

Western Balkans: Sixth Enlargement of the European Union

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*After the enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe,
the process of European integration has advanced, but it is still not complete.
Twenty countries are still not members of the EU.
The republics of Western Balkans are likely candidates
for the next wave of enlargement.*

Key words: European integration, Central and Eastern Europe, Western Balkans

1. Introduction

Ten countries became full members of the European Union on 1 May 2004, thus increasing its population by 80 million and enlarging its territory by 700,000 square kilometres. Accession negotiations have also advanced with Bulgaria and Romania, which will in all likelihood join the EU in 2007 or 2008.

Upon the completion of the fifth enlargement, the EU will have twenty-seven member states. It will encompass 4.3 million square kilometres and have 460 million inhabitants. The twelve countries within the fifth enlargement will increase its population by 33 per cent and its territory by 30 per cent, but its gross domestic product will increase only by about 5 per cent.

Even at the very advanced stage of the European integration process, at the moment of comple-

tion of the fifth enlargement, not even then will the EU be able to consider itself complete, because the following twenty countries will still remain outside its borders:

- Western developed countries which decided to remain on the margin of the EU: Norway, Switzerland and Iceland. Among them, Norway was closest to integration on two occasions, but the negative outcome of the referendum, probably based on the prosperity the country enjoys owing to oil exploitation, caused it to remain outside the EU.

It is probable that those three countries will remain on the margin of the Union as long as they can afford it in a rational calculus of wins and losses. If at some moment that equation becomes negative, they will start the process of integration. In any case, their degree of co-operation with the Union is stronger than that of some full member countries.

- Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and Lichtenstein, small countries, well connected with their big neighbours (Spain, France, Italy and Austria) are still reserved towards integration, because

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they deem that with it they might lose their identity and national sovereignty.

- Countries of Eastern Europe, whose borders will become frontier with the EU after the next enlargement. None of them was accepted as a candidate and, although they are a part of the "broader Europe" or "new neighbours", they are still far from fulfilling the political and economic criteria which would enable them to become candidates. It involves Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Moldavia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Although some of them have already developed their own interest in accession, the most important one among them, Russia, has neither shown such interest, nor would it find it easy to conduct negotiations on 31 chapters of the *acquis communautaire*, nor could the EU apply its norms across the enormous Russian territory, despite the indisputable fact that Russia is a part of Europe and despite its big contribution to the western culture.

- Four countries of the former Yugoslavia: Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia (FYROM), to which Albania needs to be added. Since the European Council in Feira, held on 20 June 2000, those five countries have been potential candidates and they have already been included or are next in line to be included in the Stabilization and Association process, which is a phase preceding the accession to the EU. At the European Council of Thessalonica in 2003 those countries became real candidates. In October 2005, the EU passed a decision to start negotiations with Croatia.

- Turkey, which is also a candidate country, represents a special case on the other hand. Because of its large population, unstable economy and cultural characteristics, it evokes all sorts of fears among member states of the EU which, nonetheless, decided

to start negotiations with Ankara on 4 October 2005 as well.

Those twenty countries have a total of 350 million inhabitants – of which Russia has 144 million and Turkey 70 million – and 20 million square kilometres (16 million of which is Russian territory). Their gross domestic product amounts to 10 per cent of the Union's (Russia – 5 per cent).

2. General characteristics of the Western Balkans

Due to their geographic position, the wish to become an integral part of the EU and NATO and their status of candidates for accession, it is worth studying the situation of those five countries of the Western Balkans in greater detail. Those countries have made the most progress in the accession process, especially after the European Council in Thessalonica (June 2003). Their demographic, territorial and economic characteristics are presented in more detail in the table below. Those countries have large differences in development and a modest GDP which amounts to 33 per cent of the average GDP of 15 member states.

Since the Rome Agreement (1957), the EU has gone through five waves of enlargement, gradually growing towards the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, Central and Northern Europe and, in 2004, towards the east and south of the continent.

It will most likely be followed – except if the integration of Norway, Iceland, Switzerland or micro-states does not accelerate – by the sixth enlargement. Just like it was in the previous enlargements – except in the case of Greece, which joined alone –

	Territory (thousands of km ²)	Population (millions)	GDP (billions of dollars)
Croatia	57	4.4	34,800
Serbia and Montenegro	102	10.6	23,996
Bosnia and Herzegovina	51	4.4	8,121
Albania	29	3.4	7,590
FYR of Macedonia	26	2.0	5,246

Data: World Bank 15 July 2005

what each country wants in the first place is its own accession, and, secondly, the accession of the group with which it is connected, that is a formula to which the EU gives priority. For the benefit of the group, each candidate country is ready to wait several months during which time other candidate countries are concluding their negotiations, but it will not wait several years, which explains why ten countries did not wait for Bulgaria and Romania. With the sixth enlargement, there will also occur a mixture of a big bang – five Balkan countries will tenuously be considered together – and a regatta – the first country which fulfils the accession conditions will join the EU without delay, which will without a doubt be the case with Croatia.

The sixth enlargement will probably include the following five countries of the Western Balkans, three of which – Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia – went through a terrible war in the period from 1991 to 1995, with 130,000 killed and 2,000 missing persons.¹

- **Croatia.** It is ahead of all other countries of the Western Balkans in the EU Accession Process. Croatia submitted its application for membership at the beginning of the Greek presidency. The presentation of the application for membership was preceded and followed by official visits of high representatives of the Croatian authorities to each of the fifteen member states, where they requested support for integration which, after several delays due to the reluctance of the Hague Tribunal because of the Gotovina case, resulted in the decision to approve the beginning of negotiations on 4 October 2005.

Despite all this, Zagreb does not want to give up on joint advance of the Balkans towards the EU and confirms that its initiative will also work in favour of other candidates, especially Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia based its application for integration on the following factors:

- Parliamentary consensus.
 - Large public support for integration. Although there have been ups and downs in that support in the course of time, the constant positive atmosphere has not changed.
- Adequate progress in the application of the Copenhagen political criteria, both in the reform of the judiciary as well as in the return of refugees, property repossession, democratization of the political life, police and the media, all of which are issues

which the OSCE Mission in Zagreb has dealt with since 1996.

- Proper implementation of the obligations stemming from the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

- It co-operates adequately with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague, including the case of General Gotovina, as of 3 October 2005.

- It is developing close co-operation with its neighbours, particularly with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro.

- Its border with EU member states extends 1,050 km while its border with countries in the process of Stabilisation and Association extends 1,350 km. This has compelled it to develop an effective judicial and internal policy in support of the fight against terrorism and organised crime.

- Its per capita GDP amounts to € 5,140, which is twice as much as in the rest of the Balkan countries (€ 2,026 per capita) and higher than GDPs of some member states from the fifth enlargement.

- Its initial goal was to be integrated together with Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, which is not viable because it has just started with negotiations that will, in spite of that, develop rapidly.

- **Serbia and Montenegro.** When they signed the Agreement on the State Union on 14 March 2002, they did it less out of deep internal conviction and more because it was evidently the only path for their accession to the EU.

They are equally convinced that their integration into the EU will prevent the repetition of tragedies and past wars. Serbs and Montenegrins also deem that the Stabilization and Association process is the best way for achieving that goal, and that the CARDS programme (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization) is the key to their political and economic development.

One of the specific conditions imposed upon them is the transfer of all war criminals to the Hague Tribunal. This causes, especially in Serbia, internal tensions that could produce tragedies similar to those which occurred recently in the country. Despite this, Serbia is fulfilling its obligations towards the Hague Tribunal in a satisfactory manner.

An additional project preceding integration into the EU is the creation of a free trade zone which

will gather almost the entire Balkans, that is, the five candidate countries along with Bulgaria and Romania.

When it comes to the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, the creation of which was favoured by the High Representative for Foreign Policy, Javier Solana, in 2002, the biggest question mark is its sustainability during the agreed three-year period and how its future will influence the future of Kosovo. Therefore, there is no doubt that Serbia will have to clarify two large political doubts before the start of negotiations with the EU: the future of its union with Montenegro and the future of the Kosovo Region.

- **Bosnia and Herzegovina.** Its interest in relation to the EU is very clear, although it is aware that due to the great delay in the application of the Copenhagen criteria it will need about fifteen years to complete that process.

The country is not advancing fast enough. Eighteen measures were identified in 2000 which the country had to implement in 2001 in order to fulfil an adequate "road map" on its way to the EU. The fulfilment of the plan was delayed for a year and it was completed as late as 2002. Because of that, the fifteen are not convinced that it is possible to implement the Stabilization and Association process in this country, although it was successfully implemented in Albania. In spite of this, the EU strengthened its presence in Bosnia, which is *inter alia* confirmed by the fact that UN police forces were replaced by EU police forces.

Still, with all its limitations, the Government in Sarajevo is aware of the fact that the EU accepted the future accession of the Western Balkans and its belonging to Europe, due to which Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be left as a black spot in the region, that is, if all the countries are integrated, it will not remain isolated. For those reasons, relying on funds from the CARDS programme, the Government prepared a document on strategy for the period between 2002 and 2006, which includes the realization of goals of democratization, modernization, socioeconomic development, environmental development and progress related to issues from the scope of judiciary and internal affairs.

A the same time, Sarajevo considers Croatia's indisputable progress towards the Union a positive factor – because of the impetus it will create for Bosnia itself and for other countries – and a nega-

tive one – because of the temporary isolation which the country will face in relation to the Union.

- **Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).** Since it separated from Yugoslavia and became independent in 1991 – the only Republic in the region which achieved this through a peaceful process – the EU and NATO integration is a constant objective of the Skopje Government.

In comparison with what happened in Croatia and Slovenia, in case of the FYROM the conflict occurred almost 10 years after the country gained independence, as a result of a confrontation between the Albanian minority (22.5%) and the Slavic-Macedonian majority (66.9%). There were 46 killed, 298 injured, 100,000 refugees fled to Kosovo and 70,000 persons were internally displaced in the conflict.

The effects of the confrontation and their spreading across the region were successfully limited with the Ohrid Agreement and strong international presence. Macedonia is now convinced that its future lies with the Euro-Atlantic integration and therefore there is no alternative to the option of democratic and multicultural society which represents a hindrance to any temptation of ethnic and political radicalisation which leads into civil conflict.

The relations between the EU and the FYROM to date were based on the Stabilization and Association Agreement signed on 6 April 2001, which was eventually ratified by all EU members.

The FYROM applied for membership in 2003. The fact that it is still far from fully meeting the Copenhagen criteria will represent an obstacle for the beginning of negotiations, but not for becoming a candidate state.

At this point, the country's accession to the EU and other Western institutions advances adequately, which was confirmed by the welcome the country expressed to EU forces when they replaced NATO forces in the Union's first military action, by the signing of agreement on co-operation regarding issues from the scope of judiciary and internal affairs, its co-operation with the International Monetary Fund aimed at the continuation of economic reforms in the country, as well as the activities of the OSCE Mission to Skopje.

- **Albania.** It is the only one of the five countries of the Western Balkans that was not a part of the former Yugoslavia. It differs from other countries due to its ethnic, religious and historical features, many of which position it not only separately from the Southern Slavic countries but also opposite to them. Its demographic force and economic limitations evoked an inclination towards emigration within the Albanian people which created a great number of problems for their neighbours, especially for Serbia and the FRYOM. According to the census there are fifteen million Albanians, out of whom only three million live in Albania. From the remaining number, two million live in Kosovo, five million in Turkey and one million in the United States of America.

However, Albania has a clear European orientation which should not be overlooked when it comes to the suppression of constitutionally destabilizing elements of that country both in its territory and in the surrounding countries.

In the course of 2002, progress was achieved in the area of integration in the form of signing an agreement on regional co-operation and the fight against illegal immigration with several EU countries. Necessary and demanding reforms still need to be developed in the areas such as judiciary, fight against corruption, illegal trafficking, arms trafficking and suppression of money laundering.

The characteristics that these countries have in common can be summarized as follows:

- They were all potential candidates since the European Council in Feira, and after the European Council in Thessalonica they became real candidates.
- They have clear European orientation and are seeking accession to the EU as soon as possible.
- They enjoy public and parliamentary support.
- They are aware that, because of the highest economic and political development, Croatia will advance separately, ahead of the other countries. That has become evident already in October 2005.
- They consider that Croatia's accession contains positive elements, because it stimulates and pulls other countries forward.
- For the time being, there will be no big bang of all five countries, instead, they will be advancing as a "regatta", in compliance with the preparations of each one of them.
- They believe that none of them will be excluded from the accession process since it will not

be possible to accept the existence of black spots after the process has been completed.

- Until the approval of their candidacies and the start of negotiations, the process of stabilization and association needs to situate them in better conditions so that future negotiations would not be delayed excessively.

- After the European Council in Thessalonica and the Balkan Summit held in Porto Carras (in July 2003) their accession to Europe seems irreversible.

3. The European Council in Thessalonica

In June 2003, the Greek Presidency supported before the European Council three documents which propelled the Western Balkans' will for accession. One should take into consideration the contents of the three documents as they determine the basic instructions for the European future of the southern region. Their central ideas can be summarized as follows:

- Consolidation of peace, stability and democratic development in compliance with United Nations' resolutions, Dayton and Paris agreements and the Ohrid Conference on the Security and Development of Borders (22 and 23 May 2003), as well as support to the International Criminal Court.

- Advancement of the Western Balkans towards the EU within the enhanced process of stabilization and association, especially through the creation of a forum at the highest level between the EU and the Balkans, which would be meeting periodically.

- The fight against organized crime and co-operation on other issues from the scope of judiciary and internal affairs in relation to insufficiencies influencing the region in the area of illegal trafficking and illegal immigration.

- Promotion of economic development. In December 2003, the European Commission presented a plan for public investments in the territory of the Western Balkans which at the same time promote its trade with the EU.

- Reconciliation and co-operation in the region. It is important to facilitate the return of refugees and property and overcome discrimination in the labour market.

Finally, after the European Council in Thessalonica and the Summit, the process of the

Western Balkans' accession to the EU became irreversible. What is important now is to know how fast everything will develop. The negative outcome of referenda on the European Constitution in France and Netherlands created a pessimistic atmosphere in relation to new waves of enlargement. Perhaps in order to counteract that sentiment, the ministers decided to accept the beginning of negotiations with Turkey and Croatia at their meeting in Luxembourg in October 2005.

4. Advantages and insufficiencies of the sixth enlargement

The fifth enlargement, which the Union is still dealing with, imposes great expenses on the fifteen countries. There are clear doubts as to whether it is possible, without a permanent solution, to face the additional expenses which the integration of five new countries would bring.

As a consequence, and although the European Council in Thessalonica and the Balkan Summit reflected a consensus of twenty-five countries in favour of the five countries of the Western Balkans, one should explore the degree of enthusiasm which different member states individually dedicate to that process.

Advantages in favour of providing support to the integration of the Balkans are far more numerous, stronger and more specific. They can be summarized as follows:

- It is a notorious fact that the EU will not be complete as long as an important region as the Balkans has not joined it. Among other things, this will provide the territorial continuity with one of its member states from as early as 1981 (Greece) and with two future states (Romania and Bulgaria).
- The integration of the Balkans will stabilize the region characterized by a tendency towards divisions, constant wars and turmoil.
- The Balkan turbulences were not negative only for its five countries, but also for the entire Europe which has constantly needed to provide help to the region or request NATO and US assistance in accomplishing peace in the area. The European Union cannot allow the existence of an unstable region within its environment.
- Although few member states share Greece's enthusiasm over the Balkans, there are several of

them which did not leave Athens isolated in this case (Spain, Italy, France and Austria, primarily).

- Since it is evident that after the European Council in Thessalonica the countries of the Western Balkans will become EU members, many countries will want to find themselves among the first ones to support the group.

- After the fifth enlargement towards the north, the Balkans, together with Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey, will have a balancing effect on the sixth enlargement towards the south.

- The five candidates went through a stormy history, and the EU and NATO will supervise all countries from inside, particularly Albania, the country possessing potential for demographic destabilization.

- With regard to the former members of the Warsaw Pact, the fifth enlargement represented a correction of a badly written history which bound them together in a club they detested. To a certain extent this is the case with the Balkans as well, which suffered even when communism, softened by self-management or infatuated with a Chinese-Albanian alliance, was already behind it.

- There is no doubt that the Balkans geographically belongs in Europe, in spite of frequent ironic references to its folkloric European character, which reflects a tendency towards exclusiveness quite frequent among the initial member states of the EU, and applies also to many other regions outside Central Europe.

- In their political declarations, parliamentary discussions and public polls, these five countries display clear willingness to integrate.

- The integration of this area could alter a historical tendency which in the past centuries identified the Balkans with instability, violence, divisions and chaos.

The continuance of accession of a single country of the Balkan region, Croatia, should not represent an excessive difficulty for the EU. It is a country which geographically belongs in Central Europe, of medium population (4.5 million inhabitants) and with an economy which is more stable than economies of some countries that recently became members. Its main difficulties ensue from the recent war for independence that left scars which are gradually healing.

In spite of that, Croatia itself will be relatively easy to integrate. However, it is inconceivable that the once initiated process of expansion to the Balkans, with Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, not

to mention Greece, as full-fledged members, could be interrupted leaving other countries outside the EU.

In that case, the Union would undoubtedly face a more difficult chapter of integration, which already encompasses a very complex case of Turkey, in addition to the four remaining countries that will bring with themselves a substantial number of problems, which the EU – and currently also other international organizations such as the OSCE, UNHCR, UNDP, etc. – have to resolve in the shortest possible time in order to avoid the re-emergence of hate and resentment which would prevent reconciliation.

5. Reconstructed Europe

In conclusion, we could say that after the fifth enlargement the European reconstruction will go even further although it will still be incomplete. If the success of the European Union continues, it is likely that the three western countries which do not belong to it, as well as the micro-states, will find formulas for accession simultaneously with the completion of accession of the Balkan countries. Far more complicated will be the accession of countries of Eastern Europe to the EU, some of which are, like Belarus, Moldavia or countries of the Caucasus, far from the fulfilment of basic conditions for the membership in the Union.

A separate comment is needed in case of two countries: Turkey and Russia, two great states, European and Asian at the same time, of which the first one has been a candidate state as of 1999 and it began negotiations on *acquis communautaire*. There is no doubt that it will become an EU member in the forthcoming years in spite of many doubts which might arise due to its Ottoman and Islamic culture which, along with its civilization, has hardly anything in common with the European culture.

Something almost completely different can be said about Russia, a country which contributed to the creation of the cultural and scientific essence of Europe, but which could, due to its huge land area and population, present all kinds of difficulties at the moment of negotiations on specific chapters for its integration into the EU. Maybe the future EU adjustments will render possible for it to be integrated over a longer period of time should it express a wish to do so. Most probably, the great Russian state, provided it maintains its excellent relations with the EU,

will become a developed country towards which neighbouring countries will gravitate.

Nowadays, the EU has twenty five member states. Tomorrow it will have twenty nine. Who knows whether one day it will reach the number of forty states with more than thirty languages? At this point Europe is still in the process of reconstruction. We will be unified again, this time within the same club, with a common currency, foreign policy and common security, common institutions and rules of the game set in advance, with great cultural, social and, to say the least, in spite of the common market and the basic principle of solidarity, large economic differences.

Will this Europe with forty member states be stable? Will it bring prosperity and development to all of its member states? Will a Europe be reborn at different speeds or in concentric circles?

The answer is more than complicated, but if the political criteria are complied with throughout the entire continent and a minimum level of prosperity is established, it is legitimate to consider that a pluralistic and diverse Europe would be perfectly acceptable, precisely as diverse are the regions within every individual country. That is how it is going to be, especially if guarantees are provided for the respect of democratic rights of Europeans and continental peace, which was broken so many times in the course of the former century. ■

NOTES

¹ The approximate number of killed persons: 8 Slovenians (and 68 Slovenian soldiers serving in the JNA), 13,000 Croats, 14,000 Serbs and 100,000 Bosniaks. There is a total of 1,073 Croats and 650 Serbs among the missing persons.