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УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ НА ЈУГОИСТОЧНА ЕВРОПА  
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## Post-Lisbonian Europe: EU Foreign Policy towards the Western Balkans

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DOI: 10.2478/v10306-012-0016-3

### Abstract

This study has been conducted in order to investigate the role of EU in the new international order and its impact on the Europeanization of the Western Balkans. The paper has a theoretical approach and examines the role and European strategy in the new order, its policy of enlargement, with particular emphasis on its foreign policy towards the Western Balkans after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. EU engagement in the processes in the Balkans has been and remains crucial to the security and stability of this region. This study explores and analyzes in detail the strategy of EU enlargement and the Western Balkan progress towards this integration.

The strategy of the EU enlargement and the analysis of European foreign policy towards the Western Balkans clearly demonstrate the commitment of this organization for the future of the Western Balkans and Europe in general.

**Key words:** *Western Balkans, EU, Europeanization, the Lisbon Treaty.*

### Abstrakt

Ky studim është bërë në mënyrë që të hulumtojë rolin e BE-së në rendin e ri ndërkombëtar dhe ndikimin e tij në evropianizimin e Ballkanit Perëndimor. Punimi ka një qasje teorike dhe shqyrton rolin dhe strategjinë evropiane në rendin e ri, politikën e saj të zgjerimit, me theks të veçantë në politikën e saj të jashtme ndaj Ballkanit Perëndimor, pas ratifikimit të Traktatit të Lisbonës. Angazhimi i BE-së në proceset në Ballkan ka qenë dhe

mbetet vendimtare për sigurinë dhe stabilitetin e këtij rajoni. Përmes një punë kërkimore, ky studim do të analizojë në detaje strategjinë e zgjerimit të BE-së dhe progresin e Ballkanit Perëndimor drejt këtij integrimi.

Strategjia e zgjerimit të BE-së dhe analiza e politikës së jashtme evropiane ndaj Ballkanit Perëndimor tregon qartë angazhimin e kësaj organizate për të ardhmen e Ballkanit Perëndimor dhe Evropës në përgjithësi.

## **Апстракт**

Целта на оваа студија е да се истражат улогата на ЕУ во новиот меѓународен поредок и нејзиното влијание врз европеизацијата на Западниот Балкан. Во трудот е застапен теоретски пристап и се проучуваат улогата и Европската стратегија во новиот поредок, нејзината политика на проширување, со посебен акцент на нејзината надворешна политика кон Западниот Балкан по ратификацијата на Лисабонскиот договор. Ангажманот на ЕУ во процесите на Балканот беа и остануваат клучни за безбедноста и стабилноста на овој регион. Преку истражувачка работа во овој труд ќе се анализираат во детали стратегијата на проширување на ЕУ и напредокот на земјите од Западниот Балкан кон оваа интеграција.

Стратегијата на проширувањето на ЕУ и анализата на европската надворешна политика кон Западниот Балкан јасно покажуваат посветеноста на оваа организација за иднината на Западниот Балкан и на Европа во целост.

## **The EU role in the new international order**

The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty had a very big importance in the developments of international relations. This process demonstrated the power of the EU as a supranational organization, announced its significant role in the new international order, strengthened the position of member states and increased the will and efforts of non-member states to join it. This important twist gives an impact also in the Western Balkans as one of the most important regions for the regional security and stability of Europe. Therefore the aim of this paper is to study the developments, processes and policies of the European Union after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on one hand, and on the other hand efforts, progress and challenges for Western Balkan countries to become part of this post-Lisbonian Europe. This study aims to provide an overview of this relationship between the EU and Western Balkan aspiring countries in order of creating a united, safe and stable Europe.

After the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the role of the European Union in the international system has also changed. In 2009, theoreticians of international relations, representatives of the declinist theory were quite noisy in stating that the European Union was on decline. They based this claim on two factors:

1. The financial crisis which caused the contraction of EU's GDP for 4% in 2009
2. Uncertainty and fatigue which have followed the process of reforming the EU Treaty (Vasconcelos, 2010: 1)

However, global leadership trends currently provide a quite different approach from the approach of declinist theoreticians. European Union remains a model of reconciliation and peace in a space as heterogeneous as the European continent. This body is an example on how to overcome nationalism and create bridges among traditionally hostile nations. European multilateralism is a convenient model on how the leading global structure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should function, when the world has become far more interdependent and faces different challenges.

### **Enlargement Strategy and EU Foreign Policy towards the Western Balkans**

The EU enlargement represents one of the most effective instruments of the EU foreign policy. The enlargement policy is the image of the EU global role as a model of soft power. Lisbon Treaty carried out a reform of the enlarged EU institutions by creating an institutional framework which will enable its adaptation in case of accession of new member states. Requirements for "a powerful union that will act as such in all foreign relations" (Paul, 2008: 11) have been ongoing.

The Balkans has always been a very important geo-strategic area for Europe, characterized by a significant diversity of geopolitical orientation. For the EU, Western Balkans has always represented a region of a great geopolitical importance. The transition process in the countries of this region, has not only been extended, but has also been followed by other parallel processes such as: post-communist political and economic transformation, violent conflicts, processes of state building, democratic consolidation and preparation of these countries for their integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. The EU engagement in these processes has been and remains crucial to the security and stability of this region. Despite the economic crisis, the EU has accepted the new demands of the two Balkan states Montenegro and Albania for joining it. EU enlargement policy has a stabilizing role in the Western Balkans.

However, EU delays for facing the Balkans' challenges have been very apparent over the last decades. Without NATO and the U.S., EU has failed to eliminate the reminiscences of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kosovo remains a test for the EU common foreign policy. Five of the 27 EU member states have not recognized it yet as an independent state. Despite the changes in the Lisbon Treaty (Treaty on European Union, 2010: 23), where the new post of EU High Representative for foreign policy, should be the unified voice of 27 member countries in order "to ensure the continuity of operations outside EU" (WESSELS and Bopp, 2008: 19), it doesn't function that way. Foreign policies of member states individually continue to dominate the European common foreign policy, thus leaving EU as just a supranational economic community.

EU should be more active in solving this problem by unifying political concepts towards the Balkans. European help is necessary, not only for the Balkans but also for its own perspective. This would avoid the difficulties caused by conservative concepts and would boost the process of EU enlargement and consolidation.

### **The impact of EU on Europeanization of the Western Balkans**

Today, the overall thrust of the EU's Balkans policy has moved from an agenda dominated by security issues related to the wars that accompanied the dissolution of Yugoslavia to an agenda focused on the Western Balkans' EU accession prospects. (ISS Report 2010: 38). EU engagement in the Western Balkans has moved from the stabilization process to the Europeanization one.

Europeanization is perceived differently depending on the point of view - from Brussels or from the Balkans aspiring countries. Europeanization represents the point where the enlargement fatigue within EU and integration fatigue within the Western Balkans meet. One of the most powerful instruments of Europeanization is "membership conditionality gives the EU significant leverage in transferring to the applicant countries its principles, norms, and rules, as well as in shaping their institutional and administrative structures" (Grabbe 2002: 93). This condition is naturally neutralized by the willingness of the applicant countries to voluntarily take responsibility for approximation, harmonization and implementation of these principles, rules and norms in order to accelerate the integration process. This organization is committed in preparing these countries for accessing this supranational organization through creation of mechanisms for each country individually. One of the stages that demonstrate the EU commitment for Europeanization of this region is the realization of the visa liberalization process, which represents one of the EU pillars on free movement. But the realization of this phase was also accompanied by numerous deficiencies. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, two countries which are crucial for the security and regional stability, remain outside the area of free movement. Nevertheless, Serbia as the main responsible for the wars in the Balkans became part of the area.

### **Progress of Western Balkans towards EU integration**

The report on enlargement strategy and main challenges for 2009-2010 prepared by the European Commission had concluded: "The countries of the Western Balkans (...) have still, to different degrees, substantial work ahead in meeting the established criteria and conditions. The pace of reform is often slow. The international economic crisis adds to the strains. In several cases, bilateral questions unduly affect the accession process." (Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009-2010, 2009:2). And these issues remain unchanged even after several years from this report.

In the Western Balkans, apart from the stalled reforms, the unresolved issues between the countries of this region cross the way to this process. The lack of compromise in Bosnia, non-democratization and non-transformation of Serbia's political culture for being able to accept the created reality - the independent state of Kosovo and the failure to resolve the name dispute between Macedonia and Greece, are holding on the Euro-Atlantic integration for an indefinite period. Poverty, large scale of corruption, lack of investments, lack of rule of law, insufficient respect of human rights and freedoms, lack of security and stability, not only postpone the democratization and the progress of these countries, but also pose a threat to stability and security in the European continent as a whole. These are the challenges that countries must face as soon as possible, regardless of deadlines and requirements of the European Union. Meeting the Copenhagen and Madrid criteria should not serve as a goal for

the Western Balkan countries to become part of the western union. These criteria should serve as guidance for building democratic countries with rule of law and which produce stability for the region in general. Therefore, the integration into these structures would happen automatically, since the Western Balkan countries will not need to access the European Union, but the European Union could not function without them.

### *Conclusions and recommendations*

- EU enlargement strategy and analysis of European foreign policy towards the Western Balkans clearly demonstrates the commitment of this organization for the future of the Western Balkans and Europe in general.
- Enlargement is the most appropriate strategy for stabilization of the Balkans.
- EU Enlargement strategy is the best way to move from crisis management towards the democratization of this region.
- European Union should consider sub-regional approach to integrate Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia into EU, since other states of the Western Balkans are now part of the process of Europeanization (Croatia, Macedonia and Albania).
- The unresolved issues in the Balkans as bilateral disputes and the completion of state-building processes could bring consequences on the development and economic cooperation in the Balkans, regional destabilization, and it may even lead to deviation of the main NATO and EU strategy for stabilizing the Western Balkans and the loss of confidence in these organizations.
- European Union should build up a coherent policy towards the Balkans.
- The Balkans can be sustainable only when there is a stability and sustainability of each country individually. Any fluctuation and instability in any of the countries gives impact on the entire peninsula.

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