
AICEI PROCEEDINGS

EU Crisis and the Western Balkans: Enlargement Unaffected

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Abstract

What started as the fiscal challenge later exposed dormant structural problems within the European Union, at large. Among the other crucial areas the crisis impacted on was the coherence and content of the EU foreign policy, as well. Surprisingly, the most successful foreign policy project in EU history – EU enlargement has not been seriously harmed by the protracted political turmoil in Brussels. Common EU efforts to preserve the Euro have long overcome the parameters of the economy and have become a catalyst for transforming the overall patterns of the organization. The aim of this chapter is to analyze different options contemplated thus far for the reform of EU foreign policy and their direct dependence upon the changes eventually made on a broader political level. Western Balkan countries are not part of the current debate, but, they will be heavily affected by its outcome. Our basic assumption is that regardless of the transformations that may be made, EU enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans is going to stay. We would argue that this is because the region can be integrated without substantial EU resources being applied, and also because Western Balkan countries have weak capacities to fundamentally affect the pillars of the future Union once they are admitted in it.

Keywords: euro crisis, transformation, enlargement, reforms, Western Balkan

Introduction

The long-standing assumption both in Brussels and in the capitals of the Western Balkans is that enlargement fatigue is deployed more on the “other side” than in the organization itself or in the region. Balkan euro skeptics are routinely applying the thesis that infighting in Brussels has undermined the attractiveness of the European project and that this has increased enlargement fatigue especially among the older members of the EU. What they avoid to mention almost by default are the lasting bilateral disputes between the local nations and the sluggish pace of structural reforms which have been holding some of them back for years. However, a hypothesis never before presented to the regional public is that the process of enlargement towards the Western Balkans had been practically unaffected by the financial and political turmoil which embraced the European Union over the past few years. A quick glance at the fact sheets regarding the individual candidates and would-be-members would confirm the absence of influence of the ongoing EU crisis over the tempo of rapprochement between the candidates and the Union.

Croatia has just been through the most rigorous enlargement process ever in the history of the EU, but, the membership criteria have been previously sharpened because of frustration in Brussels with the level of preparedness for the entry of Bulgaria and Romania, a year before the Eurozone crisis erupted. Intra-European discussions on the future of the organization, also, are not associated with the package of preconditions laid out for Serbia since it would be inconceivable to neglect the interdependence between Belgrade and Pristina after the experience in 2004 when the divided island of Cyprus was admitted. A key requirement for the Republic of Macedonia to reach a mutual solution for the name dispute with Greece before commencing negotiations was imposed on it during the NATO Bucharest summit in the spring of 2008, half a year before the collapse of a number of US banks and insurance companies heralded the coming of the global financial crisis. Among would-be members, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania have been challenged for many years by the same set of basic democratic obligations regarding the internal cohesion and viability of the Federation and the sustainable political dialogue, respectively.

The previous line of reasoning can be applied to explaining the status of the two other candidate-countries which formally do not belong to the Western Balkan group: political logic for Turkey to be frozen on the road to enlargement is in no way connected with the current EU crises. With regard to the current leadership in the key continental European Union member states: France and Germany are formally respecting their commitment to a fully-fledged membership status for Turkey, but, in practice are supportive of a special partnership with Ankara. Iceland is advancing rapidly through the Chapters of the EU *acquis communautaire* and the preconditions already specified by Brussels hold much less potential to halt its candidacy than the growing resistance by the domestic electorate.

In the next sections the performance of the European Union during the current (or recent?) crisis will be examined with special emphasis on the conduct of its Common Foreign and Security Policy. A separate section is dedicated to the positioning of the so-called “big three” in EU foreign policy (Germany, France and United Kingdom) and their political maneuvers between national interests and declared European goals. At the end of the article the most probable scenarios for the future of EU foreign policy will be considered and within it the prospects for future enlargement with the Western Balkans states. But, at the very beginning, a brief paragraph about some of the real effects of the previous, fifth round of the EU enlargement will ensue.

Myths and Reality about EU Enlargement

Before the massive 2004 enlargement, but, more intensively after the accession of the ten countries, eight of whom with a communist past, many of the EU members supported two incorrect assumptions about the future functioning of the European Union. First, the deepening of the European integration allegedly has to proceed in step with the EU enlargement and second, a fundamental overhaul of the decision-making processes should be introduced before considering the new applicants at all (Leigh, 2012). In the ensuing period an attempt to adopt the Constitution was heavily defeated by the French and Dutch citizens and until the approval of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 no significant

steps toward building political unity or major internal restructuring was agreed upon. Even the key Lisbon Treaty provisions about creating the European External Action Service (EEAS) and a much stronger role envisaged for the European Parliament were not beneficial for increasing absorption capacity, developing a more effective decision-making process or overcoming the much criticized democratic deficit of the organization (Ibid).

The European Union has always been notorious for its lengthy and laborious decision-making processes regardless of the formal number of members. However, the most visible paradox which exists in the enlarged EU is that the biggest disagreements, particularly after the euro zone crisis erupted have been recorded among the older EU member states. Furthermore, the sovereign debt crisis which later translated itself into a profound crisis of public confidence in the economy, in the political class and in the European project as a whole (Stokes, 2012, p. 1) has severely destabilized Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Ireland, all of them part of the so-called “old Europe”. Within the same context, also, could be placed the incoming challenge to the EU, the referendum announced by London about its status and relations with the future Union. Though never considered by the rest of the field as “faithful” Europeans, the reality is that the United Kingdom has been one of the most influential members of the EU since its entry in 1973.

Instead of blaming enlargement for the current EU setbacks (Leigh, 2012), the EU countries should concede that in reality eastern expansion has: “extended the European zone of peace and prosperity to the Baltic region in the north and the Black Sea in the east”. Nowadays, only a few people and politicians are mentioning these values. Public perceptions are predominantly focused on immigration and the inflow of workers from the new member-states which are allegedly threatening labor markets and the salaries of the domestic work force (O’Brennan, 2012). However, there are several studies on the subject, including a detailed analysis of the intra-EU population movements provided by the European Commission which demonstrate that the “overall level of migration from new to old member-states has been very modest”. To the Commission’s findings even suggested that a contribution to the economic growth of the receiving countries was made by these migrants

who “helped alleviate labor market shortages” without any negative impact “on wage levels or employment conditions” (Ibid).

EU enlargement for the period 2004-2007 was not the first case of this process, but, was nevertheless certainly unique due to the huge income differences between the old and new member states. Interesting findings emerge when juxtaposing the immigration numbers from the new member states and the consequences on the biggest EU economies, Germany in the first place, whose government has restricted access to its labor market for the workers from the new entrant states. Having in mind the restrictions imposed, around 6% of the Polish, Latvian and Slovak workforces, and 9% of the Lithuanian workforce after 2004 have emigrated, mainly towards the UK and Ireland (Elsner & Zimmermann, 2013, p. 12). What happened there was rather unexpected by a general public that had long been cultivated to fear and not to cheer the arrival of the foreign workers: immigrants who were better- educated than the average native and who mostly compete for jobs with previous migrants, not with the domestic workforce. Overall, free migration brings small economic benefits to the countries which did not impose restrictions, but, for Germany as a whole, the “costs of the restrictions exceeded the benefits by far” (Ibid). Considering the positive net economic benefits for the old member states they clearly can compensate for the “fiscal burdens of the EU budget resulting from the net transfers to the accession countries” (GEFRA, 2007). Lastly, two more arguments about the lack of the negative macroeconomic effects: firstly, fears about the systemic relocation of firms due to the comparative disadvantages in Germany did not materialized and secondly, despite earlier predictions, even the border regions on the German-Polish frontier were neither positively nor negatively affected by the enlargement (Ibid, p. 15).

Overall, migration waves remained below the expectations in some countries and were within the previous forecasts in some others (Traser, 2008, p. 4). On the level of the EU 15 (membership before the enlargement in 2004) the share of the EU 8 workers (all new members without Malta and Cyprus) was under 1% of the total employed workforce. Migrant workers do not “crowd out nationals”, they simply “fill in the employment gaps and consequently contribute to production growth” (Ibid, pp. 4-5). The unbiased conclusion should echo the words of the former EU Director-General for enlargement who said that the

false assumptions about the negative effects of the eastern enlargement turned out to be “enormously costly in terms of political capital” and the attractiveness of the EU project as a whole (Leigh, 2012).

The Euro Crisis and European Foreign Policy

In the past three years the economic crisis has pressed European leaders to dedicate more time to EU financial problems than to its geopolitical role. Europe’s soft power continued to erode on the global level with the ever decreasing budgets for its international activities (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2013, p. 9).

Although the crisis has reinforced the drift towards the renationalization of European foreign policy the foundation of the EEAS has partially reversed the trends (ECFR, p. 20). The Lisbon Treaty in 2009 introduced the post of EU High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy and a common diplomatic corps with the aim not to replace, but, to complement national embassies (Park, 2012). The conclusion of the experts was that despite the ongoing crisis “European foreign policymaking is happening...” and in September 2012 an informal group of EU foreign ministers issued a report with a few far-reaching policy proposals for a more unified and effective security and defense policy on the pan-European level (Ibid). In September 2012 a crucial message to the political elite and the public was dispatched by the President of the European Commission Barroso who called on the organization to remain engaged and explicitly “warned against turning inwards” (Mason, 2012). Even in the midst of the turmoil the impact of the euro crisis EU capability to act as a plausible foreign player was insignificant: Europe reacted promptly to the Arab awakening, and relatively quickly over the Iran case and it “has been weak on all of the other issues that it has traditionally been weak on” (Techau, 2012). Surprisingly to some, but, the crisis has even brought America and the EU closer together since in Washington D.C. It was well understood that a stable Europe would be beneficial for the US in the long run (Ibid).

Since the outbreak of the euro zone crisis there were no doubts that not only with 'both' the EU economy and indirectly the world economy would suffer the consequences. The immediate effect was a

decline of the reputation of the EU as a model of competent economic policy management and successful regional integration (Emerson, 2012, p. 1). What was less clear was the outcome for European foreign policy and for European enlargement in particular. For years there was a widely shared assessment that enlargement is the most powerful tool through which the EU exerts its transformative influence in its “near abroad”. According to some extreme interpretations, the EU even does not have a foreign policy, only an enlargement policy (Kral, 2010, p. 2).

While in 2011, with the euro crisis at its peak the European Union has recorded progress in the area of enlargement. In 2012 the EU started exporting economic aftershocks to its already weak periphery which to some extent has undercut its efforts in the region (ECFR, p. 76). Even so, it is fair to say that in a complex environment some of the regional countries had successfully fulfilled their pro-European agenda and have been rightly awarded for their achievements: Croatia *became member* in July 2013; Montenegro started accession negotiations; Serbia was granted candidate status and is expecting a date for negotiations and Kosovo received a positive feasibility study by the European Commission to sign a Stabilization and Association Agreement as a very first step towards membership. But, efforts made by the European Commission and the EEAS had not paid dividends in the cases of Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania. Macedonia is blocked by the EU member Greece over the so-called “name dispute” where no visible signs of progress have been seen in the lengthy UN-sponsored negotiations between the two parts; Bosnia-Herzegovina had not met any of the essential EU preconditions because of conflicting domestic interpretations about the non-functional Dayton Accord; relevant Albanian politicians have for a long been unable to produce meaningful political dialogue about the country’s political priorities. Unfortunately, any relative overall progress of the enlargement process has not been matched by any significant improvement in the areas of democratic governance, rule of law and human rights and freedoms in the region. To that end apart from the EU commitment, the engagement of the local political elites is a condition *sine qua non* for improving democracy (ECFR, p. 79) in the region still in the final stages of the democratic transition.

Analyzing the relationship between the long-term effects of the economic crisis and European enlargement some questions are likely to

appear on the horizon related to the costs of future accession. Namely, the gradual convergence of the candidates in the past requested significant sums of money from the EU pre-accession funds. Nevertheless, having in mind the relatively small size of the Western Balkan economies they are not able to inflict any serious impact on the overall EU budget which is nowadays smaller than in the past. In this regard, only Turkey would appear to be an exception to the rule (Kral, 2012, p. 4).

Regional and EU Views on Enlargement

EU foreign policy was reasonably resilient in 2012 as the EU itself appeared to emerge from the crisis (ECFR, 2013, p. 7). Nevertheless, a critical requirement for a sound EU foreign policy and any further enlargement would necessitate sustainable public support in the member-states which has in fact been on the decline since the crises began. The latest polls have only confirmed the negative trends over the past five years: 36% of European citizens were against further EU enlargement at the end of 2007, but, by the end of 2011 the numbers had risen to 50% . In the same period the percentage of people in favor of enlargement had dropped below 50% for the first time (Di Mauro, Fraile, 2012, p. 1). A complex mixture of economic and cultural reasons (in the case of Turkey) has become a breeding ground for the increasing frustration against enlargement. The citizens of the future EU of 28 countries with very different cultural and religious traditions could sustain these anti-enlargement reservations even without the massive economic problems (Ibid, p. 5).

In good times the EU exported prosperity towards the region, at the times of crisis it is exporting instability. Once in the past the regional politicians and functionaries in Brussels alike firmly believed that the EU provided the solution for the post-communist societies of the Balkans; nowadays many predict that a “disintegrating EU” could be a danger for them (Bechev, 2012, p. 1). An array of polls shows that popularity of the EU among the Western Balkan nations is on the decline, but, is still respectable with Euro-realism instead of Europhilia emerging slowly (Ibid, p. 3). But, why should the Western Balkans still need Europe? First, nearly two-thirds of the region’s exchange

is with the EU and trade and financial liberalization has almost been completed. The Russian Federation mentioned in some regional circles as an alternative to Europe lies in a distant second place with only 5.5 percent of the overall volume. Secondly, the EU is the most important source of foreign direct investment and remittances from the sizable Balkan diaspora living in Western Europe (Ibid, pp. 3-4). Thirdly, in spite of a few sporadic successes the region as a whole is still far away from the highest international standards of democracy as is confirmed time and again by the consequential Freedom House reports (Ibid, p. 6).

What are the potential losses to the European Union in the case of a stalled Western Balkan integration? The risk of regional instability has significantly diminished, but, has not disappeared by any means. The unresolved status issues, disputed borders, interethnic tensions are still on the table and could quite easily cause economic migrants and criminals to migrate to the rest of the continent (Leigh, 2012). Security experts agree that the EU's security will be greater once the Western Balkans become an integral part of the Union. Certainly, organized crime and corruption would pose a far bigger threat to EU citizens if the Balkan countries remain outside the EU (Schily, 2009).

Another, different type of an impact to the EU global standing would certainly come in the case of its failure to irreversibly transform and democratize the Western Balkans. If the organization is not capable of making a difference in its backyard no one would be convinced that the Europeans could be credible actors in the Middle East, the post-Soviet space or East Asia where the contexts are much more complicated and overcrowded with respective players (Bechev, 2012, p. 7).

The Triangle of Power and European Foreign Policy

In 2012, to the surprise of many the leadership of the so-called "big three" in the European Union: Germany, France and United Kingdom was on the decline in the field of foreign policy. As for enlargement policy it would appear that the EEAS and the European Commission executed a much stronger coordinating role and that was obviously beneficial for the Western Balkan countries (ECFR, p. 17). The key innovation introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, the EEAS is slowly,

but, gradually developing into an important actor in shaping the EU positions on many issues stemming from the foreign policy agenda of the organization. According to some predictions, in due course it can overtake some functions currently informally managed by the “big three”, but, a crucial precondition for something like that to happen would be the EEAS’ capacities to be substantially upgraded (Lehne, 2012, p. 4). The EU’s foreign policy is very different to the management of national foreign policy, but as a result of the Lisbon Treaty the EU had already developed an extensive diplomatic network of about 140 embassies in the world (Lehne, 2012, p. 20). Still, neither the European Commission nor the EEAS would be in a position to manage any of the vital foreign policy issues, including enlargement, without the explicit or at least tacit approval of the three most powerful members of the organization. The formal principle of unanimity stipulated as the crucial method of decision-making in foreign policy is boosting the perception that in this very heterogeneous entity all 27 members-states are equal. Although, for those familiar with the bargaining behind the scene it is clear that on most occasions the largest members are taking the lead (Ibid, p. 1).

In the post- Second World War period, Germany has never been ambivalent towards transferring part of its national sovereignty to the pan-European level because a long standing tenet that there was “more Europe” is inherently good for the country (Lehne, 2012, p. 10). Within this context, eastern enlargement is undisputable for Berlin with the exception of Turkey’s bid at which point the political elite is still highly polarized – the Christian democrats are against enlargement (?), whilst the Social democrats are in favor, having in mind, among others, the integration of Turks living in Germany. The inclusion of the Western Balkans, Croatia in particular, was a high priority on the German foreign policy agenda since the fall of communism. Rare statements voicing skepticism about Croatia’s level of preparedness (EurActiv, 2012) are more akin to the pre-election juggling with the sentiments of the electorate than any real political strategy to counter EU accession to the main German ally in the region.

From a historical perspective French foreign policy has been recognizable by the protection of national sovereignty and opposition to any accumulation of power outside of France’s borders. Historically,

French politicians have always been against “broadening” without the “deepening” of the EU, afraid of progressively losing influence in a growing Union (Brincker, 2009, p. 1). At the same time, all relevant political parties, with the exclusion of the far right have been in favor of a broader Europe, but, all politicians would have assumed a leadership role for France in the occasions of a common external endeavor. Wide-ranging and frequently unspoken consensus does exist against the fully-fledged membership of Turkey, but, the integration of the Western Balkan countries is not contested, of course, in due procedure and without any shortcuts. The French media are from times to time “obsessed with Turkey”, but, the paradox is that the French people are not obsessed by the eventual inclusion of the Western Balkans countries despite the fact that they know less about the Balkans than about Turkey (EurActiv, 2010).

The United Kingdom has always been bestowed with partial legitimacy in the debates about the future of the EU because London has commonly been perceived by other member states as the mouthpiece of Washington D.C. Therefore, London’s commitments in favor of enlargement have been interpreted more as conveying an American agenda, then as any genuine desire to strengthen the Union. Anyhow, the UK has been a strong supporter of enlargement and the neighborhood policy which are considered useful instruments to stabilize the European periphery (Lehne, 2012, p. 17). Even in a period when contemplating a potential exit strategy, London is advocating enlargement in the belief that the EU will remain strong only if it is outward looking and continues to grow (Lidington, 2012).

Anyway, the UK debate on Europe in the last year has shifted significantly, motivated by the official announcement of Prime Minister Cameron on the referendum about the UK’s future relations with Brussels. The United Kingdom’s contributions to European foreign policy is so important that their eventual decision to leave the Union would seriously hurt the European project (Ibid, p. 18). If such a scenario were to happen, new political and institutional arrangements would certainly follow and they might redefine many of the basic EU categories, including the very notion of enlargement. While waiting for that moment to eventually come, it is apparent that enlargement

fatigue among the “big three” is not a paralyzing factor to the current enlargement processes concerning the Western Balkans.

The United States and EU Enlargement

On both shores of the Atlantic a number of articles have been published about the endurance of the Western alliance after the fall of communism and most of them are predicated on the gradual downfall of the partnership. In the last few years pundits delivered projections with a similar intensity about the influence of the prolonged financial crisis which started in the USA, but, mostly embraced Europe. On both ends of the field two opposing camps are as vibrant as before: in the first group there is a degree of certainty about the “end of Atlanticism” and a strategic drift that allegedly could result in separation (Daalder & Kagan quoted in Kupchan, 2012, p. 60). In the second one scholars strongly emphasize the axis of values and interests that the trans-Atlantic alliance is laid upon which has not lost any significance in an era of “ongoing diffusion of power from the West to the rising rest” (Ibid).

Concerning the level of EU unity and enlargement policy Moravcsik argues that the process of European integration is reaching a natural plateau at least for the foreseeable future. The movement towards an ever-closer Union has to stop “at some point”. Yet, despite all the predictions of the doomsayers the EU does have a future and according to him, even the collapse of the euro would not threaten the very existence of the EU (Moravcsik, 2012, p. 68).

In the group of countries which are concerned about the EU’s future in the fallout of the crisis the position of the USA is by far the most important one to be reckoned with. The United States of America has permanently supported the project of a “United Europe” embracing ever more countries with the key argument that it serves the US national interests by advancing democracy and stability in the euro-Atlantic area (Archick, 2013, p. 14). The enlargement was strongly endorsed with an additional set of arguments coming for years from both sides of the highly polarized US political scene. First, it was seen as being beneficial for the US since most of the new member-states have been considered as more pro-American than the old ones. Also, the US

business community has generally favored enlargement, believing that their commercial interests would be better served by a larger and more integrated market (Ibid, p. 15). Although there were sporadic concerns that a bigger EU with the total GDP equivalent to that of the US could question the global supremacy of Washington D.C. many within the political circles and expert community have been very critical at the slow pace of enlargement, particularly with regard to Turkey (Ibid).

Future Scenarios for EU Foreign Policy and Enlargement

It sounds paradoxical, but, the main factor for shaping the future of EU foreign policy is not placed outside the foreign policy realm. Yet, if the problems within the euro zone are not resolved, the EU's foreign policy is going to be a collateral damage (Lehne, 2012, p. 23). Basically, experts do not significantly differ when projecting the possible course of developments in this domain. Lehne has described three broad scenarios and in the first one he predicts that permanent crisis management will continue to absorb most of Brussels' attention focusing the political elite away from executing foreign policy. Centrifugal tendencies will be strengthened in a more fragmented Europe so that a stronger leaning towards the renationalization of foreign policy would be unavoidable. The loss of coherence will marginalize the whole area, the EEAS probably will not be given the necessary resources and political support, and the EU would lose its relevance as a global actor, as well (Ibid, p. 24). In the second scenario, the EU would succeed in resolving the crisis without implementing profound changes in foreign policy structures. Member-states, especially the most powerful members would maintain their presence and activities on the international scene, but, an increasing part of foreign policy would be realized within the framework of the common EU institutions. In the last scenario the EU would undertake deep structural changes transferring substantial fiscal and economic competencies on a supranational level which would lead to the formation of a "federalist circle" in the middle of the Union. In such a scenario the EU institutions would be gradually sidelined while the federalist core would reach the level of political and economic integration similar to that of the federal states (Ibid, p. 25).

Out of the three projected situations only in the first one would EU foreign policy suffer on some scale: the EU's overall capacities for external activities would be downgraded, moderately affecting the enlargement process. However, the remaining capacities and political will on the part of the EU as a whole would be sufficient for absorbing the Western Balkan countries and potentially further afield to include the absorption of Turkey and starting the process of integrating Ukraine. Also, there are some specifics in the third scenario when the EU would develop a stronger strategic vision and more efficient decision-making procedures (ibid, p. 26). The enthusiasm for enlargement would probably stay the same on both sides, but, the ambition to enter into the so-called federalist core would be hardly achievable due to the more complex accession criteria.

The scenarios offered by Fagersten (2012) are similar with minor modifications in the phases the whole process is expected to move through. In his first variant the Eurozone "muddles through, but, foreign policy is left to decline", new political structures and procedures are not introduced and the EU is facing problem to act as a Union (Fagersten, 2012, p. 22). In the second alternative the euro zone fails with more than a certain negative impact on EU foreign policy. According to the last scenario the monetary union would be successfully re-designed and positive effects spillover into the foreign policy field. Higher levels of political unity would be within reach in the mid-term with elevated public support for the EU to speak with one voice in international affairs (ibid, pp. 23-24). Within the overall general framework that has been presented it is obvious that with the exception of the second scenario the enlargement policy should not be put on hold under any circumstances.

Conclusion

In the past five years European politicians and citizens alike have been preoccupied with forging practical solutions for the dire economic challenges which had not previously been experienced by the organization in its five and a half decades of existence. Concrete financial and economic circumstances have forced all of them to be continually in

the operational mode characteristic for daily politics. Nevertheless, it is clear that the longevity of the European project could be assured only by the infusion of a set of fresh ideas and initiatives of strategic proportions. Long ago designated as the “grand ideas” of the 20th century - peace, stability and prosperity remain valid even nowadays, but, these success stories are mostly associated with the past (Emmanoulidis & Janning, 2011, p. 12) and do not bear the same mobilization strength and attractiveness for contemporary generations. Despite the enlargement fatigue in many member states and the increasing accession fatigue among the current and potential candidates, EU enlargement has always been considered as one of its major assets (Ibid, p. 15). Beyond doubt, each round of enlargement since the 1970s has been a source for the kind of EU political and economic dynamism necessary to overcome the challenge of expanded membership and transform and improve its institutional setting (Ibid, p. 10). Moreover, in the period after 1989 the integration of the former communist countries has stretched out the zone of stability and prosperity in Eastern Europe with, in return, a positive influence to the western parts of the continent.

A very similar set of reasons might be used for the promotion of the prospective EU membership of the Western Balkan countries with an added argument in favor of their admission: as members they cannot significantly alter the embedded internal distribution of power or overburden any paragraph of the EU financial perspective. Obviously this was the prime reason why during the deep financial crisis the most influential EU members have not obstructed the activities of the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and the High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy regarding the region. Therefore, if Brussels is observing its obligations in a time of crisis it is up to the local elites to redouble their integration efforts and bear the responsibility for the better future of their citizens staying for so long in the transitional corridors.

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