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Key findings:

- *New EU members are on average more optimistic about the EU compared with pre-2004 member states.*
- *Citizens of new EU members feel that their interests are not being taken into account to a sufficient degree.*
- *The Eastern Enlargement distinction between the new and the old is no longer relevant in the context of EU decision-making. More persistent distinctions are: small versus large, Northern versus Southern, rich versus poor.*

Important lessons for EU candidate countries Serbia and Montenegro:

- *Poorer countries almost always win economically from EU membership;*
- *There is a steep learning curve during the first years of being a member of the EU, but new members learn from the others;*
- *It takes a lot of time and effort to become proficient in EU decision-making, so the candidate countries should use all the available opportunities to monitor/learn how decisions are being made in Brussels before they obtain full membership.*

Comparative study on EU New Member States' Level of Integration in EU Decision-Making

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The purpose of this study: to evaluate the depth of integration of the citizens and the decision-makers of "Eastern Enlargement" states within the European Union (EU) decision-making. The study also takes a look at two EU accession countries – Montenegro and Serbia.

The study has been based on:

1) A baseline study on indicators for EU New Member States' Level of Integration and Engagement conducted in 2013[1];
2) Two opinion polls conducted during September 2013 and September 2014 in four new member states – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland - specifically for this study;
3) Six citizen taskforces (focus groups) conducted during 2014 specifically for this study in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Montenegro, Poland, and Serbia with the aim of gaining a more in-depth insight into the results of the opinion surveys;
4) Six national reports written on the basis of further desk research and interviews conducted with representatives of national governments and parliaments, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), lobbyists, and experts on EU matters.

For the purposes of this study, 12 EU member states are referred to as the new member states (NMS) – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia,

[1] http://pasos.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/EU-NMS-study-iveta-kazoka-oct-2013.pdf

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Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The division line that separates the NMS form the old member states (OMS) is taken to be the 2004/2007 Eastern Enlargement. Croatia is not accounted for as a NMS as during the research phase for this study there was too little comparable data relating to this member state that joined the EU on 1 July 2013.

The study takes a look at all of the NMS, with a more in-depth focus on three countries that joined the EU in 2004 (Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland) and one country that joined the EU in 2007 (Bulgaria). For a comparative insight, the report also looks closely at two candidate states to join the EU in the future: Montenegro and Serbia.

1. Accession story

For former communist countries in Eastern and Central Europe, accession to the EU was part of their "back to Europe" endeavour. For example, Latvia and Poland applied for official EU membership in 1995, and the Czech Republic applied in 1996. Membership in the EU and NATO was seen additionally seen as a guarantee that these countries would escape Russia's sphere of interest. The motif of a return to a place with a sense of a true belonging was vivid throughout the 1990s, and motivated the political elites of those countries to undertake the hard reforms necessary to propel their states into the EU.

The candidate countries needed to prove that they would be able to meet the membership criteria that in 1993 became known as the "Copenhagen criteria":

- Economic: a functioning market economic economy and capacity to deal with competitive pressures from other EU countries;
- Political: existence of stable institutions to guarantee democracy, the rule of law, and human rights;
- Ability to be an effective member of the EU: namely, the ability to accept its common laws and regulations, as well as adherence to the aim of political, economic and monetary union.

Following the successful end of negotiations, eight former communist countries were invited to join the EU – they became members on 1 May 2004. For all of those countries, the decision to join was preceded by a referendum. The highest support for EU membership was seen in Poland (94% of participating voters voted in favour) and Lithuania (91%), while Latvians and Estonians were more sceptical (67%).

In addition to Central and Eastern European countries, two more countries joined EU on 1 May 2004 – the Mediterranean countries of Cyprus and Malta. Two other Central European countries – Bulgaria and Romania - were recognised as having fulfilled the criteria to join the EU three years later: in 2007. This is considered to be the same wave of expansion (2004/2007): the fifth in the history of the EU. It has been the largest enlargement to date.

Not all the new member states are currently at the same stage of EU integration. As can be seen in Table 1, not all of the NMS are part of the Schengen Area agreement - which means that they do not yet have border-free relations with other EU member states. Less than half of NMS have introduced the common currency: euro.

Table 1. Different stages of EU integration for NMS

New member state	*Year of accession*	*Member of Schengen (as of October 2014)*	*Member of Eurozone (as of October 2014)*
Bulgaria	2007	NO	NO
Czech Republic	2004	YES (2007)	NO
Cyprus	2004	NO	YES (2008)
Estonia	2004	YES (2007)	YES (2011)
Hungary	2004	YES (2007)	NO
Latvia	2004	YES (2007)	YES (2014)
Lithuania	2004	YES (2007)	NO
Malta	2004	YES (2007)	YES (2008)
Poland	2004	YES (2007)	NO
Romania	2007	NO	NO
Slovakia	2004	YES (2007)	YES (2009)
Slovenia	2004	YES (2007)	YES (2007)

Not all the NMS have benefitted to the same extent from membership of EU. Table No. 2 shows that the poorer countries upon accession have seen the most dramatic adjustment of their GDP to the EU average. The success has been particularly impressive for the three Baltic States, and for Slovakia, Romania, and Poland. Meanwhile, those countries that started out relatively closer to the EU average in terms of GDP have either stagnated (see the data for the Czech Republic) or even gone backwards (see Cyprus and Slovenia). An exception to this trend has been Malta.

Table No.2. GDP per capita in PPS Purchasing Power Standards (EU28 =100). Ranked from the most impressive changes to the least impressive changes. Eurostat data[2].

New member state	*2004*	*2013*
Lithuania	52%	74%
Latvia	47%	67%
Slovakia	57%	76%
Romania	35%	54%
Poland	51%	68%
Estonia	57%	72%
Bulgaria	35%	47%
Malta	80%	87%
Hungary	63%	67%
Czech Republic	78%	80%
Cyprus	91%	86%
Slovenia	87%	83%

It is hard to evaluate precisely to what extent EU membership has contributed to the rise seen particularly in the poorer EU countries, but access to EU cohesion funding and the credibility brought by EU membership status have definitely played a large role. For example, in 2004 Croatia's GDP per capita was comparable with the poorer NMS (58% of EU average), but had barely changed when Croatia joined the EU on 1 July 2013, by when it had increased to only 61% of the EU average.

Research conducted in Latvia highlights also the tremendous increase in foreign trade, manifold increases in internal security (as indicated by crime rates), a more educated populace, and less corruption in the same time period (2014-2013)[3].

A further wave of EU enlargement is expected in the future. The enlargement priority: the Western Balkans. For instance, Montenegro applied for EU membership in 2008, and Serbia applied in 2009. Both countries have been granted the status of EU candidate country. In addition to the Copenhagen criteria, the Western Balkans countries have to prove good regional co-operation and neighbourly relations. At the moment, their respective GDP per capita is 36% (Serbia) and 29% (Montenegro) of the EU average, which means that in terms of economic development they are at a similar level compared with Bulgaria and Romania in 2004. Their EU accession is not likely during the next five years.

[2] Eurostat data. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tec00114
[3] Latvia in the EU – ten years later. A different Latvia?
http://providus.lv/article_files/2610/original/Latvia_in_the_EU_10_years_brief.pdf?1401281421

2. Attitudes towards EU integration

Citizen taskforces (focus groups) organised in two accession countries – Montenegro and Serbia – for the purposes of this research indicated that the populations of the accession countries have very similar hopes and fears to the citizens of those countries that joined EU in 2004/2007 (for example, Poland and Latvia).

Opinion surveys also show that there is the same optimism combined with uncertainty regarding the EU project as was characteristic for the Eastern Enlargement countries. In Montenegro, 51% of the population deems EU membership a good thing (compared with 17% against membership and 31% with no clear opinion. In Serbia, 40% favour EU membership with 19% against and 38% undecided[4]. An even larger percentage consider that the respective countries would benefit from EU membership (65% in Montenegro, 57% in Serbia)[5].

When asked during the focus groups about the main benefits of EU membership, the citizens of those countries tend to mention the following factors:

- Accession as a catalyst for much needed reforms regarding democratic and market institutions;
- New possibilities for free movement (travel and work in other countries);
- Better education/scholarship opportunities in EU member states;
- The idea of their country "regaining its rightful place in Europe".

When asked about their doubts and fears, the following factors were mentioned:

- Fears of their industry not being competitive in the EU;
- Feeling that EU accession is an elite-driven propaganda process without giving the citizens enough quality information to judge on its costs/benefits for themselves;
- Fear of a loss of their country's identity within the EU;
- Fear that the EU might treat new and small EU member states unfavourably.

These are almost exactly the same hopes and fears that were expressed by citizens in NMS such as Poland and Latvia. That is why it is illustrative to look at how societies of NMS evaluate EU integration ten/seven years after having joined the "club".

The Eurobarometer opinion surveys show that the NMS are EU-optimists. On average, only 30% of NMS citizens believe that their respective countries would face a better future outside EU. This is the same level of support for EU membership as shown in the OMS. Furthermore, compared with OMS, the NMS on average trust the EU more, see the EU in a better light, and envision a better future for

[4] Standard Eurobarometer 81. Spring 2014. Annex, page T24 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb81/eb81_anx_en.pdf
[5] Ibid, p.T25

the EU[6]. Two more in-depth opinion surveys conducted for the purposes of this study indicate that citizens of NMS believe that EU integration has been good for democracy, quality of public services, quality of life, and the international status of their respective countries.[7] The citizens of the NMS also have a relatively high degree of trust in EU institutions (European Parliament, European Commission), mostly higher than their trust in national institutions.

Citizen taskforces (focus groups) organised in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvian and Poland confirm the overall high approval of EU membership.

When asked to indicate benefits and losses from accession to the EU, citizens tend to name more benefits than losses. The benefits that are mentioned most often include:

- Free movement (especially for Schengen Area countries);
- Opportunities to work in other countries;
- Availability of EU funds for development;
- EU standard of rights, concerning basic human rights, and, for example, consumer rights;
- Larger markets for businesses;
- Recognition of education certificates among EU member states, and the ERASMUS programme facilitating student exchanges.

The main negatives include:

- Emigration of their compatriots to other EU countries;
- Doubts as to whether the EU is not to blame for closures/restructuring of certain factories/industries;
- Feeling that their countries are not strong enough to influence EU level policies;
- Concerns about the effectiveness of the usage of EU funds for the development of their respective countries.

[6] http://pasos.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/EU-NMS-study-iveta-kazoka-oct-2013.pdf

[7] Opinion surveys conducted in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, and Poland in September 2013 and September 2014.

3. Active Citizenship

One perception was very visible in the opinion surveys and citizen focus groups – namely, that the citizens of NMS feel that their countries are more often recipients, but not the shapers of EU policy. Comprehension of the way the EU works is almost identical in both OMS and NMS, so a lack of awareness of EU matters is probably not a decisive issue[8]. Compared with NMS, citizens of OMS have more trust that their member states and they themselves as citizens exert influence on EU decision-making. They also have a clearer sense of belonging to EU citizenship, and they discuss EU issues more often with their friends.

The NMS are not all the same in this matter. For example, the surveys conducted in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, and Poland in 2013/2014 indicate that the Poles are the most positive regarding the extent to which their MEPs, national government, and the EU as a whole promote their interests at the EU level (already around 42% in 2013, and around 48% approval in September 2014 after the appointment of Donald Tusk as the new President of the European Council), while Latvians are the most negative in this regard (approval lower than 20%)[9].

What about the participation of the citizens themselves?

Except for Poland, the participation of the citizens of NMS in collecting signatures for European Citizens' Initiatives (petitions addressed to the European Commission that are signed by a total of at least 1 million voters from at least seven member states) is low[10], even though around 14-20% of the population of NMS claim to have heard about such a possibility[11]. When given a choice between several methods for influencing EU policy, the preference for initiatives as a specific instrument is not an obvious choice for most respondents (Bulgaria – 10%, Latvia – 14%, Czech Republic – 23%)[12].

Despite the record low turnout during the 2014 European Parliament elections across the EU, it was only in the NMS that it fell below 30% - Slovakia (13%), Czech Republic (18%), Poland (24%), Slovenia (25%), Hungary (29%). One encouraging sign was that at least some voters noticed the new type of election campaign organised by the candidates to the office of the president of European Commission and claim that this campaign has encouraged them to vote (Poland: 9%, Czech Republic: 11%; Latvia: 13%).

A not so encouraging sign was that Bulgarians, Latvians, and Czechs - when presented with a variety of ways for potentially influencing EU decision-making (such as signing a petition, participating in a public hearing) - tend to state that they would prefer not to participate in EU decision-making at all (Bulgaria and Latvia – 33%, Poland – 51%), or have no answer[13].

[8] http://pasos.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/EU-NMS-study-iveta-kazoka-oct-2013.pdf For example, on average 33% of citizens of OMS believe that their voice counts in the EU, while only 24% of citizens of NMS believe the same. In total, 44% citizens of OMS believe that their respective country's interests are well taken into account in the EU, while the same is true for 34% of NMS' citizens.
[9] Opinion surveys conducted in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, and Poland in September 2013 and September 2014.
[10] http://www.ecicampaign.org/eci/stats/
[11] Opinion survey conducted in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland in September 2013
[12] Opinion survey conducted in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia in September 2014.
[13] Opinion surveys conducted in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, and Latvia in September 2014.

4. Level of integration in EU decision-making

When Brussels insiders[14] are asked about the level of integration of NMS in EU decision-making, the most frequent answer is that they do not feel that it makes sense to describe the NMS as a distinct, coherent group. The countries that fall under this category are quite diverse, and the effect of being a new member state evaporates quickly.

Brussels insiders consider that there are more relevant distinctions operating in the EU, such as:

1) Small member states versus large member states (NMS, except Poland, being small);

2) Rich member states versus poor member states (NMS all being below EU average GDP);

3) Northern states (compromise-oriented, pragmatic work ethic) versus more Southern states and a more leisurely and at the same time strike-prone work culture (there is a variety of working style cultures among NMS, but they are almost universally characterised as predominantly "Nordic").

There are many issues where the differences are issue-dependent, for example, the traditions of organising social dialogue in each respective EU member state, irrespective of whether it has joined recently or has been in the EU from the very beginning.

Nevertheless, if we take as the point of comparison the OMS versus NMS, there are a certain number of similarities and differences that are perceptible via data and interviews.

Parliamentary work

Data indicates that representatives of the NMS are less active in engaging in parliamentary work – both at the EU and national level.

For example, during the 2009-2014 European Parliament term, on average there were around three reports per MEP from OMS, while there were only two per MEP from NMS. The difference was even larger for the most important co-decision reports. The MEPs from OMS were also more active regarding amendments to reports (~80 per MEP from OMS as contrasted to ~60 per MEP from NMS). The distinction was the largest regarding parliamentary questions: on average 107 questions were asked by a parliamentarian from an OMS, and only 34 asked by a parliamentarian from a NMS[15]! During the same time period, the NMS were underrepresented at the committee chairmanship level (just one out of 23 in 2013!) and at the level of EP bureau/leadership of political groups[16].

When asked to explain these differences, Brussels insiders note that it takes time to gain enough credibility in the European Parliament to be assigned some important duties – such as being a rapporteur for some co-decision report or being appointed the head of a committee. The MEPs who

[14] For the purposes of this research, interviews were conducted throughout 2013-2014 with representatives of different permanent representations, advisors to European Parliament groups, Members of European Parliament, Cabinet level staff in the European Commission, EU Council Secretariat, representatives of EESC (European Economic and Social Committee), members of national parliaments and governments, journalists covering EU matters.
[15] Data taken from: End of term scorecard: the activity records of MEPs analysed by Member State. VoteWatch Europe special policy brief 2/2014
[16] http://pasos.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/EU-NMS-study-iveta-kazoka-oct-2013.pdf

have served longer in the European Parliament have a natural advantage as compared with representatives of NMS that should evaporate over time. In fact, the differences have begun to lessen during the time of this research. For example, the data indicate that the new European Parliament, elected in May 2014, already has five NMS representatives as committee chairs and six NMS representatives in the European Parliament bureau. This change can be attributed to two factors: 1) the increased experience of MEPs coming from NMS; and 2) the results of the 2014 European Parliament elections that weakened the formerly cohesive and large representations of OMS in the political groups of the European Parliament[17]. There is almost no difference between OMS and NMS in the context of the number of parliamentary opinions drafted, signed motions for resolutions, or participation in roll-call votes[18].

Nevertheless, the low number of questions addressed by NMS' MEPs to the European Commission and the relatively lower engagement of NMS' national parliaments in the context of subsidiarity control (the so-called "reasoned opinions" when reviewing EU legislation)[19] probably indicate that in-depth differences persist in parliamentary traditions between OMS and NMS.

Council level

All EU member states have permanent representations in Brussels. The size of such representations are more or less equal, except during the time when a country is presiding in the Council of the EU.

As most of the work done at the Council level is undertaken behind "closed doors", there is little data to make possible a comparison as to whether NMS as a group differ from OMS.

The records of votes in the Council (voting is itself infrequent in this institution) indicate that NMS tend to find themselves voting with the majority more often than OMS. Three countries tend to be in the minority most often, and they are all OMS: UK, Germany, and Austria[20]. The interviews conducted for the purposes of this research led to the conclusion that these differences cannot be explained by the greater skill of NMS in navigating Council politics. It is more likely that the NMS' governments are more flexible in their positions in the Councils as they have less "political baggage" and fewer inflexible entrenched interests.

Some other enlightening observations about the differences between OMS and NMS emerged during the research interviews:

- The composition of delegations of NMS in all EU institutions tend to be on average younger;
- The NMS tend to be more EU-optimistic and more ambitious in institutions such as the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). This can partly be

[17] Who holds the power in the EP committees and the bureau? VoteWatch Europe special policy brief; September 2014
[18] Data taken from: End of term scorecard: the activity records of MEPs analysed by Member State. VoteWatch Europe special policy brief 2/2014
[19] http://pasos.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/EU-NMS-study-iveta-kazoka-oct-2013.pdf
[20] Agreeing to Disagree, The voting records of EU Member States in the Council since 2009. VoteWatch Europe Annual Report, July 2012

explained by the fact that EU posts in NMS are less often seen as a downgrade from national-level politics.

4.1. Challenges for NMS in the context of EU decision-making

The "rocky beginning" for the NMS during their first years as EU members was mentioned repeatedly by interviewees during the research for this study. The main reason: the sheer complexity of EU procedures, both formal and informal, that developed during the decades prior to the Eastern Enlargement. "It's like arriving at a theatre when it is already the third Act" was the analogy offered by one representative of a NMS. It takes time to get truly proficient at the EU.

The following challenges were faced by NMS during their first years in the EU, and some of these challenges persist in the eyes of representatives of NMS when asked where they still trail behind the best of OMS:

a) A lack of sufficiently nuanced understanding of the procedures according to which decisions are made in EU and a lack of fluency in the consensus-oriented culture of EU decision-making (this is still a problem for NMS that haven't yet held their first Presidency in the EU Council);

b) A lack of skills to form coalitions/networks around important issues (both for MEPs and for government representatives in the Council); insufficient knowledge on "whom to call" or "whom to catch in a lobby", or "with whom to have dinner";

c) A lack of appreciation of the need to be proactive and to engage in attempts to influence EU legislation at the time when it is still just an idea in the European Commission;

d) A lack of strategic vision regarding national interests at the EU level, a "bird's eye view" that would allow to prioritise and filter important issues (where proactivity is key) from insubstantial issues. This is a particularly large problem for the smaller countries that have a tiny and overstretched national-level administration;

e) NMS are not able to promote their representatives for high-level jobs in the European Commission and various EU agencies. Even though the EU treaties say that the Commission has to be neutral from the member state's interests, it is not always the case. Placement of people in high offices in the European Commission can bring benefits to the respective member state;

f) Weaknesses and low capacity of the national-level administration/government to prepare quality, evidence-based argumentation that could be used to defend NMS' interests in the EU, and the lack of engagement of stakeholders and civic society organisations in the process of forming national positions on EU matters[21];

g) An ineffective national system for co-ordinating EU matters both at the national level (circulation of information among various institutions on EU matters) and at the EU level (for example, mobilising/co-ordinating actions of people from the respective member states who work in EU institutions when national interests are at stake);

[21] See, for example, Opportunities for the Civil Society to Influence EU Decision-Making via National Positions, Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS, 2014 http://providus.lv/article_files/2553/original/EU_decision_making_petijums.pdf?1391777868

h) Relatively little understanding of EU issues and working procedures not just among the population in general, but also among opinion leaders (journalists, politicians), combined with sometimes low-quality and outdated training on EU matters;

i) A weak private sector lobby presence in Brussels on behalf of NMS, and relative scarcity of people from NMS working in Brussels think-tanks on EU related matters.

Overall, none of the four NMS that were explored in more depth in their respective country studies – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland – is fully satisfied with their engagement in EU decision-making. It was mentioned in the country studies that Bulgaria still behaves more like a candidate country rather than an EU policy-shaper. The Czech Republic is also no agenda-shaper – especially as it is being perceived as being against EU integration. It doesn't get involved in many coalitions and rarely tries to form them. A lack of clear strategic interests of their respective countries at the EU level has been mentioned as a defining problem in Bulgaria, Latvia and Poland.

4.2. Successes for NMS in the context of EU decision-making

During the course of their EU membership, NMS have undergone a steep learning curve in terms of their skills in influencing EU policy-making. The respondents in all of the 20 interviews conducted in Latvia have indicated that the progress has been impressive, even though Latvia's first Presidency of the EU Council is yet to come in 2015. In Poland and (to a lesser extent) the Czech Republic, their countries' respective EU Council Presidency was perceived as a breaking-point away from being a passive and reactive EU member state to having the knowledge/skills necessary to be a shaper of the EU policy.

When Brussels insiders are asked about the most skilful NMS in influencing the EU policy, it is Poland that is usually mentioned as the leader of the group. The respondents have seen it successfully organising and leading a coalition of smaller member states during the negotiations on the multi-annual financial framework for 2014-2020 that prevented a substantial reduction in EU expenditures on cohesion policy. Poland has also been very active regarding the Eastern Partnership by pushing forward the initiative and convincing other EU member states that the countries to the east of Poland are important for the EU as a whole. Polish European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek and other Polish top officials in EU institutions have led skilful PR campaigns and shown a strategic vision of Poland's long-term interests. Moreover, Polish MEPs have shown cohesion when voting unanimously together across political group lines on cohesion policies and agriculture.

The changes in the Latvian approach since 2004 might serve as an illustration:

- Latvian representatives in EU working groups were only reactive during the first years of the Enlargement. Since then the state official, when s/he learns that the European Commission intends to work on a new legislative proposal, goes to the Commission in order to proactively try to shape it more in line with Latvian interests;

- Latvian representatives now rarely just say "no" to proposals as they once did (without then managing to stop the new EU legislation), but instead they now try to come up with their own proposals so that the resulting policy takes into account their ideas;

- Latvia is learning to prioritise its interests – there are specific task-forces organised in the Latvian administration regarding top-priority EU issues (such as the multiannual framework, EU enlargement, European Semester (yearly cycle of economic policy co-ordination), climate policy). These task-forces are created out of convenience and are quite loose in their structure: they include various stakeholders and allow co-ordination of lobbying attempts in a more effective manner;

- Latvia has learned to use informal channels (such as ad hoc dinners, conversations among prime ministers) to make sure that its position is understood by the partners;

- MEPs who have been elected in Latvia have learned to be more effective in the European Parliament – they focus less on loudly stating their positions, and more on gaining credibility as experts on some particular issue (such as transport, trade, petitions), as well as networking with other MEPs;

- There are some first attempts to link together citizens of Latvia working in various EU institutions during informal events – so they can exchange information and help each other in the same manner as done by Germans, for instance.

None of these steps is an invention of Latvia: this is what OMS tend to do, and NMS are following their example by gaining the necessary expertise and experience to be more self-confident and skilful in their attempts to influence EU decisions. The socialising effect of being in the constant company of colleagues from 27 other member states cannot be overstated. For example, the head of the Latvian parliamentary European Affairs Committee Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica said during an interview[22] that her role-model has from the very beginning been Luxembourg – a small country with a small administration, and yet perfectly capable of pushing its interests during the green paper/white paper stage (when the proposal is just an idea or policy document and not a legislative draft).

NMS have also learned to free-ride more effectively in circumstances where they are at a disadvantage owing to lack of resources. For example, they now know that British and French civil services can always be counted on to provide exceptional evidence-based argumentation – so if their interests align with these two countries, they don't need to focus on formulating the evidence and argumentation themselves, and can instead focus more resources on the priority issues that are important solely for themselves. It might be unrealistic for small countries' citizens to secure a share of top offices in all EU institutions, but small countries do benefit disproportionately from the quota system that underlies the recruitment principles for EU institutions. Despite a shortage of top-level officials, a lot can be achieved if a country's EU officials and representatives are linked together by common events/information-sharing, and if there is a clear shared vision on the strategic interests of the respective country.

[22] Interview with Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica, head of European Affairs committee of Latvian Parlaiment. Conducted on 11 August 2014 for the purposes of this research.

5. Conclusions

a) Some NMS have via EU membership gained more than others in terms of GDP growth, with the formerly poorest ones gaining the most. For example, despite the economic crisis, the Baltics, Slovakia, Poland, and Romania have experienced tremendous economic growth over the past decade. Meanwhile, the economies of the Czech Republic, Cyprus, and Slovenia have been relatively stagnant.

b) Having spent 7/10 years in EU, NMS are still on average more optimistic about the EU as a whole, its institutions and its future compared with OMS.

c) The citizens of NMS feel less engaged in EU decision-making than the citizens of OMS, and they feel that their interests are not being taken into account to a sufficient degree.

d) When prompted with different means of participating in EU decision-making, the most frequent choice for an average citizen in NMS is not to engage at all.

e) The very first years after having joined the EU tend to be difficult ones for the NMS. The organisation is so complex that it takes years to have a sufficiently nuanced understanding to go beyond being a recipient of EU policy to become an active shaper of EU policy. Nevertheless, the EU also functions as a gigantic socialisation machine – where the newcomers learn from their colleagues on the best form of co-ordination and communications to get things done.

f) Some of the elements that NMS still feel are problematic for them as compared with the older member states:

    i. Understanding of the procedural nuances and all the "people who matter" for EU decision-making (for example, lack of sufficient training, institutional memory);

    ii. EU affairs co-ordination both among national-level institutions and regarding citizens of the respective NMS who work in various EU institutions;

    iii. Having a strategic vision on what are the long-term goals and priorities for the respective country in the EU;

    iv. Stronger national-level administrations capable of produce quality evidence-based arguments/proposals for EU decisions, and visionary, competent political leadership to push them forward.

g) The Eastern Enlargement distinction between the new and the old is no longer relevant in the context of EU decision-making. More persistent distinctions are: small versus large, Northern versus Southern, rich versus poor.

h) The EU Eastern Enlargement NMS have important lessons to share with the current accession countries such as Serbia and Montenegro:

i. Poorer countries almost always win economically from EU membership, and are satisfied with the decision of having joined the EU 7/10 years later;

ii. There is a steep learning curve during the first years of being a member of the EU, but new members learn from the others: when looking back 10 years on, a tremendous degree of progress becomes visible, and all the countries have become more effective participants in EU decision-making. Even if a country lacks the resources of a quality national administration, there are lots of access points/potential allies that can help in EU politics;

iii. It takes a lot of time and effort to become proficient in EU decision-making, so the candidate countries should use all the available opportunities to monitor/learn how decisions are being made in Brussels before they obtain full membership.

Annex 1. Main results of two opinion polls organised in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland in September 2013 and September 2014[23]

	Bulgaria		Czech Republic		Latvia		Poland	
	2013	**2014**	**2013**	**2014**	**2013**	**2014**	**2013**	**2014**
Believe that integration with the EU has brought more losses than benefits	17%	21%	34.9%	33%	29%	33%	12%	10%
Believe that integration with the EU has brought more losses than benefits for democracy in that country	13%	20%	27.5%	28%	26%	30%	12%	11%
Believe that integration with the EU has brought more losses than benefits to the quality of life in that country	13%	34%	29.2%	29%	20%	30%	12%	11%
Believe that integration with the EU has brought more losses than benefits to the	13%	20%	29%	23%	20%	22%	12%	11%

[23] Polling commissioned by PASOS, Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS, Institute of Public Affairs, and European Institute as part of this project.

quality of public services in that country								
Believe that integration with the EU has brought more losses than benefits to the status of that country internationally	14%	19%	26.2%	28%	16%	20%	10%	8%
The activities of the European Parliament have been good	52%	49%	31%	32%	27%	25%	48%	56%
The activities of the European Commission have been good	47%	47%	32.9%	32%	21%	23%	47%	55%
The extent to which the EU takes into account the interests of citizens of that country and national priorities has been good	33%	30%	25.4%	33%	21%	15%	43%	50%
The extent to which MEPs from that respective country effectively promote citizens' interests at EU level has been good	30%	22%	27.1%	29%	17%	18%	42%	47%
The extent to which national government promotes citizens' interests at the EU level has been good	26%	19%	26.6%	27%	12%	14%	39%	47%
Have heard of the European Citizens' Initiative	20%	n/a	16.1%	n/a	14%	n/a	15%	n/a
Have participated as a signatory of a European Citizens' Initiative	1%	n/a	4.7%	n/a	3%	n/a	9%	9%
Would be willing to participate/make use of the European Citizens'	27%	n/a	15.9%	n/a	23%	n/a	31%	n/a

Initiative								
How are Members of the European Parliament nominated in your country? (correct responses)	57%	61%	32.3%	51%	35%	50%	40%	56%
Noticed the Spitzenkandidaten campaign (promotion by the main EU political groupings of their candidates for the position of President of the European Commission) prior to 2014 elections and claims that the campaign encouraged them to participate in elections	n/a	n/a	n/a	11%	n/a	13%	n/a	9%
Prefers not to participate in EU decision-making	n/a	33%	n/a	54%	n/a	33%	n/a	n/a