

DOES EUROPEANISATION EQUAL DEMOCRATISATION?

APPLICATION OF THE POLITICAL CONDITIONALITY PRINCIPLE IN THE CASE OF THE MACEDONIAN SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Western Balkan region has been ravaged by the forces of balkanization for more than a decade since the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation. Although geographically belonging to Europe, the Balkans has been labeled as the 'black hole' of the continent and often treated as the 'constitutive other' to Europe¹ which has remained outside of the Europeanisation projects of the EU. However, more than a decade after the dismantling of Yugoslavia, the present image of the region gives rise to impressions of relative stability and joint commitment of the Western Balkans countries towards the future EU membership. The EU approach, on the other hand, has transformed from a failing foreign policy of conflict prevention towards a strategy for Europeanisation of the region through the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) designed for the 5 countries in the area (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro). The purpose of the SAP process is to achieve stabilization in the region, democratization of these countries as well as to equip them for accession and future membership in the EU.

The case study of Macedonia is used to examine the impact of Europeanisation process and its interrelation with the democratization endeavors of the country. The analysis focuses on the system of governance through political conditionality of the Republic of Macedonia. The paper advances the view that Europeanisation through political conditionality is an integral but not all encompassing factor for fostering genuine democratization as exemplified by the Macedonian system of governance. The paper also argues that a modification of the Europeanisation approach that takes the specificity of the context and the *stateness* issue into account is needed in order to build Macedonia into a future democratic member state of the EU. The case study of Macedonia provides impetus for the Europeanisation process as applied in the countries of the SAP framework and contributes academic debate on democratization in view of the process of European integration.

II. EUROPEANISATION FRAMEWORK OF THE MACEDONIAN SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE: CRITICAL OVERVIEW

The EU approach in the Western Balkans post communist era has had two dimensions. On the one hand, the EU has affected the developmental path of these countries through its role as '*an active player*' in the mediation and conflict resolution in

¹ Maria Todorova, Imagining the Balkans Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 15.

the region.² Thus, the EU acted as a soft arbiter facilitating the gradual move towards association with the EU of the countries of the region.

The other dimension of the EU approach in the region - ‘EU as a framework’ – is a long-term perspective because it offers a possibility of participation in decision-making for these countries and equips them with models of governance and policy options.³ The EU approach has evolved into a stronger commitment towards these countries by offering them a more tangible prospect (e.g. prospect of membership) for the future.

In the case of Macedonia, Europeanisation processes have been introduced through the Stabilization and Association framework for the countries of the Western Balkans. Albeit the process under the SAP, the EU approach towards the Republic of Macedonia has some peculiarities. It is important to note, however, that the relations between the two parties, Macedonia and the EU, have not been of an antagonistic nature due to Macedonia’s commitment towards the maintenance of peace and cohabitation and its firm orientation towards European Integration as well as the cooperative approach of the EU. Indeed, the political perspectives for development of the Republic of Macedonia have been completely compatible to the models of governance offered by the EU since the outset of its independence despite the problems that have been encountered.⁴

The EU has become a normative and cognitive frame⁵ for the aspirant countries that have undertaken Europeanisation. Europeanisation is the overall frame leading towards external transfer of EU rules and their subsequent adoption by non-member states⁶ with the aim of obtaining eventual membership. In the context of “aspiring candidates in transition, Europeanisation can be understood as the conceptual framework that links integration and transition” due to the simultaneity of these processes as well as their overlap.⁷ Thus, the EU can be perceived as “a reference model for modernization of the political, economic and social systems) of the aspiring candidates in transition.”⁸

Europeanisation extends as a process attempting to tackle and change the ‘ways of doing things’⁹ in the aspirant countries. The two main mechanisms utilized in the process are the prospect of EU membership and conditionality, as the main tool. In the Europeanisation process of these countries, conditionality encompasses political/democratic and economic requirements and the adoption and implementation of the EU *acquis*.

Political conditionality is indented in the Stabilisation and Association Process and mainly results from the Copenhagen criteria and additional country specific requirements. The SAP is envisaged as a framework designed to accompany the countries from the Western Balkans until accession based on the SAAs and CARDS¹⁰, which is

² Gergana Noutcheva., N. Tocci, *et al.* “Europeanization and Secessionist Conflicts: Concepts and Theories.” Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe. 2004, 8. Available at: <<http://www.ecmi.de/jemie/indexauthor.html>>

³ *op.cit.* p, 8.

⁴ Sasho Stefkov, Interview with the authors, April 2005.

⁵ C. M. Radaelli. “Europeanisation,” *op.cit.* p, 26.

⁶ Frank Schimmelfennig, & Ulrich Sedelmeier “Governance by Conditionality.” *op.cit.* p, 661.

⁷ *op.cit.* p,662.

⁸ Agh 1998, cited in Leeda Demetropoulou. “Europe and the Balkans: Membership Aspiration, EU Involvement and Europeanization Capacity in South Eastern Europe.” South East European Politics Vol. 3. No.2-3. 2002, 89.

⁹ Ioakimides 1998, cited in L. Demetropoulou. “Europe and the Balkans: Membership Aspiration, EU Involvement and Europeanization Capacity in South Eastern Europe.” South East European Politics Vol. 3. No.2-3. 2002, 89.

¹⁰ *op.cit.* p, 3.

¹⁰ Ettiene De Perrier, Interview with this author, April 2005.

now evolving in the pre-accession process and the introduction of the new Instrument of pre-accession assistance IPA.

In the case of Macedonia, additional conditions are introduced and include: successful implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, Cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the return of refugees and Regional Cooperation, as incorporated in the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The main political conditionality as a function of the Europeanisation process in Macedonia includes democracy and rule of law as well as human rights and protection of minorities as promulgated at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993. Furthermore, the signature of the European Partnerships on bilateral basis with the SAP countries has strengthened the commitment of both sides to work for accession towards full membership as opposed to the SAA where the commitment of the sides was asymmetrical in the sense that the EU was generally monitoring the process.¹¹

II. 1 ANALYSIS OF EUROPEANISATION THROUGH POLITICAL CONDITIONALITY IN MACEDONIA

o Copenhagen Political Criteria: Democracy and Rule of Law

The Democracy and Rule of Law criteria require a short overview of Macedonia's system of governance, in terms of both structure and agents, in order to assess its impact on domestic change. Democracy and the Rule of Law in the Copenhagen criteria are described to include the holding of fair and free multiparty parliamentary elections¹² and "the functioning of the legislature, the functioning of the judiciary, the functioning of the executive and anti-corruption measures."¹³ The assessment of the functioning of each of these domains constituting the Macedonian system of governance, in view of the process of Europeanisation, is provided through the Annual Reports from the Commission, on the EU side, and through the compatible National strategy, Progress Reports, Action Plans and the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) as adopted by the Macedonian government.

A key issue contributing the democratic functioning of states are elections which are "free and fair and are in line with international standards and commitment on democra[cy]."¹⁴ In the case of Macedonia, elections have been evaluated as being generally free despite some problems such as proxy voting, multiple voting, cases of intimidation inside polling stations, etc.¹⁵ Moreover, the consecutive Commission Report has assessed the parliamentary elections on 15 September 2002 bringing the new coalition with a turnout of 74% and the Census operations in November confirmed the

¹¹ Vladimir Gligorov. "European Partnership with the Balkans," *European Balkan Observer*, Vol. 2, No. 1. 2004, 8.

¹² Hoffmeister 2002, cited in D. Kochenov., "Behind the Copenhagen façade. The meaning and structure of the Copenhagen political criterion of democracy and the rule of law." *EIOP* Vol. 8. No. 10. 2004. Available from: <<http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2004-010a.htm>>, p, 13.

¹³ D. Kochenov., "Behind the Copenhagen façade" *op. cit.* p, 13-14.

¹⁴ *op. cit.* p 14.

¹⁵ Commission of the European Communities. *Commission Staff Working Paper FYROM Stabilisation and Association Report 2002*. 2002. Available from: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/sap/rep1/cr_fyrom.pdf>, p, 5.

broad trend towards greater stability and were praised by the international community.¹⁶ In addition, these elections were manifestly estimated as being in large compliance with international standards albeit some recurrent problems.

The latest parliamentary elections that were conducted on July 5, 2006 and the overall electoral process was observed by OSCE-ODIHR as “conducted generally in a peaceful and orderly manner and largely in accordance with international standards,” albeit the “significant irregularities” that took place on that day.¹⁷ Hence, the Commission finds that the conduct of elections is moving towards a general democratic direction, in the Macedonian context, while recognizing the persistent problems. It has to be noted here though, that the increased monitoring by external actors (e.g the EU) has an impact on the democratization of elections as seen through the “significant efforts to improve the electoral system [...], the comprehensive reform of the electoral code [...] and by ensuring participation of civil servants in electoral administration.”¹⁸

Furthermore, external monitoring has reflected positively upon political behavior in Macedonia. The anchoring of elections as part of the democracy political criterion and their extensive external observance requires changes in practice and political behavior in view of the requirement for institutionalization of international democratic standards and their incorporation in the domestic system of governance.

The above stated brings the issue of political culture of parties into consideration. Bzezinski notes that apart from the conduct of democratic elections as an integral feature of democratic states, democratic governance is a requirement in these countries, as well.¹⁹ The absence of democratic political culture resulting in the absence of genuine democratic behavior of political parties appears as a major impediment to the democratic governance and the rule of law in Macedonia. Indeed, the ethnicisation of political parties coupled with the non-democratic political legacies not only affect the European Integration endeavors in the country but encumber domestic democratic changes and could bring about polarization of inter-ethnic relations. Moreover, another persistent cleavage is the absences of constructive dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition as well as the party in power and the President of the country that damaged and blocked the acceleration processed for almost one year in 2006-2007. Following the last Progress Report issued by the Commission issued in 2007 and the pending invitation for NATO membership, the political dialogue has improved but needs to be maintained by all political elites.

At present, Europeanisation serves as a uniting factor across political lines regardless of political background or ethnic belonging as evident from their public discourses which accounts for the positive impact of this process and contributes the acceleration of European Integration as the strategic aim for the country’s future prosperity. Hence, Europeanisation triggers domestic changes of actors since the process in itself carries conditions that need to be fulfilled in order to obtain the rewards. Although no strict conditions are imposed by the EU on the political parties, the

¹⁶ Commission of the European Communities. *Commission Staff Working Paper FYROM Stabilisation and Association Report 2003*. 2003. Available from: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/sap/rep2/cr_fyrom.pdf>, 2.

¹⁷ Commission of the European Communities *Communication From the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: The Western Balkans and European Integration*, 2006a. Available from: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/2006.pdf> , p.6.

¹⁸ Commission of the European Communities *op.cit.* p. 5-6.

¹⁹ Zarko Trajanoski. “Leadership In Crisis: Macedonian Situation.” *Political Thought* Vol. 2, No. 6. 2004. p. 82.

enlargement process demonstrates the trend of political parties trying to derive legitimacy as being the carriers of the entire endeavor.²⁰

Respectively, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia has outlined the need of advancing of internal democratization of political parties, the adoption of regulations for their financing, and the incorporation of control mechanisms as important tasks in the National Strategy.²¹ Thereof, the increased external monitoring of the 'ways of doing things' on the domestic scene through the process of Europeanisation translates in transformations of the behavior of political parties.

A key feature for the functioning of the system of governance is the inter-relation and coordination of actions among the executive, legislative and judiciary in order to "find solutions to bring the rule of law into line with European standards."²² In Macedonia, the system of governance is divided among the three branches and it is in principle based on the coordination among the same. However, in reality, the system of governance has been executive centered although efforts for fight against organized crime and corruption and improvement of the independence and efficiency of the judiciary as well as increased transparency are carried out in the past period.

With regard to the role and functioning of the Parliament, several features are needed in order to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria. Kochenov extrapolates the following features as necessary for a Parliament to meet the criteria: satisfactory operation, to have powers which are respected, to have an opposition that participates in activities, as well as to allow representation of minorities.²³ Although the Parliament was primarily assessed as functioning satisfactorily, "the tension between the majority and the opposition" and "the essential [need] for the government to seek consensus on a number of critical reforms, due to the specificities of the country's political model, and in the interest of political stability"²⁴ are recognized as incumbent to the proper functioning of this institution. The other important role of the Parliament in the Europeanisation process that has been underway is its capacity to contribute the Stabilisation and Association Process through the regular discussions "in the Committee on EU Affairs based on reports by the Deputy Prime Minister, who is in charge of EU integration."²⁵ As such, the Europeanisation process has acted as a vehicle for the reforms in the Parliament that need to be further improved. Most recently, a National Council for European integration was formed as a body attached to the Parliament, chaired by the leader of the opposition – SDSM which will have a say in the overall policy-making and advancement of the European integration process of the country. Political democratic behavior of MPs in the Parliament needs to be further fostered and exercised.

The EU requirements regarding the institutional system in view of the democratic criterion postulate the balance between the executive and legislature as well as smooth coordination between the two branches as important. Hence, institution building, as an

²⁰ Noutcheva 2005, Interview with the authors, April 2005.

²¹ Government of the Republic of Macedonia. *National Strategy for the European Integration of the Republic of Macedonia: Executive Summary*, Skopje, The Republic of Macedonia. 2004a. Available from: <www.sei.gov.mk>. p. 33-34.

²² Commission of the European Communities. *Commission Staff Working Paper FYROM Stabilisation and Association Report 2004*. 2004a. Available from:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/sap/rep3/cr_fyrom.pdf>. p,9.

²³ D. Kochenov., "Behind the Copenhagen façade" *op. cit.* p, 13-14

²⁴ Commission of the European Communities 2006. *op.cit.* p, 6-7.

²⁵ Commission of the European Communities 2006. *op.cit.* 7

aspect of the democratic criterion and as an ability to adopt and manage the *acquis*, is the most challenging area where domestic reform needs to be undertaken. In addition, building of institutions in terms of administrative and judicial capacity are crucial areas stemming from the Europeanisation agenda that are necessary to meet the democracy criterion.

Europeanisation as incorporating the institution building aspect has triggered significant reforms and restructuring in both public administration and the judiciary. The public administration in Macedonia has a communist legacy of a rather centralized system with the absence of democratic tradition and standards stemming from the former Yugoslav federation.²⁶ Nevertheless, the Yugoslav administration has been seen as having an impartial tradition even under communist rule.²⁷ Yet, the building of administrative capacity remains a great challenge for the post-communist countries such as Macedonia in particular. The Stabilisation and Association requirements have brought about public administration reform as an indispensable priority that will horizontally anchor all sectoral reforms in the process of European Integration while being an essential factor for their success.²⁸ Whilst the progress made in implementing the reform on PA, “mechanisms to increase professionalism and accountability and guarantee independence and political neutrality need to be fully implemented”²⁹ coupled with introduction of a merit system and improvement of salaries of public administration.

Likewise, the establishment of equilibrium between the administrative and political components of government and the creation of a ‘political zone’ between politics and administration³⁰ are of crucial importance for the realization of the requirements not only in PAR but also in the democracy and rule of law criterion on the whole. It is important to avoid institutionalization of European norms through Europeanisation by conditionality in a case where major political actors are disunited around the new institution, “so that the new rules have the chance to endure without being immediately contested” in the EU enlargement context.³¹

The judicial system is another segment of Macedonia’s system of governance where an overarching reform needs to be undertaken in order to meet the Copenhagen political criteria as well as achieve a system of independent and efficient judiciary. The reforms in this area demonstrate effective implementation and progress towards putting the necessary legal framework into place in line with EU standards. Nonetheless, the ‘maintenance of the momentum’ and the requirement of a ‘broad political consensus’ are mentioned as essential for the future progress of the reform processes in the 2006 Report.³² Accordingly, Europeanisation again acts as the driving force towards internal reforms although as Savo Klimovski, a legal expert and Professor of Law, notes “the

²⁶ Sevic Z. & Rabrenovic A. “The Civil Service of Yugoslavia: Tradition vs. Transition,” edited by Verheijen, T. Civil Service Systems in Central and Eastern Europe. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. 1999. p. 47.

²⁷ Tony Verheijen & Rabrenovic A. „The evolution of Politico-Administrative relations in Post-communist states: Main Directions,” edited by Verheijen Tony. Who Rules – Politico-administrative Relations NISPAcee Bratislava. 2003, p. 418.

²⁸ Government of the Republic of Macedonia 2004a, *op.cit.* p. 227.

²⁹ Commission of the European Communities 2006. *op.cit.* p. 8

³⁰ Tony Verheijen & Rabrenovic A. „The evolution of Politico-Administrative relations in Post-communist states,” *op.cit.* p. 424.

³¹ Anotaneta Dimitrova. “Enlargement, Institution-Building and the EU’s Administrative Capacity Requirement.” West European Politics Vol. 25. No. 4. 2002, 176.

³² Commission of the European Communities 2006. *op.cit.* p. 8

independence of the judiciary has been a necessary condition for the structural reforms” in Macedonia.³³ Moreover, Europeanisation through political conditionality and the prospect of membership has mobilized crucial reforms in the third branch of the governance system. However, major challenges of monitoring of implementation of legislation as well as maintaining the commitment for an effective fight against organized crime and corruption remain imperative.

The analysis of the aspects of the Macedonian system of governance demonstrates that Europeanisation has geared substantial reforms towards the fulfillment of the democracy criterion as a crucial segment of the Copenhagen political criteria. With regard to the rule of law aspect, the Commission has identified progress in the judiciary whose operation will “have to be demonstrated by a sustained track record.”³⁴ Concurrently, measures (e.g. anti-corruption, etc.) have been taken or envisaged by the Macedonian government in the documents such as the National Programme for the Adoption of the *acquis* which sets the short and medium term measures to be undertaken regarding the combating of these problems and acceleration the country’s road towards Europe. Nonetheless, the domestic endeavors towards achieving results need further commitment and results. The 2007 Progress Report did not result with a recommendation for starting accession negotiation with the Republic of Macedonia, which geared up internal political forces to resume reform process and further the process. On the other hand, the rather reserved EU discourse towards Macedonia in the past year has also changed recently and currently translates into a set of benchmarks provided to Macedonia on whose completion the positive avis for starting negotiations will depend in the 2008 Progress Report.

Evidently, Europeanisation through conditionality acts as a process generating domestic reforms in terms of both structure and agency towards the creation of a democratic state governed by the rule of law in Macedonia. Yet, despite the obvious positive impact of the Europeanisation framework, deficiencies can still be spotted.

IV. EUROPEANISATION IN LIGHT OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE SAP COUNTRIES: WHAT FUTURE FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS?

III. 1 DOES EUROPEANISATION EQUAL DEMOCRATIZATION?

The European Union has evolved and is considered as a *sui generis* system of governance that has advanced a unique way of promoting democracy through integration in the last decade.³⁵ According to Noutcheva and Emerson, the EU has become a gravity democratic model resulting from its “reputational quality and attractiveness of that democracy, its geographic and cultural-historical proximity, and its openness to the periphery” thus attracting third states to converge to the same.³⁶ This author advances the

³³ Duvnjak, Gordana. “Elections in a Macedonian Way.” *Utrinski Vesnik* March 15, 2005. 2005. Available from: <<http://www.utrinskivesnik.com.mk/>>

³⁴ Commission of the European Communities 2006. *op.cit.* p. 11

³⁵ Antoaneta Dimitrova & Geoffrey Pridham, “International Actors and Democracy Promotion in Central and Eastern Europe: The Integration Model and Its Limits.” *Democratization* Vol. 11. No.5. 2004, 94.

³⁶ Noutcheva G. & Emerson M. “Europeanisation as a Gravity Model of Democratization.” *CEPS Working Document*. No. 214. 2004. Available at: <http://shop.ceps.be/BooksList.php?category_id=5&>, p. 2.

argument that the approximation of the Macedonia to the EU framework through Europeanisation with political conditionality is a process that positively impacts the democratization but it is not without problems which stem from the formal application of democratization endeavors. This argument could be extended to the countries of the SAP process.

IV. 2 WEAKNESSES AND PROBLEMS OF THE EUROPEANISATION FRAMEWORK

- GENERAL CRITICISM ON THE EUROPEANISATION APPROACH

One can pinpoint several drawbacks stemming from the EU approach applied as the democratization model in the Eastern enlargement context. Grabbe identifies two major intervening variables specific to the process of Europeanisation: “one is the *asymmetry* of the relationship with the European Union, and the other is the *uncertainty* built into the accession process.”³⁷ The asymmetric relationship results from the inability of the countries that are appropriating and institutionalizing the EU models to influence the Europeanisation process and due to the advantaged position of the EU that allows it “to set the rules of the game in the accession conditionality.”³⁸ The uncertainty variable, as related to the SAP states, refers to the insufficient firmness of the EU commitment towards future enlargement to include these countries.

The *commitment* of the EU currently envisaged as a ‘prospect for membership’ needs to be strengthened³⁹ and a new “visionary strategy that will bring the region steadily onto the enlargement track”⁴⁰ should be formulated in order to avoid non compliance by domestic actors since the end result of the entire process of Europeanisation is insecure.

The *non negotiable nature of the political conditionality* exerted by the EU upon the aspirant countries accounts for a little possibility or absence for domestic actors “to exercise their veto.”⁴¹ A constituting particle of this weakness of the EU enlargement approach is related to the *technocratic feature* of the overall approach. The manner through which the EU operationalizes democracy is mostly focused on institutional structures.⁴² Krastev puts forward the argument that the exported models of democratization, such as the one of the EU, have “a strong dash of technocratic thinking”⁴³ when evaluating “any new democracy mainly on the basis of its level of institutionalization.”⁴⁴ Alongside, Carothers advances the view that “the programs that democracy promoters have directed at governance have tended to be minor technocratic

³⁷ Heather Grabbe, “Europeanization Goes East: Power and Uncertainty in the EU Accession Process.” in: K. Featherstone & C. M. Radaelli, eds. *The Politics of Europeanization*. (Oxford : Oxford University Press). 2002, 13.

³⁸ *op. cit.* p. 13.

³⁹ Anastasakis & Bechev *op. cit.* p.5; Demetropoulou *op. cit.* p. 12; Knaus, G. & Cox, M. “Building Democracy After Conflict: The ‘Helsinki Moment’ in Southeastern Europe.” *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 16. No.1. 2005, 3; Jacques Rupnik. “Eastern Europe: The International Context.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 11. No. 2. 2000, 29.

⁴⁰ Anastasakis & Bechev. *op. cit.* p.5

⁴¹ Anotaneta Dimitrova. “Enlargement, Institution-Building,” *op. cit.* p.172

⁴² Noutcheva 2005, Interview with the authors, April 2005.

⁴³ Ivan Krastev. “The Balkans: Democracy Without Choices.” *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 13. No. 3. 2002, 44.

⁴⁴ *op. cit.* p. 44.

efforts, such as training ministerial staff or aiding cabinet offices, rather than major efforts at bolstering state capacity.”⁴⁵

One of the problems that can be deduced from the technocratic approach is that the EU puts emphasis on *efficiency rather than legitimacy* thus contradicting the democratization efforts included in the process.⁴⁶ A problematic outcome of such an approach results from the presumption that the EU can account for its own *democratic deficit* when the aspirant countries become members of the EU.⁴⁷ The danger is that only the top layer of state officials will become ‘Europeanized’ while the prospects for the emergence of a ‘pan European’ demos will be reduced thus exacerbating the democratic deficit within the enlarged Union.⁴⁸

This argument is reinforced through the way in which this process affects the system of governance in the aspirant states. Grabbe, Dimitrova and Pridham all recognize the existence of an ‘*executive-bias*’ through the privileging of the executive over the legislature and the judiciary in the process of Europeanisation.⁴⁹

These inherent weaknesses are applicable to Macedonia and the countries of the SAP framework.

○ **Europeanisation Deficiencies in the SAP Context –case study of Macedonia**

When assessing Europeanisation through political conditionality in the Western Balkans, a major shortfall in the EU approach comes from the lack of consideration of contextual factors particularly related to the issue of state weakness as a general characteristic of the SAP countries.

The historical legacies of the Balkans, combined with the post communist political, economic and social issues in the countries of the region are considered as ‘confining conditions’ that are of importance and that have impact upon the democratization processes of these states.⁵⁰

The democratization efforts in the early transitional period translated into nation and state building projects which have been counterproductive for the developmental path of the Western Balkans. Following the relative post-conflict stabilization of the Western Balkans and the continuation of democratic efforts - *the weakness of the states*⁵¹ - related to the multifaceted political, economic and social problems as well as to sovereignty concerns is stipulated as the principal problem in the Balkans.

Krastev identifies state weakness as a general problem in the Balkan discourse encompassing problems ranging from the unintended side effects of reforms, to the weak capabilities of these states in delivering democratic procedures, and the domination of ruling elites that have ‘captured’ the state for their own particular interests.⁵² Thus, an

⁴⁵ Thomas Carothers. “The End of the Transition Paradigm.” *Journal of Democracy*. Vol.13. No.1. 2002, 17.

⁴⁶ Heather Grabbe, “Europeanization Goes East: *op. cit.* p. 19.

⁴⁷ *op. cit.* p. 18.

⁴⁸ Grabbe 2001:1029

⁴⁹ Grabbe 2001:1016; Dimitrova & Pridham 2004:108

⁵⁰ Pridham, Geoffrey. “Democratization in the Balkan countries.” in Geoffrey Pridham & T. Gallagher, eds. *Experimenting with Democracy: Regime Change in the Balkans*. (London and New York: Routledge.) 2000, 11; L. Demetropoulou. “Europe and the Balkans” *op.cit.* p. 90.

⁵¹ Ivan Krastev. “The Balkans: Democracy Without Choices.” *op. cit.* p. 39.

⁵² *op. cit.* p. 50.

externally induced model that disregards these contextual factors and that does not attempt to address the issue of state weakness as part of its Europeanisation framework in the SAP context, is likely to have problematic implications in the long term.

In relation to the specific case of Macedonia, it also remains questionable why did the EU refrain from using conditionality to pressure Macedonian governments into democratic reforms to improve minority rights since Macedonia was open to Western conditional assistance since the early 1990s which could have accounted for avoiding of the 2001 crisis.⁵³ Nevertheless, the EU active role in the mediation of conflicts in its Balkan backyard is regarded as significant and problematic in terms of its effectiveness, as it was previously outlined.

An additional strand of criticism on the Europeanisation framework in Macedonia and subsequently the SAP countries evolves from the *ambiguity* in combining the regional approach with the differentiation based on 'own merit' principle for individual country assessment by the EU. On the one hand, the *regional cooperation* among the SAP countries presently constitutes an integral part of their conditionality as introduced with the 1997 Regional Approach in order to achieve stability in the region. Conversely, a strong emphasis is placed on the '*own merit*' *evaluation principle* as the mechanism of differentiating among frontrunners as opposed to the laggards.⁵⁴ This combination of the two mechanisms as part of the EU conditionality in the Western Balkans is perceived as rather contradictory because it is insufficiently clear which tool does the EU prefer⁵⁵ in addition to regarding the two tools as accounting for the inefficiency of the SAP in the Western Balkans.⁵⁶

Ergo, *a revision of the EU approach* is necessary in order to better accommodate and better equip the future member countries to deal with adaptation pressures as well as to account for genuine democratization. Simultaneously, the importance of domestic political forces and the need for further institutionalization of democratic values in the behavior of political actors remains pivotal.

Implications of Europeanisation as a mode of democratization and recommendations

The transitional development of the Republic of Macedonia is dominated by the Europeanisation paradigm with the aim of achieving future membership in the EU subject to fulfillment of the designated Copenhagen criteria and additional conditions. The instruments employed by the EU including both financial support and institution and capacity building impact democratization efforts in the country. Albeit the voluntaristic *opt-in* of the Republic of Macedonia in the SAP, the current framework does not fall short of deficiencies centered on formal instead of substantive democratization.

In the Macedonian context, the Europeanisation framework falls short of sufficient context consideration and issues such as state weakness, socio-economic difficulties, corruption and organized crime. The signing of the Ohrid Framework agreement mediated by the EU whose successful implementation constitutes one of the core political criteria on the basis of which progress of the Republic of Macedonia is viewed as "resulting more from externally imposed

⁵³ M. A. Vachudova. "Strategies for Democratization and European Integration of the Balkans." in Marise Cremona, ed. *The Enlargement of the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 2003, 150.

⁵⁴ O. Anastasakis & D. Belchev. „EU Conditionality in South East Europe“ *op.cit.* p. 8.

⁵⁵ *op.cit.* p. 10.

⁵⁶ International Commission on the Balkans. *The Balkans in Europe's Future. Report of the International Commission on the Balkans*. 2005, 14. Available at: <<http://www.balkan-commission.org/>> p. 14.

conditionalities than from domestic dialogue among different interest within a given country.”⁵⁷ More importantly, besides having de facto adverse impact, “external conditionalities worsen the relationship between politicians and public [because] governments get elected by making love to the electorate, but they are married to the international donor.”⁵⁸ Additionally, externally imposed conditionalities and deficiencies in the EU strategy are sometimes used as justification by domestic political actors for the failure or blockage of certain policies/measures and their underperformances towards the electorate.

Therefore, an adaptation of the EU approach to take into account the Macedonian context is necessary. The following *recommendations* could be considered:

- A stronger commitment coupled with a secure prospect of future membership for the SAP countries and Macedonia
- Greater flexibility⁵⁹ in the Europeanisation through conditionality approach directed towards address of contextual factors (e.g. weak states issue, underlying socio-economic problems)
- Strengthening of the relationship between the EU and domestic political actors and diminishing its asymmetric component
- Reconciliation of the ambiguity in the EU approach evolving from the coupling of regional cooperation with the ‘own merit’ principle
- Policy design that fosters the specific pluralist nature that should be cultivated because it is in the diversity and multiplicity of opinions that most viable solutions are achieved
- Assisting a substantive process of democratization that will have a *double dimension*: combination of both bottom up (domestic) and top down (EU) inputs⁶⁰ and an amalgamation of ‘grass roots’ (civil society) and ‘high level’ (political elites) critical initiatives.⁶¹

In terms of substantial steps that need to be taken on the part of the EU with regard to Macedonia (as well as the Western Balkans) to manifestly strengthen the commitment for enlargement several propositions can be forwarded. Most importantly, **liberalization of the visa regime** for Macedonia based on the ‘own-merit’ principle will strengthen the commitment towards enlargement and validate conditionality requirements for Macedonia in particular which fulfills the necessary criteria through the introduction of the biometric passports, the signing of readmission agreements, the reforms in the IBM system. Moreover, contradictory or ambiguous announcements by the EU (clear commitment to opening of visa liberalization dialogue with Serbia as opposed to unclear prospect for Macedonia) could also impede regional cooperation due to the asymmetrical application of conditionality principle towards the countries in the SAP. In such a way, the EU will reiterate its commitment towards Macedonia and the countries of the region and will generate greater popular faith in the overall Europeanisation project.

Hence, rethinking of the EU approach in Macedonia *combined with sincere* domestic effort for democratic consolidation can account for a genuine societal change and trigger more substantive democratization which will concomitantly bring about the incorporation of the country into the European Union in the near future.

⁵⁷ Krastev, 45.

⁵⁸ Krastev, 51.

⁵⁹ Demetropoulou 2002; Mungui-Pippidi 2004

⁶⁰ Dimitrova & Pridham, 93

⁶¹ Youngs, 56.

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