THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: MANAGING DIVERSITY

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Abstract

This paper gives a retrospective of the events in the Balkans in the last 20 years. Hence, it indicates the problems, the progress and the challenges in terms of respecting and promoting diversity. The Western Balkans has always been a very interesting region with many challenges during different historical periods. If we take into consideration all the differences and diversities in this region, then this shouldn't strike us as surprising. During history the Balkan region has always been a crossroads of many events, conflicts, changes and destructive occurrences. In order to understand the connection between ethnic and the religious diversity, as well as the future of the Western Balkan countries in terms of Euro-Atlantic integration, we need to provide some information about the political, economic and social changes in these countries during the past, especially in the last two decades.

To get a better understanding of all the processes and events we need to take a look at the 90s of the last century. This period was one of the most

important turning points in international relations. By the end of the Cold War there were two blocks within the societies – The Western (capitalist) and the Eastern (communist), and an agreement for the Balkans to be a balance between these two blocks. This fact was important for the promotion of the concept of the nation-state, which refers generally to both of the blocks. However, changes such as the dissolution and breakdown of the USSR and Yugoslavia, as well as the official Eastern bloc fiasco, brought an increase in the individual identity of the citizens living in these countries.

This was the beginning of a new era to be characterized by conflicts, wars, refugees, humanitarian crises, a large number of casualties and injured people, because of the idea that the emerging countries, especially from the Balkan region, should be nation-state countries, i.e. composed of a nation thereby ignoring the ethnic and religious differences or the unrecognized diversity of the citizens of different ethnic groups living in these countries.

The establishment of the Euro-Atlantic integration concept as a key national and state priority of almost every country in this region led to the understanding of differences as an asset, and not as an obstacle for the faster integration to the EU and NATO. This fact undoubtedly contributed to the establishment of the criteria for membership, and in particular to the promotion of the rights and freedoms of minorities as most important for the integration process.

Key words: Western Balkan, ethnic/religious diversity, conflicts, disputes, EU/NATO integration.

1. Introduction

The main approach of this research to the political, social and economic changes in the Western Balkans in the manner presented in this paper is multi-dimensional. The questions *why* and *what are the reasons*, are always present throughout the paper. We have to take into consideration the fact that the Balkan Peninsula was always one of the crossroads with a high impact and influence to the broader geopolitical positions, and we cannot conduct a grounded analysis if we exclude the behaviour of the main global world actors on Balkan soil.

Although this region of Europe has continuously been one of the key priorities of the international organizations and institutions such as the UN, NATO, EU and OSCE, the communities living in this region do not perceive this as a high interest towards the societies. This dilemma can only be solved

if we make an accountable, independent and impartial analysis on the behaviour, impacts, events and other issues that happened in the Balkans during the centuries, but mostly during the period of the post World War II and post Cold War era.

Problems addressed in this paper are reviewed from many viewpoints. However, in order to be more precise, we will only take into consideration three main groups: the social, political and economic viewpoint.

It is an important step to analyze the main problems faced by the countries from the Western Balkans through the prism of interests and commitment in the road to Euro-Atlantic integration. Having in mind that NATO and EU are two international organizations (institutions) that function in accordance to certain criteria and provide values, the Western Balkan countries coming from a period when these two organizations were not only considered as distant organizations, but also perceived as "enemies" during the period of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, when NATO and EU were engaged actively. It is an interesting fact that this was not present very long time ago, but just prior to 1990.

The history of the countries in the Balkan Peninsula is full of conflicts, clashes, disputes, problems and opened issues. Even though throughout the history they have shared many common interests, these countries continued to have antagonisms towards each other. What is the thing that influences countries and nations to look at each other with hate and intolerance to the level of starting a conflict? For centuries this issue has presented a great concern and has always been looked at as an individual perception of a certain problem or issue of that kind. Science does not recognize influenced and dependant perceptions in an analysis in regard to issues related to turbulences, past wars and conflicts among nations and states from this region[1].

For the sake of clarification, our intent is not to go deeply into history and address events or try to find the ones to blame and the ones who are the victims among nations-states, but to address the main reason why all these problems from the past are following us through the present and drive us to the future.

Aiming to underline the importance of how the international organization and institutions had positively influenced all fields of societies we will

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[1] Blerim Reka, Otmar Höll and Ylber Sela, Institution and Politics of EU, Tetovë: Univesitas, 2010.

determine a model of both of the processes of EU and NATO integration and enlargement by aspirant countries.

2. The EU and NATO integration path of the Western Balkan countries[2]

Observing the map of the NATO and EU into a geographical alignment, we will see that the Western Balkan countries or this region looks like a gap. From the very formation until now both of the international organizations, NATO and the EU, went through two processes, the integration and the enlargement process. Without any intention to theoretically explain both of the processes, we will enter the process of analyses with what was or is the path of the regions countries to membership. In this context we will explain which country we can include to the research, will it be only several countries of the "Western Balkan" or we shall extend the analysis to other Balkan countries[3].

To narrow our approach we have decided that the subject of interest in this paper is the countries which share the same destiny on the path to the Euro-Atlantic integration and progress of reforms. Here, we would include the countries such as: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia[4].

Just for the purpose of raising more attention on what the process of integration and enlargement means for this particular region, we would like to share some views.

We know very well that the process of enlargement starts from the very beginning - since their establishment. From the start there were challenges for the countries who decided to integrate into NATO and EU, since the 60's when referred to NATO and 70's when referred to EU, through the integration of certain countries such as Greece and Turkey in the NATO Alliance and Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark in the EU. The integration process included

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[2] European Commission, Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament And The Council, Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges by the years 2005-1015.

[3] R. Craig, Nation, *War in the Balkans 1991 – 2002",* Carlisle: U.S. Army War College, August 2003, 1-2.

[4] Same as before

problems and disagreements between the members of both organizations, but apart from all these facts, the process of enlargement continued in the future.

Based on this fact, we raise a number of questions: How does this process influence things? What are the consequences? How it is going to continue in the future? If we take into consideration the process of enlargement with twelve countries from the central and eastern part of Europe (2004/07), we will see that the impact was great and all simultaneous activities of EU led towards the approval and implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. Another question about the process of enlargement of the EU and NATO would be, what are the challenges for the future of this process and on which countries or region will be decided to accede. The case of Croatia's membership into EU in 2013 proved that EU still open for new members. From the NATO Summit in Bucharest, the Alliance declared his "open door policy". The EU and NATO approach and policies in relation to the first process of enlargement and the last one (including the future plans) have drastically changed.

During the last enlargement, EU introduced the model of "group or package", for the countries of the Western Balkans, after some events (Lisbon Treaty, different scale of progress of countries etc.), the EU changed its course and started using the models "regatta" or "individual approach for each country, based on merits" (Copenhagen and Madrid's criteria). However, this model or approach is difficult, fully bearing in mind the fact that a certain country cannot be "a hostage" of another country that "lack to accomplish their duties in time". Of course that individual progress of the some countries have to take into consideration. These facts are not in compliance or are not in the spirit of solidarity, equality and other principles set for the accession processes. This is the problem that makes the process of integration and enlargement more difficult. Best example for this conclusion is the blocking of Slovenia's accession by Italy and then Croatia's by Slovenia etc.[5]

This approach was used by the EU and its institutions to raise the awareness of the high profile countries in context of common cooperation and good relations.

Perhaps, similar approaches are used by NATO through the initiatives such as Partnership for Peace and The Adriatic Charter or other different regional initiatives among aspirant countries. However, once again, we would like to

[5] Bekim Maksuti , "Influence of western Balkan states bilateral disputes on reforms and criteria's for membership in

EU and NATO" (approved PhD diss. University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje 2009).

underline that the approach used during the "big bang" enlargement of NATO and EU with the countries from the Eastern and Central Europe, will not happen again soon. Those occasions were used to prevent some occurrences that could have happened later similar to ones we have seen in some parts of Eastern Europe.

In the following we would like to explain the processes and events separately for each country.

a) Albania

When we defined the term Western Balkan as an expression we said "…region of countries from former Yugoslavia plus Albania…". This implies that Albania didn't have many things in common with the countries established after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, but still was a country coming out of a communist regime. If we take into consideration all the challenges and problems this country had during the modern history, we can conclude that it also had many similar problems with the surrounding countries. These included the collapse of the state in 1997, Kosovo's crisis with the refugees, the economic and political problems were only some of the challenges that influenced the late starting of the process of integration into EU and NATO. Albania expressed the readiness for aspiration earlier as a member of Partnership for Peace (PfP) NATO tool. Later, Albania, together with Croatia and Macedonia, and led and supported by USA, the three countries formed the A-3 (Adriatic Charter) Initiative[6]. Albania started the negotiation on a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2003 and signed in 2006. This country joined all the initiatives of EU and NATO for the Western Balkan countries. After becoming a member of NATO, Albania made some key reforms, but still some problems including the political dialogue and corruption have remained. The application for membership was submitted by Albania to EU in 2009 and received a status of a "potential candidate country". In all annual progress reports of the EU there are recommendations that the country continue some of the key reforms to ease the negotiations during the membership process. The 2014 European Commission Report about the progress of Albania is mostly positive, but still calls on reforms in the Rule of Law, dealing with corruption, and other areas. From June 2014, Albania is a country with the candidate status for EU membership.

b) Bosnia and Herzegovina

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[6] This initiative now is A-5 including plus Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.

This country became independent after Yugoslavia's disintegration. We must make some parallels between this country and the EU in the past and the present. The EU was involved in all events in the modern history of this country (from the breakdown of Yugoslavia which led to the establishment of several new states, the end of conflicts and peace operations, mediations, reconciliation etc.). The direct involvement of EU in the politics, economy and rule of law, make this country slightly different to the other countries in the Western Balkans. During the post-conflict period Bosnia and Herzegovina made various progresses in many areas, but still have serious problems in their economy and politics. The instability of this country initiated by many political divergences between different communities is a key problem in political progress of this country on the road toward the EU integration.

This country started the negotiations on SAA in the course of 2005 and concluded them in December 2007. This was the first step before the application for a candidate status and commencing membership negotiations. As we said earlier, the main problem is the political dialogue and differences between community officials; this process was concluded in 2008 with singing of the SAA. According to progresses and efforts, the country's officials planned to submit an application for membership between April and June 2009, but it didn't happen until 2010. Bosnia and Herzegovina still has many unsolved issues in their society. However, the worst issues are the ones that might be invisible and those are the ones BiH has with Serbia and Croatia related to bilateral disputes and neighbourhood relations that are the key for fast and positive progress in the process of integration to the EU. From June 2012 EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina launched the High Level Dialogue on the Accession Process. With the status of a potential candidate for membership, Bosnia and Herzegovina received three European Commission Progress Reports which lacked a perspective for a fast change of the current status of a potential candidate, even though the country made a number of reforms in many field.

According to the relationship with NATO we must underline that in the past Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the Partnership for Peace in 2006 and has been engaged in an Intensified Dialogue with NATO on its membership aspirations and related reforms since 2008. The Alliance in 2010 invited Bosnia and Herzegovina to enter the Membership Action Plan (MAP) as a process that leads the way to a full membership in terms of reforms of the security sector of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The current status and developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina don't give us much faith and hope that the membership to NATO will take place soon, even with the many successful reforms it has implemented.

c) Croatia

In order to analyze the development of the process of membership to the EU, it would be better if review the events related to the integration process chronologically. In 2001 Croatia commenced its first negotiations with the EU, and in October that year signed the SAA. After two years, in 2003 it sent a formal application for membership to EU. The same year Croatia submitted the answers to the Commission's Questionnaire. In 2004 the Commission replied with a positive opinion (Avis) that opened the door for receiving the official candidate status, and in December the European Council set the date for the beginning of negotiations on 17 March 2005. The problematic issues related to the Hague Tribunal (ICTY) had a great influence in the progress of reforms and negotiations toward the EU integration.

An interesting event to be mentioned here is the blockade of negotiations due to the border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia. During the opening and closing of some of the EU Questionnaire Chapters, Slovenia used this issue as a trigger to show that the process of membership to EU will be difficult to continue without prior resolution of the bilateral dispute around the Gulf of Piran. In this case the EU and its officials played a brave and great part in managing this new situation and put both sides to finding a commonly acceptable solution for this issue. In 2009 Slovenia agreed on an immediate ending of its blockade of Croatia's EU accession and continued the further negotiations on the Gulf of Piran border dispute. Croatia continued to close down the Chapters to the full enclosing of the negotiations.

The annual progress reports for Croatia (from the first one in 2004 until the last one), showed enormous efforts and reforms taken by Zagreb's officials to simplify Croatia's road to the full membership in the EU. Croatia finished its negotiations and from June 2013 became the 28th member of the EU.

The NATO membership process of Croatia is similar to that of Albania. Together with Macedonia, under the US leadership they formed one of the most successful regional cooperation initiatives called the Adriatic Charter, also known as A-3. Croatia joined the Partnership for Peace initiative in 2000. As a result of the strong commitment on security sector reforms and fulfilment of the other criteria (political, economic and social), Croatia was invited during the Bucharest NATO Summit in 2008 and in April 2009, together with Albania, joined the Alliance as full members.

d) Kosovo

The inclusion of Kosovo into the new EU launched mechanism called "The Agreement for Stabilization and Association", means that this country would be a part of the process of integration of the Western Balkan's countries to EU. This mechanism launched in 2003 in the EU Summit in Thessaloniki, when the main Agenda was the process of enlargement and integration of the EU, and Western Balkans countries' perspectives. At the outset, we must introduce the main events about Kosovo and the process towards the EU. Since 1998 Kosovo was referred under the UNSCR Resolution 1244 until its Declaration of Independence in 2008. In this context Kosovo initiated the dialogue and cooperation with the EU in many fields. Through the establishment of EULEX to the commencing of negotiations with Serbia, under the leadership of HRVP Ashton, Kosovo began the close cooperation with the EU and its institutions. The launch of the many EU instruments and tools for supporting Kosovo in its integration path, in 2014 Kosovo and EU initiated the Stabilization and Association Agreement. This fact signifies that Kosovo has become a potential candidate for membership to the EU.

Kosovo, being a country where NATO was engaged military for the first time in its history will become one of the main topic and a priority for the international community in establishing its strong capabilities and capacities, the rule of law, peace and security, face the challenges to help the country reinforcing its stability and its sustainable development. Since the 2008 NATO intervention, they will be engaged in Kosovo under the UNSCR Resolution 1244. This peace operation is still an ongoing process after the military intervention. The cooperation of Kosovo with the NATO continues as a consulting process for the implementation of the reforms and the achievement of the objectives of the Alliance and the international community. NATO has a unique and strong role on reforms and transformation process of the Kosovo Security Forces to their transformation into the Armed Forces of Kosovo. A strategic goal of Kosovo is its membership to NATO, but this remains in the stage of willingness because some of the NATO member states still don't recognize Kosovo as an independent country.

e) Macedonia

If we compare the countries from the West Balkan region, in regard to which of them progressed mostly in the process of integration to EU, we would come to understand that Macedonia is at the bottom of the list. The reason for this is owing to some facts related to the integration process. The Republic of Macedonia was the first country that signed the SAA in April 2001. To this

day, important issues for the country continue to present many difficulties in dealing with the rule of law and the inter-ethnic disagreements. Another major issue is the contested name with Greece. Although after the proclamation of independence in 1991 Macedonia was recognized by many countries and international organizations by the FYROM reference, and in 1995 Greece and Macedonia signed an Interim Agreement under the consent of UN in order to transcend the differences, the problem remained an obstacle for the country.

The EU and its institutions are seriously engaged in the policy of reforms and cooperation with the Republic of Macedonia. Macedonia is on the verge of being a candidate country, but continues to face many challenges and problems. The third recommendation for starting negotiations on accession is under question. This issue gained emphasis after the boycott of the major opposition party in the parliament and especially with the recent wiretapping affair of high governmental officials.

In 2004 Macedonia applied to become an official candidate for membership to the EU and one year later the EC recommended the attainment of a candidate status. During all the progress reports Macedonia has had many recommendations about reforms in many areas of the society. In 2008, during the NATO Summit in Bucharest Macedonia failed to receive the invitation for membership, within the Adriatic Group A-3 (Croatia, Albania and Macedonia). This was a clear signal that the resolution of the name contest is a part of the EU integration process. Since that moment until today Macedonia is still in the process of waiting for the commencing of negotiations with the EU. In almost all the progress reports and in open recommendations of the EU officials it is stressed that Macedonia should solve the name issue with Greece in order to continue the integration process.

As mentioned before, Macedonia has had long term cooperation with NATO. The key initiatives are the Joint Partnership for Peace in 1995, the founding of the A-3 Charter and the participation in NATO led operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Macedonia is now on the 16th MAP cycle and still in the sidelines of the "open door policy" since the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008. Truthfully, Macedonia remains one of the most serious candidates for membership to the Alliance.

f) Montenegro

The newest country (except Kosovo) in the Western Balkan region was quite successful in its ambitions and efforts toward the EU integration. Montenegro, like a part of the State Union with Serbia, started a process of

Accession to the EU in 2005 (the SAA negotiations). In 2005 Montenegro voted independence in a referendum and moved out of the Union, and this new independent country continued the negotiations in the late 2006. The Agreement was officially signed in 2007 and it officially applied to join EU in 2008. In April 2009 EU institutions accepted their application after answering the questionnaire. In May 2010 the SAA came into force and in the recommendation of 2015 the EC recommended that Montenegro is to be granted the official status of a candidate country. If we analyze all the events that happened in a very short time, we can conclude that Montenegro is the most successful country form the region in the process of EU integration.

Montenegro, as a candidate country for membership to the EU, continues to be one of the most serious countries from the region. This is backed up with the opening of a couple of chapters, the strong commitment to reforms and the achievement of the goals. Based on this Montenegro will soon become a full member of the EU.

Montenegro's path to NATO integration is not a very long story. Just after gaining its independence from Serbia, the leadership of Montenegro openly expressed its national strategy for NATO membership. It is still a country strongly committed to this policy through the implementation of reforms, regional cooperation and its support in peace operations. The last NATO Summit in Wales was a good opportunity to present the readiness for integration and enlargement. Montenegro has high hopes to receive an invitation to join NATO at the next Summit in Warsaw.

g) Serbia

If we put a parallel between the status and relations of all countries from Western Balkans from the beginning until now we can see that Serbia was in holding back the process of integration. Serbia was a part of former Yugoslavia and was included in all the conflicts and destructive processes during the fall of the Federation. When Montenegro gained its independence from the Union (Serbia and Montenegro), Serbia had started with its efforts to join the integration process with the rest of the Western Balkan countries. Hence, Serbia's first initiative to start the process of integration in EU was together with Montenegro (after the fall of the Milosevic regime in 2000). Negotiation on a SAA started in late 2005. After a few months the EU suspended SAA talks with Serbia over its failure to arrest Ratko Mladic and other personalities sought by the ICTY. Already all the countries involved in the conflict have some additional conditions to fulfil in their integration process to the EU. Serbia's main condition was to find and arrest (or help in

arrest) the criminals sought for crimes against humanity. Another main issue included in the conditions for integration to EU was the Kosovo case. In 2008 Kosovo declared its independence and EU had to deploy a mission –EULEX. The coordination and implementation of this mission was impossible without the involvement of Serbia. A few months after Serbia arrested Radovan Karadzic the EU decided to reopen the talks and negotiations (2007). Serbia officially applied for EU membership in December 2009. During 2011 Serbia answered the questionnaire. Serbia received the candidate status for membership to EU, though it faced many challenges. As mentioned before, among the conditions were, and still remain, the negotiations with Kosovo. This process started in 2010 when initially it was agreed that both countries sit together at a negotiating table in Brussels. This helped Serbia to achieve the SAA Agreement in 2013 and in preparing the start of negotiations. This process now is in the stage of what we understand as a pre-accession phase where EU looks for the modalities of the close cooperation and of recognition of Kosovo's independence.

In regard to Serbia's integration to NATO there is not much to be said. After the NATO intervention in 1998 Serbia has no cooperation with NATO. The policies of this country do not go in the direction of integration. This is the current situation on this aspect and most probably it will not be changed in the near future. However, it continues to have close cooperation with Russia, especially on the field of military cooperation which makes it even more difficult to find a way for cooperation with NATO.

3. The diversity in the Western Balkan countries – Managing the challenges

In general and during the detailed elaboration of the characteristics of each country on their road to Euro - Atlantic integration we identified some issues where the EU addresses their awareness about which country should focus on what reforms more or give more efforts in advance just to avoid critics or open issues[7].

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[7] Milica Delevic, Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans, *EU Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper,* no. 104, July 2007 [journal on line]; 15 – 16; available from:

http://www.iss.europa.eu/chaillot/chai104.pdf; Internet; accessed 15 December 2007.

Why is this region especially interesting for the critics who focus on the process of integration on one hand, and on the enlargement process of NATO and EU on the other hand? The answer to this question can be found find in many academic publications, many conclusions from different conferences, workshops etc, however, it is an issue that remains to be addressed. It's no doubt that the strategic interest of all the countries from the region is integration into EU and NATO, with the exception of Serbia in regard to NATO integration. Nonetheless, peace and stability of the region are high priorities and that depends directly on the integration into these organizations. Therefore, their "open doors" policy is of great importance to both the region and wider Europe.

Furthermore, the Balkan region continues to face many issues and problems that derive from the past. In this context we would like to emphasize some of the disputes or open issues between these countries. As an example prior to the analysis of different diversities, we will take the case of the bilateral disputes between Slovenia and Croatia. In order to show how the different problems can be interpreted and this case is a perfect example on how certain issues can be used or misused from both sides to build or raise political intolerance. The bilateral dispute about the Gulf of Piran in the Adriatic Sea was used by the Slovenian side to achieve a better position during the negotiation process and the opening of the Chapters, to influence the resolution of this issue deriving from the Yugoslavia period, and after the declaration of Slovenia's independence. During the 2008 Slovenia decided not to approve the opening and the closure large number of negotiation chapters with Croatia. Having in mind that another aspect of what makes this example special is the fact that within this disputed region between the two countries live different ethnic groups.

In the following we will make a parallel between the diversity of the ethnic groups in the countries of the Balkan region with the challenges on their road to integration into NATO and EU, and how these international organizations managed this problem.

For better understanding of the diversity in Western Balkans countries we will use this table on the following:

Country	Ethnic groups in %															Religion in %			
	Albanians	Greek	Macedonians	Montenegrins	Egyptians	Roma	Bosnians	Serbs	Croats	Muslims	Hungarians	Turks	Gorani	Vlachs	Others	Orthodox	Catholics	Muslims	Others or not declared
Albania	95.9	2.4													1.7	16.9		59.79	23.31
Bosnia and Herzegovina							46.1	37.9	14.6						1.4	31	15	40	14
Kosovo	92						2	4				1	1			1.48	2.2	95.6	0.72
Macedonia	25.2		64.2												10.6	64.78	0.3	33.33	1.59
Montenegro	4.9			45			8.7	28.7							12.7	72		19.1	8.9
Serbia	1.2					2.1		83.3			3.5				9.9	84.5	5.0	4.0	6.5

Based on the preliminary 2011 Census, Albania has a population of 2.831.741, where 95.9% are Albanians and 4.1% other ethnic groups. The largest ethnic group minority are the Greek at 2.4%, and then Macedonians, Montenegrins, Aromanians, Balkan Egyptians and Roma. As regards the religious diversity in Albania, 59.79% are Muslims (Sunni and Bektashi), 16.9% Christians (Catholics and Orthodox) and the rest declare as Atheist (or don't prefer to answer).[8]

One of the problematic issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the carrying out of the census. As a country coming out from the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the first and last census of this country is provided by UNHCR in 1996 with results as follows: 3,919,953 total population where 46.1% are Bosnians, 37.9% Serbs, 14.6% Croats and rest are Albanians, Montenegrins, Roma and undeclared. The religious diversity is also interesting, where 40% are Muslims, 31% Serbian Orthodox, 15% Roman Catholic and 14% others[9].

Croatia held a census in 2011. According to this census, Croatia has 4,29 million inhabitants, 90.4% are Croats, 4.5% Serbs and 21 other ethnicities (Italians, Albanians) with religion diversity of Roman Catholicism 86.28%, Eastern Orthodox 4.44%, Muslims 1.47% and the rest not declared or Atheists[10]

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[8] http://www.instat.gov.al/media/195035/statistika_4_2012_.pdf

[9] Agency for Statistics Bosnia and Herzegovina, www.bhas.ba/tematskibilteni/BHAS_Demografija_BH.pdf, http://www.bhas.ba/saopstenja/2014/DEM_2013_001_01_bos.pdf

[10] "Census 2011 First Results". Croatian Bureau of Statistics. 29 June 2011. Retrieved 5 August 2011.

According to the Kosovo figures of the 2005 Survey of the Statistical Office of Kosovo[11], the population number estimates between 1.9-2.2 millions, where 92% are Albanians, 4% Serbs, Bosnians and Gorani 2%, Turkish 1%, Roma 1% and rest declared as others. In Kosovo live 95.6% Muslims, Catholics 2.2%, Orthodox 1.48%, and the rest are other religious groups or not declared.

Macedonia held the last census in 2002. According to this census Macedonia has a population of 2,02 millions, where 64.2% are Macedonians, 25.2% Albanians and 10.4% are other ethnics groups as: Turkish, Roma, Muslims, Bosnians, Vlachs and others. As regards the religion in Macedonia live 64.78% Eastern Orthodox, 33.33% Muslims, 0.3% Catholics and the rest as other or not declared[12].

According to the 2011 census, Montenegro has a population of 620,029, where 45% are Montenegrin, 28.7% Serbs, Bosnians 8.6%, Albanians 4.9% other ethnic groups such as Croats, Roma, and Egyptians etc. Most of the population belongs to the Eastern Orthodox religious group 72%, Muslims 19.1% and others religious groups[13].

According to the 2011census organized by the Statistical Office in Serbia, there live 7,186,862 people, where 83.3% are Serbs, 3.5% Hungarians, 2.1% Roma, and the rest are Bosnians, Albanians, Croats, Macedonians and other. As regards the religion, the composition in Serbia is 84.5% Eastern Orthodox, 5% Roman Catholic, 4% Muslim and other religious groups.[14]

Why are these figures about the diversity of the countries interesting? This question deserves special attention. Having in mind that even the EU member countries all face these challenges and issues, such as the increase of the ethnic and religious diversity, it is still used by the leadership of the international organization as an advantage for strengthening the cooperation between member states, as well as between candidate and aspirant countries. So if we

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[11] UNMIK. "Kosovo in figures 2005" (PDF). Ministry of Public Services. Archived from the original on 9 March 2008. BBC News (23 December 2005). "Muslims in Europe: Country guide". Retrieved 24 July 2009. BBC News (20 November 2007). "Churches Regions and territories: Kosovo". Retrieved 24 July 2009.

[12] http://www.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb2007bazi/Database/Censuses/databasetree.asp Censuses of Population 1948-2002 State Statistical Office.

[13] "Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Montenegro 2011". Monstat. Retrieved 12 July 2011.

[14] http://pod2.stat.gov.rs/ObjavljenePublikacije/Popis2011.pdf

look at the map of the Balkan in this regard we will see that not even one single region (town or city) is purely consisted of one ethnic group. In most of the countries live people from the neighbouring countries, and of different religions. In this context we would like to say that these problems in the past were a generator of disputes, hate, conflicts between nation and countries from the Balkan. From this point of view we can conclude that should not consider diversity as an obstacle but as common values where candidate countries can cooperate together. EU has installed numerous efforts on the common application for many found on those issues. Thus, with this kind of diversity the Balkan region is one of the most mixed regions in the world as regards the ethnicity and religion.

EU and NATO are facing with the challenges and problems from the past (membership of Greece and Turkey into NATO), in regard to having open issues and not fulfilled the necessary reforms for membership (Bulgaria and Romania into EU).

How the problem of diversity about countries together with the tools of EU and NATO can drive into positive direction is the question where IPA funds can be used successfully by the countries or common projects. On the overview of the European Commission about IPA-I 2007-2013 had a budget of €11.5 billion divided by the countries but almost 15% going for multi countries projects. IPA-II 2014-2020 with a budget of €11.7 billion divided by countries and more than 30% for the multi countries projects[15].

We used all those facts in direction to show how the interest of the EU is about raising of awareness of regional cooperation during the diversity challenges.

4. Conclusion

Since their establishment the EU and NATO were defined as organizations which would give the same membership conditions and criteria to every country, regardless of their differences and diversities. Moreover, all the past and present proclamation showed that the differences in the Union and the Alliance represented an enormous treasure. However, if all the activities of the organization are analyzed in the context of enlargement we will come to the

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[15] For more information go to:
http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/instruments/overview/index_en.htm.

conclusion that different factors contributed to change the directives, ways and conditions of the enlargement process.

All the previous enlargements of the EU and NATO had a positive impact in providing a new momentum for reforms within all the involved actors. The growth of the market, the economic growth, the financial and monetary strength, as well as the stability are just some of the predispositions that made the EU a global actor, escaping from the traditional shell.

Since the foundation of the EU there have been enormous achievements: the EU today is an internationally recognized actor, a significant global actor, an important contributor to the international peace and security together with the United Nations and other organizations.

The improvements within the political environment in combination with the security component highly elevate the significance of the EU in relation to the membership acceptability of each country from the Balkan region. This model, which in a way represents a *sui generis,* is merely an enticement for coping with other continents and regions. However, the question that arises is whether these positive aspects of the enlargement are sufficient for defining these policies and contributing to the process of enlargement in the future. The answer is most definitely not.

If we take into consideration that the last EU enlargement occurred in the spirit of expressing a form of "reward" toward the countries that chose to integrate to this organization, it is clear that the EU has not always approached the process of enlargement in the same way. In certain cases the EU weariness and scepticism does emerge into view. Factors worth mentioning in this occurrence are the reduction of the absorbed capacities and the economic crises appearing in an unsuitable moment when the EU was considering enlargement with the countries from the Western Balkan (the EU integration package).

On the other hand, the countries of this region gave the highest priority to all the EU integration initiatives (reforms, efforts, development, etc.), giving them national interest significance. Moreover, if we analyze the impact of the EU in all the cases of the Balkan countries during the conflicts, such as the humanitarian actions, the reconciliation, the state building, the rule of law, the solving of many issues and disputes, then we can conclude that this region is more connected with the EU than ever before, or more than any other region.

The latest developments after the approval of Lisbon Agreement, facing the economic and financial crises, the crises within the Euro zone with the

Greek Debt, as well as others, influence the opinion of the EU leaders to move at a slower pace when it comes to the region's inclusion into the EU and NATO. Hence all the reforms taken by countries of this region are mostly at a formal level in this stage. At the same time the EU and NATO in particular are facing one of the most challenging security issues related to developments in East Ukraine and Russia.

If we analyze the way the EU managed the global financial crises and maintained the stability of the Euro currency; how they shaped the monetary policy and prevailed over the most difficult period in its history --the Debt crises, then we can convincingly conclude that enlargement as a foreign policy tool is very efficient, the EU's competence is extremely high, and that the EU continues to be a significant global actor. Implementing these positive practices of the EU in the region of Balkans is of great importance for the region.

It is of crucial importance that the membership to the EU remains an imperative for all the countries from the West Balkans region, regardless of the price they have to pay for it. These Balkan countries have to continue with the reforms until their full membership.

Whether the integration or enlargement of EU with new countries from the Western Balkan region will be in its agenda we will have to wait and see. We hope that the EU's and the Western Balkan countries' leadership (including Turkey) will find a common language, interest and the proper tools for these processes.

There is no another alternative except these countries becoming a part of the EU. The EU will never be complete without the inclusion of the Western Balkan countries.

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