

## WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES – MAIN ISSUES CONCERNING CO-OPERATION AND INTEGRATION WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

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**Abstract.** Western Balkan countries have played a crucial role in the EU foreign policy since years. This was reflected in the actions taken in order to end the warfare and subsequently to ensure stability in the region. The Western Balkan countries have been subject to different forms of support, including the financial one. Such policy brought a number of positive changes, but its effects are far from satisfying. The article presents crucial factors determining the importance of Western Balkans to the EU, main components of provided support and potential effects of their accession to European Union.

**Keywords:** Western Balkan Countries, Stabilisation and Association Process, Stabilisation and Association Agreement, EU financial support for Western Balkan Countries, integration of Western Balkan Countries with the EU.

**Jel:** E44; F13; F14; F15.

### 1. Introduction

Shortly after the outbreak of the 1991 civil war in Yugoslavia, caused by the declaration of independence made by Slovenia and Croatia, the European Union has taken steps aiming at bringing peace in the Western Balkans as soon as possible. The region has remained in the sphere of EU interests for many years, as shown by several factors (Borkowski, 2009):

- Newly formed countries were an attractive area in the economic and social field for former West European powers such as France or Germany. Traditional bilateral relations became possible again;
- Due to the geographical proximity the situation in Yugoslavia was jeopardizing directly the security of European Union countries, which were involved in the internal reforms at the time The European Communities were concerned about spreading the conflict into their territory;
- The European Communities' leaders desire to prove their ability to take action in crisis situations and to strengthen their position in the international arena, particularly in relation to the United States;

- Confirming that the Community is ready to strengthen cooperation and develop the Common Foreign and Security Policy, as well as to act as a stabilizer in Europe was also the case.

Following the signature in 1995 of the Dayton agreement the efforts to create a uniform policy of the European Union towards the Western Balkans were made. However that strategy has not proved appropriate. It has been decided that the region should be seen as unity and supported not only politically but also financially. This was reflected in the adoption of the Stability Pact for South - Eastern Europe in June 1999 in Cologne (Borkowski, 2009). The document assumed assistance in strengthening the security in the Balkans and made it dependent on the entry of these countries on the path of democratization. These assumptions were confirmed in the Declaration of Sarajevo in July 1999 (Zięba, 2003).

Another step towards deeper integration was the adoption of declaration by the European Council in Santa Maria de Feira in 2000 that every Western Balkan country has the chance to become in the future a member of the European Union, provided that it meets certain conditions.

In turn, during the summit: EU - Western Balkan Countries in November 2000 in Zagreb it was emphasized that the main goal of the Balkan states is the accession to the Communities. Balkan states declared improving neighbourly relations, supporting the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for Crimes in former Yugoslavia, the intensification of monitoring the flow of weapons and respecting the rights of minorities. It was also decided to implement financial programme *Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization* – CARDS.

During the summit in Thessaloniki in June 2003 the representatives of the European Council emphasized the importance of regional cooperation in the process of integration with the EU. It was also agreed that from now meetings of the European Union - Western Balkans at various levels will take place on a regular basis (Zajączkowski, 2006). The whole policy of the European Union towards the WesternBalkan Countries<sup>1</sup>, starting in the second half of 2000, was defined as the Stabilisation and Association Process (Manteuffel, 2007).

## **2. Stabilisation and association process**

Stabilisation and Association Process prepared by the European Union during a number of summits and meetings, is without a doubt an essential element leading to the integration of Western Balkan Countries with the Communities, by encouraging the

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis omits the problem of Kosovo (complex and specific situation does not allow even a summary due to volume restrictions of this article ).

increase of regional cooperation, supporting the process of transition and stabilization. This process has been helping the countries of the region to develop their capacity to adopt and implement European standards, including the *acquis* of European Communities as well as international standards. SAP is based on four principles (De Bardeleben, 2008):

- 1) **conditionality** – making the aid, support and other forms of the EU's engagement in the reforms dependent on the fulfilment by individual Western Balkan countries of the conditions settled previously by the EU;
- 2) **deconcentration** - delegates of the European Commission in individual countries are responsible for distribution of any aid coming from Brussels, and control over their spending
- 3) **decentralization** – transferring both the political-administrative and financial powers and responsibilities relating to SAP to lower levels of the authorities;
- 4) **diversification** - individual assessment of reform, progress and shortcomings in the individual countries participating in the SAP.

Stabilisation and Association Process is implemented through three components, which are also the various areas of the pre-accession aid as well as forms of European integration: the agreement on Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), trade preferences (Independent Trade Measures), as well as economic and financial assistance (CARDS Programme and IPA) (Błaszczuk, 2006).

## 2.1. Stabilisation and association agreements

The most important elements of Stabilisation and Association Process are the *Stabilization and Association Agreements* – SAA. Those agreements, concluded separately with individual countries, define the framework and the mechanisms that are meant to help the country to become a member of the EU.

The provisions of these agreements relate to both political and economic issues that facilitate deeper integration of the concerned country with the EU and achieving appropriate standards in line with the expectations of the EU prior to its accession. They regulate in detail issues related to political dialogue and respecting fundamental principles of the EU, such as democracy and human rights, regional cooperation, the flow of goods, labour, capital, services, as well as competition law, public procurement, intellectual property protection and matters of security and justice. Signing of the agreement depends on the progress made in accordance with EU requirements for adapting the various aspects of the functioning of the state to these rules (Muś, Sadowski, 2008).

Stabilisation and Association Agreements were already negotiated and signed by all Western Balkan Countries (Table 1).

**Table 1.** The involvement of Western Balkan Countries\* in the negotiating and signing process of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (Source: Own work based on (COM 2010; Muś, Sadowski, 2008, p. 12))

Countries	Beginning of negotiation process	Agreement SAA	Signing SAA
Croatia	24.11.2000	14.10.2001	29.10.2001
Macedonia**	5.04.2000	24.11.2000	9.04.2001
Serbia	10.10.2005	7.11.2007	29.04.2008
Montenegro	10.10.2005	15.03.2007	15.10.2007
Albania	31.01.2003	28.02.2006	12.06.2006
Bosnia i Hercegovina	25.02.2005	4.12.2007	16.06.2008

\* except for Kosovo

\*\* internationally known by its officially temporary name: *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – FYROM*

## 2.2. Independent trade measures

Independent trade measures are one of the main instruments supporting the economical changes in Western Balkan Countries. It has to be emphasized that those countries are treated in a special way by the EU. In November 2000, the European Commission ensured almost complete free access to its market to all goods (including agricultural products) produced in those countries (COM 2003).

Independent trade measures in conjunction with the benefits resulting from other trade agreements provide a favourable structure of the development of trade between the European Union, and the region, stimulating the inflow of foreign investment and economic development of the Western Balkan countries. Significant increase in imports from these countries, which previously was very low and did not exceed 0.6% of all EU imports was the expected effect. It was predicted that the growth in import will contribute to the economic growth in the region (Muś, Sadowski, 2008; Błaszczuk 2006).

## 2.3. Financial aid

An important mean of EU support or the stabilisation process in the region is the financial aid. In the years 1991-2000 around 6.8 billion euros were transferred to these countries under various assistance programs.

In 2000 a special program of Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation (CARDS) was created (EC, 2000). This program has provided a more strategic approach to supporting the Western Balkan countries in the Stabilisation and Association Process. Humanitarian aids, reconstruction of infrastructure, social reconciliation and the return of refugees to their homelands were the first priorities of the programme. In subsequent years it was focused more on the development of government, and legislative institutions, and meeting the European standards (EC, 2010).

In the years 2000 – 2006 around 4.6 billion euros from the EU budget were allocated to CARDS. Those funds are allocated to investments, institutional support, and other activities in the priority areas (UKIE, 2006):

- reconstruction, democratic and political stabilization,
- legal and institutional development, including adaptation to EU legislation, supporting democracy, human rights, civil society and media,
- balanced economic and social growth,
- Strengthening regional cooperation with neighbouring countries.

Since the beginning of 2007 CARDS was replaced by the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, IPA. It is assumed that in the years 2007-13 allocation from the EU budget will amount to about 11.5 billion euros (COM, 2010). IPA consists of five components (EC, 2011):

- 1) The instrument supporting transformation and institutional development,
- 2) Regional and cross-border cooperation (with EU Member States and other countries eligible for aid under the IPA),
- 3) Regional development (transport infrastructure, environmental protection and economic development),
- 4) Development of human resources (strengthening human capital and fight against social exclusion),
- 5) Development of rural areas.

Components 1 and 2 include both current and future potential candidates for the European Union. Other elements of the IPA program are intended only for the countries having the status of candidates for membership. They are mapping the Cohesion Fund, European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, European Agricultural Guarantee Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. The aid under the IPA program may be provided in various forms: as an investment, subsidies, public procurement, administrative cooperation, support for the implementation and management, budgetary support, twinning. The European Commission reserves the right to control and monitor the use of aid funds. Simultaneously, with the introduction of a new instrument, the Commission established the IPA Management

Committee. Its task is to coordinate and manage projects within the program and to increase the consistency of the assistance (Fischer, 2008).

### **3. Potential consequences of integration of the Western Balkan Countries with the European Union**

Stabilization and integration of Western Balkans is still one of the major challenges the European Union. As demonstrated above, the EU is not as involved in any other part of Europe and the world (financial aid, missions, protectorates, extension) as in the Balkans (Balcer, Gromadzki, 2010).

#### **3.1. Political and social consequences**

The accession of the Western Balkan countries to the European Union will extend the zone of peace and stabilization and it will contribute to improved security in the area. Integration with the EU is currently the only way to achieve this aim. It will integrate the divided continent, which will prove the strength and influence of the European Union. The integration can contribute to improving the relations between the Balkan countries.

One of the current effects of this approach was the signature of more than 30 agreements in the years 2002-2005, which were providing for the elimination of tariff and other barriers in mutual trade in a period of 5-7 years (more on this topic: see Molendowski, 2007a). These agreements became a basis for the conclusion of the multilateral agreement "CEFTA-2006" in December 2006, which provides for the creation of a free trade area in industrial goods and agricultural products until the end of 2010 (Molendowski, 2007b, CEFTA Secretariat, 2009). These decisions are considered as an extremely important step in overcoming the reluctance to eliminate the barriers in mutual cooperation, which were introduced after the collapse of Yugoslavia and the end of the armed conflict.

The Balkans will pass on the Community their goals, interests and contacts. Integration of Serbia would probably contribute to the rapprochement of Russia and the EU as well as closer cooperation with this close partner of Serbia. Similarly, the accession of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina would strengthen the cooperation with Turkey. In this way the European Union could gain deepening of the relations with the Muslim world. This may contribute to the improvement of EU's image in the Islamic countries, which has not been favorable. It may also have influence on Turkey's future integration with the EU<sup>2</sup>. The problem of the Western Balkan countries also affects the EU's trans-

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<sup>2</sup> It has to be mentioned that the current process of "rapprochement" of the EU to Turkey shows that it is difficult to clearly establish whether all Member States are in favor of deepening relations with the Muslim world.

atlantic relations. The Americans strive for a situation when Europe finally begins dealing with the Balkans on its own (Balcer, Gromadzki, 2010).

In the Western Balkans migration is a very common social phenomenon. Integration with the European Union can support the Western Balkan countries in pursuing reforms that should lead to resolution of the negative phenomena. The opening of borders after the accession and inclusion in the Schengen area will ensure the free movement of people. This does not mean flooding the markets of the EU with employees originating from the Balkans, as the migration potential has been significantly depleted (Muś, Sadowski, 2008).

### **3.2. Economic consequences**

The accession of the Balkan countries would not change the macroeconomic and the demographic indicators of the European Union significantly, neither in the foreseeable future, nor in the long run. Gross Domestic Product, of all the countries of the region in 2009 amounted to 106.5 billion euro. It is only 0.35% of GDP of all the countries of the European Union in the same year (EC, 2011a).

Similarly, the Community's population size would not increase significantly after the accession of the Balkans, since the population of these countries (about 21 million) in 2010 accounted for just over 4% of the population of the European Union (EC, 2011b).

Currently, the Western Balkan countries are not a significant trading partner for the European Union, while for those countries cooperation with the Community is of great importance and it is a great opportunity for them. Albania has the biggest share of trade with the European Union - it is about 80% of export and 70% of import.

Integration with the Balkans could broaden the internal market that would favor the growth of competitiveness and it would also increase the economies of scale. According to the research carried out in 2007 after the accession of Croatia to the European Union, its GDP in 2025 would increase by 1.1%, consumption by 2.6% and export even by 13.9%. However, the influence on the EU indicators would be negligible. Only in the group of 12 New Member States, which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, the integration with Croatia would increase exports by 0.1%. Other countries in the region would probably influence on these indicators to even lesser degree. (Lejour, Mervar, Verweij, 2007).

Integration with the European Union will significantly affect the growth of Foreign Direct Investment in the Western Balkan countries. Thanks to trade liberalization, this area would become more attractive, which would also increase the competitiveness (Muś, Sadowski, 2008).

### **3.3. Financial consequences**

Extending the EU to Western Balkan region will definitely contribute to an increase in EU spending. Due to incomplete data for future spending on EU policies, it is impossible to completely identify the financial implications of the integration between the EU –Western Balkan countries.

Due to the large wealth gap between the Balkan countries and the EU average, these countries will broaden the group of beneficiaries, especially the framework of the cohesion policy. Taking the current rules and the budget into account, it is estimated that these countries would receive aid amounting to around 4.5 billion euros per year, which represents approximately 4% of the EU budget.. Balkan states as an agricultural area, would also be incorporated into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). It was estimated that the Balkans could receive 1.6 billion euros annually to support farmers and 0.4 billion euros for the section of the agricultural guarantee. Probably the total expenditure for the Balkans area would amount to 7.5 billion euros a year, which could increase the total cost of EU aid by approximately 6% compared with 2008 (Muś, Sadowski, 2008).

#### **4. Progress in the process of preparations for the membership**

In recent years the Western Balkan countries approached considerably to the EU and each of them have made progress - although uneven - in undertaking reforms and in meeting the established requirements and conditions for the accession. In November 2010 the European Commission prepared a report evaluating these preparations (COM 2010). In mid-2011 Croatia was the most advanced in the accession process, as it has already completed the negotiations and signed the treaty scheduled for the end of the year. Although Macedonia obtained the candidate status in 2005, it still has not started accession negotiations. Serbia signed the Association Agreement more than 3 years ago (April 2008) which has not yet been ratified by the parliaments of the EU countries (due to reliance of a favorable opinion of the Court in The Hague on the prosecution of war crimes), and in December 2009, President B. Tadic officially submitted Serbia's application for membership in the EU. (Ślżzak, 2010). Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the only one (excluding Kosovo) still has not applied for the candidate status. Albania and Serbia in 2009 have submitted requests for the candidate status, which have not yet been approved by the Commission. Macedonia cannot start negotiations due to a dispute with Greece concerning the name of the country<sup>3</sup>. The independence of Kosovo is

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<sup>3</sup> In the international arena it is referred to by the temporary name: Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. On the 11th of August 2005 the Polish government decided to use the name - Republic of Macedonia in bilateral relations with the Macedonian State (as well as over 120 other countries). At the same time, they decided that the name Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will be used by the Government in international fore (UN, EU, NATO etc..). (Zuchowicz K., 2011).



still not recognized by five EU countries (Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Romania and Slovakia).

The results achieved by Croatia confirm that the Stabilisation and Association Process of Western Balkan Countries is a strategy leading to the accession to the EU. As shown in Table 2, the progress of the other Western Balkan Countries towards EU membership also depends on the pace of their political and economic reforms. Some of them (Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo) are still - in terms of economic development, internal stability (ethnic tensions), corruption, and democratization - at the level deviating far from the Copenhagen criteria.

## **5. Conclusions**

Enlargement has been one of the most effective tools of the European Union's foreign policy and the best way to stabilize its European neighbors. Thanks to it, at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first century profound positive changes in the countries of Central Europe occurred. In recent years, however, we observe a kind of "fatigue" of the enlargement process and a slowdown of this process.. Prolongation of this situation, especially under conditions of changing situation in North Africa, could threaten the stability of the neighbors that aspire to membership, including the Balkan countries.

Accession to the European Union would undoubtedly alter the image of the Balkan countries. It would mainly improve the level of economic development, as a result of i.e. opening of the borders and accession to the Single European Market. This would probably attract foreign direct investments. Thanks to increased competition, resulting from the influx of goods from the European Union the quality of local products would improve, and thus the quality of life as well.

The prospect of European integration is currently the strongest stimulant of development in the Balkan region. Striving for meeting the Copenhagen criteria, as well as individual conditions set for each of the countries, contributes to increasing economic development and improvement of social and political situation. Croatia is now the closest to the accession, which could only be threatened by a destabilisation of the entire region. Other issues that have inhibited the integration so far should be resolved in the medium term. perspective. Other Balkan countries, also advanced in the preparations, have a chance to join the European Union in the slightly longer term.

Integration with the Western Balkans will be also a challenge for the current EU members. Hence a significant division between supporters of the accession of the Balkan states as well as its opponents, both in the EU society and at national level. The problem which divides EU countries is also the future of the European Community. Some countries, mainly the old member States (EU-15) are in favor of focusing on internal integration, whilst the other ones are in favour of integration on the outside, that is the accession of new countries. Such an approach became even more noticeable after

the last outbreak of the currency and financial crisis. Finding a compromise between these two solutions seem to be the best for Europe.

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## **VAKARŲ BALKANŲ ŠALIŲ BANKAI: BENDRADARBIAVIMO IR INTEGRACIJOS PROBLEMOS SU EUROPOS SĄJUNGA**

**E. Molendowski**

Santrauka

Pastaraisiais metais, Vakarų Balkanų šalys turėjo didelės įtakos ES užsienio politikoje. Tai atsispindi veiksmuose, kurių buvo imtasi siekiant karo pabaigos bei vėliau veiksmuose, kurių buvo imtasi užtikrinant bei išlaikyti stabilumą regione. Vakarų Balkanų šalims buvo taikomas įvairios paramos formos, įskaitant finansinę paramą. Pasirinktos priemonės davė teigiamų pokyčių, tačiau neužtikrino norimo rezultato. Straipsnyje autorius nagrinėja svarbiausius veiksnius, turinčius didelės svarbos Vakarų Balkanų valstybėms, ES teikiamos paramos poveikį.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Vakarų Balkanų šalys, stabilizacijos procesas, susitarimas, Europos Sąjunga, finansinė parama, Vakarų Balkanų šalys, integracija

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