



Chapter XVI

Relationship of Information Infrastructures and Social Development Among the Visegrad-Four Countries of Central Europe at the Time of EU Accession

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ABSTRACT

The following is an examination of the developmental status of four of the next candidate countries' information infrastructures for accession into the European Union (EU). It develops significant relationships between nations' levels of information infrastructure development and their economic and social developments and applies these relationships to evaluate investment needs for a select group of accession countries called the Visegrad Four. Using cross-country analysis, the candidate countries were compared to other countries and were classified into like groups using cluster analysis while their relative developments were evaluated using regression modeling. Developmental requirements and capital needs to promote growth in their information and communications industries were then identified. It is hoped that the chapter will offer a comparative glimpse of the information and communications infrastructures of some Central and East European countries as compared to other nations.

INTRODUCTION

In 1991 after the fall of communism and the disintegration of the USSR, four of the Eastern block nations institutionalized a policy of coordination and laid the foundations of their transition from totalitarian regimes to free, pluralistic, and democratic societies. Their agreement was formalized as the Visegrad Declaration (at the Hungarian city of Visegrad), and Visegrad-Four (or V4) is the name sometimes given the four Central European post-communist countries—the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland, and the Slovak Republic (TASR, 2002). The Visegrad Declaration led to a continuation of free trade agreement among the four signatories, and trade increased with Western Europe; however, it decreased with other former communist countries and declined considerably with the former Soviet republics (Baylis, 1994). Also, agreements among the Visegrad-Four led to these four countries simultaneously and jointly submitting their applications for European Union (EU) membership (Shea & Stefes, 2002).

To date, the EU has had accession talks with 13 Eastern European nations and designated 10 countries as candidates for integration into the EU to join in a first wave in 2004. The 10 front-runners, named at a summit in Laeken, Belgium, in December 2001, are the original V4 (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), three Baltic nations (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia), two Mediterranean island nations (Malta and Cyprus), and the well-advanced ex-Yugoslav federation state of Slovenia¹. Bulgaria, Turkey, and Romania were designated as second-wave candidates.

Motives of the V4 for joining the EU range from purely ideological to a desire for political, economic, and military stability, and for foreign direct investments in their economies. Conversely, the motives of the EU to expand eastward are morals, fear, and economics: morals, because there is no other region in the world closer to Central and Eastern Europe capable of defusing potential strife in a historically war-prone region; fear, because in case of strife, Western Europe first would have to receive migrants from the east fleeing potential conflicts and repressions; and economics because these ex-satellite states of the USSR constitute enormous markets as well as educated and underpaid work forces ready to be plugged into the West's production systems.

Accession into the EU is a lengthy process of meeting designated criteria on several factors (i.e., enabling laws, policies, and development on telecommunications and information). We will employ cross-country analyses to evaluate the information and telecommunication preparedness of the V4 and the extent to which their national information infrastructures are developed to contribute to their needed economic growth for accession to the EU and, once admitted, to match the information infrastructures of the advanced members of the present EU. Furthermore, the V4 as a group are of particular interest to the EU because of their relative political stability and proximity to present union boundaries. As part of this investigation, we also will examine the practice by the World Bank of assessing information penetration by using telephone mainline counts as surrogate for the penetration of information technologies.

Research Model

In the ensuing discussion, by *social development* we mean the extent to which major sources of social distress and instability for the family and for society have been eliminated (United Nations, 1995). Sources of distress are traditionally described by a collection of factors measuring social well being; accordingly, a Social Development.

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