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The Europeanization of the Western Balkans: Is It Just A Dream?

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ABSTRACT

After the wars of Yugoslav secession between 1991-1995 and the Kosovo conflict in 1999, the European Union became more anxious to enlarge its borders into the Western Balkans. In fact this enlargement strategy of EU was an apparent departure from its previous passive presence in the region where the EU had restricted itself to providing humanitarian assistance. Thus, in contrast to pre-1999 Western Balkan policies, the 2000s have witnessed a period of effective “transformation through integration”.

The policy brief discusses the reasons behind EU engagement in the Western Balkans, steps that were taken through the EU enlargement, stages that each Western Balkan country stands at the EU membership process and reasons of the growing Western Balkan skepticism in Europe in the last years. It also deals with the question of how Western Balkans could successfully accomplish the accession process and be an integrated part of Europe. The potential contributions of Turkey to the Balkan regional cooperation are discussed as well.



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THE EUROPEANIZATION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS: IS IT JUST A DREAM?

After the wars of Yugoslav secession between 1991-1995 and the Kosovo conflict in 1999, the European Union became more anxious to enlarge its borders into the Western Balkans. In fact this enlargement strategy of EU and direct involvement in the issues of the Western Balkans were an apparent departure from its previous passive presence in the region where the EU had restricted itself to providing humanitarian assistance. Thus, in contrast to pre-1999 Western Balkan policies, in which the main goal of the EU was to supply regional cooperation, the 2000s have witnessed a period of effective “transformation through integration”. This development led to the EU-induced regime changes in the region and was commented on by some specialists as the “post-1999 European Order.”¹ However an important question comes to mind as to why the EU became more engaged in Western Balkan politics after that time.

REASONS BEHIND EU ENGAGEMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

During the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the subsequent war of 1992-1995, the Western Balkans became Europe’s Achilles’ heel, revealing EU inability to act decisively in crisis management. The EU neither played a critical role in the ethnic bloody conflicts of the former Yugoslavia nor was it successful in mobilizing the international community before the Kosovo crisis upsurge. It was, however, the crises in the Western Balkans during the 1990s that proved to be a catalyst for much change within the EU. After those crises were brought to an end, there was a widespread perception, even among EU policy makers, that Europe could do better. As Chris Patten, the EU commissioner for external relations put it:

1. See for example, Emilian Kavalski, “The Balkans after Iraq... Iraq after the Balkans: Who’s Next,” *Perspectives on European Politics and Societies* 6 (2005): 107-108, Emilian Kavalski, “Divide and Reward: Maintaining EU’s Deterrence in the Balkans after the 2004 Enlargement,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 34 (2006): 289.

Any regional conflict in the Balkans would not only allow the countries to drift into turmoil, but would also threaten the security of Europe. Thus the geographic closeness of the region made the EU more decisive in maintaining peace and stability there in order to prevent the possibility of migration influx and new economic burdens.

Europe completely failed to get its act together in the 1990s on the policy for the Balkans. As Yugoslavia broke into bits, Europe was largely impotent because it was not united. Some member states wanted to keep Yugoslavia at all costs, some wanted to manage its break up, and others still felt we should stay out of the whole mess... We had to do better. A lot better.²

Also, due to previous experiences with Central and Eastern Europe, the EU became well aware that conditional offer of membership has an enormous influence in terms of suppressing nationalist governments and in introducing discipline in economic and political spheres.³ As Moore says, it is mainly for this reason that the EU has engaged in a strategy for "effective deterrence," in which external incentives dissuade negative policy patterns and reward prescribed ones. Naturally, this policy targets the individual compliance of every state as opposed to pre-1999 EU policies for regional cooperation.⁴ Thus, the integration policy of the EU reveals much about what drives change not only in terms of the Balkans but also in the EU itself.

Any regional conflict in the Balkans, known as the "backyard of Europe,"⁵ would not only allow the countries to drift into turmoil, but would also threaten the security of Europe. Thus the geographic closeness of the region made the EU more decisive in maintaining peace and stability there in order to prevent the possibility of migration influx and new economic burdens. This became more important especially after the last two enlargements of 2004 and 2007 when the EU frontiers were extended throughout the East, and with the new Union of 27, moved closer to the countries of the Western Balkans.⁶ After the accession to membership of Hungary and Slovenia in 2004, and Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, the Western Balkan countries became nearly enclosed within the EU. It is clear that due to its geographical location, it is the EU which will be affected the most by any turbulence in the Balkans. Thus, conflict prevention strategy was planned to secure stability not only in the Western Balkans but in the EU countries as well. In that sense, as Stefanova stresses, the EU developed its enlargement strategy as a non-traditional method of security provision, in which high conditionality, externalization of EU policies in the long run, and direct military intervention in any case of need became key instruments.⁷

Hence, the EU's gravitational pull would have a decisive effect in stabilizing the Balkans under the EU flag. It would give the EU enormous influence on the course of policies in the region and would accelerate the expansion of Western norms throughout the

2. Lenard J. Cohen, "The Balkans Ten Years After: From Dayton to the Edge of Democracy," *Current History* 104 (2005): 365.

3. Gergana Noutcheva, "EU Conditionality and Balkan Compliance: Does Sovereignty Matter?" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburg, 2006): 228.

4. John Moore, "Beyond the Democratic Peace" *Virginia Journal of International Law* 44 (2004): 376, Kavalski, "Divide and Reward," 290-292.

5. See for example, "Peacekeeping Close to Home: Paving the Way to EU Membership in the Western Balkans" *Foreign Policy* 169 (2008): A6.

6. Adriana Berbec, "Reassessing European Union Limits: What Role for the New Regional Partnerships?" *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 10 (2010): 69.

7. Boyka Stefanova, "The European Union as a Security Actor: Security Provision through Enlargement" *World Affairs* 168 (2005): 57-59.

Balkans. Many people in Europe stress the “transformative power” of the EU which is “broad and deep; upon entering its sphere of influence countries are changed forever.”⁸ In that sense, the dominant aspect of the post-1999 European order can be called “the securitization of Western norms” through a process of socialization. This process also prompted a trend towards functional differentiation between the EU and NATO; strengthening the first as a civilian power whose diplomacy is mainly based on the economic sphere, while committing the second to the role of security.⁹

The policy of integration would also create an opportunity for the EU to increase its power in the region. It would diminish confusing approaches of the EU members towards the region and would unify them under a certain policy. Hence, during the Dayton agreement, NATO stabilization and the subsequent US-led alliance’s military support of Bosnia, and later during the Kosovo crisis, it was American success that evoked old transatlantic tensions. By applying the integration approach, the EU also aimed at balancing its military inferiority with political instruments.

STEPS TOWARDS THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE EU INTO THE WESTERN BALKANS

The EU’s first attempt at engagement in the Western Balkans was realized just after the end of the Kosovo war. In that sense, the Kosovo war became a turning point for the EU, which then began not only to cope with domestic criticisms within the member states but also with the outflow of refugees. While domestic criticisms stressed the failure of the Union to prevent conflict and its incapacity to take military action, the refugee crisis brought the security of Europe into question. The member states were also very uncomfortable due to the long lasting military action of NATO in Kosovo. Although the EU governments were in favor of NATO intervention, many had been confronted with serious difficulties in maintaining party and public support for military action since this was not being carried out under a UN mandate. Especially German participation in the NATO action brought the coalition members, the Social Democratic Party and Green Party- on to opposite sides; since being a part of the military action was essentially contrary to the pacifist ideology of the latter. The Foreign Minister from the Green Party, Joscha Fischer, could only prevent the collapse of the coalition and provide Green Party support for military action, after he had pledged that military action would be pursued by diplomatic initiatives. Domestic criticisms went beyond the German lands and echoed in Greece and Italy when the campaign lasted longer than expected and caused important refugee problems. The EU had witnessed three wars in the Balkans in less than a decade, a very short period of time, and these had brought the crisis management capacity of the EU into question. Mainly because of this, less than four months after the NATO bombing campaign started in March 1999, the EU launched the Stability Pact for South East Europe, in what Friis and Murphy call “turbo-charged negotiations.”¹⁰

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8. Mark Leonard, “The Road to Cool Europe” *New Statesmen* (June 16 2003), quoted in Amichai Magen, “Rules and Engagement: A Comparative Qualitative Evaluation of European Union Rule-of-Law Promotion in Romania, Turkey, Serbia and Ukraine” (PhD. diss., Stanford University, 2008): 357.

9. Emilian Kavalski, “The Balkans after Iraq...,” 107-108.

10. Lykke Friis, Anna Murphy, “Turbo-Charged Negotiations: The EU and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe” *Journal of European Public Policy* 7 (2011): 768-769.



Economic and political conditionality for the development of bilateral relations between the EU and each Balkan nation became the main tool in which the focus was the integration of individual countries into membership of the EU rather than socialization of the seven of them together.

Thus, on the initiative of its then German President, the European Council agreed to the idea of a Pact in order to encourage the political elites of the Western Balkans to work together on common issues such as democratization, economic development and security. It was clear that only after the support of USA and Russia had been obtained, would the Pact come into existence. It would not be so difficult to convince Russia to agree to such a kind of organization since it strongly opposed NATO's existence in the region. Also, since NATO did not have a post-bombing strategy there, the USA became more engaged in the German initiative. It was not coincidental that the plan for the stabilization of Western Balkans and the integration of the region into the Euro-Atlantic community was put forward at the Washington Summit, in April 1999. However, it must be stressed that some member states, such as France, were very anxious about the role the USA played during this initiative and had the impression that the Stability Pact would turn into a tool in the hands of the USA, which would then force the EU to enlarge its membership.¹¹

Parallel to the Stability Pact, in 2000 the EU also launched the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) at the Zagreb EU-Balkan Summit¹² as a new instrument for Western Balkan countries. This new program gave the possibility of EU membership to the Western Balkan countries after they had carried out the relevant requirements. In other words, it became a turning point in the sense that the European Union, for the first time in its history, was to open up the prospect of joining Europe to the all Western Balkan countries. This new strategy underlines the fact that, although these countries had many differences, yet they had more common and interrelated problems which could only be solved by a global/regional approach. In this sense, EU membership became a powerful motivator for Western Balkan countries to apply the necessary political and economic reforms in a timely manner. Economic and political conditionality for the development of bilateral relations between the EU and each Balkan nation became the main tool in which the focus was the integration of individual countries into membership of the EU rather than socialization of the seven of them together. The main conditions that each Western Balkan country had to carry out concerned respect for human rights, implementation of political and economic reforms, and active contribution to the development of regional cooperation. In other words, the SAP was formulated as a (pre) pre-accession framework whereby each of the Western Balkan countries would fulfill a set of conditions in order to sign a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU. The process was planned to consist of three sub-phases: in the preparatory phase each country would realize the initially-needed reforms in order to sign the agreement. The second phase would be the actual negotiation and adoption period, while the third phase would focus on the implementation of the agreement. Only at the end of those phases, would those countries become fully associated with the EU.¹³ It should be noted that the SAA contained no formal EU commitment; instead, it was designed to lead the target countries to candidate status and the commencement

11. Ibid, 773.

12. Will Bartlett, "Regional Integration and Free-Trade Agreements in the Balkans: Opportunities, Obstacles and Policy Issues" *Econ Change Restruct* 42 (2009): 26-27.

13. Harald Schenker, "The Stabilization and Association Process: An Engine of European Integration in Need of Tuning" *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 7 (2008): 2.

of accession talks. The EU used trade and financial instruments as carrots to improve stability and security in the Western Balkan states.

The elections of January 2000 in Croatia and of October 2000 in Serbia, which ended undemocratic regimes there, became a turning point for the EU which then began to focus more on integration and to give more substance to the SAP. As Javier Solana said in a special contribution to the *Herald Tribune* of October, 12, 2000, "We [the EU] are no longer satisfied with simply wanting to see peace and stability in the Balkans. Responding to their aspirations, we are committed to working for the full integration of the Balkan countries into the political and economic mainstream of Europe."¹⁴ It was at the Feira Council in June 2000 that, for the first time, the EU mentioned Western Balkan countries as potential candidate member states.

During the second half of 2000, the EU put into action two decisions to support economically the implementation of the SAP and the preparation of the Western Balkan countries for EU accession. The first was the application of an asymmetrical trade agreement with the target countries whereby the EU unilaterally raised all duties and restrictions on almost every import originating from the region. The second decision concerned the replacement of the PHARE programmes for the Western Balkans and the OBNOVA reconstruction programmes, established to assist reconstruction in Republics of the Former Yugoslavia, by a single legal framework known as the Community Assistance for Reconstruction and Development and Stabilization (CARDS), in order to assist domestic reforms and reconstruction in the countries. Thus, CARDS became a long-term assistance approach in which the needs of every Western Balkan country were gathered up in a single framework.¹⁵ CARDS was planned to finance investment, institution building and other programmes in four major areas: reconstruction, democratic stabilization, reconciliation and the return of refugees. This included institutional and legislative development and the operation of a free market economy; sustainable economic and social development, including structural reform; and the promotion of closer relationships and regional cooperation among SAP countries, between the European Union and themselves. The EU also decided to enlarge the scope of the European Reconstruction Agency, which had previously applied only to Kosovo, to all of the former countries of the Republic of Yugoslavia. By late 2001, it was clear that the SAP had become the main instrument through which the EU would deal with the Western Balkans.¹⁶

However, despite all these developments, there is no doubt that the SAP was not sufficient to overcome the regional security challenges. SAP's vague content was far from providing a reliable stabilization program for the region. Because of the problems in

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14. Javier Solana, "A European Future for Serbia" *International Herald Tribune* 12, October, 2000, quoted in Gergana Noutcheva, "EU Conditionality," 230.

15. Nikolaos Tzifakis, "The Intentions-Declarations Gap in the EU Policies towards the Western Balkans and the Southern Mediterranean" *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 34 (2006): 238-239.

16. Bernhard Hulla, "Institution Building in Southeast Europe: The Human Element," *Euroinvest* (2003): 28-29. Through the PHARE programme the EU gives necessary know-how, including consulting and training to public, private and nongovernmental organizations as well as funding studies, giving capital and necessary guarantees, together with other international organizations, for infrastructure projects. On the other hand, the OBNOVA programme targets economic development, the rehabilitation of civil society and cooperation among the republics of the former Yugoslavia. For more information about the PHARE and OBNOVA programmes see, for example, Angelos Kotios, "The European Union's Balkan Development Policy," *Intereconomics* 36 (2001): 196-07.

The admission of Western Balkan countries to the EU is a complex process which goes through six stages. Among the Western Balkans, Croatia, now standing at the sixth stage, is the country closest to completing its EU negotiations and there is great expectation that it will join the Union in 2012 or 2013.

application, at the European Council of Thessaloniki in 2003, the EU addressed some of the SAP's deficiencies and made a new contribution to the process. It launched the membership perspective for five countries from the region and specified the procedure for the promotion of potential candidates to full candidates.¹⁷ Thus, the Stabilization and Association Agreement, SAA, became the sole contractual agreement for the target countries to sign during the membership process. The EU also accepted co-responsibility for the process.

POTENTIAL EU CANDIDATES OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

September 11, 2001 was a turning point not only in terms of the shift in US priorities but also in the logic of the EU enlargement momentum. Along with the war on terrorism, the crises and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq inevitably turned US concerns to other regions and gave the EU an opportunity to take more initiative in the Balkans. Thus, it is not wrong to say that in the transatlantic rivalry between Europe and America, the Balkans had become one of the most important arenas in which European potential was manifested.

Under these circumstances, the EU's military and police mission to Macedonia, and the police mission to Bosnia in January 2003 made an important contribution to the EU's role in the Balkans. In 2003, the EU diplomats also came to an agreement about the replacement of Yugoslav federation designed by Milosevic. According to the agreement, a referendum that would determine the association or separation of Montenegro and Serbia was postponed until 2006. Also in July 2003, EU Commission President Romano Prodi declared in Croatia that "the whole of the Balkans must come into the European Union. No wall, no barrier, must divide the Balkans."¹⁸

The next step in the Western Balkans was the candidate status of Croatia for EU membership in June, 2004. After Macedonia, it was the second country that signed a SAA with the EU in October, 2001. In February 2003, Croatia submitted a formal request for EU membership, the first country of the Western Balkans to do this. Accession negotiations for Croatia were opened in October, 2005. It was at the end of 2006 that Croatia successfully finished the screening process. By June 2010, Croatia was able to open the last three policy-related negotiating chapters out of the original thirty three.¹⁹ It must be noted that the admission of Western Balkan countries to the EU is a complex process which goes through six stages. Among the Western Balkans, Croatia, now standing at the sixth stage, is the country closest to completing its EU negotiations and there is great expectation that it will join the Union in 2012 or 2013. It is quite clear that the conclusion of Croatia's accession negotiations will have an encouraging effect on the other Western Balkan countries.

Coming to Macedonia, although it was the first country of the region to sign a SAA in April 2001, it obtained its candidate status a bit later, in December, 2005. This delay

17. Nikolaos Tzifakis, 240.

18. Lenard J. Cohen, "The Balkans Ten Years After," 368.

19. Herbert Pribitzer, Georgios Ghiatis, (2010), "The Western Balkan Countries" http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/en/FTU_6.4.1.pdf.

derived first from a serious political crisis in 2001 about the rights of the ethnic Albanians who constitute about 25-30 percent of Macedonia's population, and then the bilateral dispute with Greece over the country's name. In October 2009, despite the EU's recommendation to open accession negotiations, Greece opposed Macedonia's accession negotiations saying they could only start after the dispute over the country's name had been solved. It was in November, 2009 that the European Commission proposed to grant visa liberalization to the citizens of this country.²⁰ Macedonia stands at the fifth stage of the EU path. The EU expects from Macedonia to adopt a democratic judicial system, to hold reliable elections, to take new measures for its border security and to reconstruct police department so that people of Albanian origin can also be hired. Nevertheless Macedonia has been struggling with political crises for a long time, a situation as a result of which, EU diplomats started to think that Macedonia is very far from being a member of the EU.

On the other hand, after a short period of time, Montenegro declared its independence in June 2006; it signed a SAA with the EU in March 2007. In December 2009, the EU also lifted the Schengen visa requirements for Montenegro citizens travelling to EU countries. In December 2010, the country obtained candidate status. Thus, Montenegro took the sides of Croatia, closest candidate to EU and Macedonia whose membership negotiations were hindered by the name dispute with Greece. However, despite all these developments, Montenegro must make judicial reforms to ensure its independence, should fight against corruption, and should achieve impressive progress in freedom of expression and minority rights in order to join the EU.²¹

After the collapse of Communism in 1990, Albania also made significant efforts towards social and economic reforms which resulted in the signing of the SAA in June 2006, and the submission of an EU membership application in April, 2009. As it had done for other countries, the EU abolished the visa system for Albania in December, 2010.²² However, despite all these significant developments, the parliamentary boycott of the opposition party after the June 2009 elections increased political tensions in the country. Corruption and organized crime, as well as problems about judicial and media independence, are the main obstacles that Albania must fight in order to get EU candidate and membership status. Albania and Montenegro stand at the fourth stage of the EU path.

Coming to the biggest Western Balkan country, Serbia, this country became a potential candidate for EU accession following the Thessaloniki European Council of June 2003. In October 2005, the European Council decided to open negotiations for a SAA with the Union of Serbia and Montenegro. However, negotiations went into abeyance in 2006 since Serbia was far from meeting its co-operation commitments with the International Criminal Tribunal concerning the former Yugoslavia, and negotiations were only restarted in June 2007, after a commitment for cooperation was undertaken. In

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20. Kyriakos D. Kentrotis, "The European Union and the Balkans: Between Symbiosis and Integration" *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 10 (2010): 59-60.

21. Herbert Pribitzer, Georgios Ghiatis, "The Western Balkan Countries."

22. Ibid.

Although Boris Tadic's government is in need of tightening links with the EU and obtaining the candidate status as soon as possible, whether or not this process will be accelerated, will heavily depend on the decision of EU Commission on Serbia expected to be announced in October 2011.

April 2008, Serbia signed the SAA after the Serbian officials seized a number of most wanted war criminals, most notably Radovan Karadzic. A year later, in December 2009, it submitted its EU membership application.²³ However it has not yet been granted a candidate status for the EU membership. Although Boris Tadic's government is in need of tightening links with the EU and obtaining the candidate status as soon as possible, whether or not this process will be accelerated, will heavily depend on the decision of EU Commission on Serbia expected to be announced in October 2011. Belgrade is required to solve its problems with its neighbors and promote regional cooperation in order to be granted a candidate status. It has to make progress towards solving its problems with Kosovo, to dissolve Serbian parallel structures in Kosovo and arrest and transfer war criminals to the Hague war crimes tribunal on charges of genocide. In that sense the arrest of Ratko Mladic, the former Serbian general and most wanted war crimes fugitive who was accused of making genocide during 1992-1995 war, on 26 May 2011, is a good indicator that if European and international soft power could persistently keep on pressure, it can make big achievements for regional stability. It also represents Serbia's increasing desire to the EU membership. The apprehension and extradition of Mladic was a condition for Serbia's EU accession negotiations and it is clear that his capture will bring Serbia closer to the EU. However in order to achieve this, Serbia must keep up its democratic motivation and must arrest another war criminal, Goran Hadzic who is still uncaught. Serbia must also struggle more with corruption and organized crime as well as strengthening its public-administration and law system.

After the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the war in Bosnia Herzegovina in 1995, the country became a focus for EU political interest. In order to increase cooperation among the two ethnically- based entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation, the EU signed the SAA in 2008 and encouraged the politicians to become more tolerant and more open to compromise. However, after the signing of the SAA, EU efforts within the country met with little enthusiasm.²⁴ There is a long list of reforms including constitutional reform, to be carried out. Narrow ethnic and short-term personal political interests were the main obstacles to advancing the reforms that the country needs. Republika Srpska which covers 49 percent of the country clearly opposes certain reforms. After the elections held on 3 October 2010, the President of the European Council Van Rompuy declared that Bosnia Herzegovina had a new opportunity to generate momentum of the necessary reforms and focus on the EU agenda with renewed vigor.²⁵ Nevertheless, even though there has been a long time since elections, no government has still been established. In December 2010, Bosnia and Herzegovina also gained visa-free access to the EU 25-country Schengen area. Sixteen years after the Dayton Agreement, the country is still in need of much more progress especially in keeping a balance between its ethnic groups. Like Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina stands at the third stage of the EU path.

23. Suzette R. Grillot, Rebecca J. Cruise and Valerie J. D'Erman, "Developing Security Community in the Western Balkans: The Role of the EU and NATO," *International Politics* 47 (2010): 73.

24. Lenard J Cohen, "Detours on the Balkan Road to EU Integration" *Current History* 108 (2009): 127.

25. "Roundup: EU Chief Calls on Western Balkan Countries to Join Hands for Accession" *Xinhua News Agency, CEIS, Woodside*, Oct 20, 2010.

Coming to Kosovo: in the Thessaloniki Summit of June 2003, the EU confirmed that Kosovo is firmly anchored within the framework of the Stabilization and Association Process. Also, in order to solve the conflicts between Pristina and Belgrade, the EU became a mediator together with US and Russia in August 2007. However, a short while later, in December 2007, the mediators acknowledged that, since the two parties were far from an agreement, the negotiating process had ceased. After this failed negotiation process, the Kosovo assembly unilaterally declared Kosovo's independence in February 2008. Until now, among the 192 members of United Nations, only 75 of them have recognized the independence of Kosovo. Among the EU states, five members have not recognized Kosovo's independence.²⁶ Mainly because of this, Kosovo is still an unfinished state and the only one among the Western Balkan states that does not have even a contractual agreement with the EU. Among the EU members, those which, for internal political reasons, are against the independence of Kosovo, namely Southern Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Slovakia and Romania, have made the country only marginally accepted on the international scene. Even the advisory ruling of the International Court of Justice which affirmed in July 2010 that Kosovo had not violated international law by its unilateral declaration of independence, has not changed the opinion of those states. It is clear that the complicated relations between the Balkan states and, more importantly, the problems between Kosovo and Serbia, lie behind this lack of recognition. The EU has been careful not to make Serbia's membership conditional on recognizing Kosovo; on the other hand, it calls on Belgrade to be more flexible and establish good relations with Pristina. As well as internal political problems, Kosovo's lack of motivation to fight against organized crime and corruption, and accusations of organ-trafficking activities have blocked its pre-accession process. Kosovo is the sole country among the Western Balkans that does not have visa-free access to the Schengen states.²⁷ It can be seen that among the Western Balkan countries, apart from Croatia, no one is likely to be ready for full EU membership before 2020 and, most probably, Kosovo will be the last country to join the EU.

Kosovo is still an unfinished state and the only one among the Western Balkan states that does not have even a contractual agreement with the EU. Among the EU members, those which, for internal political reasons, are against the independence of Kosovo have made the country only marginally accepted on the international scene.

Pre-Accession Financial Assistance (by Million Euro)²⁸

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Albania	61.0	70.0	81.2	93.2	95.0	96.9
Croatia	141.2	146.0	151.2	154.2	157.2	160.4
Macedonia	58.5	70.2	81.8	92.3	98.7	105.8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	62.1	74.8	89.1	106.0	108.1	110.2
Kosovo	68.3	184.7	106.1	67.3	68.7	70.0
Montenegro	31.4	32.6	33.3	34.0	34.7	35.4
Serbia	189.7	190.9	194.8	198.7	202.7	206.8

26. Kentrotis, "The European Union and the Balkans: Between Symbiosis and Integration," 59-60, Herbert Pribitzer, Georgios Ghiatis, "The Western Balkan Countries".

27. Arbër Vllahiu, "Kosovo and the EU" *Democracy and Security in Southeastern Europe 2* (2011): 30-32.

28. Huguette Laermans, Paul Roosens, "The Enlargement of the European Union" *Ekonomika Praksis DBK. God XVIII. 2* (2009): 405.



The growing Western-Balkan skepticism in Europe is not the sole problem that EU diplomats have to deal with; there is also a noticeable rise in Euro-skepticism in the Western Balkans. The population of the Western Balkans seems not to forget the uninfluential capacity of the EU during the last two wars of the region.

AN UNDUE BURDEN?

In spite of great achievements, the Western Balkans still have to cope with serious problems in institutional, political and economic spheres. Open status issues, constitutional uncertainty, the weak state syndrome, a poor business environment, high rates of unemployment, and poverty are the key issues that not only the Western Balkans but also the EU has to tackle during the enlargement process. Even the task of building peace in the region has not come to an end, while the state building procedures largely continue to ebb and flow. Stability and transparency in government are still absent while extremism and ultra-nationalism in some countries threaten the regional peace. Insufficient protection for the basic rights of ethnic minorities, continuing pressure on the media, low citizen participation in the political process and a high level of organized crime and corruption reduce the likelihood of EU accession. The current financial and economic crises have also caused anxiety in both the EU member states and those of the Western Balkans. The EU's failure to reform even its own institutions has made the policy makers of the EU more doubtful about the integration capacity of the Union. There are growing indications of enlargement fatigue among the member states, which have begun to question the capability of the EU to shelter more members. Also there is a great fear that the inclusion of the Western Balkans in the EU may give rise to serious conflicts in the region at the heart of Europe.²⁹ A large section of the population of the EU states sees enlargement as an undue burden which would be carried out only for the benefit of the Western Balkan countries.

The growing Western-Balkan skepticism in Europe is not the sole problem that EU diplomats have to deal with; there is also a noticeable rise in Euro-skepticism in the Western Balkans. The population of the Western Balkans seems not to forget the uninfluential capacity of the EU during the last two wars of the region. They are doubtful about the EU's capacity to prevent a crisis. The idea that EU requirements will bring new burdens on the population has been voiced more often in recent years by the region's people. Changes in the EU path and the SAP requirements, in particular, seem to evoke little enthusiasm among the people because of their more bureaucratic and less definite approach. It is a paradoxical situation that among those states, Croatia, the most capable of fulfilling the requirements for EU membership, seems to have the least enthusiasm for entering Europe. The country witnessed strong protests last March and protest slogans such as "I love Croatia, not EU"³⁰ show that people are very sensitive about the potential challenges that they, as a small country, would confront after they become a member of a very complex, multiethnic, political and economic union.

Obviously, one of the main aims of the membership process was to foster a collective identity among the Western Balkans. It was planned to create a community atmosphere in which the path of becoming a European member-state would bring the states in the region closer together. However, as time went on, it became obvious that, due to the disadvantages of each country treading the path to the EU independently,

29. Sotiris Serbos, "European Integration&South Eastern Europe: Prospects&Challenges for the Western Balkans" *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 18 (2008): 95ff.

30. "Anti-Croatian Government Protests Held in Several Towns" *BBC Monitoring European*, London, March 13, 2011.

the relationships between the countries of the region became weakened rather than nurturing regional cooperation. After that handicap had been noticed, the EU made regional incorporation a condition for membership. The statement of the Union that “cooperation between the states of the region is not a luxury but a requirement for integration” was a clear evidence of that policy shift.³¹ However, although this shift created a growing sense of cooperation among elite levels, the population in general has not yet developed a sense of regional belonging. The situation is mainly related to the high bureaucratic basis of the EU and the standard toolbox for enlargement policies in which the accession process is seen as a body of rules, very formal in nature and far from embracing the real life of the people of the region.

TURKEY’S ROLE

It is quite clear that no single actor, not even the EU itself with all of its members, has sufficient capacity to bring stability and security to the Western Balkans. The problems that Western Balkan countries continue to face; ethnic tensions, border disputes, organized crime and corruption, refugee problems, uncontrolled use of weaponry, and insufficient infrastructure, as well as political and economic instability, can only be surmounted by a high level of external assistance. In that sense, due to its considerable influence on the Western Balkans, mainly based on its historical, geographical and cultural ties, Turkey deserves special attention. The active foreign policy of Turkey which is based on rebuilding historical, cultural and economic ties, as well as promoting good-neighbor relationships has made it an important regional player in the security of the Western Balkans. Also Turkey is among the first countries whose advice may be taken into consideration by the Western Balkan countries due to its natural relationships with and closeness to the region.

In the last decade, Turkey has increased its presence in the region via economic and cultural projects. Turkish exports to the Western Balkans come to about 6.9 billion dollars while imports come to 3.4 billion dollars.³² Increasing political dialogue at the leadership level, a rising Turkish economic presence in the region, and the promotion of a common regional vision based on multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious coexistence, have all made Turkey a center for regional cooperation among the Balkan people. In that sense, the Trilateral Balkan Summit between Turkey, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, which was held on the initiative of Turkey, first in April 2010 and secondly in April 2011, has confirmed that Turkey can be as a strong mediator in the improvement of regional stability.

Among the factors which have improved relations between Turkey and the Western Balkan region are the lifting of visa requirements which has increased the number of airflights between Turkey and the Balkan countries; scholarship opportunities in Turkish universities given to students of Western Balkan origin; foreign aid provided especially by the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency, TIKA, for

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31. Suzette R. Grillo, Rebecca J. Cruise and Valerie J. D’Erman, 79.

32. “Turkey: Seeking Influence through Mediation,” *Global Post*, 12 January 2011.



Cooperation between the EU and Turkey in the Western Balkan countries would strengthen regional security while decreasing conflicts and preventing any further discrepancies along ethnic and religious lines.

projects in education, culture, health or infrastructure in the Western Balkan countries, as well as aid provided by non-governmental organizations of Turkish origin; and the broadcasting of Turkish media productions, especially sit-coms, on Balkan television channels. TİKA's aids to Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia have been markedly increased in the last years, focusing especially on education, housing funds for war victims and restoration funds for historical buildings coming from the Ottoman ages.³³

Turkey signed the partnership agreement with the EU (then EEC) almost forty years ago, at a time when most of the Balkan countries were behind the iron curtain. Despite this fact, there are notable similarities in the EU's vision for full membership of Western Balkan countries and its vision for Turkey, approaching to both with rising skepticism. Turkey has been continuing the accession negotiations since 2004 in spite of all difficulties. A successful and happy end to this route will also be beneficial for the EU-Balkan relationship since Turkey can make significant contributions to a stable and prosperous Balkan region. Within a EU where Turkey would have a determining role, the importance of the Balkans would increase since the center of gravity would shift from the core Europe to the east. Also, cooperation between the EU and Turkey in the Western Balkan countries would strengthen regional security while decreasing conflicts and preventing any further discrepancies along ethnic and religious lines.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is clear that only after strong outside help has been assured will the Western Balkans find a way to create a peaceful future together. Of course, all these Western Balkans countries have had mutual conflicts in their past, but more complex historical, cultural and economic ties as well. Despite all problematic areas, it is a hopeful sign that significant progress has been realized through regional cooperation, especially in the areas of trade, refugee issues, fighting against organized crime and corruption, the energy market and regional infrastructure strategies.

It is time for the Western Balkan people to realize, as Tarifa and Lucas point out, that a prosperous future does not lie in the revival of historically-depressing memories, but through building political, economic and social conditions that foster peace and support open and democratic systems.³⁴ In that sense, inasmuch as membership perspective is important for the Western Balkan countries, the converse is true for the EU. It is clear that the membership process of the Western Balkans will bring new burdens to the EU but, more importantly, it will also make important contributions to the stabilization of the Balkans and securitization of Europe. The European Union should spend more effort on solving the problems of the Western Balkans and in shaking off its enlargement fatigue.

33. For more information about TİKA's aids to the Western Balkans see, "2009 Türkiye Kalkınma Yardımları Raporu," "2010 Tanıtım Broşürü" www.tika.gov.tr.

34. Fatos Tarifa, Peter Lucas, "The End of Balkan History" *Policy Review* 141 (2007): 68.

Hence, the carrot and stick strategy for membership of the EU is far from creating a regional consciousness by means of which Balkan integration might be enhanced through inter-state communications and trust. In order to foster a regional identity, the EU should focus more on inter-communication rather than, or at least, as well as, following an independent program for every state. Exchange student programs among the countries of the region should be increased as well as inter-travel opportunities. The EU should add to its agenda a socialization approach through which the Balkans may form a regional consciousness. Economic integration within the region is known to be at a very low level while the markets are small and have great similarities in their production structures. Lack of a cross-border trade infrastructure reduces the possibility of Western Balkan integration into the global economy. In this context, the introduction of an active trade mechanism that would make the borders of Balkan countries more open, the realization of a production process within the framework of regional division of labor, and the dissemination of common free-trade zones within the region would enhance such integration. Also, an increase in the number of international non-governmental organizations would bring Balkan countries closer to each other and an acceleration of academic studies would reveal common cultural and historical experiences. Such efforts, if realized, could prevent the region from becoming "more balkanized."

In order to bring the Western Balkans into the heart of Europe, there should also be a change in the mental attitude of Western Europe towards the Western Balkans. The Balkans, in general, have been an alien member, an "internal other" of Europe for long centuries. Western depictions of the Balkans over the last two centuries, which originated first from seeing them as "Oriental," then as first "Turkey in Europe" and finally as part of Europe, are still, under the influence of ill-defined approaches, based on the image of an outsider.³⁵ The Western Balkans are not yet Europe, and in order to reduce the fissures in the continent, European intellectual interests should be more ambitious to enlarge the European borders so as to contain all its natural parts.

It is clear that the end of balkanization in the Western Balkans is directly related to the establishment of strong regional cooperation there. The EU should work closely with the regional powers, especially with Turkey due to its historical ties with the region, to encourage the Western Balkan countries to embrace multicultural and multiethnic co-existence. Certainly the enlargement instruments created a strong dynamism among the countries of the region, encouraging them to set aside old conflicts and concentrate more on the EU agenda. In the case of slowdown, it is possible that "old ghosts" could rise again.

35. K. E. Fleming, "Orientalism, the Balkans and Balkan Historiography" *The American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 1229-1230.

After the wars of Yugoslav secession between 1991-1995 and the Kosovo conflict in 1999, the European Union became more anxious to enlarge its borders into the Western Balkans. In fact this enlargement strategy of EU was an apparent departure from its previous passive presence in the region where the EU had restricted itself to providing humanitarian assistance. Thus, in contrast to pre-1999 Western Balkan policies, the 2000s have witnessed a period of effective "transformation through integration".

The policy brief discusses the reasons behind EU engagement in the Western Balkans, steps that were taken through the EU enlargement, stages that each Western Balkan country stands at the EU membership process and reasons of the growing Western Balkan skepticism in Europe in the last years. It also deals with the question of how Western Balkans could successfully accomplish the accession process and be an integrated part of Europe. The potential contributions of Turkey to the Balkan regional cooperation are discussed as well.

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