

WESTERN BALKANS AND EU ENLARGEMENT - NEW SECURITY TRENDS

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Abstract: The subject of this thesis is the current situation in the process of the western Balkan countries joining the European Union, an undertaking made more complicated by the recent conflict in the Ukraine. Comparative analysis, content analysis, inductive and deductive techniques and case studies are among the methods used in the approach to this topic. Multi-criteria analysis has been conducted on the changed decade-long practice of the process of admission of candidate countries to the EU, the granting of candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova by an accelerated procedure and the relation of these changing conditions to the countries of the Western Balkans. In the matrix of changed conditions for privileged countries, the emergence of new security tendencies is becoming evident. The position of the Western Balkan countries is analyzed in relation to these new developments, with the emphasis on almost impossible mission of fulfilling the conditions that are set before them. The paper is additionally interspersed with the presentation of various researches that have obtained results about this security problem. At the end, concluding thoughts, suggestions, recommendations, as well as a forecast of the development of the problem in the future are given.

The goal of this scientific paper is to point out the numerous obstacles that the countries of the Western Balkans need to overcome in the accession process, as well as to bring to light that the stated intention of joining and candidate status often result in additional pressures and constantly emerging new conditions given by the EU, which for the countries of the Western Balkans produce a path without a certain end.

Keywords: EU, The Western Balkans, security tendencies, integration

INTRODUCTION

The countries of the Western Balkans represent a group of countries that more than two decades ago the open possibility of membership in the European Union. All the time, these countries are going through processes various forms of transition and gradual fulfillment of conditions on the way to the European Union. And besides despite all efforts, the road is neither easy nor without setbacks. The causes of such a condition are numerous, partly as the consequence of the internal policies of the candidate countries, and they were helped to a significant extent non-existent policy of the European Union and its member states towards this region.

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Declaratively, the accession process supports democratic reforms in candidate countries and potential candidates for membership, but because of their unwillingness to be in the midst of an internal crisis deals with the process of fundamental reforms in the candidate states, the European Union shifts the center of gravity to the most important issue for her, which is the stability of the region. At the moment, there is no indication that everything member states have a unique view of the speed and desirability of further expansion of the Union, which especially related to the region of the Western Balkans.

Today, the EU is facing numerous internal crises, so there are circumstances in which it is necessary to expands, compared to previous expansions, burdened with numerous problems. Nominally, the Copenhagen criteria are formal criteria for membership that should be met by each a country that intends to become a member of the European Union. They are defined as political, economic and administrative/institutional: 1) stable institutions that are guaranteed democracy, rule of law, human rights and respect and protection of minorities; 2) functional market economy capable of dealing with competition and market pressures in the European to the Union and 3) the ability to assume the obligations arising from membership, including commitment the goals of the political, economic and monetary union.

In practice, in relation to the aforementioned Copenhagen ones, before the countries that want to join Union, far more complex requirements have been set, the number of chapters and reference points is greater, a balance clause was introduced and constant changes to the criteria are made. The process is additional burdened by a multi-year moratorium on expansion and the marginalization of this issue on agenda of the EU, the Union's less focus on the Western Balkans, all while declining support for further enlargement and growing Euroscepticism in member states. The process accession to the EU in the countries of the Western Balkans is at the same time threatened due to the modest economic growth and increasingly pronounced poverty, as well as institutional inefficiency in the implementation of European standards and values, accompanied by a decline in support for joining the EU and accession-related reforms. How to stimulate the processes of European integration and exit end with influences that undermine these efforts in these circumstances, the question is which country The Western Balkans must inevitably be resolved.

The enlargement procedure itself is structured in such a way that it complicates the countries' faster progress in the process approaching the Union. How the states declare about the progress of the candidate country for membership members unanimously, any further step of that progress is subject to blocking by any of those country. Member states often try to resolve bilateral tensions through conditionality its benefit. This behavior of the existing member states of the Union is particularly favorable changed approach to accession negotiations with current candidate states that it implies that the political chapters (for example, chapters 23 and 24 for Montenegro, and for Serbia in addition to these two and chapter 35) are opened first and closed last. This way, the space for arbitrary behavior of the member states of the European Union is large considering fragmentation of the process of accession (and joining) and thus numerous opportunities for conditioning. The European Union today is not the same community it was thirty or more years ago. The number and diversity of members has increased drastically, and at the same time, the scope of the European Union's activities has also increased union dramatically expanded. Discus-

sions about the justification and sustainability of the sequel are getting louder integration according to the previous model of mandatory involvement of all member states in all areas actions of the EU. More specifically, EU officials in contacts with candidate countries talk about support for accession, but in the institutions of the Union they do not make decisions that would undoubtedly support it. In this way, the enlargement process is there, but for the candidate countries it is practically difficult to achieve.

Additionally, the granting of candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova by accelerated procedure, amended is a radical decade-long practice of the process of admission of candidate countries to the EU, which is directly reflects changes in conditions in relation to the countries of the Western Balkans.

On the matrix of changed conditions for privileged countries, new security ones are on the scene tendencies, the position of the countries of the Western Balkans is changing, and in that context it is being promoted an almost impossible mission to fulfill the conditions that are set before them.

ENLARGMENT POLICY FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF KEY ACTORS- CROSS-SECTION OF THE SITUATION

It can be concluded that the previous expansion processes were simpler, shorter and with far fewer conditions, and thus the possibility of blocking candidate countries from member countries.

The leaders of the EU and the Western Balkans have repeatedly discussed the future membership of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia. The member states of the European Union have adopted a declaration by which confirm “unanimous support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans”, as well as support “enlargement process”, based on “credible reforms of partners”.

During its six decades of existence, the European Union (that is, the former European Community) were at a crossroads many times, but it has never before been the target of so many at the same time crisis (financial, euro crisis, migrant, Brexit, identity crisis, war in Ukraine, energy crisis) that strongly threaten its foundations. Member States are considering different scenarios future appearance of the European Union, but what is important for the countries of the Western Balkans is where is the question of enlargement in the transformed European Union. Although they come from Brussels assurances that the expansion will not be abandoned, it is obvious that this issue is not currently there on the list of priorities of the Union. Not only because of the many current challenges with which The Union is facing, its determination to consider expansion to the Western Balkans is already on infusion this decline in interest leads to a decline in interest among the countries of the mentioned region are in the process of accession. This further leads to the growth of Euroscepticism in the regionThe Western Balkans has fertile soil.

What about the current problems of functioning of the supranational political framework of the European Union in relation to the enlargement process, the key actors, the European Union, the most important member states, non-members and new political authorities. Achievements so far in terms of Euro-Atlantic integration of the region, and according to the view of the member states, are modest, which

leaves room for new ones conditions, demands, and even pressures towards the candidate states. At the same time, there are real dangers (Kosovo and Metohija, dysfunctional BiH, slow transfer of power in Montenegro, the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis...) that can shake security support for stability Western Balkans. Although the Berlin process revived regional cooperation and confirmed the role of the EU as an international actor who takes care of the security of the immediate environment, short-sightedness of individual national governments of the Union member states has been sending conflicting ones over the last years messages and undermined the confidence of the citizens of the Western Balkans in the realism of the perspective joining the united part of Europe.

European Union. The European Union is a unique actor in the region of the Western Balkans, where since at the beginning of the nineties of the last century applied a wide range of foreign policy instruments: diplomatic and trade measures, financial aid, civil and military missions, as well as enlargement policy, which is its most successful foreign policy tool. It is an undeniable success which the enlargement policy of the European Union had by influencing the transition process of the countries Central and Eastern Europe.

The great crisis of the European Union is more than a decade-long process conditioned exclusively by internal factors reasons. The main driver of the crisis is the difference between the high goals of integration projects and inadequate institutional, legal and political capabilities to achieve these goals (Samardic, 2018). In practice, this difference is expressed in the dysfunctionality of newer integration systems covers (monetary union, common foreign and security policy, judicial and police cooperation) which, as a rule, leads to the dysfunctionality of many areas of the previously achieved degree of integration. Today, the officials of the Union almost uniformly say that the expansion will take place continue after the reform of the Union itself. It is about an unknown long period. Meanwhile, the basic function, and even the content, of the enlargement policy has changed. It doesn't exist purpose is to extend the integration process of the Union to other European countries, because that process itself is uncertain, but to ensure that they remain in the new security and geopolitical constellation a country in the sphere of Western influence and domination. It remains open for candidate countries, otherwise politically unasked, the question: why not revise the process of stabilization and association which should prepare the country for full membership, in the direction of better general adaptation to changed circumstances.

The process of accession, it turned out, contains numerous shortcomings, the root of which lies in itself in the structure of the enlargement policy, as well as in the nature of mutual relations between the European Union and its own member states, on the one hand, and candidate countries for membership, on the other (Radic Milosavljevic, 2017). The process of stabilization and association was created for the countries of the Western Balkans two years ago decade, from the beginning it left room for the European Union to unilaterally, in its own way discretion and needs, defines the conditions for admission. The Union did it most often under the leadership geopolitical and security interests instead of objective criteria derived from of certain policy sectors. This relationship between the Union and its member states, together with weak developed democratic political culture and statehood experience on the part of the countries candidate, led to the unprecedented interference of the

Union in internal political and constitutional issues candidate countries. Obvious arbitrariness in the policy of conditioning, too ambitiously conceived the idea of stabilization and democratic consolidation, the tutelary and hegemonic relationship of the Union towards candidate countries, as well as the now clear prolongation of the process, led to a loss his credibility and fatigue on both sides.

The new EU enlargement strategy of 2018 defined the rule of law issues and civil liberties, infrastructural connection, digitalization, strengthening the common security in relation to the issue of mass refugee waves, the COVID 19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, sanctions against Russia, as dominant in the field of fulfilling formal conditions for the continuation of negotiations and accession to the Union. In official announcements from numerous meetings of the EU - Western Balkans; the word “expansion” is missing more and more often. In this way, the process enlargement becomes more politically uncertain, and the Western Balkans is increasingly defined as a space security concerns, not an area that is desirable and useful to integrate into the EU. Thus the EU reinforces the negative perspective of this space to remain a periphery, a waiting room, an outpost, and the geopolitical game field of large and powerful actors (powers).

Great Britain and the Western Balkans. With the exit from the European Union, Great Britain is in to the process of reconstructing its foreign policy, which until now relied on three pillars of “satellite relations” with the United States of America, the prevailing influence on the countries Commonwealth, and membership in the European Union. Leaving the EU raises the question: what will it be like the new British approach not only to the European Union, but also to Europe as a whole. Britain is right after referendum on Brexit began to emphasize that the terms Europe and the EU are not synonymous, and that she wants to lead a policy of presence in Europe, but not as a member of the EU. This constructs a new region: “Europe outside the EU”, in which the British foreign and security policy sees a possible field of its own intensive action in the immediate future. Given the continued hesitation of the EU to fully integrate the Western Balkans into the Union, British foreign policy has room to appear in the Western Balkans as an external power. By changing the nature of the relationship between London and Brussels, it is possible that the emphasis on slightly different priorities in the process will also change of these integrations.

USA and the Western Balkans. Transatlantic relations are in the process of deep reconfiguration, they are fundamentally changing, but their complete collapse is not to be expected. This process is reflects the position of Southeastern Europe as a whole, and the Western Balkans in particular its politically very unstable part. On the one hand, adopting a new (big) strategy which would significantly limit action in regions that are not of key security importance priorities (eg the Western Balkans) could mean that the United States of America they leave this space to the security coverage of the European Union and its most powerful members, who, faced with their own internal problems, would then with more or less the success of the competition for influence with other regional and global actors such as Russia, Turkey or China. The fact that US President Joseph Biden is talking to the president Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission expressed strong support for the continuation of the process accession of the countries of the Western Balkans to the European Union, confirms that the USA will continue to be present in the Western Balkans.

France and the Western Balkans. French President Emmanuel Macron called for to the countries of the Western Balkans to have a clear perspective of accession to the European Union, advocating for “a strong and independent Europe” and the new security order “Europe with NATO in relation to Russia. “We must no longer move away from the Western Balkans.” They need to get a clear one from us the prospect of joining the Union within a reasonable time,” Macron said in a speech in the European Parliament, Parliament in Strasbourg. However, he stressed that Europe in the current conditions is not what it is which can receive new members, stressing that changes in the Union are necessary that would make it possible “faster, clearer and more efficient decisions”.

Russia and the Western Balkans. Russia, with its foreign policy, is trying to secure strengthening the country’s position as one of the three most influential actors in contemporary international affairs relations in the changed geopolitical picture of the world, with the USA and China. The basic proclaimed goal Russia’s promotion of trade and economic interests and protection of national security. Russia and in the Western Balkans, it works on the economic cooperation level, but also on the military-technical level cooperation. The most favorable outcome for Russia would be the creation of a group of militarily neutral countries the Balkans, namely the former Yugoslav republics with Serbia in first place. To Europe The Union is seen as part of the global market, with little possibility of self-initiative solves geopolitical problems, for which it relies on the strength of the NATO military alliance and having in see the still uncertain European future of the countries of the Western Balkans, Russia would hereby was a consolidated position in the southeast of Europe. Russia sees Serbia as a country with state-building tradition and integration potential, and which would be cultural and historical closeness, support in public opinion, the unresolved issue of Kosovo and Metohija and uncertainty the European future was a relatively solid stronghold. For Russia, the Balkans are still a zone of geostrategic, political and economic, i.e. national interest. In a more significant case changes in global relations and the eventual collapse of the European Union, Russia would could intensify activities in the Balkans by encouraging the issue of Serbian unification national space.

Turkey and the Western Balkans. Current Turkish foreign policy pays a lot of attention to space Western Balkans. For Turkey, increased influence in this region is a support for stronger rooting its presence in Europe. Turkey’s Balkan activities are aimed at countries with a predominantly Muslim population and countries where a significant number of people live the minority belonging to this religion (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Macedonia and Serbia). At the same time, as a key support for the revitalization of Turkish power in these areas, Bosnians and Albanians apostrophize as guardians of Ottoman heritage.

China and the Western Balkans. The region of the Balkans throughout its turbulent history attracts attention global forces. The traditionally interested powers are strengthening their political and economic the People’s Republic of China joined the position at the beginning of the 21st century. Due to the increased inflow of Chinese foreign direct investments in Europe, the European Commission insisted that all tender procedures are carried out transparently and with strict compliance with European regulations union. Seen from this angle, China’s growing role should not pose a threat to integration processes. However, some European leaders expressed

their fear that the presence would China threatens the European Union's efforts to democratize the region.

NATO and the Western Balkans. From the NATO headquarters in Brussels, it is continuously emphasized that the word about the region of strategic importance, and that this organization remains fully committed stability and security of the region by continuing to support Euro-Atlantic aspirations countries outside the Union, especially by preserving and strengthening the presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo and Metohija relations with Serbia. The US intends to respond seriously to the threat of a risk spiral in the certain parts of the region that can be easily confused with the coming anti-Western the influence of Russia, China and Turkey. As the European Union, to all security threats, it responds with a strong reliance on the strength of the NATO military alliance, and the Union's enlargement process itself the countries of the Western Balkans will have the unmistakable seal of NATO's military and political alliance with the dominant role of the USA and the most powerful European countries. While at the beginning of the 21st century USA strive to maintain control over this part of Europe, Russia, China and Turkey appear as new/old rivalries and try to take advantage of numerous unresolved issues of neighborly relations thus with a skillful combination of military-political, economic and cultural instruments for individual countries The Western Balkans offer a strategic foreign policy alternative in the circumstances of the extended period economic crisis and the currently uncertain perspective of European integration.

THE COUNTRIES OF THE WESTERN BALKANS ON THE ROAD TO THE EU WITHOUT A CERTAIN END

The European integration of the countries of the Western Balkans is still "on hold". Three are dominant events in the Western Balkans in the focus of EU institutions. These are constant oscillations in the process normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, ending the almost three-decade-long dispute between Macedonia and Greece (ended by the signing of the Prespa Agreement on June 17, 2018). The third event which is the war in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia which were imposed as a "condition of all conditions". Numerous factors have contributed to the slow Europeanization of the Western Balkan countries: post-conflict societies, weak states characterized by a lack of rule of law, developed organized crime and corruption, illegitimate institutions, weak management capacities, challenging statehood. We will consider how it looks on the example of individual countries candidates and potential candidates.

Serbia and Kosovo. We also link Kosovo to Serbia, because there is no generally accepted position on the status the southern Serbian provinces, as seen by Serbia and some member states of the European Union on one I independent independent states, as seen by the US and most of the member states of the Union, on the other foreign. When it comes to the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, the head of the EU Delegation in Serbia, Emanuel Zofre said that it is important to resolve all open issues, and that Belgrade and Pristina should take advantage opportunity to reach an agreement on the normalization of relations (Žofre, 2022). So, the achievement is mutual an acceptable solution for Kosovo is of key importance for Serbia's EU perspective. Because, EU officials insist on achieving progress in the dialogue.

There are many standing in the way of progress problems, and the most significant ones stand out as the non-implementation of all agreements reached so far party, especially the Brussels Agreement. At the top of the pyramid is the formation of the Community of Serbs municipality, which Serbia insists on, but also mutual recognition, which the temporary ones insist on authorities of Kosovo. Minority rights, freedom of movement, church property, searching for the missing and economic development, complete this list of priorities. World crisis because of Ukrainian-Russian of the conflict additionally complicated Serbia's position on the way to the EU. Serbia voted for the UN resolution condemning the Russian invasion. For that, she received only polite acknowledgments in the form of yes to the Union welcomes this vote, that Serbia remains an important partner of the EU. But, as a candidate country for membership in the EU and a government that prioritizes EU accession, Serbia would have to give its external progressively fully harmonize the policy with the European Union. We want Serbia to be with us us, even in these difficult times, and to comply with EU statements and measures to oppose Russia's obvious aggression, and we welcome all steps in that direction. So, they insist on sanctions against Russia, which is unacceptable for Serbia. Further refusal of Serbia to imposes sanctions on Russia leads to the termination of the negotiation process.

Bosnia and Herzegovina. The event that is currently in focus and on which the EU and the US are working are the elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which will certainly only confirm the previous negative trends and trends within the country. The reform of the electoral legislation is buried in unrealistic demands ethnic leadership, with no indication that any changes are taking place. That's why the membership perspective will Bosnia and Herzegovina in the European Union will continue to be in the shadow of evident strengthening of influence certain actors, such as the Russian Federation and Turkey. In the latest Report on the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a number of problems in the functioning of institutions in the country and non-compliance with the law were listed and legal provisions.

Twenty-seven years after the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina is increasingly an object rather than a subject international relations, primarily thanks to the inconsistencies of the present international ones actors with and without a mandate. As a country that expressed its determination to become a member of the European Union already in the first years after the tragic conflict, Bosnia and Herzegovina for more than two years for decades it has been suffering the consequences of inadequate, ineffective, and often biased action established management structures of the international community (OHR, OSCE, EUFOR, of NATO), which seriously threatens both the integrative processes and the perspective of membership in Union. With the now, albeit unofficially, established international protectorate, that is not the case possible. Essentially, the European Union itself slows down the integrative processes, intensifies them Euroscpticism also damages its credibility and distances Bosnia and Herzegovina from accession.

When it comes to Montenegro, the country that most often qualifies as a leader in to the process of integration of the Western Balkans, along with the deep polarization of society, all the above problems are expressed (Weber, 2019). In Montenegro, for almost thirty years, the same people were at the same time the bearers of reforms and the main causes of the captivity of the state. The only success that Montenegro can achieve to boast of more than fifteen years of negotiations on full membership

in the EU opening negotiation chapters and meeting the technical prerequisites for integration which at the same time, they do not mean building institutions and strengthening the rule of law.

North Macedonia. North Macedonia was the first country in the region to sign Stabilization and Association Agreement in 2001, and in 2009 Skopje officially received positive recommendations for the start of accession negotiations. The European Commission put has placed North Macedonia on the list of the 20 greatest achievements of the EU in recent years. Northern In 12 months, Macedonia completed the reforms in their entirety, thoroughly implemented the agreements with Greece and Bulgaria are still an example of cooperation and friendship in the region. Past years the country has switched to a new negotiation methodology, but is still facing a new one unprincipled problems and bureaucratic positions that become a stumbling block for the prosperity of North Macedonia on the way to membership in the European Union. Today, 20 years later, North Macedonia is still in the waiting room of the European Union.

FORECASTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROBLEMS IN THE FUTURE.

Two decades after the creation of the new approach of the Union for the countries of Southeast Europe, the Process stabilization and association, the very process that provided the perspective of membership and policies enlargement of the European Union have lost credibility. Apart from the general idea that the space of the West The Balkans should be pacified through the stabilization of the political and security situation within and between them countries that belong here, at the time of creating the process it was not clear what exactly it would give implies. In particular, there were political conditions, such as, for example, demands for by returning refugees, in full cooperation with the International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia, by respecting international agreements, regional cooperation, normalization relations with Pristina. Policies in the sectors of freedom, security and justice are particularly important for the accession of the countries of the Western Balkans to the EU due to the image of the region as a source of instability. From the very beginning, the relationship between the European Union and the countries of the Western Balkans was established as the superior-subordinate relationship instead of the relationship between equal partners. Described maintaining the candidate countries in a semi-dependent position on the European Union is probably one of the biggest negative consequences of the process of association, that is, accession.

The very process of association, that is, accession, therefore, contains numerous shortcomings. Their own the root lies both in the structure of the enlargement policy itself and in the nature of mutual relations The European Union and its member states, on the one hand, and the candidate countries for membership, on the other sides. The reason for this lies in the pronounced dominance of the European Union, which is in a position to at its own discretion, establish or terminate this relationship with arbitrary creation and modification conditions and rules. So, the problem in the relations between the European Union and the associated countries, that is non-member states that are in contractual relations with the Union, lies in their

undemocratic nature of this relationship while significantly limiting autonomy and exerting influence on the constitutional order States.

When it comes to the countries of the Western Balkans, this problem is at its peak. Apart from regulations of community law that are subject to harmonization in the associated states, for countries a number of different, often unacceptable conditions were produced in the Western Balkans. The process of Stabilization and Association created for the countries of the Western Balkans two decades ago, from the beginning, he left room for the European Union to unilaterally, at its own discretion and needs, defines the conditions for joining and admission. Obvious arbitrariness in politics conditions, an overly ambitious idea of stabilization and democratic transition and consolidation, the tutelary and hegemonic relationship of the Union towards the candidate countries, as it is now but the clear prolongation of the process led to the loss of its credibility and fatigue on both sides (Radic Milosavljevic, 2016).

The attitude, or better to say the slogan, that the European Union has no alternative was used in the domestic to the political space by domestic political leaders, but occasionally also EU representatives, in order to predominantly emphasize the importance of European integration. An alternative to a full-fledged one membership in the European Union and the termination of all relations with it, would lead to the presentation of the candidate state the influence of other global actors, especially Russia and China. Today it is clear that politics conditionality as a key instrument in the European Union's relations with Western countries The Balkans did not produce adequate results. More importantly, because of the way it is structured with the absolute favoring of political stability, with the asymmetric nature of each other relations, together with the objective circumstances in which Europe found itself, began to produce and negative effects in the form of support for undemocratic practices and authoritarian regimes, and so on expansion and accession fatigue (Eriksen & Fossum, 2015). Predictions about a possible date next expansion are not optimistic, but in their attempt to give optimism otherwise obvious stalled enlargement process, the European Commission determined the year 2025 as possible the year of the next accession. Even if the next expansion occurs in the mentioned year, it will be a consequence of the calculation by the member states of the European Union that the costs of enlargement are for the Union smaller than the benefits that would be achieved in that way ("Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, 2018).

Just as bad a scenario as early accession would be one in which the enlargement would add up was postponed pending the actual readiness of the candidate for membership. This would mean that the states candidates and potential candidates remain in the status of non-members with the obligation to continue accepting and applying the rules and norms of the European Union without participating in their adoption. On the thus, they would continue a painstaking process with an uncertain and unpredictable end difficulties. This is supported by the examples of numerous exceptions that are current states members of the European Union have made in terms of participation in certain policies of which they are economic and monetary union and the Schengen visa regime, most obviously. Despite all the shortcomings of the process, giving up membership is an unlikely scenario for now.

The Union still manages to convince the countries of the Western Balkans that the "European way" is the only one correct, implying by that full and complete mem-

bership, however, without guarantees in regarding deadlines. There is no doubt that the countries of the Western Balkans have both economic and political interest in participating in certain policies of the European Union, but not the interest to be “forever”. in the waiting room, without any indication of the completion of the accession process.

CONCLUSION

The countries of the Western Balkans are, each in their own way, on the way to the EU. One European politician is said “either Europe will lend a hand or someone else will do it”, (referring to China, Russia).

EU leaders, with the agreement of leaders from the Western Balkans, adopted at the EU-Western Balkans summit are a declaration in which they give unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkans and confirm the commitment to the enlargement process based on “credible reforms of the partners” with an emphasis on the importance of “strengthening the integration and capacity of new members” by itself of the European Union. The European Union has proposed strengthening the security and defense of Western countries of the Balkans in order for the region to strongly join the bloc. This is the moment to “revive the process” EU and that formal negotiations for accession to the bloc begin as soon as possible, said Joseph Borelj (Tanjug, March 14, 2022). Although everyone agreed that the countries of the Western Balkans belong In Europe, the call of some members to give an indicative, if not a fixed, date was not supported countries of the Western Balkans for their accession to the Union.

The new methodology adopted in February 2020 stipulates that no chapter can be closed until the transition criteria are met. The countries of the Western Balkans are opted for a new methodology for accession to the European Union. Possibility of closure perspective of the joint construction of lasting peace in this area, which has been neuralgic for centuries, not a realistic option. For a region affected by the consequences of a decade-long global recession, establishment of strategic influence as an instrument of particularistic foreign policy which ignores the long-term vision of the common future of the countries of the Western Balkans, it may seem attractive, but it is essentially superficial, based on immediate promises and is dangerous substitute for the perspective of a united Europe, no matter how effective it is at the present moment far and uncertain.

The Stabilization and Association process and the enlargement policy in general was until recently perceived as the most successful foreign policy of the European Union, so it is not realistic to expect that the European Union from abandons it or reduces it in any way. Faster exit from long-term and unfavorable of non-member status, for the candidate states it would mean limiting the possibility of arbitrary I hegemonic relationship in which they participate as a subordinate party. An approach that would make it possible to candidate countries (and potential candidates) choose the areas in which they would participate in integration, it would increase the degree of their autonomy, which is seriously undermined by the current regime of the process accession. If in this way the possibility of conditioning in political areas, not only would the progress in the technical chapters be unblocked but also made it clear to the candidate states that they are responsible for their own democracy reforms (Radic Milosavljevic, 2017).

In the accession process, the question of differentiated integration in general, and even that one, is mentioned more and more often which would start at the stage of the accession process (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/white_paper_on_the_future_of_europe_en.pdf). Such a the integration model would limit a certain number of public policy areas and states in advance they participate (Leruth & Lord, 2015). The most common objections to the idea of differentiated integration in in any of its forms, they refer to the fact that this model of integration is too complex to would work, as well as deepening the differences between member states. It's not good to the methodology for joining the European Union changes when the country is already deep in negotiations, said Tanja Fajon, a member of the European Parliament. According to Fajon (2022), "If the methodology were to change, it would not be good, because the European Union has lost a lot credibility because of it.

With an insight into the diversity, advantages and disadvantages of the model of relations with the European Union³, it is possible to open opportunities for accepting the fact that it is with the Union it is possible to build successful and mutually beneficial relationships even without membership as it was until now imagined, that is, through membership in some other form of it. The most important thing is to get out imposed state of non-alternativeness that makes it impossible to make not only penetration into the process of getting closer to the European Union and forming a mutually beneficial and equal one relations, but also to make a step towards the essential consolidation of democracy in this part of the world.

The new geopolitical situation caused by the war in Ukraine may bring perspective, but not accelerated path of the Eastern Partnership country to the European Union. And not even the countries of the Western Balkans they should "due to the situation" expect shortcuts. A new political debate within the European Union expansion is taking place in light of the war in Ukraine and warnings of possible "spill over" Russia's undermining influence on Ukraine's neighbors and the Western Balkans. "The war will increase the pressures to improve the process of joining the Balkans and make these ideas relevant for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, as well as for the six countries of the Western Balkans. In Brussels, they also say that they are aware that the member countries, advocates of joining the Western Balkans, will certainly "use the newly created situation" and seek faster accession of the Western Balkans six. "It can brings new momentum to the reception of the Western Balkans, but the member countries that insist on fulfilling the criteria for joining the EU will continue to do so, regardless of the new geopolitical situation reality", concluded in Brussels. The messages that can be heard from Brussels are that it will not happen enlargement of the European Union for at least the next five years because no country in the Western Balkans has ready for membership.

As a conclusion, it is imposed that the European Union, and especially the member states, do not have harmonized attitudes regarding enlargement. Individually, some of the institutions of the European Union and some of the officials, often emphasize the perspective and commitment to admission, but persistently insist on the list revised and added conditions. The countries of the Western Balkans are committed to accession, but they are deeply buried in the process itself, which receives

3 Read more in: Gstöhl, S. (2015). Models of external differentiation in the EU's neighbourhood: An expanding economic community?. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 22, No. 6, 2015, pp. 854–870.

new requests from day to day. To everyone their achievements are not seen by giving recognition in the form of shortening the European path, but rather he even extends it. It is persistently requested from Brussels that the candidate states, consistently in every situation follow the European Union, regardless of their individual state interest (eg the request that Serbia impose sanctions on Russia). For now, apart from declarative support, there are no visible indications of the end of the process that will lead to membership, the conditions multiply, the demands are more and more strict, the behavior under often subjected to unfounded criticism. Survival on the road to accession is the ultimate goal for the countries of the Western Balkans, but for now there is no end in sight.

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