

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD BY GUEST EDITOR

In June 2015 Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb, hosted international conference, with the support of the European Commission, Jean Monnet Programme of the European Union, titled “**Decade after the EU ‘big bang’ enlargement: a future perspectives of the enlargement process**”.

The big bang enlargement of the European Union, that saw 10 new member states (mostly from Central and Eastern Europe) accede into membership, occurred more than a decade ago. It was a political step of great importance, both for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as for the European Union of then 15, predominantly Western states. Such an important political event, was, of course analyzed extensively. Those analyses produced significant insights in the functioning of political processes both in the EU, as well within individual states, and the ways new people, their cultures, differing historical narratives, and societal expectations, influenced the supranational integrations.

Those insights might be important to understand the further enlargement of the EU. Enlargements yet to happen will follow in the footsteps of all the previous expansion waves, but will in some ways be idiosyncratic due to changing circumstances in the European Union as a whole, in specific member states, in candidate, and potential candidate countries, as well as in the international field at large. The European Union has never had more crises to deal with – from the so called migrants crisis, to the ongoing Eurozone crisis, and with it linked sovereign debt crisis of “periphery” countries (Greece, Spain, Portugal, Ireland), to the potential crisis caused by the UK’s “Brexit” referendum decision – hence EU’s institutions and actors have been forced to look inward and deal with their own problems. On the other hand, member states’ citizens and governments are contending with enlargement fatigue ever since 2004, without any sign of abating. Especially if we take into account the rise of populist political forces all over Europe, as well as complete overtake of some

national political systems by actors proselytizing the gospel of illiberal democracy and moderate populism. Candidate countries have also been dealing differently with waning membership protests. Some, like Turkey, gripped in post-coup purges of all who were critical of AKP and its leader R. T. Erdogan, are showing their muscles insisting the European Union needs Turkey more than the other way around. Other, like Serbia under SNS leadership of Aleksandar Vučić are nominally doubling down on the reform path, understanding that the EU needs a model actor who, at least on paper, are fulfilling all their obligations. Some other, like Iceland, have completely gave up on the road to full membership, while other, like Bosnia and Herzegovina are gripped with internal conflicts among hostile political elites which blocks almost all, including technical issues. What this shows us is that the enlargement process has never been as hard for candidate countries, and for the European Union, as it is now, and that future member states face tough and unknown challenges before stepping over the “European threshold”.

But this “known unknowns” in the words of former US Defense Secretary D. Rumsfeld, do still allow us to draw knowledge, basic assumptions, and answers from previous enlargement processes, especially those happened in 2004, 2007, and 2013. Therefore, the academic journal *Političke perspektive (Political Perspectives)*, whose editor-in-large, assistant professor Ana Matan, graciously invited me to guest edit this special issue is publishing a volume titled: **A DECADE AFTER THE EU 'BIG BANG' ENLARGEMENT: A FUTURE PERSPECTIVES OF THE ENLARGEMENT PROCESS.**

We invited academics – from master students, PhD students, and post-doctoral researchers, to long-time researchers, and tenured professors – to submit papers that focus on the link between political reforms in candidate countries and potential candidate countries, and the enlargement policy of the EU. We also welcomed papers that dealt with the influence of the enlargement process on the states of the Eastern partnership, as well as on any other European state that is influenced by the EU enlargement policy. The response was overwhelming. We have received more than 110 abstracts, and have had 24 presenters at our conference. From those, five papers have successfully passed the first round of double-blind peer reviews, and we present them here.

As will be obvious from the articles that follow this introduction, we have a plethora of differing views, with scholars from Croatia, Europe, and beyond. We have also received papers on many different policy aspects, all of them linked to the enlargement, but all of them looking at the enlargement process from different perspectives.

The contribution by Marijana Musladin from the University of Dubrovnik, deals with the Eastern Partnership, once an important foreign policy of the European Union, that has suffered greatly since the Russia's aggression on Georgia, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and Russia-supported war in eastern Ukraine. Musladin's paper, titled "The Future of the Eastern Partnership of the European Union" (written in Croatian), shows the inadequacy of that policy in tackling the problems and challenges countries to the European Union's east are dealing with. She points to the necessity of reframing the policy in the light of Russia-led crises (sticks), but also new economic integrations – The Eurasian Union – Russia is offering (carrot) in order to show the countries from Belarus and Ukraine, to Armenia and Kazakhstan, the need to stay in Russia's sphere of influence. The conclusion of the paper is that the European Union cannot, due to its current state, offer anything substantial, like membership, so the only possible solution is a major overhaul of both Eastern Partnership and European Neighborhood Policy.

Jan Muš, from Vistula University's Institute of International Relations, deals, in his article, with the problem of enlargement as a process of peripheralization. Paper titled "EU Enlargement as Process of Peripheralization", shows the failure of Western Balkan countries to take advantage of closer relationship with the European Union and advance both economically and socially. This revelation is even more visible when compared to one of the 2004 enlargement's success stories – Poland. Muš shows that the success story narrative hides a lot of problems, the most important one of which is that the failing liberal paradigm, that the European Union forced upon candidate countries during the process of enlargement, led to (re)peripheralization of the countries in the European east. Because of that, and having in mind the financial, sovereign, and Eurozone crises the European Union has gone through, the Polish case is not a great role model for the Western Balkan countries to emulate.

Simona Sobotovicova, a PhD candidate at the University of Basque Country and Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, and her coauthor Juan Ignacio Ugartemendia from the University of Basque Country, wrote an article titled "The Mobility of Nationals from Western Balkans within the European Union: New Challenges and Opportunities". They show the challenges of the European Union's in the area of freedom, security, and justice. The security breaks on freedom of movement of citizens of eastern member states, the migrant crisis, Brexit and terrorism showed in recent years the freedom of movement strained to its limit. Authors also show the Europeanization of migration policy, as well as its influence on migration from the Western Balkans countries. They correctly interpret the migration from the Western Balkans to the European Union, as

brain drain that puts a lot of pressure on political and social system of those countries.

Srđan Orlandić, from the University of Ljubljana, in his paper, titled “Predetermined Foreign Policy – Aligning National Policies of the Candidate Countries with the CFSP and CSDP: Case of Montenegro”, shows the obligations, successes and failures of candidate countries in aligning their national foreign policies with the European Union’s foreign, security and defense policies. With it, Orlandić shows how candidate countries, especially those considered “good students”, feel the need to reframe their national interests expressed through their foreign policies in order to strengthen their claims for the membership in the EU. This opens questions on what sovereignty means in this context, and how can a small country, like Montenegro, establish its foreign policy that may or may not go directly against local, regional, or global international actors (like Serbia in the case of Kosovo, or Russia).

Finally, paper by Namchoke Sasikornwong, project assistant working at the Royal Thai Embassy to Belgium and Luxembourg, titled “EC/EU Membership and Austria, Sweden and Finland: Neutrality Redefined with European Norms?”, points to an interesting topic of neutrality when countries become members of the European Union. Drawing conclusions from the 1995 “neutrality” enlargement, which saw the European Union expand to include Austria, Finland, and Sweden, Sasikornwong shows the reconceptualization of the concept of neutrality, and linked to the founding norms of the European Union – peace, liberty, democracy, etc. Article concludes by showing that neutrality is not only linked to security of a neutral state, but also is cultural in its nature, positioning a neutral country in a family which shares similar culture. With that in mind the membership of Austria, Finland, and Sweden in the European Union is “natural”, and has implication in formulating and steering European policies, like CFSP.

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