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Thesis summary

Europeanization as social reality: a constructivist view

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The emergence of the European Communities has brought a lot of concepts, questions and social processes. One of the concepts that emerged immediately after the formation of the communities is that of European integration.

Because accession meant integration into the community, it was believed that all changes made in the name of integration were related to integration. This seemed to make sense, until these changes were also identified in countries outside the Union, in those states that were to join the community or in those that only collaborated with the community and did not necessarily seek to join it. This raised a lot of questions which revealed the existence of another process that researchers have called Europeanization.

Since the discovery of Europeanization, many authors have focused on defining it, to clarify what it represents and what impact it has on society. Given that Europeanization is related to European integration, its research has started primarily from the integration theories. Neofunctionalism is one of the most used approaches due to its vision and the ease it creates in research, taking into account that the results of top-down Europeanization are easy to observe and study. However, other approaches are also present, such as functionalism, intergovernmentalism, federalism, new institutionalism or governance theory.

One would think that the wide range of theoretical approaches should have helped to define Europeanization; however, the authors failed to agree on a single definition. The only thing they agreed on was that Europeanization is a process, and then each theoretical interpretation defined this process in its own way, taking into account its own observations.

This is how Europeanization came to have dozens of definitions. Although unexpected, Europeanization studies have reached a crisis caused by the concentration of studies on the same group of theoretical approaches. Studies have entered a routine in which they start from the same ideas and reach similar results. Although several studies have been developed based on other theoretical approaches, they have also failed to bring Europeanization studies out of this crisis of ideas that outlines the need for new visions of the process.

With the intention of contributing to the solution of this crisis, I decided to develop this thesis starting from another theoretical approach.

Part I

The first part of the thesis is a technical one, focused on identifying the purpose of the paper: the study of Europeanization as a new social reality.

Then, to achieve this goal, I set out to answer the following question: if Europeanization is a new social reality, then how did it come to replace the old reality, what mechanisms and tools were used to root, routine and normalize it in the Romanian society?

If Europeanization exists as a new social reality, then it is present in any field of social activity, it ensures and describes a way of life. Therefore, at a more detailed analysis, in order to detect the presence of this reality in the Romanian society, it would be enough to find results from the installation of Europeanization in a single field. For this reason, I have chosen to focus this study on the Romanian competition policy and on the Competition Council as the institution responsible for the application of this policy.

Next, I established a set of questions that should help me in my research, questions such as: Is Europeanization a new social reality in Romania? To what extent did the Competition Council contribute to the Europeanization of the Romanian society? What were the mechanisms used in transmitting the reality formulated by the EU to the Romanian society and its institutions? To what extent has the reality model, formulated by the EU, been applied in the Romanian Competition Council and how much does it characterize the Romanian society?

These questions helped me establish the following research hypotheses:

1. If Europeanization is a new objective reality, then its results can be observed, studied and measured.
2. If Europeanization is a new social reality, then most individuals will perceive it the same way.
3. If the Romanian Competition Council is a catalyst for the Europeanization of Romanian society, then it must be Europeanized at the highest possible level and be aware of this reality so it could transmit it to the society.
4. If the EU encourages and sustains communication and institutional learning, then these could be the key mechanisms used for the Europeanization settlement.

These hypotheses are related to two objectives of the research that I set out to achieve, namely: to demonstrate that Europeanization is a new social reality in Romania and then to study how this reality has been installed.

In this direction, I concluded that the thesis should have the following structure:

Chapter I focuses on establishing research objectives, research hypotheses, the purpose of the thesis, research issues and limits and the methodology used to study the subject.

Chapter II is focused on the construction of a theoretical basis that would later help me to develop the empirical part of the paper. Here I analyze some of the most well-known paradigms and identify the approach I use in this paper - a mixed approach. Next, I outline some of the central ideas of the paradigms used and apply them to the concept of Europeanization.

In Chapter III I illustrate the current state of development of Europeanization studies. Here I highlight some of the findings that help me to develop the thesis such as: theories and definitions of Europeanization, the mechanisms of the process, the areas influenced by it and the directions and degrees of Europeanization. Based on this knowledge, I define Europeanization and identify the link and differences between Europeanization and other parallel processes such as globalization and European integration.

Chapter IV is about personal research, where I apply theoretical knowledge to empirical research. In the first part of this chapter I demonstrate that Europeanization is a new social reality, and in the second part I analyze how it was installed, the mechanisms that contributed to establishing this reality, and the importance and role of the European Union in formulating and maintaining this reality. Also, here I try to understand to what extent the adaptation of the Romanian Competition Council to this reality contributed to the installation of Europeanization as a new social reality in the Romanian society.

In the end, I present conclusions and recommendations for future research.

The structure of this thesis started from the following research plan:

- Identifying the problem as a subject of study.
- Proposing a different way of approaching and studying the problem.
- Outlining the hypotheses of the research.
- Analyzing basic concepts and underlining work definitions.
- Choosing a case study.
- Describing the research methodology.
- Emphasizing the theory based on which the process is studied.
- Elaborating a questionnaire and interview to be addressed to the employees of the Romanian Competition Council.

- Building a system for measuring the results of Europeanization settlement taking into account the paradigms chosen for research. Respectively, the construction and application of the model for measuring the results of Europeanization.
- Studying the role of communication and institutional learning in institutional and social Europeanization.
- Describing the evolution of the relationship between the Romanian Competition Council and the EU, and the role of the EU in changing, establishing the directions of RCC work.
- Emphasizing the communication ways between the Council and EU, then between the Council and society and their role in the settlement of Europeanization as anew social reality.
- Describing the Competition Council's role in transmitting to society the values, ideas, principles and 'way of life' formulated at EU level.
- Formulating research conclusions and highlighting new research openings.

Following this research plan, I succeed through this thesis to make a special contribution to European, European integration, social and philosophical studies.

As my intention was from the very beginning to bring a new approach to Europeanization, this thesis has a major contribution to the studies of Europeanization and European integration. However, the theoretical approach I chose made the whole work a study of the reality of European society in the 21st century, representing an important piece of the puzzle of social and philosophical studies focused on understanding human being and reality at different times in history.

In order to be able to contribute to these areas, I had to choose a research methodology to help me gather the information needed to achieve the purpose of the thesis.

Considering the theoretical choice, I decided to use a mixed methodology, with both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative ones aim to help me gather data that can be quantified, numbered and measured, and the qualitative ones to help me fill the gaps left behind by the inability of the quantitative methodology to explain how Europeanization has become a social reality.

The main research method is the case study. I chose Romania as the territory for the analysis of Europeanization, with special attention on the competition policy and the Competition Council. I made this choice of case study for several reasons: living in this country gives me the

opportunity to observe closely the effects of the installation of Europeanization both on the Competition Council and on the policy that it strives to apply. Later, I chose to focus on studying the impact of Europeanization on the Competition Council because it is a relatively new institution, which has a close relationship with the European Union and its institutions. This made me believe that there is a higher degree of institutional transparency, respectively free access to information that can help me in the elaboration of this thesis. So, the case study helped me notice how Europeanization changed the way the Competition Council works, its working principles and the internal organization. It also made me understand the Council's involvement in the Europeanization of Romanian society, to observe the basic mechanisms that helped install Europeanization as a new social reality and to identify the role of the EU and the Council in transforming Europeanization into normality, in a way of life.

In addition to the case study, I considered the survey to be an equally important method in research. I used both tools it provides, the interview and the questionnaire. The questionnaire helped me gather data that I used to measure the results following the installation of Europeanization, in order to verify if it is a new social reality; I used the interview to research and understand how this reality came to replace the old social reality in Romania.

In addition, to guarantee the research objectivity, I used both fieldwork and observation. Although they are in diametrically opposed camps in terms of the objectivity that the researcher may have, I decided to use both, in order to have different perspectives on the subject, to obtain some degree of detachment and to closely observe the subject of the research.

I also used document analysis, process tracking, a contrario, analysis grid and black box logic.

Considering the working methodology, the theoretical approach, my knowledge of daily life, from the beginning of the paper I had some expectations regarding the research results. Because Romania is a member of the European Union, given its degree of integration in the community and my personal observations from everyday life, I expected my hypotheses to be valid from the very beginning.

Then, because the Competition Council is a national authority and its power of intervention was relatively small throughout its existence (only after 2004 it gained more rights of action and later after 2018), I did not expect its degree of adaptation to Europeanization to be at the highest

level; I only expected it to have a relatively high degree of Europeanization and to be active in disseminating the new reality to Romanian society.

During the study, I encountered some research limitations. These include the lack of clarity in defining research paradigms. As each paradigm was taken by each researcher and presented from the perspectives of their work, I encountered vagueness and a different approach to both the ideas of paradigms and their names (e.g. constructivism, social constructionism, social constructivism).

Another limitation in the research was limited access to official information. For example, although the Competition Council started its activity one year after the formation of the competition law in Romania, they find the reports of its activity only after 2003. Then, even if these reports are available, they do not present the same information every year. For this reason, I could not follow the evolution of the institution's budget throughout its activity, the number of employees, the internal organization and others.

One of the major limitations of the research was the unavailability of Council employees to participate in my questionnaire and interview, for various reasons such as busy work schedule, fear that their answers could be misinterpreted, lack of knowledge, etc.

The biggest limitation in my research was the COVID-19 pandemic and all the restrictions it brought, which prevented me from taking interviews. These were taken by the staff of the Council's institutional development service.

Part II

This part of the thesis is a theoretical one in which I try to identify the research paradigm and define the key concepts. So, it all starts with looking for a paradigm. In this direction, I analyze some of the most used research paradigms, such as: positivism, constructivism, social constructionism, post-positivism, critical realism and postmodernism.

To understand which of them fit the present thesis and how they can help me bring a new approach to Europeanization, I focus on the analysis of the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of paradigms to see the ideas behind them; then, I focus on the researched object and on the validity and reliability of the paradigms in order to understand to what extent one paradigm or another can help me more or less, taking into account the limited research resources.

Following this analysis, I concluded that I must develop a mixed research, both theoretically and methodologically, in which to use positivism and social constructionism as research paradigms.

Positivism helps me verify whether Europeanization is a new social reality in Romania. Starting from the way positivism approaches reality, I find that it helps me demonstrate the objectivity of Europeanization as a new social reality by counting and measuring the results of the changes made since its installation. Then, taking into account the cause and effect relationship promoted by positivists, and that the installation of a social reality involves triggering changes in all areas involved in managing and developing daily life, I come to understand that a social reality would influence all areas of activity and that Europeanization as a new social reality would justify the presence of changes at national level in line with the ideas, values, policies of the EU in all areas related to the activity of society. Therefore, Europeanization would be the cause of constant national changes to comply with EU requirements.

Next, following these ideas, I conclude that in order to demonstrate that Europeanization is a new social reality in Romania, I should count the results of national changes, as a result of Europeanization, in a certain field or in a certain institution, namely: competition policy and the Romanian Competition Council. Counting these results allows me to verify both the objectivity and the degree of adaptation to this reality in relation to other national changes that were not inspired by or related to EU ideas.

Starting from the theoretical conclusions, I decide to approach Europeanization theoretically in such a way that I can test the first two hypotheses starting from positivism and its quantitative methodology.

Given the human subjectivity and the lack of any information that would allow me to accurately calculate the degree of adaptation to the new reality, I conclude that the qualitative methodology has enough tools to allow me to collect data and then interpret it quantitatively. In this way, I establish that the first measurement will be a quantitative one based on qualitative evaluations, which will contribute to the measurement of the degree of adaptation to Europeanization of the Competition Council.

In order to meet the expectations of the positivist methodology, I emphasize the need to build a system based on the counting of normative acts in the field of competition in Romania that

derive from EU legislation. All this, in order to present another way of measuring and to demonstrate the presence of Europeanization in the competition policy, the Competition Council and in the Romanian society.

Starting from the idea that these would be enough to develop measurement systems and to verify the first two hypotheses, I move away from Comte's positivism and focus on the social constructionist ideas of Berger and Luckmann to understand how Europeanization came to be a new social reality in Romania.

Just as communication, socialization and learning are seen in social constructionism as key elements in social realities, I try to establish first what everyday reality means and what it would mean for Europeanization to be an everyday reality. Also, here I identify language as a main tool in transmitting a reality. I further study the importance of the EU's presence, its ideas and values, in public discourse as well as in the communication between the EU and the institutions and between the institutions and society.

All this time, communication is considered the main mechanism of transmitting a reality, building knowledge, negotiating meanings and rooting common rules that outline a behavior specific to a reality. Next, I see communication as irrelevant if it is not accompanied by learning, which is the incorporation of knowledge and behavioral patterns related to the reality model.

Given these observations, I understand that both communication and learning must be the main mechanisms that have contributed to the installation of Europeanization as a new social reality. So, I intend to test this idea in my case study.

Next, I will define the basic concepts of this thesis, starting with the Europeanization. Given that this term is often confused with that of European integration and others such as modernization, globalization and Americanization, I decided to define this concept using the 'a contrario' method, namely by emphasizing what Europeanization is not.

In this way, I was able to clarify the differences between Europeanization and other terms so that there is no confusion throughout the paper. In addition, I come with an analysis of the definitions given to Europeanization and I choose the definition given by Radaelli to outline what this process implies, which I identify with a social reality.

Next, I turn to the notion of social reality, which is also called everyday reality or the reality of common sense. The social constructionist theory helps me identify the defining elements of

this reality so that I can later clarify what it would mean for Europeanization to be a social reality.

Characterized by a permanent process of change and social adaptation to the rules, norms, values and ideas of the European Union, Europeanization seems to be a reality that invades all social fields, guiding the activity of social constructs. This reality is attached to the existence of the European Union as a supranational construct, capable of formulating, reformulating and maintaining social reality. Here the question arises: how did Europeanization come to replace the old social reality?

To answer this question, I follow the ideas of the social constructionist paradigm which emphasize that although society tends to reformulate a social reality rather than build one from scratch, there are situations in which some factors can influence society and stimulate the development of a new reality to meet social needs. In this sense, I argue that Europeanization emerged as a new social reality after the Two World Wars emphasized the need to reformulate the values, ideas and principles that underpinned the policies, politics and all social activities that led to the destruction of the world.

For this reason, the foundations of the European Communities have been laid as new constructions to pursue the development of society based on values other than the previous ones.

With all this in mind, I turn to European studies to analyze the state of research in this area and to identify the main findings that can help me develop this study.

Part III

Europeanization has been researched from multiple perspectives, but since each of them has focused on certain aspects of the process, Europeanization has come to be seen in different ways. This abundance of perspectives is why we do not yet have a single definition for this concept. The focus of the studies on the theories of European integration and their different discoveries have made Europeanization have various definitions arising from each approach.

Therefore, I begin this chapter with the analysis of Europeanization theories, their research directions as well as the contributions made to Europeanization studies. Among these theories are federalism, neofunctionalism, functionalism, intergovernmentalism and liberal intergovernmentalism, multilevel governance and constructivism. Each of them helped identify different aspects of Europeanization such as the areas it influences, the mechanisms that

contribute to stimulating local change, the depth of the process and the degrees of change, the types and dimensions of Europeanization and the link with other processes.

I pay special attention to the depth and degree of Europeanization. This helps me identify the general levels of adaptation to the new reality, namely: reaffirmation, retrenchment, inertia, absorption, accommodation and transformation. Each of these illustrates the state of adaptation to Europeanization. Reaffirmation represents the lack of Europeanization; retrenchment may represent both the lowest degree of Europeanization and the state in which a country undertakes changes in the opposite direction to Europeanization; inertia illustrates a certain degree of compatibility, which according to the authors, is already present in many states without any effort for change (application of the rule of law, human rights, etc.); absorption is the active state of change in Europeanization, characterized by the wholesale incorporation of laws, ideas and policies formulated and promoted by the EU; accommodation is the state of adaptation to Europeanization that characterizes the efforts to harmonize all aspects of life with new ideas and values recently absorbed, and transformation is that state of change for permanent accommodation to the continuous changes of the Union and characterizes the highest level of adaptation to Europeanization.

Understanding and classifying these directions and characteristics of Europeanization is important in my thesis because it helps me build a questionnaire that allows me to transform the received results, related to each level of change, into quantitative data. In this way I manage to gather data regarding the impact of the changes following the installation of Europeanization, as a new reality, on the Competition Council and the competition policy in Romania. I used the results to test the hypotheses and to measure the Europeanization of the Council.

I pay special attention to the dimensions of Europeanization. They help me understand how Europeanization has settled and been maintained as a social reality. Subsequently, from the governance approach I borrowed the circular model of the dimensions of Europeanization in the analysis of the role of communication and the consumer model in the application, reformulation and maintenance of Europeanization as a social reality.

Next, I focus on the mechanisms of Europeanization, which according to Europeanization studies are: national laws, cooperation, competition, conflict management (Laegrid and Stenby, 2010), imitation, competitive selection and framing (Borzal, 2003), socialization (de Flers and

Muller, 2010), negative outsourcing, compulsory impact, compliance, communication, social - intergovernmental learning, constructive impact, transnational learning (Shimmelfening, 2012).

I notice that all these mechanisms have a few things in common, namely communication and learning, be it from a negative, positive model, mimicry or competition. Therefore, I propose another approach to the mechanisms of Europeanization where communication and learning are the central mechanisms that participate in the transmission of a reality. In this discussion I take into account the social constructionist arguments regarding social communication, the social construction of reality, respectively the importance of communication and learning for the possibility of disseminating a subjective construct in society.

These mechanisms contribute to shaping a unique behavior, in my case, that of complying with EU requirements, which transforms subjective reality into one that defines everyday life. This approach helps me understand that these mechanisms are also the ones responsible for replacing the old realities, namely that communication transmits information and ensures the permanent refreshment of information on this reality. Then, learning is the mechanism that helps to replace the knowledge about the previous daily routine with new knowledge that represents the European lifestyle.

Therefore, I understand that without communication and learning it would be impossible for an artificially constructed social reality to set in, as the ideas, knowledge and meanings related to this reality would be impossible to transmit or think individually in the same way by all members of the society.

For this reason, I have focused on the EU's working tools and the special attention it pays to digitalization, transparency, communication and interaction between national institutions. Considering the theoretical approach, I conclude that learning and communication are the main mechanisms for transmitting and rooting Europeanization as a social reality. I came to this conclusion by looking at the impact of digitalization and transparency on communication. This analysis showed me that digitalization and transparency support communication, and communication is the basic mechanism that makes it possible to disseminate the ideas behind Europeanization. Together, digitization, transparency and communication have made it possible for information about this reality to be easily accessible to society.

Part IV

In order to test the hypotheses of the paper and the theoretical assumptions, I start in this part of the thesis from the case study, the Romanian Competition Council, which helps me first of all to verify if Europeanization is really a new social reality in Romania.

I start the study by analyzing the competition policy and its importance in ensuring social welfare, respectively the role of the Competition Council in the application of competition policy and the subsequent impact of its actions on social welfare. In this part of the paper I emphasize the evolution of competition policy in Europe and the importance of the treaties for its empowerment. Here, too, I refer to the importance of competition policy in defending human rights, which, to some extent, are protected by the correct application of competition policy.

Then, considering that competition policy has as its main purpose the management of the market, I notice that its impact is in fact much wider. Starting with the management of the market, the competition policy comes to influence the economic growth, the technological development and later through all this to contribute to the social welfare.

Taking all these things into account, I define Europeanization from the perspective of the positivist paradigm, namely as an objective reality that presents observable, countable and measurable changes. Because Europeanization is an artificially created reality, there is a possibility that it is only in our minds. To find out, I build a system for measuring the results of Europeanization that will verify the local adaptation to this reality. Considering social needs and theoretical conclusions, I argue that for this reality to be objective, changes must be observable and measurable. In all this context, I also take into account the fact that all the impulses for change and the models that trigger local change must come from the European Union as a formulator of reality and as a authority empowered to maintain this reality by adapting it to social needs.

If Europeanization as a social reality is objective and describes everyday life, then its impact should be easily found in every field of social activity. Therefore, in order to prove that Europeanization is a new social reality in Romania, it would be enough to count and measure the results from the installation of this reality in a single field - that of competition.

In this direction I have built two systems for measuring the results of Europeanization. I did this because the first system starts from measuring the general evaluations of the Europeanization results on the Competition Council. As these assessments were made by

Council staff, with only 5 options for assessing changes taken by the Council to adapt to the new reality, this measurement implies a degree of subjectivity in the responses and therefore does not fully meet the methodological requirements of the positivist paradigm. Thus, I developed a second system for measuring the results of the installation of Europeanization, but this time counting and measuring regulatory changes in the field of competition, as key changes in shaping social behavior. I must mention that the data collection required the use of a research method belonging to the social constructionist paradigm, namely the analysis of the text, after which I came to identify the normative acts with reference to the EU and its competition law.

Next, I managed to count and calculate the degree of adaptation of the competition policy in Romania, and respectively of the Competition Council, to Europeanization. This measurement was only possible for the period 2007-2018 as I did not find complete information for the normative changes from previous years. However, the measurement was sufficient to demonstrate that Europeanization is a new social reality in Romania, that it can be found in the field of competition and that for at least 11 years it has influenced competition policy and the Council to constantly adapt to EU demands.

I then turn my attention to the second hypothesis. To test it, I asked several questions in the questionnaire to help me see whether this reality is seen in the same way by Council employees. To the question related to the appearance of the Council as a result of Europeanization, 72% of the respondents answered "yes", while 28% acknowledge the impact of Europeanization on the institution, but not on its formation.

In another question, I asked the respondents to assess the extent to which the definition of Europeanization applies to Romanian society. 55% of respondents said that it applies "sufficiently" and "to a large extent", but none of them chose the answer that says that Europeanization does not describe Romanian society.

The answers to these questions make me understand that most respondents see the impact of Europeanization in the same way, and, at the same time, the Romanian society lives this reality called Europeanization to a lesser extent than the Council. In order to verify this, I am focusing on the first Europeanization measurement system in order to see the degree of adaptation of the Council to the new reality.

In this direction, looking at EU competition policy and its influences on national competition authorities, I understand that when Europeanization is a new social reality, the EU sets the Council's aim to apply and promote competition policy at the highest possible level.

Considering that the Council's employees can closely observe the changes taking place in the institution and its role in the application of competition policy, I asked them to assess the Council's involvement in promoting competition policy in Romania.

From the received answers (39), although not representative, I nevertheless decided to continue measure the degree to which the Council has adapted to the changes brought by the Europeanization in order to obtain some indicative results and to test the measurement system.

Starting from the directions of Europeanization and the related degrees of change, I built a table where I assign a score from 2 to 5 to each level of Europeanization. Although my table also indicates negative values and a lack of Europeanization, considering that Romania is an EU member state, then it is impossible for the Competition Council not to have adapted to the changes brought by Europeanization especially when this reality is included in the Romanian Constitution which emphasizes the need to comply with European ideas, values and policies. I assigned each score a word to illustrate the degree of change, such as: acceptable, satisfactory, big and very big. Then, considering human subjectivism and the possibility that each answer may vary between the proposed options, I calculated, in addition to Europeanization, a margin of error that applies to the result.

The Europeanization calculation formula is the arithmetic mean of the maximum and minimum scores obtained in the questionnaire. After putting the data in the formula, I obtained the result of 87.5%, which illustrates the degree of adaptation of the Romanian Competition Council to Europeanization as a new social reality, which established from the very beginning its directions of action, purpose and work objectives. This result has a margin of error of $\pm 6.28\%$.

The second method of measurement involves counting all regulatory acts in the field of competition for one year and identifying those with direct reference to European legislation, to EU or those built to complement and harmonize existing legislation to the European one.

Also, here I count Romania's cases of violation of competition law as a result of which the European Commission initiated infringement cases. These cases are evidence of a lack of adaptation to European competition law and non-compliance with the so-called Europeanization reality which is in fact about permanent compliance with the EU's impulses for change.

Limited access to technology during the 1990s together with the different administrative traditions of national institutions raised the issue of access to information and allowed me to calculate the Europeanization of the RCC and competition policy only after 2007. This is also related to the transparency of the information, communication and the tools they had at that time to make the actions transparent. This does not mean that the Council did not publish other reports until 2007. It is only that they do not refer to all the amended normative acts from before 2007.

Although counting the changes from 2007 to 2018 is enough to demonstrate that Europeanization is a new social reality in Romania and that it influences competition policy as a key area in ensuring economic growth and social welfare, I decided to look in the *Acquis Communautaire* and in the existing research for the level of compliance that a state must have before joining the Union. Therefore, I concluded that a country at the time of accession must be in an advanced state of accommodation, which means an adaptation to the new reality of about 65 - 75%.

After collecting and processing the data, I applied it in the calculation formula that makes the sum of the approximate level that a state can have at the time of accession and the changes undertaken later for continuous compliance with the impulses of change brought by the new social reality.

Following the calculations, I obtain a result of 78.03% - 88.03%, which illustrates the degree of adaptation of the RCC and the Romanian competition policy to Europeanization.

The results I obtained in the two measurements are close. This shows that the methods of measuring adaptation to Europeanization are effective as they have led to relatively similar results. Then, the results show that the Romanian competition policy and the RCC have a high degree of adaptation to the new reality and that Europeanization is an objective reality. However, I decided to use the method of *reductio ad absurdum* to verify in another way the results obtained and the validity of my hypothesis.

In this direction, I establish some assumptions with which I try to prove that Europeanization is not a social reality in Romania, such as: in Romania there is another social reality than that generated by the European Union (which implies the existence of another social construct to formulate and maintain this reality and to which Romania should comply); or, the European Union is not a generator of ideas, values, principles and policies, which implies the absence of a reality that it transmits, etc.

After a thorough research of the statements, I came to confirm that Europeanization is in fact a new social reality in Romania, respectively that it can be identified in public speeches, in the Romanian constitution, that it guides the course of trade relations between Romania and the EU, etc.

As in this part of the chapter I came to confirm the first two hypotheses, in the second part I studied and underlined how this reality was installed.

For a subjective reality to become a reality 'par excellence' it is necessary to normalize an idea and to root it in the social consciousness. This requires communication to negotiate, discuss and promote the meanings of ideas, values and policies that are the subject of this reality and that have been transmitted to us to comply. First, these ideas, values and policies are initially disseminated to the national institutions to be transposed into national legislation, which will later constrain our behaviors in order to adapt to this reality.

Communication, Berger and Luckmann (1991) say, is what allows the transformation of a subjective construct into an objective reality, it allows the maintenance, modification or reconstruction of a social reality.

Although communication is the most important mechanism that allows the installation of Europeanization as a new social reality, I understand that learning is also needed so that the knowledge transmitted, once negotiated through communication, can be incorporated into the logic of social actions (Berger and Luckmann, 1996). Therefore, in order to understand how Europeanization was installed as a new social reality in Romania, I followed the role of communication and learning in the Europeanization of the Competition Council, which, as I showed before, managed to adapt very well to this reality.

Communication takes place at different levels, but for an idea to reach society it must go through certain layers of communication. Because the European Union never had direct communication with the citizens of a state before it became a member of the community, the elements that constitute Europeanization as a new social reality had to be transferred first to national institutions. Among them is the Competition Council, an institution built as a result of Romania's adaptation to Europeanization and its attempt to integrate into the Union. Just as the single market was the central point of interest for both political leaders and society, the way to make Romanian society embrace a new social reality is by imposing conditions of change related to the single market to influence people's daily life.

Communication between the Competition Council and the EU has been from the very beginning and is still at a very high level. Each case of infringement of European competition law at national level is resolved together with the European Commission. In this direction, the European Union encourages communication through various means and tools to help national authorities comply as well as possible with its competition requirements.

An EU step towards supporting communication and information exchange has been to encourage exchanges of experience and training within the European Commission. Seminars, and experience exchanges take place together with communication through the European Competition Network to share best practices for complying with EU requirements.

Communication with the European Commission is an important element in the work of the Council as all changes in competition at national level must be reported to the European Commission for it to observe compliance or deviation from European rules.

Communication between the EU and the RCC has led to many changes within the Council. This is confirmed by the Council staff who took part in my interview. When asked if they noticed a change in the work of the Council following the collaboration with the EU institutions, all participants claimed that this collaboration brought a lot of changes in the institution and positively influenced the efficiency of the RCC.

I notice a decrease in the number of anti-competitive cases initiated and completed in the period 2001-2018. This decrease is a sign that the promotion of a competitive culture has had a positive effect on market players. Next, the trend of balancing curves indicating the number of open and closed cases per year shows how communication between the Council and the EU has led to a better understanding of EU competition law, more effective practices, etc., which in the end led to faster resolution of anti-competitive cases.

This is confirmed by the participants to the interview and by the official data from the Council reports which emphasize that the average time to resolve an anti-competitive case has decreased from 4.5 to 1.7 years (Competition Council, 2016).

In addition to the efficiency of the institution, Europeanization also influenced the structure of the Council (the EU was not the only one to make recommendations in this regard, another example is the World Bank). The structure of the Council was changed once the EU focused on certain aspects of competition such as economic concentrations or abuse of a dominant position, transparency of actions, digitization of work to facilitate work and the rapid transfer of

information, etc. Pressure from the EU to improve a specific direction in the Council's work has led to countless changes in its organizational structure. As a simple proof in this respect can serve the organizational chart of the Council from 2008 and 2020 (from 10 directions in 2008 to 12 directions in 2020, etc.).

I pay special attention, from the perspective of communication, to the training process for which the Council allocates large parts of its budget, from ~50,000 RON in 2005 to ~237,500 RON in 2018. To understand the importance of preparing staff for adaptation to Europeanization, I asked the RCC employees, during the interview, about the importance of training in the Council's activity. They say that their professional training helps them develop their knowledge about the European law and about the most effective procedures and practices in resolving anti-competitive cases. Respondents also claim that training has improved the communication capacity in the institution which has subsequently increased the efficiency of its actions, improved the internal organization and the capacity of the RCC to transmit EU knowledge to society.

This aspect caught my attention and made me focus on the Council's communication with society and its role in disseminating Europeanization as a new social reality in Romania.

The Council's communication with Romanian society is largely influenced by Europeanization. This can be seen through the transparency of the institution and its compliance with the new means of communication. I say that Europeanization has affected the Council's communication with Romanian society because transparency and digitalization can be seen in both the EU's list of priorities and the Council's principles of work. A directive to put pressure in this direction was given by the EU in 2004 to make the actions of nation states transparent. Subsequently, this directive was empowered by another directive from 2013 where I again notice that transparency remains a problem but also an aspiration in the actions of the institutions.

The transparency of the Council's actions had a major impact on Romanian society as it encouraged the social trust in the RCC, which transmitted to society by all available means the ideas, values and principles underlying competition policy and other European competition policies. The transparency of the Council's actions has improved the Council's communication with society in the context in which the information underlying the RCC's work has been made public and easily accessible to citizens. The information is constantly refreshed and adapted to the new changes in the EU so that society can see and relate to it in everyday life.

In addition to transparency, digitalization comes as a working principle that has brought the society even closer to the Competition Council. Like transparency, digitization is an EU working principle that we find in the 2018 digitization strategy and on many EU-funded projects since 2014-2015¹.

The digitization has allowed the transparency of actions and the widening of the ways in which the society can contact RCC. In this direction, the Council makes available to citizens various online pages with information on the leniency policy, the official monitor, the online state aid page, the official page of the Council and the rigged auction module. Consumers are given the opportunity to notify possible anti-competitive cases that have led to the infringement of their rights.

I note from the number of petitions how the Council's communication with society has improved considerably. The number of petitions increased from 100, in 2010, to 380, in 2018. It is important to note that the number of petitions addressed to the competent authorities decreased from 51% of the total number of petitions in 2010 to 2.69% in 2015. This shows how the Council's communication with the society led consumers to know about its competencies and trust it as an institution whose actions are transparent and oriented towards consumer protection.

As mentioned above, the consumer role of people makes society attracted to Europeanization.

The European Union was built based on several core values that it promotes and strictly respects, one of which is human rights. With the evolution of the single market, human rights have also evolved in the context of new challenges and needs.

Most authors who have closely followed human rights and their evolution have noted that technological developments and the emergence of the online market dimension have stimulated the EU to advocate for the development of a new set of rights to complement human rights, namely consumer rights.

The authors' opinions are divided on this generation of rights, some saying that they are an extension of solidarity rights (peace, development, healthy environment, etc.) and others classifying them as a separate generation of rights. Starting from the idea that all generations of human rights are linked and complement to some extent a previous generation of rights, I argue

¹ For more details on EU technological transformation and digitization projects visit: European Commission, 2020. EU-funded projects on data. Available on: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/programme-and-projects/project-factsheets-data> (Accessed: 23 August 2020)

that consumer rights are those that constitute the fourth generation of rights aimed at protecting a vulnerable actor in the context of economic interdependence, globalization and the emergence of the e-market.

The consumer has received protection due to the EU, which since 1957 defines the consumer not only as a passive beneficiary of free trade, but also as a person with a social life that can be affected by free trade (Luczak, 2011). In this context, consumer rights become closely linked to social rights (Birzea, 2005) and are therefore vital to society.

When I say that consumer rights are important and that they are closely linked to social rights, I am referring to the fact that, today, all aspects of social rights intersect with consumer rights. Just as social rights are about ensuring basic needs and principles such as equality and access to basic goods and services that allow us to survive while technology is part of our daily lives, consumer rights are what ensure that society members will not suffer from contact with the market. Consumer rights have been built to ensure market equality and fairness to protect the consumer (Jacobs, Stoop and van Niekerk, 2010). Finally, the consumer can benefit from the results of the impact of technology on the market, which means a wider variety of products, continuous production, more services, access to different products and services through the e-market, etc.

Although it seems that EU law is strong enough in this direction and that national consumer protection authorities are active, consumer protection policy has seemed insufficient to guarantee the fourth generation of rights. Therefore, a tool was needed to prevent actions that could have led to infringements of consumer rights. In this context, it is the competition policy that has been given the task of preventing the violation of consumer rights by pursuing market players who comply with the competition policy formulated to protect the consumer as the final beneficiary. The Romanian Competition Council has been given from the very beginning the task of pursuing compliance with the competition policy at the highest possible level and the registration of a high level of efficiency of its actions following the application of the competition policy. Since its effectiveness is verified by calculating its impact on consumers, I understand that its interest in consumer protection is above competition itself, avoiding in some cases to apply anti-competitive sanctions because the impact on consumers was positive.

The fact that the results of the Council's actions are measured by analyzing the impact it has on consumers shows the Council's awareness of the impact it has on consumers and society.

In other words, as the consumer is interested in enforcing EU requirements to guarantee his rights, the consumer becomes a potential ally of the Council in enforcing competition policy. Based on this, the EU's pressures for action transparency and the benefits of the technological impact on society as a whole, the Competition Council has expanded its communication channels with consumers by disseminating the values, principles, ideas and ways of doing things formulated and subsequently transmitted by EU for application and dissemination in society. These means of communication are: online petitions, telephone line for advice or feedback, the "price monitor" application to help consumers compare prices and make informed decisions, which subsequently impact competition for quality, variety and price, or the big data process that it is built to identify competition infringements that affect consumers in online markets.

Following the analysis of the relationship between the Competition Council and Romanian consumers, I came to the conclusion that the key actors that contribute both to the Council's compliance with Europeanization and to the installation of Europeanization as a social reality in Romania are the consumers. Having consumer rights and the communication with institutions aimed at protecting them, consumers are those who have encouraged Europeanization settlement as a new social reality aimed at protecting them, especially since these rights are linked to the basic people needs.

As the consumers did not have direct communication with the EU institutions, the dissemination of Europeanization in Romanian society was done through national institutions, especially through those that were in permanent contact with the EU, such as the Competition Council.

With the above analysis, I showed that the Competition Council is a result of the Europeanization of Romanian society and it is also an instrument that was built in order to facilitate the adaptation of society to the new reality and to speed up the integration process.

The Council's mission is to disseminate through its actions the ideas, values and principles underlying Europeanization. For EU, the national competition authorities and their work have been, in a way, a project to exemplify the results of Europeanization so that it can be more easily absorbed and supported by the society.

Conclusions

Following the research, I came to confirm all the hypotheses. I have demonstrated that Europeanization is a new social reality by counting and measuring the results from the installation of this reality both in the Romanian competition policy and in the Competition Council. I verified the results through the method of *reductio ad absurdum*, where I showed again that Europeanization is a new social reality in Romania through an analysis of: public discourses, used to refresh and disseminate in society the ideas related to Europeanization; trade relations, which indicate the relationship of the state with the authority that formulates reality; legislative changes in different areas, which indicate the presence of this reality in multiple areas with an impact on daily life.

Then, I started looking for answers to questions such as: how was Europeanization installed in Romanian society and what were the main mechanisms for rooting this reality? What is the role of the Competition Council in this process? Is the Council aware of its role?

With the help of the case study I also confirmed the second hypothesis, namely that most people who are impacted by Europeanization every day perceive the results of this reality similarly.

The third hypothesis concerns the role of the Council as a catalyst for Europeanization of the Romanian society. This is confirmed after analyzing the communication between the RCC and consumers and the impact of this communication on society in terms of disseminating the ideas, values and principles around which Europeanization was built.

Continuing the analysis of the importance of communication both between the EU and the RCC and between the RCC and Romanian society, I understood that EU pressures for transparency and digitization are mainly related to the EU's intention to intensify communication and permanent transmission of this reality to national institutions and to society for maintaining and refreshing the ideas and values that underlie Europeanization.

In conclusion, I found that Europeanization is indeed a new social reality in Romania, installed as a result of the first step that Romanian society has taken for integration into the Union in order to have access to economic benefits and the single market. For accession, Romania had to adapt to the reality of the countries that were already part of the Union.

After accession, Romania was pressured by the EU to adapt to Europeanization, with which Romania agreed from the moment of accession, and even earlier, since it applied for membership, as it wanted the lifestyle promoted by the European Communities.

Europeanization, as a reality that characterizes a lifestyle of Western European states, was gradually installed in Romanian society through communication and learning, with the help of national institutions, especially the Competition Council. The Council's role in disseminating Europeanization in society lies in its importance in market management and in the decision-making process at national level where it supports the application of competition rules that promote respect for the principles and values that are the essence of European social reality.

Considering consumer rights and the social desire for protection, society has become the Council's ally by supporting application and compliance with Europeanization. This has been a benefit both for the Council, which aims to comply with EU requirements, and for the society that has come to live a reality formulated in its interest.

During all this time, communication and learning were the key mechanisms that led both to the Europeanization of the Romanian society and to the adaptation of the Council as close as possible to the EU requirements.

Although the study was made following the Romanian case study, when we talk about Europeanization as a new social reality, this applies to the entire Union. To a certain extent, I could say that Europeanization applies to the whole of Europe and characterizes the European society of the 21st century.