

Council of Europe's Invisible Forces: Power, European Values and Communication in the Committee of Ministers

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Introduction

1989, the *annum mirabilis*, brought among other changes a significant shift in the understanding of the political role of international organisations. The collapse of the Communist regime caused alterations in structure of international organisations and institutions and changed the ideology of intergovernmental relationships from resistance and confrontation to cooperation. The Enlargement of the Council of Europe initiated after 1989 was therefore more dramatic and fruit bearing than any other enlargement of this institution. The inclusion of the *newly democratic*, i.e. post-communist countries proves to be more complex than the people who represent both the old and the new member states to the Council are willing to admit.

The cooperation between countries in Europe is based on common ideological principles and the Council of Europe proposes to be a leader in this matter. It defines its role through propagating the philosophy of democracy, human rights and the rule of law which are to be part of the European value system. Until the Enlargement caused by the 1989 transformations little changed in the structures of the Council, but the Enlargement challenged the function of the Council and altered the interactions within its Committee of Ministers. The Committee of Ministers is the executive organ of the Council representing the governments of the member states. It provides a link between the Council of Europe and the governments and communicates with the Parliamentary Assembly. The Secretariat of the Committee of Ministers handles all matters pertaining to the activities of the Committee along the lines prescribed by the Council of Europe.

The Committee of Ministers' conference room, sometimes referred to as the "Flying Saucer" is round in shape with shaded windows and carpeted floor. It is situated on the second floor of the Palace of Europe and oversees the street below. The room is equipped with audio and computer systems, a copy centre and an underground space for immediate written translation. The ambassadors are seated in alphabetical order by country at a large circular table, of which there are three rings. There are seats for the ambassador and two other members of his delegation. The part of the table across from the door is occupied by the representatives of the Secretariat and the

current chairman, above whom the countries' flags and the symbol of Council of Europe preside.

Before the meeting starts the participants of the gathering, mostly male, shuffle papers in front of them or talk to others in their proximity. They gesture emphatically, smile at each other with understanding, whisper. Their pre-meeting interaction ends with the suggestion of the chairperson to begin the session. There are many items on the meeting's agenda, but the most anticipated one -as we hear in the corridors- is about the budget ceiling for 1999. Position 1.1 of the printed meeting schedule states: Adoption of the Agenda. Unexpectedly, the meeting stalls because an ambassador of an old member state proposes not to approve the agenda. The debate on tradition, democracy and the role of the Council of Europe erupts as some delegations object to this novel proposal some saying that there is a necessity to maintain the tradition of proceedings (Russia) others criticising the discussion as procedural and not substantial (Ukraine). Others again (such as France and Germany) position themselves in favour of doing as the Committee of Ministers pleases rather than is customary. The verbal conflict between the ambassadors active in the discussion (there are ambassadors who do not participate in the discussion at all) escalates and includes elements beyond theoretical aspects of Council procedures such as the relations between member states on the larger political arena of Europe (for example, Greece-Turkey relations). Even after the agenda is finally adopted three hours later, the intensity does not evaporate and is carried over to the parts of the meeting regarding the human rights commissioner, the accession of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in regards to the situation in Kosovo, and most distinctively - budget ceiling. Despite the assurance of the ambassadors during the meeting that their actions and decisions were directed to benefit the organisation, the methods of reaffirming one's position in the organisation itself was never discussed.

- 636th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies

"Power relations? Shhhh... Are you even allowed to say it...?"

- an international observer to the Council at a reception

Power relations and the distribution of power among the ambassadors and the Secretariat are never mentioned. They exist because when the practice of the pre-Enlargement Council members meets the position of the new members, one can observe them in the interactions between the Council's multinational components. Their interaction takes the form of competition for ideological influence in an environment where power relations are not discussed. Power can be defined as "the actual or potential ability of one or more participants (...), according to the true or false conviction of an observer or a participant, to have affected or to affect the specified, significant actions of one or more other participants (...)" (Doob 1996:8). Power is only present where there is asymmetry of relations (Doob 1996, Wrong 1993, Dawson 1992, Balandier 1970). The competition results in a different power redistribution among the old and new members of the institution. New Members attempt to reassert their position in the Council. Their communication is channelled though through the institutional structures. It is also trapped by the strict hierarchy, long established working methods and bureaucracy. The Council of Europe welcomes the new members yet it requires subscription to its character. However, the newcomers bring along their national perspective, historical experience and political practice forcing the organisation to rethink its design in the light of the role it plays in the architecture of

the New Europe.

1. Methodology

There is an abundance of sources on the Council of Europe and its functions. However, most of them have an official and informational character. Other European and world organisations, for example the United Nation, are the subject of scientific investigation (Jonsson 1994:30), while the Council of Europe, in spite of position it assumes in *the common European home*, is not scientifically examined. Existing information booklets give only statistical data regarding the organisation but neglect to show the dynamics of activities (*modus operandi*) in differing and changing international environment (Jonsson, 1994:30). For example, Guy De Vel in the introduction to his work on the Committee of Ministers defines the purpose of the book as a work “aimed at guiding the reader through the complex procedures of the Committee of Ministers” (De Vel 1995:12). The author thoroughly investigates the origin of the Committee, its structure, procedural organisation, relationships with other branches of the Council in an informational manner and thus presents the Committee of Ministers as a part of a well functioning machine rather than a dynamic work environment for people.

To investigate these power relations we observed and interacted with the Committee of Ministers and the Secretariat of the Committee of Ministers, paying equal attention to both. We used participant observation, interviews and content analysis of documents, which were prepared for and by the Committee of Ministers during our research and the documents produced earlier. We established our first contacts with the Secretariat employees with the help of the project coordinator while the contacts with the ambassadors and their staff were mostly facilitated by the Secretariat.

The participation in the daily meetings of the Secretariat, nicknamed by them “the morning mass” or “morning prayers” allowed us an insider’s view on its daily activities. The employees guided us through their tasks, responsibilities and work environment with the permission of their supervisor. Formal interviews with them were difficult to obtain due to time constraints so we acquired information in an *ad hoc*, informal fashion. The Committee of Ministers, on the other hand, had a very official character which placed our interaction with the ambassadors on a formal level. Meetings with them were ascribed time and place, only rarely were we able to conduct an interview during a social function such as during a reception. With time we begun to be recognised in the Committee of Ministers’ conference room and were frequently asked about the purpose and process of our investigation. Sometimes we were approached by the ministers who expressed an interest in giving an interview.

In terms of power relations in the Committee of Ministers we concentrated on the way in which the relationships created between the new and the old member states enable the deputy foreign ministers to redesign the political space of their countries in the Council. We paid attention both

to the different position of the countries in international politics and to the personal standing of the ambassadors. To demonstrate these dependencies we investigated interpersonal relations in communication through technological channels (computers, telephones, printed material) and on personal basis (meetings, business lunches, receptions), we examined language use and observed the cultural exchange between the old residents of the Council and the newcomers in the light of the European value system, all of which we placed in the context of the international experience of the Council of Europe.

2. *Communicating*

“The majority of the new member states representatives cannot express their personal opinion because they have their countries on their back. The amount of instruction which they receive from home varies. The old members have more experience in this kind of work and that is why they can speak more freely without state instructions”.

- a new member state representative

“The number of staff in our embassy? Three and a half”.

- new member state representative

The Secretariat performs the role of a mediator between the ambassadors and the Council and provides a point of contact for different parts of the system. It does not have the formal power to take the matters into its own hands when the need arises but it issues a strong recommendation that reflects its tremendous experience and the permanent position in the Council. The Secretariat is the crossing point for all links within this international organisation. This point of interconnection provides a condition for effective cooperation between all parts of the Council.

During the meeting of the Committee of Ministers, the staff of Secretariat perpetuates a constant influx of papers, documents, and messages also communicated through phone and computer. The representatives of the Secretariat exchange visual signals between each other and are ready to give a quick advice to the chairperson, if such was needed. However, due to the differing status of the member countries the cooperation between the delegations and the Secretariat depends not only on the personality of the ambassador and the Secretarial staff but also on the power relations already present in the Committee of Ministers. The Secretariat encourages the newcomers to acquire the norms of the institution for better cooperation but in some cases it is not possible because of the previous cooperation norms of the newcomers. The new members are more reluctant to come for help. The newcomers describe their cooperation as good but some add that they would want more independence of action. The old ones are confident in the Secretariat's experience and position and frequently contact it for help.

The Secretariat, than, is a guide through the structures of the Council for those who need it and want it. Although it plays a role of an intermediary on a neutral ground, at the same time its employees have the possibility of great influence due to their long-term experience in the Council. The Secretariat is the grey matter of the Council, and aware of it. It is seen as natural for the ambassadors of the new countries to *come* and *introduce* themselves and to actively

familiarize themselves with the working methods of the Council. It clearly shows that the newcomers have to adjust to the institution and not the reverse and that their success depends on the good relations with the Secretariat.

The communication between the Secretariat and the ambassadors was also mapped on a calendar board. It consisted of coded messages and information but it also of designated spaces that had nothing ascribed to them. This unwritten communication was reserved to the higher informal level of information exchange that required a more delicate handling. The function of informal yet official contacts between the ambassadors and the Secretariat as well as between other persons crucial to the operation of the Council was fulfilled by receptions at the embassies or on the grounds of the Council. These meetings helped the officials show their more personal side and remind others that their performance on the floor of the Committee of Ministers is work. Even in these informal settings the rules of the house have to be observed to equilibrate power plays exhibited on the floor. They provide a space to change relations produced at the meetings. They allow discussion and positioning required for the enforcement of the next task.

The staff of the Secretariat stressed the importance of communication and practised it through daily meetings that set the course of the day. Their meetings contrasted in style with the meetings of the Committee because of their informal character. In both types of meetings *Council English* or *French* was used, which consisted of abbreviations and numbers thrown together in a seemingly incoherent fashion. The *Council language* is a mixture of numbers and letters, sometimes interrupted by a verb. This disjointed expression, however, served the purpose of quicker communication in a particular setting where English and French were not native languages for their users. Paradoxically, in the Secretariat this could not have been the reason for its use, as almost only native speakers of one of the above languages worked there, who had with a superb knowledge of the other. Such an environment allowed for a practice of extensive word play similar to the one in which the able diplomats engaged on the floor of the conference room. The Council Language was supported by the use of telephones, fax machines, email and printed memos.

The Secretariat consists of seven A and B level administrators and a secretarial staff. In their own words, the Secretariat is the brain and the memory of the Council of Europe because it occupies a permanent position in the interaction between the ambassadors and the institution. Often it is the Secretariat who suggests research into pressing issues pertaining to the Council's activity although it is other divisions of the Council who should propose initiatives. Its stable position high in the structure of Council, as well as the personality of its employees, allows its members to present most serious topics such as the budgetary issues in a light and funny way.

The permanent position of the Secretariat in the Council reaffirms the strength of its members. However, they act as a team and there is virtually no struggle for influence within that body. The feeling of power is created by the unity and common goals of the Secretariat. Only the full and

willing compliance with the rules that were set up long ago carries the Secretariat forward placing its members above the interactions in the Committee of Ministers at the same time requiring from it susceptibility to issues raised on the floor. The Secretariat participates in the distribution of influence through the production of documents that reflect the importance of discussed topics. The Secretariat oversees the functioning of working groups thus officially supporting the importance of all members on the equal footing and at the same time it makes sure that the new member states meet the standards of the Council. Therefore, influencing a country means helping them to become one with the institution.

3. Different but Equal, Equal but Different

The Vienna Declaration of 1993 confirmed the Council of Europe's role as "the preeminent European political institution capable of welcoming, on an equal footing and in permanent structures, the democracies of Europe freed from communist oppression" (De Vel 1995).

The Council of Europe aspires to be an egalitarian organisation yet its own structures exhibit strong hierarchy through departmental divisions and precise job descriptions. Because of this structure the ambassadors, who are "A" level officials in the hierarchy of importance, rarely meet employees of the lower levels with the exception of those who work for them directly. Their sphere of influence pertains to inter-ambassadorial and inter-national levels, not the levels of the Council. Influence is "a process whereby one party changes the views or preferences of another so that they now conform to their own" (Dawson 1992:163). After its Enlargement, the Council remained the same hierarchic organisation, however the power has been redistributed between the old and the new members. The new condition demands from the Committee of Ministers a new style of cooperation within the existing structure. On the official level, the Committee of Ministers proclaims to cooperate on the basis of inclusive egalitarian participation of all members. However, the new members are in an unequal position because of their different status in terms of its democratic tradition, its position in Europe, financial status and membership in other European organisations.

The political practice of the New Democracies can be the cause of alienation because of different communication skills and methods. For example, the cooperation with the Secretariat might be more or less successful depending on the openness of the newcomer. Also, the old member countries have the advantage over the new ones in the staff they provide for their permanent representations. Their staff is better equipped has more specialised and experienced employees and it has established links with their own ministries which results in good communication. This good communication is visible on the floor when the answer regarding a problem comes from the home country almost immediately after it was raised.

"From the time of the establishment of the Council the organisation was a closed club. The 1989 events changed this situation"

– New Democracy ambassador

“1989 changed the raison d’être of the Council. It seized to stand in an opposition to the Communist block. If Catherine la Lumiere had not come up with the brilliant idea of Enlargement, the Council would have been gone.”

- a long-term high level employee of the Council

Shortly before the Council’s Enlargement two ways of including new states into its structure were discussed. In the first one the Council waited for the prospective member to implement democracy, observe human rights and execute the rule of law before admitting it. In the second the organisation attempted to mould the new member into a democratic state by including it into the Council. After the events of 1989 Enlargement the institution managers chose the second option. The newcomers were to learn democracy, human rights and the rule of law through *membership and cooperation*, while the old members lead and the new ones follow. The Council assumed a position of authority in this matter and by extension the old member states became representatives of this authority. Power and authority relations were recognised and acknowledged by both sides thus setting the stage for an expression of difference of opinion. The new member states, agreed to the authority of the Council by submitting their application for admission. A member of the Secretariat as well as some other long-term employees of the institution expressed on numerous occasions that if a country wants to fit into the Council, “they have to play by the rules”. Thus, the newcomers agree to participate in any exchange they may encounter while already admitted but as our observation proved, they do not necessarily have to agree to the distribution of power. By means of diplomatic procedure and political alliances the newcomers try to change the guidelines for legitimacy of the already existing authority.

The new members states’ representatives attempted in the past to break or change the existing scheme of member cooperation and to affirm their role in the Committee of Ministers in a way that suited their countries better. The new members often quietly comment on this style of cooperation and sometimes voice their opposing opinion. One New Democracy ambassador with extensive “Western” diplomatic training was very active in the meetings. Asked about his participation, he answered that the new countries must make themselves more visible. He implied that without such activity the new countries will be overwhelmed by the old ones. This process of affirmation of a political position happens in different forms and with different understanding of the cooperation model. Now, after the Enlargement, the Committee of Ministers is at the point of redistributing positions and of creating new levels of interaction.

Some new members are ready to accept the model of *teacher and pupil* and admit that they need the education. For these newcomers the Council is the first step or a *trampoline* to the EU and because they have such an aim they are ready to assume a non-equal position in the partnership.

The first reaction of the interviewed ambassadors of the old member states was to express their will to lead the new ones in the correct direction. Right after its Enlargement the Council subscribed to the *teacher-pupil* model but as this contradicted the equal partnership principle of the Council the Summit in

Strasbourg in 1997 decided to subject all members to the Council's control through monitoring.

"We must not allow countries like Russia to stray into a situation that would lead into another authoritarian state. We must show them the way. There are outreach programs, we must educate, we must dispense expertise of the Council".

- an Old Democracy ambassador

"The aim of monitoring is not to criticise but to define the problems in the field in the investigated country and to help with assistance to eradicate these problems".

- an Old Democracy ambassador

The original idea behind the monitoring was to oversee the progress new members made in terms of the values the Council represents, that is human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Monitoring entailed a form of punishment for unfulfilled requirements. The public discussion on human rights violations was felt as a punishment because of the embarrassment of public scrutiny. This highly powerful procedure now includes the old members as well. Presently, monitoring is to be the same for all countries regardless of their democratic status. The change in the monitoring system shows that the new members gained enough strength to cause a shift in control. Yet, the old member states occasionally stress the necessity to assume the position of an educator, especially when there is a breach of human rights agreements or a lack of compliance with the rule of law. Then, the cooperation model of a *teacher and pupil* is easily adopted and has little resistance from those newcomers, who are ready to be a pupil.

Some new members want to strengthen an image of important players on the European political arena and always underline the principle of partnership in the organisation, so for them the *teacher-pupil* model is not admissible. They try to construct political and power relationships on the base of equal partnership and equal participation. The cooperation model of *equal partners* is the official form of work in the Committee of Ministers and is the preferred model for the newcomers who are not yet firmly established in the Council and Europe in general. Active participation signals a strong position in the Committee of Ministers because a passive one marks only confirmation of authority and it is not a sign of influence. The new members reported that in the first years after the Enlargement they were *being asked* rather than *asking themselves*. An "older brother" asks and the "younger one" answers the questions about the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the investigated country. The New Democracies do not have as advanced democracy and guarantee mechanisms for the maintenance of human rights and the rule of law as the Old Democracies do. The attempt on the part of the new members to show that the old ones also have problems with such issues as human rights indicated an ambition of new members. For example, the Ukrainian delegation asked about human rights violation in Sweden. The assembly was stunned but responded to the question in writing.

4. Egalitarianism?

The Council defines its function as helping the newcomers to learn how to be equal, positioning the old members as role models. However, we found that despite the egalitarian principles of the Council of Europe countries of the same status form groups to counteract other interest groups. For example, there are informal bodies grouping the EU members, the Nordic countries, the Baltic ones and so forth. The countries who do not present a high level of importance in European politics because of their economics or size do not assume an active position in the discussion on questions such as budget issues and members' contribution in it.

Therefore, the relations between the member states are highly politicised. The financial contributions of countries establish their position among other delegations primarily because they become more vocal in discussions that are essential to the existence of the Council, such as the budget debate. Their degree of involvement in discussions on the political role of Council reflects their financial status. The heated debate about the Council as an organisation practising preventive diplomacy shows the political interests of the Grand Payers that go well beyond democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The newcomers whose financial standing is poorer rarely discuss the related issues. Their position of a "poor cousin" then showed dramatically. The silence of the majority of the New Democracies during such debates showed that although the question of power is often evoked, it is never verbalised. Only the observers to the Council of Europe allowed themselves an occasional comment on the power struggles within the Committee of Ministers but the topic was never challenged. Only in a few cases the ambassadors lost the firm grip over their diplomatic skills, and it was precisely over the issues of money. Otherwise, the diplomacy completely covered the contentious matters and allowed the problems to move into the informal sphere of interactions.

Changes in the budget would most likely cause a cut in the activities of the Council and the countries with smaller contributions protested further budget cuts. Money was very visibly the bone of contention and the Committee of Ministers was very close from naming the difficult situation of the enlarged Council as undergoing a rift. The financial debate showed a "feudal" side of the Council, which expressed the primary care of the institution for its self-reproduction and only in second place for the activities and goals of the Council. It showed the necessity of the institution to satisfy primarily its administrative requirements.

Due to the inability to influence these discussions, the newcomers compensated for it through taking an active position in the debates on other topics, such as the political role of the Council. The most important of the fields of influence are those which are of concern on a more global scale, such as peaceful settlement of military conflicts in Europe. During discussions about the conflict in Kosovo and the possibilities of the Council as an international organisation to play a regulative role in this conflict, the newcomers displayed their position more actively than long-time members did. They demonstrated their contribution in different proposals. For example, Slovenia suggested civic education seminars, Russia was against any military action in general, and the old member states did not want to discuss the matter until September 1998 (the meeting

took place on the beginning of July 1998), also rejecting the proposition to issue a statement of the Committee of Ministers regarding the situation in Kosovo. The new members proposed different methods to solve the problem with non-military yet active means, which suggested a new *philosophical base* for the Council in international conflict resolution.

The meetings are conducted in a ritualized way and serve the purpose to prevent an outburst of criticism directed at any member of the assembly in a less than diplomatic way. The ritual of gathering at a round table and the friendly interactions at informal meetings underline that the environment is assumed to be “egalitarian” (Brison 1991). The “egalitarian” political structures make it difficult to reach a decision because those who try to influence a decision are seen as power-seekers, a highly undesired characterization. The Committee of Ministers meetings about Kosovo seemed to serve the function of gaining a larger picture about the current issue and of establishing a position without necessarily taking action.

The interactions were influenced by the levels of diplomatic training and linguistic abilities of the people involved. The interaction of ambassadors in the Committee of Ministers was always emotionally charged but at the same time it was curtailed by diplomatic behaviour. The relations of countries toward one another were visible through mutual support or disagreement on certain issues. The level of diplomacy the ambassadors represented carries weight because it enabled them to express intricate thoughts in a non-abrasive, and even sometimes joking way. In the interviews they stressed the friendly diplomatic relations that characterise their work at the Council and always reminded us that they simply express their country’s position without personal hostilities.

Those fluent in either French or English were more vocal and always more eager to take the floor, which greatly contrasted with the participation of countries whose representatives lacked the linguistic training. Vocal expression can be understood as a tool to become a member of the elite in the Committee of Ministers and such an attempt was made by the countries which participated in the discussion on every topic regardless of the relevance and weight of their own opinion. Thus, the use of a language becomes strategic depending on the person using it and the choice of it can become a display of a powerful position. The ambassadors often choose a certain language to advance their chances in reaching an agreement with another deputy minister, although there were some situations when the ambassador would speak the language he or she prefers even if the other ambassador is not as apt in it. Usually, though, the *couloir chat* happens in the language that marks the politics between the conversants. On the floor, it was common to hear one ask a question in one language and receive the answer in another. For the delegations whose leaders were not able to speak either language fluently the position was at a loss from the start.

The position of the newcomers in the Committee of Ministers is established with the help of initiatives and proposals of new delegations. These proposals have different aims and forms and should be, in theory, considered with equal attention. One new delegation put forward a proposal

regarding a new judicial body in the institution but the proposal brought no reaction from the Committee of Ministers. One can infer that the significance given to proposals was linked to the status of the country and not to the importance of the suggestion. The proposals for the future perspectives of the Council as an international and intergovernmental institution *can* help a newcomer to acquire a position of a more noteworthy participant and thus contribute to the *new construction* of the Council. However, as not to all initiatives due attention is paid, it is fair to assume that it is also up to the Committee of Ministers as a body comprised of both old and new members to decide on the allocation of influence. In cases when initiatives of new members are not discussed in depth, a question arises: are these proposals not interesting and important enough or are they challenging the *leader and follower* model in the Committee of Ministers?

5. Institutional Constraints

The institutional structure of the Council, and the Committee of Ministers in particular, provides a set stage for interactions between the long-term members, the newcomers and the institution in a political way. The international and intergovernmental character of the Council of Europe rigidly positions the member states' representatives – the ambassadors - between the Secretariat, their home ministries and vis-à-vis each other. Also, the year 1989 clearly defines the chronology of events and makes it possible to establish a time “before” the Enlargement and “after” it. Such a distinction allows the old members of the institution to see the changes that occurred and places the new members on a highly visible plane of interactions.

The habits and the traditions of the Council clash with the perspective of the Council's new members on the level of working methods. These methods include meeting procedures and formal and informal diplomatic exchange framed in a bureaucracy that develops as a result of long-term interaction. The working methods of the Council have been developing and changing since the time of its creation. In the years when the number of members remained unchanged these methods solidified and became the norm of the institution. The values and working norms are termed the *acquis* of the Council of Europe. Any discussion in the Committee of Ministers that involved a change in the customary way of proceedings was met with a vibrant protest and perceived as dangerous to the existence of the institution. Hence, there was a pressure from the old members to retain the order of meetings “as before” although such order sometimes proved inefficient due to a larger number of members. The question by a new member why not change the proceeding was met with a surprised reaction: “but we've been doing this in this way for 30 years...”

The diplomatic exchange between the participants of meetings ensured that the order of the gathering will not take an unexpected turn and that the ambassadors remain anonymous and only represent their country. Therefore the chairman calls the representatives of member states by the name of their country (for example, “Cyprus has the floor”, “the ambassador of Germany, please”) rather than by the name of the ambassador. Only in one case the name of the

ambassador was mentioned and this situation was connected with the special status of that man and his achievements for the Council and the international community and his subsequent status. Further, the communication between the participants happens through printed material available to them from the Secretariat. They are free to obtain it at the meeting, they also have access to it prior to the gatherings. The information they receive through the Secretariat ensures the “proper” order of the proceedings and for the purpose of the institution it provides a structure for interactions. Standard procedures give a unified style of work, breaking of which would create a visible discrepancy and would show the difference of interests, which is not admissible because of the egalitarian premise of the Council.. From the perspective of the institution bureaucracy is the tool that enables it to maintain its spheres of influence. It can also be useful for the members of the Committee, both new and old if they know how to use the slow procedures of that bureaucracy to their advantage.

Bureaucracy of the Council requires the newcomers to heed to its hierarchy and it imposes certain rules on individuals thus repressing their national and cultural backgrounds. “Background levelling”, as described by one new member state delegate, has to take place as a condition for work in an international organisation. In this understanding, bureaucracy limits the influence of power-holders in the Committee of Ministers and in the Secretariat and becomes a working condition. The rules of bureaucracy lock the employees in a fixed position of inability to act which might be used by the ministers in a conscious or subconscious attempt to retain their position. Bureaucracy is also perceived as an obstacle for personal (not career-wise) growth because it forces the people working for the Council to lower their high ideals when they become entangled in the bureaucracy. The habits of the institution, become an invisible umbrella for mundane everyday interactions.

However, the personality and experience of the ambassador often shapes the position of a *newly democratic* country among those of larger experience.

“The size of a country does not play a role. It is important who you are as a person. Look at Slovenia. The ambassador is a strong politician, that is why she is listened to”.

- an Old Democracy ambassador

The personality of the ambassador influences the relationship with the Secretariat and could be characterised as ranging from neutral to positive. Negative relations were not overtly reported; an explanation of unanimous solving of animosities and conflicts was offered instead. It is beyond the question, however, that antagonisms existed. The Secretariat's disassociation with any existing feuds could be summarised in the verbal reference to the ambassadorial body as “them”. The personal power comes from the personality of the ambassador, his/her openness to the multicultural and multinational factors of the high official level. The ambassador is also limited by the institutional constraints of the Council itself, for example the duration of the representation (about 5 years). The ambassador has to recognise the structure and play by its rule while the Secretariat remains unchanged for a much longer time.

6. The Power of Values: Europe, Multiculturalism and Democracy

“You ask me what are the European values? Well, you should know, you are European”

- a long-term employee of the Secretariat

Q: “What do you bring back to Strasbourg when you go to England?”

A: “You mean when I go home? Oh, various things, books, foods, pictures of family. Pictures are important, pictures are home”

- an interview with a long-term employee of the Secretariat

“I speak many languages. I feel at home here.”

- Secretariat’s employee

The national identity should not be abolished or neglected in favour of the European one. *Europe* as a space is said to complement the idea of *home* to which one needs to belong. In this case European identity and its values spread like an umbrella over nationalities and protect them without negating their existence and importance. The *possession* of "European values", however, causes asymmetry and imbalance in the power check book because the old member states are suppose to *have* them while the new ones only strive to *acquire* them. Therefore values become powerful, and having the European identity is an asset.

“One needs to put the good ideas into the heads of the young people”

- an Old Democracy ambassador

“European identity does exist but how should I describe it? One can find many aspect of it: cultural, historical, political and judicial. Council’s conventions are elements of European identity”.

- a New Democracy ambassador

“European values are humanitarian values but are used for political aims. I can find only one aim for them to prepare Eastern and Central European countries to be included in the European Union”.

- a New Democracy ambassador

The acquiring or further strengthening of the European identity is “suggested” by the old members but its definition is not disclosed. "European identity" is used in the Council of Europe for the purpose of the institution and by those who want to belong to it. The new members therefore often insist in saying that their countries are already "European". The concept of "nationality", although sometimes not mentioned overtly, is present in the Council through stereotyping and jokes. It seems that the European identity has an “official character”, while the

national identity – a personal one.

Conclusion

Power in the Committee of Ministers in the Council of Europe is visible when the involved sides institutionally defined as equal attempt to show their superior position over each other. Also, this competition has a distinct purpose for each participant. The Old Democracies strive to retain their pre-Enlargement authority by presenting themselves as model democratic states, attempting to gain the position of a mentor, up to now expressed in the activity of monitoring. The interest of the New Democracies is to create a politically viable position in the Council of Europe as its rightful members in order to further develop binding relations with other organisations in Europe and to become a member of larger European community. The interest of the Council as an international institution is to be a leader in the process of the formation of a new philosophy of European co-existence in the architecture of the New Europe. The interests of these three groups also include individual countries' concerns which intercept with the political practice and historical experience of both the old and the new member states' representative. Their exchange is carried out under the umbrella of the *universal European values*, which the Council of Europe defines as democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It takes place in an environment designed for political communication: the conference rooms, the Secretariat quarters, embassies and all routes between them create for the ambassadors an arena for powerful interactions when they engage in sometimes seemingly meaningless verbal and non-verbal exchanges. The era of the Council of Europe as a *closed club* ended with the admission of post-communist states and subsequently the people who participate in all interactions of the Committee of Ministers and the Secretariat exhibit positions that are related to the acquisition and maintenance of political power.