

## ENLARGEMENT OF THE EU TOWARDS WESTERN BALKANS AS A SOLUTION FOR SECURITY IN THE REGION

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### 1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EU AND THE WESTERN BALKANS

After the decay of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the early 90s the Western Balkans was considered as a region burdened with conflict, economic collapse, political repression and human rights violations. While the European Union (EU) was providing economic and humanitarian aid to the countries of the Western Balkans from 1990, its attention was more orientated towards the internal deepening and enlargement of Central and Eastern Europe. Because of the increased number of refugees from the Western Balkans the priority for EU became also the inclusion of South-Eastern Europe in the European integration.

“Under the German presidency of 1999 the EU announced a plan to draft a bigger regional Pact for stability in South-Eastern Europe. The pact included financial aid for the countries of this region and was adopted the same year”.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the pact was the long-term stability of the region, which required from the EU an assurance of gradual development and the possibility of accession to the Union for the Western Balkan states.

At present the candidate countries for accession to the EU are Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), alongside Turkey. The negotiations for Croatia began in 2005. However, because of the unresolved border issue between Slovenia and Croatia, several chapters are currently blocked for Croatia. This could be one of the reasons for the resignation of Ivo Sanader as Croatian Prime Minister, leading to even greater instability in the country.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, FYROM has been a candidate country since 2005, but negotiations have not even begun. The name Republic of Macedonia is not recognized by Greece, which is the core issue between the two countries. Another issue of instability in Macedonia is ethnic tension between the Albanian minority and ethnic Macedonians, which in the early 1990s was developed into a theory about the spark for a new Balkan war.<sup>3</sup> The civil war did in fact erupt but lasted only a few months before the cessation of hostilities with the signature of the Ohrid Agreement in 2001.

In addition, potential candidate countries in the Western Balkans are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo under UN Security Resolution 1244.<sup>4</sup> Difficulties with these

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<sup>1</sup> Baun, J. Michael. *A Wider Europe. The Process and Politics of European Union Enlargement* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2000) 231.

<sup>2</sup> Kajzer, Rok. *Ivo Sanader odstopil, opozicija zahteva volitve.* ( Delo, 2009) 1.

<sup>3</sup> Shea, John. *Macedonia and Greece. The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation.* (McFarland, 1997)314.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, enlargement: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/potential-candidate-countries/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/potential-candidate-countries/index_en.htm) (2. July 2009).

countries reside mostly in ethnic divisions, which are the potential source of conflict. Bosnia remains an ethnically divided country with Bosniak (Muslim) plurality, and a Serb and Croat population. Confrontations between Serbs and Albanians also occur from time to time in the Serb controlled north of the Republic of Kosovo, while five EU states still do not recognize Kosovo.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the EU cooperates with the countries of the Western Balkans within the framework of stabilisation and association agreements, which means a treaty relationship between the EU and individual countries in the Western Balkans. At the centre of stabilisation and association agreements is respect for basic democratic principles and the foundations of a unified EU market. The economies of the region and EU are becoming more connected with the introduction of free trade areas with the Union and with reforms, of which the goal is acceptance of EU standards.<sup>6</sup> EU enlargement policy is based on standards indicated in Article 49 of the Treaty of the European Union, which states that: » *Any European State which respects the principles set out in Article 6(1)<sup>7</sup> may apply to become a member of the Union. It 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. The conditions of admission and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the Union is founded, which such admission entails, shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the applicant State. This agreement shall be submitted for ratification by all the contracting States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements* «.<sup>8</sup> Due to past enlargement of the EU, the criteria over the years have become stricter for candidate states. Nowadays, the applicant country for EU membership must, in addition to fulfilling the standards set out in Article 49 of the Treaty of the EU, fulfil also the Copenhagen criteria. The Copenhagen criteria were promulgated by the European Council in 1993. From then on, the country wishes to join the EU must meet three criteria:

- *political: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;*
- *economic: existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;*
- *acceptance of the Community acquis: ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.*<sup>9</sup>

Because of the increased number of member countries forming the EU nowadays, difficulties arose in the EU pertaining to the effectiveness of its institutions. In order to be able to function effectively and quickly, the EU had to rethink its future direction. In 2001 the European Council in Laeken authorised an international conference on the future of Europe to provide propositions as to how to

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph, P. Edward. 2009. *Europe's Balkan Failure. The U.S. vice president's trip is evidence of a lack of European leadership.* Foreign Policy, May 2009:1.

<sup>6</sup> Bratoš, Nastja. *Izzivi procesa nadaljnje širitve Evropske unije.* Fakulteta za družbene vede. Univerza v Ljubljani, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Principles set out in Article 6 (1) are: freedom, democracy, human rights and the respect of the rule of law

<sup>8</sup> Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union, Access at: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/12002M/htm/C\\_2002325EN.000501.htm](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/12002M/htm/C_2002325EN.000501.htm) (6. September 2009)

<sup>9</sup> Accession Criteria, Copenhagen criteria. Access at: [http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession\\_criteria\\_copenhagen\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm) (6. September 2009)

adapt the EU's institutions to an increasingly enlarged Europe. The international conference prepared a draft proposition for the European Constitution (2003). The Constitution introduced changes to the functioning of institutions, decision-making procedures, new policies and it envisaged the consolidation of all the Treaties, legal regulations and policies into one document. Due to its rejection in referendums held in France and the Netherlands, a reformed treaty was proposed in place of the constitution. The so-called Lisbon Treaty will be valid only after the ratification of all EU member states. Since it was rejected by the Irish voters in 2008, although now accepted, and at present the ratification process among all EU member states is incomplete, the future shape of EU enlargement remains under question.

## **2. IMPACT OF THE FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS ON THE WESTERN BALKANS**

The economies of Western Balkan states did not avoid the consequences of the global financial and economic crisis. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of various Balkan countries discussed at the Bled Strategic Forum the economic challenges present in their region. They agreed that the region is facing a recession and that only regional cooperation can lead to improvement and development. Furthermore they valued highly the importance of membership in international organisations such as the WTO, EU as also being a part of CEFTA or SAA.

The Minister for European Integration in the Government of Montenegro Dr. Gordana Đurović was concerned about increasing obstacles to membership of international organisations like the WTO and EU, as the criteria and standards for becoming a member are now higher and stricter. She evaluated the growth prospect in Montenegro over the last 3 years: the growth average of labour was about 9%, where the indicator is a positive trend in the reduction of unemployment. Compared to a 30% rate of unemployment in 2003, today unemployment in Montenegro has been reduced to 11%. In addition foreign direct investment (FDI) into Montenegro was also very strong, but according to the Central Bank of Montenegro in the first half of this year there was almost no change on 2008. Moreover Dr. Đurović said that with measures such as the privatisation of the electric company, the opening of a major infrastructure project by building a motorway (between the Montenegrin part of the Adriatic Sea and Serbia), and high expectations of investment in tourism they will be able to cover the larger part of their problem concerning the economic crisis. At the end she emphasised the importance of a visa-free regime with the EU.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of Republic of Macedonia explained that the effects of the global economic crisis were reflected with certain delays in Macedonia's economic sector, a decrease in construction, industrial production, budgetary incomes, stock rates, direct investments and external trade. Measures were taken regarding the national currency, reducing taxes and extra fiscal arrangements in order to provide stability. He pointed out that measures should be market-orientated and that the crisis should be overcome as soon as possible. Importance should be attached to enabling further liberalisation of trade and regional development, which are necessities while re-

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<sup>10</sup> Dr. Đurović, Gordana. Minister for European Integration in the Government of Montenegro. 2009. Speech at Bled Strategic Forum. Panel: Economic Challenges in the Western Balkan. 31. August.

gional integration is also a solution. Gruevski said that only countries which are connected to each other show better results, which is why integration should begin in institutions and infrastructure projects like the construction of roads and railways.<sup>11</sup> A major problem that has increased with the crisis is that 34% of the Macedonian population are unemployed (2008). Registering growth in 2009 will depend on quickly adjusting policies to the new environment. The supplementary budget, planned for the second quarter of the year, will be critical in this regard. Despite bleak prospects for FDI and exports, a carefully crafted and sustainable fiscal stimulus which will not crowd out financing for the private sector, combined with a still relatively healthy financial sector, a vibrant construction sector could help the economy avoid recession.<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, Mladen Zirojević, Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) agreed that the region is facing the consequences of global economic crisis. In

BIH businesses are tackling a reduction in the inflow of credit, a reduction in investments, and the liquidation of companies – especially in construction. Regarding this situation, the population identifies the crisis, with job losses. In Zirojević's opinion the crisis could be overcome with the integration of markets, investment in energy and attracting foreign capital. The consequences of the crisis demand greater attention, above all from international organisations like the IMF. The World Bank estimates while there was no serious crisis in the financial sector, the economic sector and private consumption have slowed substantially since the end of 2008. Furthermore, while external financing requirements are being reduced, if governments at all levels fail in their plans to cut expenditure, the aggregate fiscal deficit could be as large as -3 to -5 percent of GDP, which would be unsustainable in the medium term in the context of the currency board.<sup>13</sup>

In continuation, Gordan Jandroković, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Croatia stressed the fact, that protectionism should not be an answer to the financial crisis. The Chinese word for crisis, is composed of two characters representing danger and opportunity. While the region is faced with danger caused by the financial crisis, we should try to find the opportunity in the present situation. Jandroković expects that the EU will do more to help candidate countries become members of the EU. Financial aid in the crisis should be devoted to infrastructure, business, education and care of the younger generation. Progress in the region depends on the EU's perspective of Balkan countries, because it is the only engine and motivation, which can help them with the positive development and stabilisation of South-Eastern Europe.<sup>14</sup> So far Croatia has coped relatively well with the present global economic crisis, unlike some countries in the region which have been hard hit. This is mostly due to sound monetary policies, and a stable financial and banking sector. With declining budget revenues due to the economic slowdown and uncertain economic prospects,

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<sup>11</sup> Gruevski, Nikola. Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia. 2009. Statement at Bled Strategic Forum. Leader's Panel: New Global Governance for 21<sup>st</sup> Century. 30 August.

<sup>12</sup> Country Brief 2009 for Macedonia. 2009. Access at: <http://www.worldbank.org.mk/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/MACEDONIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20630587~menuPK:304480~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:304473,00.html> (5. September 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Recent Economic Developments, Country Brief of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 2009. Access at: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/BOSNIAHERZEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20629017~menuPK:362034~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:362026,00.html#econ> (5. September 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Jandroković, Gordan. Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Croatia. 2009. Speech at Bled Strategic Forum. Panel: Economic Crisis as a Threat to Security and Development. 31. August.

the government embarked on a revision of the 2009 budget. As for Croatia's growth prospects and financing of the budget deficit, much depends on the tourism season and developments in the international capital markets.<sup>15</sup>

The situation in Albania is a surprise commented Lulzim Basha, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Albania. Although the crisis has affected different branches of industry there has been economic growth. The reason lies in policies employed to diminish the administrative burdens of investors, liberal policies etc. Basha explained that their policy has been motivated by a desire to combat corruption and monopolistic practices. Albania has concentrated on attracting foreign and domestic investors, by increasing their investment portfolio by 8-times. Development in past years occurred because of realisation of an infrastructure building programme. Albania has improved its logistical capacities by constructing more than 800 km of new roads, connecting Albania with the rest of the region. They plan to build one of the largest Mediterranean ports for container shipment and to improve railways. Great potential resides also in energy and tourism. However difficulties arise from the lack of integration within the Balkan region. Within the region the borders present an obstacle to the easier mobility of people and goods.<sup>16</sup> Based on the World Bank indicators for Albania, the export of services, foreign direct investments, GDP, high-technology exports and others have increased in past years, which should be an incentive for other countries in the region.<sup>17</sup>

The economic situation in Serbia is not an exception to the world financial crisis. According to economic analysts, Serbia is currently torn between national bankruptcy and social unrest, because of the country's own shortcomings. The IMF estimates that the Serbian economy will no longer grow this year, but shrink by 2%. Moreover foreign investments have come to a standstill. The prices for electricity, heating and public transport have increased, and this has increased inflation by 8-10% this year. Unemployment at the moment stands at around 20%. The crisis has highlighted the severe structural problems of the economy. The balance of trade has a chronic deficit, and industrial production had dropped by a quarter at the beginning of the year. Investment is stagnating, and foreign capital is increasingly being withdrawn. However, around EUR 472 million will be pumped into infrastructure projects in 2009 alone. The EU will provide EUR 168 million in "pre-membership aid" in order to stimulate the Serbian economy. There are plans above all for cheap loans to both consumers and companies.<sup>18</sup>

Over the past few years Kosovo's economy has shown significant progress in transitioning to a market-based system and maintaining macroeconomic stability, but it is still highly dependent on the international community and the diaspora for financial and technical assistance. Kosovo's citizens are the poorest in Europe with an average annual per capita income of only \$2,300. Unemployment, affects around 40% of the population and is a significant problem that encourages out-

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<sup>15</sup> The Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Croatia. Country Brief of Croatia. 2009. Access at: [http://www.worldbank.hr/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/CROATIAEXTN/0\\_contentMDK:20150212~menuPK:301252~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:301245\\_00.html](http://www.worldbank.hr/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/CROATIAEXTN/0_contentMDK:20150212~menuPK:301252~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:301245_00.html) (5. September 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Basha, Lulzim. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Albania. 2009. Speech at Bled Strategic Forum. Panel: Economic Challenges in the Western Balkans. 31. August.

<sup>17</sup> World Development Indicators. World Bank for Albania. Access at: <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/DDPQQ/report.do?method=showReport> (5. September 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Serbia between national bankruptcy and social unrest. Wien International. Access at: <http://www.wieninternational.at/en/node/13576> (5. September. 2009)

ward migration and black market activity. A limited and unreliable electricity supply due to technical and financial problems is a major impediment to economic development. Kosovo has one of the most open economies in the region, and continues to work with the international community on measures to improve the business environment and attract foreign investment.<sup>19</sup>

### **3. ATTITUDES OF EU MEMBER STATES TOWARDS FURTHER EU ENLARGEMENT TOWARDS THE WESTERN BALKANS**

Guidelines for the future enlargement policy of the EU towards the Balkan region were set in 2001 in Solun. The Solun Agenda for the Western Balkans anticipates the European perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans, as potential candidates. Furthermore, it stresses values such as the consolidation of peace, promotion of stability and democratic development. It enriches the Stabilisation and Association Process, enhances support for institution building, with instruments like twinning, monitoring and reforms. It promotes the fight against organised crime, cooperation in justice and home affairs and promotes economic development.<sup>20</sup> One of the reasons why the EU might prefer have the Western Balkans within its borders is for stability. It is the only way to overcome existing bilateral tensions such as exists between Greece and Macedonia, or Slovenia and Croatia. An additional reason is the economic one. The Balkan countries provide the possibility for investment in infrastructure and in energy. Thirdly, the Balkan region also has strategic importance for the EU. While enlarging towards the Balkan region, the Black Sea area, Caucasus and Central Asia will become proximate neighbours of the EU. Ultimately, through achieving stability in the region, social or economic, there will consequently be less migration.<sup>21</sup>

Among the reasons why EU member countries foster the integration of the Western Balkans into EU are: assurance of long-lasting peace, stability, prosperity, security, good neighbourly relations, stable democracy, higher living standards, justice, stimulation of investments, the unification of Europe, human rights, the fight against the corruption and organised crime and sustainable development of the region. Furthermore, the reasons for which EU members support further enlargement towards South-Eastern Europe are the strategic importance of the Balkan region for Europe, historic ties, responses to globalisation challenges etc.<sup>22</sup> While the attitudes of EU members are uniform on the foundations of the Solun Agenda, some of the attitudes of EU members differ. In particular the older member countries of EU like Holland, France, Portugal and Spain have reservations over further enlargement. They fear that an enlarged EU could not function effectively and that the organisational abilities of an enlarged Union would be questionable.

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<sup>19</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. Economy of Kosovo. Access at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kv.html> (5. September 2009)

<sup>20</sup> The Solun Agenda for the Western Balkans. European Commission. Enlargement. Access at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement\\_process/accession\\_process/how\\_does\\_a\\_country\\_join\\_the\\_eu/sap/thessaloniki\\_agenda\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/how_does_a_country_join_the_eu/sap/thessaloniki_agenda_en.htm) (5. September 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Mulej, Robert. 2009. Living With the Neighbors. A talk with Erhard Busek, the former Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe. *SEE Business. Business Magazine for Southeastern Europe*. 5 (14).

<sup>22</sup> Bratoš, Nastja 2008. Izzivi nadaljnega procesa širitve EU. Fakulteta za družbene vede. Univerza v Ljubljani. (47).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The establishment of the EU was a response by a destroyed Europe to World War II. The only way to overcome ideological differences and simultaneously remain connected in order to assure the development of the European continent was economic cooperation. With additional enlargement processes throughout history, the EU has elaborated its structure from an economic, political and institutional point of view. Today's financial and economic crisis erupted because of misplaced values in the world. The logic of the Machiavellian idea presented in *Il Principe* that » the ends justify the means « stimulated the capitalistic behaviour of hegemonic powers to abuse the loans of banks in order to buy, make and waste more. The result was the collapse of the financial system, because the money was present only as an illusion, because in reality debts were increasing and reserves were evaporating. Because the world became a global village, the financial crisis did not affect only those who caused the problem, but also the innocent. The multinationals spread around the globe started to dismiss workers who were in fact responsible for huge factory incomes. Unemployment increased and with that social instabilities. If the world switched from bipolar to multipolar, the international organisations like the IMF, EU, UN and others were bound to react to the crisis, with fiscal politics, and financial aid to stimulate the countries' economies which dropped in the recession.

Referring to the Western Balkans, the region is faced also with the financial crisis. The main branches affected in various countries in the Balkans were the same as in other parts of the world: construction, the automobile industry, textile fabrics, tourism and others. Western Balkan countries which are also facing internal problems beside the current financial crisis had to cope with the problem by themselves. If they are not able to produce a sufficient budgetary income, while foreign direct investments diminish, they will be obliged to request more loans from the IMF which will result in even greater external debt and present a burden for future generations.

In conclusion, if the crisis represents danger and opportunity, the time has come for a new form of international cooperation in order to provide stability and security to Europe as a whole.

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