the old Member States reveals that the views of individual newcomer states vary – the new Member States are not perceived as a unified group. So while some countries are perceived in a more positive light, others are seen in a somewhat more negative manner in particular areas. But even these negative views do

not contradict the image of an ally suggested by our findings – the broad picture is generally positive.

This leads us to conclude that, in its current form, image theory has only limited ability to examine perceptions among EU Member States. Image theory hence needs to be amended to be able to shed more light on the subtle differences in mutual perception of EU Member States. The ally image must be remodelled to take into account several more finely differentiated subcategories of ally capable of describing the various perceptions of the Member States. This is a task for further research that should focus on the theoretical underpinning of these fine-grained differences in perception as well as their empirical analysis within the EU.

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Attachment: List of the interviews:

Interview 1: Diplomat, Permanent representation of France to the EU, Brussels, 11 May 2010.
Interview 2: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Ireland to the EU, Brussels, 11 May 2010.
Interview 3: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Belgium to the EU, Brussels, 11 May 2010.
Interview 4: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Ireland to the EU, Brussels, 11 May 2010.
Interview 5: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Italy to the EU, Brussels, 12 May 2010.
Interview 6: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Italy to the EU, Brussels, 12 May 2010.
Interview 7: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Italy to the EU, Brussels, 12 May 2010.
Interview 8: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Ireland to the EU, Brussels, 12 May 2010.
Interview 9: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Greece to the EU, Brussels, 22 June 2010.
Interview 10: Diplomat, Permanent representation of the Great Britain to the EU, Brussels, 22 June 2010.
Interview 11: Diplomat, Permanent representation of the Great Britain to the EU, Brussels, 22 June 2010.
Interview 12: Diplomat, Permanent representation of France to the EU, Brussels, 22 June 2010.
Interview 13: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Belgium to the EU, Brussels, 22 June 2010.
Interview 14: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Portugal to the EU, Brussels, 23 June 2010.
Interview 15: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Portugal to the EU, Brussels, 23 June 2010.
Interview 16: Diplomat, Permanent representation of the Great Britain to the EU, Brussels, 23 June 2010.
Interview 17: Diplomat, Permanent representation of the Netherland to the EU, Brussels, 12 May 2010.
Interview 18: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Luxemburg to the EU, Brussels, 12 May 2010.
Interview 19: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Luxemburg to the EU, Brussels, 12 May 2010.
Interview 20: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Germany to the EU, Brussels, 22 June 2010.
Interview 21: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Denmark to the EU, Brussels, 22 June 2010.
Interview 22: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Austria to the EU, Brussels, 23 June 2010.
Interview 23: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Finland to the EU, Brussels, 23 June 2010.
Interview 24: Diplomat, Permanent representation of Sweden to the EU, Brussels, 22 June 2010.