

An analysis of the European Enlargement Policy through years: the case of Western Balkans

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Abstract

No matter its peculiarities, enlargement policy through its conditionality policy instrument is viewed as the most successful EU foreign policy. It is argued that enlargement has strengthened and stabilized democracy in Europe. This review article discusses the enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans since the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit and the Union's efforts and mechanisms to maintain enlargement at the forefront. These mechanisms include forums and summits of discussion between EU and Western Balkan key actors, various strategies on enlargement, and financial dedications to fostering reform implementation like IPA. The 2003 Summit is considered a critical point in regards to refocusing attention and efforts to enlargement and reaffirming a European future for the Balkan region; therefore, it is important to consider all alternations from that point in time. Thus, the aim is to look at enlargement policy through years and provide an insightful view to the enlargement credibility that allows us to critically review it. To achieve the set goal, this article employees the content analysis methodology. The results show that although the Commission has shown its commitment to enlargement from time to time, the enlargement policy has been at stake at different times from 2003. The raise of the populism right wing parties in Europe, the growth of eurospectis and spread of terrorism are few of the contributing factors to the enlargement fatigue.

Key words: Enlargement policy; Western Balkans; EU commission; Enlargement credibility; Enlargement fatigue;

1. Introduction

“Enlargement is both a political necessity and a historic opportunity for Europe. It will ensure the stability and security of the continent and thus will offer both the applicant States and the current members of the Union new prospects for economic growth and general well-being. Enlargement must serve to strengthen the building of Europe in observance of the *acquis communautaire* which includes the common policies.” (Madrid European Council 1995).

The European Enlargement Policy (EEP) comprises and deals with countries aspiring to join the Union. Aspiring countries refers to countries willing to join the Union and also able to join the Union in terms of being eligible to applying to become a Member of the Union (Treaty on European Union, article 49. 1992). Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) provides the legal basis for countries to apply to become members of the EU. In particular article 49 notes:

"Any European state which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. The European Parliament and national parliaments shall be notified of this application. The applicant state shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the assent of the European Parliament, which shall act by an absolute majority of its component members." (Treaty on European Union, article 49. 1992).

Further deconstructing what Article 49 encompasses, a discussion paper on Kosovo’s candidate status (European Policy Centre, 2017) explains that article 49 is composed of three explicit criteria that each country has to fulfil if it wants to join the Union. The three criteria include the following:

1. Each applicant must be a “European State”;
2. Each applicant must respect and uphold values including respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law;
3. Each applicant must satisfy the Copenhagen criteria (EU eligibility conditions). (Treaty on European Union, Article 49. 2012 and European Policy Centre, 2017).

According to Larsen (2010) European Union Enlargement Policy is a long complex process and represents many challenges to the functioning of the Union as a whole, but also to the Members States themselves. The long complex process of enlargement includes various conditions, which are set by EU institutions for other countries to become members of the Union. Thus, when enlargement is discussed, a number of policies from various sectors come to the forefront and are negotiated with these countries. These policies or criteria are related to economic matters, political representation of new countries, legal, judicial and administrative matters, and are organized into 35 chapters that are also known as the *acquis communautaire* or as 35 different policy fields. (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations).

It is mandatory that various principles, regulations, legislative frameworks, and standards that fall under the above mentioned chapters may be adopted by aspirant member states in order to circumvent any difference between member states of the Union and the new members. The differences between member states and candidates refers to the socio progress and economic growth differences including the GDP per capita which portrays a lot in terms of the standard of life in both parts. It is important to underline that the final goal is to create market functioning economic with prosperous growth and to consolidate democratic functioning institutions. Given that, the living standards of candidate countries would be comparable to those of the Union and that would mean that these countries would not present a threat to its complex functioning. This process of adoption, implementation and transformation of societal structures is a long one, as referred above, and a complex one which engages long time frameworks and financial resources. How long the time framework of adoption and implementation of these policy fields can last, depends on many factors like the capacity absorption and adoption of candidate countries, as well as the administrative capacity to implement the policies. Some policies are more challenging to get implemented due to their nature of involvement of high political or financial costs, while others are more challenging to fit within the context of the candidate country.

Considering the fact that enlargement is a difficult process for the EU to handle, literature has also addressed the question of why to enlarge, particularly the question of legitimacy and justification in the EU's Enlargement Policy. Sjursen (2002) approaches an analytical distinction that includes three categories of arguments a) pragmatic, b) ethical-political and

c) moral towards explaining the expansion of the EU. According to Sjørusen (2002), through a pragmatic approach the policy decision to enlarge would be defended due to the output it would produce; actors would take decisions based on calculations of utility. In an ethical-political approach justification relies on the idea of belonging to a particular community that shares values and the responsibility to share these values because of being part of the community. The third approach presented, the moral one, notes “the aim would not be to justify policy with reference to calculations of utility nor with reference to the values of a particular community, but to find justifications that rely on universal standards of justice, regardless of the utility of the policy to the particular actors involved in the decision or the specific values or perceptions of the ‘good life’ embedded in the community outlining the policy (Sjørusen 2002).” According to the author, the first approach belongs more to a rational approach, while the second and third belong to the logic of appropriateness.

2. Enlargement Policy towards Western Balkans (2003-2018)

Throughout the years, in more general terms the European Commission has confirmed its commitment to the enlargement policy while portraying that the region of Western Balkans is of geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe based on common values. However, the Commission’s commitment to enlarge has not been consistent throughout the years, thus the credibility of enlargement has also been at stake (Fouere, E. 2014). Criticism towards the Union’s ability to enlarge, prosper and transform have also been present. Particularly, nowadays when the populism right wing parties are growing in Europe, and the eurosceptics are growing. Therefore, the below section discusses the enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans since the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit and the Union’s efforts and mechanisms to maintain enlargement at the forefront. These mechanisms include forums and summits of discussion between EU and Western Balkan key actors, various strategies on enlargement, and financial dedications to fostering reform implementation like IPA. The 2003 Summit is considered a critical point in regards to refocusing attention and efforts to enlargement and reaffirming a European future for the Balkan region, thus it is important to consider all alternations from that point in time. This perspective of looking at enlargement policy through years will

provide an insightful view to the enlargement credibility and allows us to critically review it.

2.1 The Thessaloniki Summit

The 2003 Thessaloniki Summit is considered a momentous of the Union's relations with the Western Balkans including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Serbia. It is important to note that Kosovo was not represented by its head of state as other countries where, but the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in Kosovo was part of it (EU- Western Balkan Summit, Thessaloniki 2003). The composition of the Summit was of high political representation and other EU actors included the President of the European Commission, the Secretary General of the Council/High Representative, the Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe and the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. This Summit served to discuss issues of common interest; exchange of views on major developments in the EU, and most importantly reiterated its unequivocal support to the Balkan countries European perspective. At the end of the summit they also agreed on a set of issues including a) the share of common values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human and minority rights, solidarity and a market economy; b) economic prosperity is essential to long term stability and democracy in the region, thus persistent efforts and structural reforms are required to establish functioning market economies; c) organized crime and corruption is a real obstacle to democratic stability, rule of law, and economic development; d) acknowledging that the Stabilization and Association process (SAP) will remain the policy framework for the European course of the Western Balkan countries, amongst others (EU- Western Balkan Summit 2003). Another discussion dimension of the summit was the international cooperation referring to the need for a close co-ordination of the EU with the US on Balkan issues, in addition to continued co-operation with the UN, NATO, OSCE, and other international organizations (European Union Factsheet, 2003). A special emphasis was also put on the necessity to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations.

2.2 The Sofia Summit

The following year, in 2004, the big bang enlargement took place, and later on the 2007 enlargement, both of which made the EU review its

enlargement policy, its priorities, as well as its conditionality policy. Many have questioned and reviewed the story of Eastern European countries enlargement, making the EU learn the lessons from its potential mistakes when it came to monitoring mechanisms, assessment of progress, benchmarking mechanisms and similar towards then Eastern candidates. Therefore, only 15 years after the Thessaloniki summit did the second enlargement summit took place in Sofia. This was considered a renewed commitment as for many years EU was considered to have neglected the Western Balkans in terms of enlargement (Swoboda, H. and Koppa, E. 2018). On a comparison note, Europe looked different in this summit due to enlargements round of 2004 and 2007, as well as the single entrance of Croatia in 2013; economic crisis of 2008, spread of terrorism and frequent terrorist attacks across Western Europe, the rise of right wing political parties in Europe, migration waves, amongst others. All these are considered as internal challenges to the region's European integration (Bieber, 2018). All these events have put enlargement into a gloomy mood if not questioned it. Going back to the organization and the discussions that took place in the Sofia summit, the two highlights that portray the lack of a unanimous EU foreign policy include the following:

- The boycott of Spanish Prime minister due to their stance against Kosovo's independence. Surely, this could be considered as a discouraging signal for Kosovo and it also shows the differences when it comes to the Union's foreign policy.
- The decision to refer to states as partners throughout the summit and in the final declaration due to the divisions within the Union in regards to Kosovo's independence. One has to note, that partners cannot be members of the Union, only countries can, leading to a discouraging sentiment for all, particularly for Kosovo.

After the Summit, a joint declaration of the leaders of the EU and of its Member States, in consultation with Western Balkan partners was concluded (EU-Western Balkans Summit, Sofia 2018). This declaration has put down 17 points, which relate to commitment by both sides towards ensuring European values and principles like democracy and rule of law, particularly the fight against corruption and organized crime, good governance, as well as respect for human rights and rights of persons belonging to minorities, in the region. Similarly to the 2003 Summit, focus

was put on regional cooperation and stability, and good neighbourly relations; in particular it has been stated that the Union is not interested to import any bilateral disputes within its structures (eluded on the bilateral dispute between Kosovo and Serbia). Furthermore, a priority agenda was annexed to the Declaration outlining specific initiatives to boost connectivity like the launch of a digital agenda for the WB, launch of a new package of connectivity projects, amongst others (EU-Western Balkans Summit, Sofia 2018). In particular, in the Commission's press release two points were highlighted including a) connecting infrastructures, economics and people, and b) closer cooperation on security. In regards to the former the EU committed to provide grants worth 190 million Euros for 11 high-priority transport projects like roads, rails and ports. In this press release, it is also noted that the EU will commit to support the region with energy transition to renewable energy sources like hydropower (European Commission- Press Release 2018).

Overall, it is important to note that during the Summit European leaders, in particular President Donald Tusk empathized that "...I don't see any other future for the Western Balkans than the EU. There is no other alternative, there is no plan B. The Western Balkans are an integral part of Europe and they belong to our community (European Council, 2018)." This declaration expresses the EU's determination to intensify relations with the region and to support the region in terms of transformation. Chancellor Merkel pointed to the economic transition of countries by stating "...in the interest of peace and security for all of us that we have a secure Western Balkans region that is developing well economically (Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 2018)." On the other hand, the other European leader, President Macron gave a more discouraging enlargement message while noting that the EU must first reform itself before deciding to enlarge and bring in new members. According to him new enlargement should be looked upon with great caution and rigour. This means that the Western Balkan enlargement is therefore as much a challenge for the candidates as it is for the EU. In conclusion, the Summit and the declarations itself sent a signal to the Western Balkan regions that enlargement is not going to happen in the near future, though the Union will remain committed to the development of the region and to its European perspective.

2.3 Enlargement Strategy Documents

Each year the Commission produces a communication for the Parliament and the Council, entitled Communication on the EU Enlargement Policy. In this Communication the Commission identifies the challenges faced by the Enlargement Policy and provides conclusions and recommendations on where the policy stands in the context of each enlargement country. The last strategy adopted by the Commission was the one on 06 February 2018, prior to the Sofia Summit, and it was entitled “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans” (European Commission, 2018). This enlargement strategy has come at a time when civil societies in the Balkans and the EU were discussing fake reforms and fake compliance with the EU standards. The EU had seemed to lose its interest in enlargement due to a number of issues including the enlargement scepticism voices that have been growing and challenges with migration flows. According to the spring 2018 Euro barometer survey, 46 % of EU citizens are sceptical about EU enlargement in the coming years (Standard Euro barometer 89, 2018). It is important to note, that four years before, in 2014, a vast negative sentiment about enlargement was also spread when Ms. Juncker, in his opening statement-political guidelines noted “the EU needs to take a break from enlargement” (Juncker, 2014). Thus, it seemed that for a long time, political elites in the Western Balkans have understood it, thus they started to follow their own agendas and space was created for decision-making, which did not fall under the European values and did not comply with the European standards.

However, with the publication of the strategy, a positive signal was sent about enlargement that had been missing for years now. This positive vibe has a two-fold benefit, one is about the leverage the EU can maintain toward enlargement countries and the other is the unexpected enthusiasm among enlargement countries in terms of reforms, which might not last long if they are not accompanied by other benefits (carrots). With the adoption of the strategy it was underlined that the progress along the European path is an objective and merit-based process that depends on individual country results and the need for the EU to be prepared to welcome new members once they meet the criteria. The strategy was followed by speeches from the President of the European Commission, Mr. Juncker, High Representative/Vice-President Ms. Mogherini, and Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement

Negotiations Mr. Hahn, all of which underlined the European perspective of the Balkan countries (European Commission, 2018).

Most importantly, for the first time, the EU in this strategy gave an indicative date of 2025 for potential accession of Montenegro and Serbia and identified them as frontrunners. According to the Commission, this date is “purely indicative and is based on the best-case scenario” (Enlargement Strategy, 2018). This depicts that the merit-based and individual evaluation approach will be employed throughout the process. The Strategy notes that for Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Commission is ready to prepare recommendations to open accession negotiations. For Bosnia and Herzegovina it notes that with ‘sustained effort and engagement’ the country could become a candidate for accession. In the case of Kosovo, the situation is more disappointing as the Commission notes, “Kosovo has an opportunity for sustainable progress through implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement and to advance on its European path once objective circumstances allow” (Enlargement Strategy, 2018). However, it is not further clarified what the objective circumstances mean for the country, indicating ambiguity. Given that, in Kosovo, the strategy has been criticized as being preferential and selective among countries and it has been noted that the best strategy is to allow Balkan countries to join the EU as a package due to the history of the region (Reka, 2018).

Furthermore, a credible enlargement perspective is in the hand of the enlargement countries themselves, but it also requires continuous support by the Union. Thus, to make the support more concrete the 2018 Enlargement Strategy announced six flagship initiatives that refer to specific actions that the EU will take over in the coming years to support transformation of the region. The six flagship initiative (2018) include the following:

1. *Initiative to strengthen the rule of law*: detailed action plans will be provided to all Balkan countries. Assessment of reforms will be improved including the development of impact indicators, trial-monitoring, case-based peer review missions and advisory missions.
2. *Initiative to reinforce engagement on security and migration*: reinforced cooperation on fighting organized crime, countering terrorism and violent extremism and on border security and migration management; joint investigation teams will further be promoted and

- status agreements with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency concluded, amongst others.
3. *Initiative to enhance support for socio-economic development*: expansion of the Western Balkans investment framework, supporting start-ups, access to finance for SMEs and R&D; mobilize expertise to support the development of the Economic Reform Programme exercise, and strengthening of the Economic Reform Programme including focus on employment and social reforms; doubling of funds under Erasmus +, amongst others.
 4. *Initiative to increase connectivity*: new investment support including increased funding in the field of transport, energy, and digital economy. Better connections will allow for increased competitiveness, economic growth and security of supply.
 5. *Initiative for a digital agenda for the Western Balkans*: the development of a roadmap to facilitate lowering roaming costs; support to the deployment of broadband; the development of e-Government, e-Procurement, e-Health and digital skills; capacity building in the digital trust and security in parallel to efforts enhancing the digitalization of industries; support for adoption and implementation of Acquits.
 6. *Initiative to support reconciliation and good neighbourly relations*: support to transitional justice, missing persons and increased cooperation in education, culture, youth and sport and expanding the scope of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office.

2.4 Berlin Process

Furthermore, it is important to note that while in 2014 Commission President Juncker stated that “the EU needs to take a break from enlargement”, Germany Chancellor Merkel announced the Berlin Process (BP), a high level political dialogue among WB governments and seven European powers including Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Croatia, UK, and Slovenia, aimed at maintaining a momentum of European integration. The BP was planned for a period of five years (2014-2018) and its aim was to advance the EU’s agenda in three dimensions including the a) economic growth and connectivity, b) good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, and c) civil society development and people -to-people connectivity. This is also reflected by the initiatives that have come out of the forums held (which will be discussed below) and by the participation of

country representatives that welcomed the heads of government, ministers of foreign affairs, and ministers of economy. During this period 2014-2018, five summits were held in five cities including Berlin (2014), Vienna (2015), Paris (2016), Trieste (2017), and London (2018). Each country that hosted the summit was responsible to draft the agenda by focusing on specific dimensions that they viewed important.

The summit held in Berlin was the first to be considered as a launching event, which set the basis and the general framework for the other summits to follow. During the summit strong political support was shown for the European perspective of the Balkans and a positive momentum for regional cooperation (Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, 2014).

The Vienna summit did put the focus on regional cooperation and solution of bilateral disputes, migration and civil society participation. It is important to note that one of the key topics discussed during the summit was the enhancement of investments in the region. Acknowledgment of progress in rule of law and good governance with special focus on public administration reform, fight against corruption and organized crime, was noted. (Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, 2015).

Moreover, the Paris summit decided to focus more on vocational training and youth exchanges. The final outcome of the Paris summit was the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). The initiative was built on the 50-year experience of the Franco-German Youth Office for your cooperation. RYCO activities promote "reconciliation of the peoples as well as programmes on remembrance, diversity, intercultural exchange, regional mobility, citizen participation and the promotion of democratic values." (Final Declaration by the Chair of the Paris WB Summit, 2016).

The following Trieste summit focused more on SME development and innovation and connecting economies. The outcome of the Trieste summit was the creation of the action plan to develop so-called Regional Economic Area (REA). The REA would serve to consolidate a market of 20 million people and attract investment while generating growth and new jobs (WB Summit in Trieste, 2017).

The London summit, the last one so far, has put focus on increasing economic stability, strengthening security cooperation, and facilitating political cooperation. To support these objectives the Commission agreed to

put forward a guarantee instrument to be launched in early 2019 under Western Balkans Investment Framework (WB Summit in London, 2018). Overall, these summits and their outcomes seem to build on each with the focus of regional and economic cooperation on mind. A number of initiatives have been launched including RYCO and REA and bilateral relations between Macedonia and both Greece and Bulgaria seem to have improved. As an endnote, the new summit is planned to be organized during 2019 in Poland, but nothing is finally set, yet.

Furthermore, no matter its peculiarities, enlargement policy through its conditionality policy instrument is viewed as the most successful EU foreign policy. All things considered, it is important to note that the need and the nature to explain European Integration process began in the 1958, with the publication on “The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economic Force” by Ernest B. Haas. The debate over what theory, the neo-functionalism or the intergovernmentalism and multi-level governance better explains the European Integration process persists today (Cini and Borrigan 2013). The former theory implies that national governments shift loyalties to the European institutions, while the latter theory implies that sovereignty and decision-making rests with the national governments. Intergovernmentalist approach views member states as key actors of the European Integration and policy-making. Member states are the ones who shape the integration process to protect their economic interests. Neo-functional approach views the supranational bodies like the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Council as key bodies in creating and shaping the integration process. Multi-level governance approach views the policymaking as cooperation between the member- states, non-state actors, and European institutions (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). In the below sections this research explains the causes of enlargement policy, its consequences and the actors involved in decision-making of an enlarged Union.

2.5 Overview of the Financial Dimensions

One of the most important dimensions of the enlargement policy is financial and technical resources to aid enlargement countries implement the reforms that the EU asks for. The financial and technical support is called EU pre-accession funds, precisely the Instrument for Pre-Accession Funds (IPA) and they are considered both an investment in enlargement countries and the EU itself. The IPA builds country capacities, helps them

adopt and implement reforms by preparing the countries to take on obligations that come with EU membership (Annual Report on Financial Assistance for Enlargement, 2014). The pre-accession assistance is considered an investment in a) public administration reform, b) rule of law, c) sustainable economy, d) people, and e) agriculture and rural development. The IPA II is planned for 2014-2020 and has a budget of 11.7 billion Euros, while IPA I was for the period of 2007-2013 and had a budget of 11.5 billion Euros (Overview- IPA, 2018). Both IPAs have a legal basis for functioning. IPA I legal basis expired on 2013 when IPA ended and it offered financial assistance through five channels which are known as components including transition assistance and institution building, cross-border cooperation, regional development, human resource development and rural development. IPA II was established on the basis of the Regulation No 231/2014, which came into force on March 2014 (Regulation EU No 231/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council).

2.5.1 How does IPA work?

Country Strategy Papers are the documents that provide the frame for financial assistance and they identify the key sectors that are in need for reform and assistance in a particular country. These papers also foresee the results that are planned to be achieved after the intervention and they identify indicators necessary to measure the progress achieved. Apart from individual assessment, there is also group assessment named Multi-Country Strategy Paper. This paper identifies horizontal priorities for specific policies and reforms including regional structures and networks, regional investment support, and territorial cooperation including cross-border cooperation programme. The following table shows that financial assistance allocated and the priority sectors to our two country case studies Macedonia and Kosovo:

Table 1: Financial Assistance under IPA II

Financial Assistance under IPA II (2014 - 2020)	
Macedonia: € 664.2 million	Kosovo: €645.5 million
Priority Sectors	
Democracy and Governance	Democracy and Governance
Rule of law and fundamental rights	Rule of law and fundamental rights
Environment and climate action	Energy
Transport	Competitiveness and innovation
Competitiveness and innovation	Education, employment and social policies
Social development	Agricultural and rural development
Agriculture and rural development	Regional and territorial cooperation
Regional and territorial cooperation	-

Source: European Commission, Neighbourhood, Enlargement, Funding by Country.

The amounts allocated to our two country case studies are similar, as well as the sector policy priorities; however, they differ in terms of the amount allocated from other Western Balkan countries, apart from Albania that has been allocated almost the same amount of €649.4 million. This also proves our selection of country case studies in terms of similarities that the two countries share. On the other hand, Serbia has been allocated €1.5 billion, which corresponds to the largest amount allocated to the region. Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been allocated lower amounts of €270.5m and €237.2 million, respectively. From the reading at the Commissions' web page it is not clear why there are these big differences in terms of financial allocations.

Furthermore, prior to the establishment of IPA on January 2007, there were other pre-accession instruments available including the following:

- The Phare programme which supported institution building actions and related investment in candidate countries.
- The ISPA programme which dealt with all-encompassing environmental and transport projects in candidate countries.
- The SAPARD programme which focuses was the support of agricultural and rural development in candidate countries.

- The CARDS programme which was focused on the support participation of the Western Balkans in the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP). The CARDS was considered the keystone of the EU's policy towards the regions of Western Balkans (Former Assistance, 2016).

3. Enlargement Causes and Consequences, and Actors

3.1 Enlargement Causes

The EU is interested to create a peaceful, politically stable and economically developed neighborhood, from which it could also benefit. On the other hand, the Union would not have been able to benefit from a troubled region; on the contrary, such a neighbourhood would potentially cause problems to the Union's functioning. This mainly explains why the Union's strategy is to persuade countries perform sustainable reform and to export values of political stability, rule of law, democracy, market economy, human rights and similar. Furthermore, the EU introduced two new criteria, including protection of ethnic minorities and settling of border disputes, to the list of requirements for enlargement countries (Sjursen and Smith 2004). It has also continuously underlined that it will not "import" any ethnic disputes or border disputes, implying that all enlargement countries have to settle their border disputes, as well as provide track record of protecting minority rights before becoming fully-fledged members of the Union.

3.2 Enlargement Consequences

Within the discussion framework of the Enlargement Policy, it is important to note that an enlarged Union is also faced with various challenges ranging from power sharing to budget allocations. Normally, a Union with a smaller number of actors would pursue a different, if not easier, policy-making procedure. More EU members reflect more members with different political systems, particularly those of small countries (Sjursen and Smith 2004). To begin with, enlargement affects the internal balance of power within the Union. Some countries might lose power with each Enlargement, as new members may support different ideas. Secondly, there are institutional implications referring to the bargaining between members' states due to the new Commissioners joining the Union. In addition, the parliament has a higher number of members representing the

new Member States that need to be socialized with the functioning methods and the institution. Thirdly, policies present another challenge to the enlarged Union due to different interests among old members and new members. For instance, the agricultural policy, structural and cohesion funds are one of the most disputed policies between old Union members and the East European members since the Eastern members have unproductive agricultural sectors and lower incomes compared to the Union's average creating a situation where tensions related to resource and budgetary allocations arise (Barnes 2010). Fourth, another significant challenge is to integrate and understand the EU political system and this refers to the Europeanization of policies and societal transformation of new members joining the Union. Literature discusses various approaches to Europeanization of policies and political institutions, administrations and other dimensions of state reflecting also various manners and speeds of being Europeanized.

3.3 EU Actors in Enlargement Policymaking

The Union has its own policymaking structures, particularly when it comes to Enlargement policy, since diverse actors within the EU have different interests they have developed distinct roles during the Enlargement process. All of the institutional actors, the European Commission, through its Directorate General for Enlargement, is the key and leading actor for the Union expansion. On the other hand, the European Council, composed of heads of Members States, has the final say (unanimous vote needed) in terms of acceptance of the application and of opening of accession negotiations. The other institutional actor, the European Parliament has no direct formal powers over enlargement, but it approves the Accession Treaty once it is ratified in the parliaments of all Members States. Thus, the decision to enlarge is not depended only in one type of institutional actor, but it rather presents interactions among all of them.

According to the liberal intergovernmentalism perspective states are the key actors in the enlargement policy. They are the ones that have the right to veto accession of new members at all stages of the integration process. Given that, they are in a more privileged position compared to supranational actors. The intergovernmentalists view the Commission's role as one that can only intervene in a way that it does not contradict any of the fundamental national interests of Members States. They argue further that the documents

of the Commission are not legally binding and that actual accessions negotiations rest in the hand of the Members States.

4. Conclusion

Enlargement policy is known as the Union's most successful foreign policy. This policy has shown to have strengthened and stabilized democracy and security in Europe and has helped the continent's potential for economy and trade in a global scale (Fontaine 2014). However, the EU has not always had the same interest in enlargement, thus it has not been blooming and flourishing at all times, but there were times when interest in enlargement was fading since post-2003. The analysis shows that there were several factors that put enlargement at stake including the rise of terrorism and terrorist attacks, the growth of nationalism and of right wing parties, lack of understanding by the public related to the enlargement benefits. Furthermore, Western Balkan countries were found in a dynamic momentum, in 2018, when the Sofia Summit was held and the Commission enlargement strategy was released. First, the Sofia Summit was being held fifteen years after the first summit was held in Thessaloniki, thus apart from its symbolic power, it showed interest in preparing the Balkan countries to join the EU. Second, the 2018 enlargement strategy for the first time in history set an indicative date of 2025 for potential accession of Montenegro and Serbia and identified them as frontrunners. According to the Commission, this date is "purely indicative and is based on the best-case scenario" (Enlargement Package, 2018). The enlargement strategy differed in another aspect from other strategies due to the credibility perspective it offered by announcing six flagship initiatives that refer to specific actions that the EU will take over in the coming years to support transformation of the region. Thus, both 2003 and 2018 are considered two momentum years for enlargement towards Western Balkans.

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