

The National Politics of EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans

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Enlargement is at the heart of the European project. It is widely considered as one of the European Union's most successful policies. Notwithstanding the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, a community that began with just six members has now grown to 28.¹ Looking ahead, it appears almost certain that we will see a further expansion in the future. Although Turkey is the largest and most prominent of the countries vying to join the EU, its prospects of membership appear to have all but disappeared. Democratic backsliding (Öktem and Akkoyunlu, 2016), coupled with growing political and popular opposition to its membership across the EU (Gerhards and Hans, 2011), means that Turkish accession is now highly unlikely in anything other than the long term, if ever. Instead, the focus of attention is now firmly fixed on the six countries of the Western Balkans – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.²

However, the course of enlargement into the Western Balkans also comes with its own set of difficulties. It is a region that is still recovering from the bitter conflicts of the 1990s. It is beset by a range of security issues, including corruption, organised crime, secessionist challenges, and religious extremism. It is also poorer than the rest of the European Union (Linotte, 2017). Moreover, in recent years authoritarian tendencies have been on the rise throughout the Western Balkans. The negative effects of policies by regional strongmen can be seen in the judiciary, the media and civil society. (The democratic regress in the region is often identified in the newly-coined term 'stabilitocracy' (Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group, 2017).) This has raised concerns about its capacity to integrate as well as fears about mass emigration once the region joins the EU. Despite this, the process of Western Balkan enlargement is also seen as vital for the European Union. For many, it is a natural next stage for the EU. It represents a chance to fill a 'hole' on the map of Europe (Avery, 2007). At a time of crisis and doubt within the EU, the accession process indirectly demonstrates how EU membership is still seen as a positive force.

The problem is that, when expressed in these stark terms of security costs and existential benefits, a rather binary picture emerges of a European polity that is either in favour of expansion or against it. In truth, the picture is far more complicated than this. Across the members of the European Union, we can see a range of attitudes towards enlargement. While some countries may see a logic to expansion, they may worry about crime. Others may see the benefits of an increasing pool of workers, but worry about how they will integrate. Public attitudes are also complex. While in some key countries enlargement fatigue and opposition to new members has very high percentage rates, things look more optimistic in other member states (Balfour and Stratulat, 2015). These attitudes are often shaped by domestic political debates, not

¹ Founders (1957): Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg; United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark (1973); Greece (1981); Spain and Portugal (1986); Austria, Sweden and Finland (1995); Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta (2004); Bulgaria and Romania (2007); Croatia (2013).

² For most of the last twenty years, the Western Balkans has usually been defined as the former Yugoslavia plus Albania and minus Slovenia. Arguably, this changed in 2013, when Croatia became the latest country to join the EU. In the context of this work, the Western Balkans are defined as the six countries vying to join the EU.

only in terms of the overall policy towards enlargement, but also as regards national attitudes and policies towards the Western Balkans. Rarely, however, do these national discussions receive a wider airing. In many ways, they are the untold stories that remain out of sight to other members. To this end, this volume is an attempt to redress this lacuna in our understanding of enlargement. It highlights the way in which enlargement in general, and expansion in the Western Balkans, is understood and debated within several in national settings across member states.

Understanding national support for enlargement

As well as having a valuable role to play in terms of understanding the specific national policy dimensions of enlargement, this volume is also intended to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between national politics and EU enlargement. Until now, there appears to have been a tendency to view enlargement in institutional terms. There is a sense amongst many observers that expansion has been driven by some sort of monolithic agenda. The EU, acting as a unified body, has pursued expansion as part of its fundamental reason for being.

According to traditional views on enlargement, the mission to expand the European Union is based on a logic of wider political and geographic integration that will, eventually, see the EU incorporate all the countries of Europe – however ill-defined this may be the concept of Europe may be. The very first line of the founding Treaty of Rome proclaims the desire of the people of Europe to pursue ‘ever greater union’. But the idea of expansion as a settled EU policy extends beyond this foundational principle. Hand in hand with this runs the idea that enlargement is part and parcel of a wider policy of advancing European values in the world (Haukkala, 2011). The EU is also regarded as a reforming body. It is understood to play a transformative role that will radically redefine, and improve, the economic, political and social conditions within aspiring members (Grabbe 2015; 2014; De Munter, 2017). From equal pay and minority rights to health and safety standards and the ability to move freely across the members, the European Union is seen to improve the lives of the hundreds of millions of European citizens across the continent. Expansion therefore draws more into this fold of personal prosperity and security. Importantly, much of the appeal of the idea of transformation through Europeanization in the Western Balkans is predicated on the previous example of Central European countries, an experiment widely considered successful (Grabbe, 2006; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005). Lastly, and perhaps most notably, the European Union is conceived as being one of the finest examples of conflict management in human history. This notion is exceedingly powerful in European thinking and numerous studies have engaged with the idea of EU’s positive impact on conflict dynamics in European peripheries and beyond (see, for example, Coppieters et.al. (2004), Diez et.al. (2006), Hughes (2009) and various contributions in the special issue of the journal *Ethnopolitics*). In many ways, it represents the founding myth of the EU. The award of the Nobel Prize for Peace to the EU, in 2012, served to cement this narrative of the EU as the conflict management mechanism par excellence.³

However, while there has been an extensive body of literature that has looked at enlargement, and the underlying reasons why the European Union as a unified political entity has wanted to enlarge, and the ways in which this process has been undertaken either at the EU side or the membership hopefuls’ side (Grabbe and

³ For more information, see the website of the Nobel Prize.
https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2012/

Hughes, 1998; Moravcsik and Vachudova, 2003; Sedelmeir, 2005; Schimmelfennig, 2007; 2005; Vachudova, 2014), relatively little work has been done on the reasons why individual member states have supported, or sometimes opposed, the process of enlargement. What has been missing from this wider, institutionalist understanding of enlargement has been a recognition that behind this aggregated support for enlargement lies a myriad of national policy agendas. Simply put, empirical investigations of member states' policies have tended to be missing in accounts of enlargement. (Some exceptions include Balfour and Stratulat, 2015; Moravcsik and Vachudova, 2003; Smeets, 2015.)

The scarcity of nationally focused analyses of EU enlargement begs an obvious question. While it is possible to discern a broader, institutional rationale for enlargement, how do we understand the rationale of individual member states to pursue enlargement? Here a complex picture emerges. To be sure, in many cases the wider logic of integration applies. For many states, the idea of an ever-expanding union, dedicated to greater integration, is a national policy objective as much as it is the wider goal of the EU. However, there is often so much more to national support for enlargement than an idealised vision of an EU that incorporates all the countries of Europe from westernmost Ireland to easternmost Cyprus and from northernmost Finland to southernmost Malta. Upon closer examination, it becomes clear that there are a multitude of separate national reasons for supporting enlargement. As well as a wish to enhance integration, manage conflict, encourage reform, promote economic development, and prevent closer political integration, the enlargement agenda has also been driven by narrower national interests, such as support for traditional allies. These wider views are neatly captured in the way in which different members approach the question of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans.

EU enlargement in the Western Balkans

While it is perhaps tempting for external observers to think of the region as a single bloc, there is huge variation between the countries when it comes to their integration progress. Leading the pack is Montenegro. As of October 2017, it has opened negotiations on 28 of the 35 chapters of the *acquis communautaire*, the EU's body of laws, and has provisionally closed negotiations on three of these. At present, it is still unclear when it will be ready to join. Some have suggested that it could be as early as 2022.⁴ However, the actual date depends not only on when it finishes its negotiations, but also on how long it will take for its accession treaty to be ratified by the parliaments of the current members. In the case of Croatia, the most recent country to join the EU, this took almost two years. Nevertheless, barring a surprise, it seems almost certain that Montenegro will be the next member of the EU.

After Montenegro, the next most likely member is Serbia. It has opened 10 chapters so far, and provisionally closed two. While it is some way behind Montenegro, it has made enormous progress on its accession path. Some have even suggested that it may yet be possible that Montenegro and Serbia could join at the same time.⁵ However, this seems unlikely. A more realistic date would perhaps be 2025. The big question mark that hangs over Serbian accession is the question of Kosovo. Serbia has still not recognised its 2008 unilateral declaration of independence. Although the EU has led a process of dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, which aims at the normalisation of

⁴ 'Darmanović: Montenegro becomes EU member in 2022', *European Western Balkans*, 20 April 2017.

⁵ 'Juncker chides EU candidate Turkey, upbeat on Western Balkans', *Reuters*, 13 September 2017.

relations, it is widely understood that Serbian will have to formally recognise Kosovo before it can join. Although this cannot be a formal EU demand, given that five EU members – Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain – still do not recognise Kosovo, individual members are free to demand this as the price of their ratification of Serbian membership. Unless Belgrade is willing to make a major U-turn on its long-standing opposition to Kosovo's statehood, the demand that it formally accept Kosovo is likely to be a major obstacle to its eventual membership.

After Montenegro and Serbia, Macedonia and Albania are the next two likely members. However, neither has opened any chapters yet. In the case of Macedonia, which became a candidate for membership in 2005, long before any of the others, the country's progress towards EU accession has been shaped by its ongoing dispute with Greece over its official name. Despite long-standing efforts by the United Nations to broker a solution, the two remain far apart in terms of how best to resolve the matter. As a result, Greece refuses to allow the opening of any chapters. Meanwhile, initial signs that the country was pursuing a radical reform programme have disappeared. (On the issue of the name dispute in relation to Macedonia's EU accession process, see Ilievski and Taleski 2009; Tziampiris 2012.) Deprived of the chance at EU accession, the country has witnessed a progressive backsliding in terms of its adherence to democratic principles and the rule of law. In recent years, it has been mired in a prolonged political crisis. Although this now appears to have been resolved, it has done serious damage to the institutions of the country. As for Albania, it has made significant progress in recent years. Although it faces huge problems in terms of corruption, there are signs that things are now starting to improve. In recognition of this, the country was awarded candidacy in June 2014.

At the back of the queue are Kosovo and Bosnia. In the case of Kosovo, progress has again been hampered by the fact that it does not enjoy full international recognition. At present, five EU members have yet to accept its statehood – although several of them maintain very cordial bilateral relations. Importantly, despite these differences, the European Union has managed to find a way to pursue Kosovo's integration. For example, in the case of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, usually regarded as the first step in the accession process, it was agreed that this could be signed by the Union acting as a separate legal entity under the terms of the Lisbon Treaty, rather than be agreed by each individual member. While this has eased the situation, it has not provided a complete solution. As some point, the issue of its recognition will become a greater challenge (Ker-Lindsay and Economides, 2012). Finally, Bosnia presents a huge challenge for the European Union. Twenty years have now passed since the country's brutal civil war was ended. Despite initial signs that the country was rebuilding, over the past decade the country's political elites have become more and more at odds with one another. To many observers, the country is now completely dysfunctional. Again, the European Union has repeatedly tried to intervene, but with little success.

The positions of member states on Western Balkans Enlargement

As can be seen, the six countries of the Western Balkans are at very different stages of their accession processes. But just as it would be wrong to view the Western Balkans as a single entity in terms of enlargement, it would be equally wrong to view the position of the European Union in monolithic terms. There is a range of very different attitudes towards expansion in the region. To highlight this, this volume examines the approaches of seven EU members towards EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. In their different ways, they represent an interesting and representative spectrum of

approaches towards expansion. The first to be considered are the EU's Big Three: Germany, France and the United Kingdom. Next comes Italy, a major EU member that has a long tradition of engagement with the Western Balkans. Then come three regional states: Hungary, Greece and Cyprus. Each shows a very distinct approach towards enlargement – both in general terms and as it applies to the Western Balkans.

Without doubt, Germany is now the single most important actor in terms of enlargement policy. And yet the country's position on enlargement is complex. Unlike many other EU members, where enlargement policy is firmly within the hands of the government and receives scant wider attention, in Germany, the Parliament has extensive powers to shape the process. This makes enlargement truly political in a way that has rarely been the case elsewhere. Domestic politics and EU expansion are closely linked. Germany also retains close relations with the region. Almost one and half million people in Germany originate from the region. German businesses are active in the Western Balkans. Germany is a huge aid donor. It has also played a strong role in peacekeeping missions. It has also taken an increasingly active political role in the region. Along with Britain and France, it has been at the forefront of efforts to support Kosovo. Berlin also worked with London to try to help Bosnia. As Britain's sway over the enlargement process has waned, Germany has stepped up its support for expansion. It is now, unquestionably, the single most important actor in the process. And yet, it has also established a reputation for being one of the strictest proponents of conditionality. While Germany is avowed supporter of enlargement, it also believes in the sanctity of the process, and the importance of ensuring that new members can meet their commitments and will not undermine the credibility or integrity of the European Union.

In the case of France, support for enlargement has traditionally been far easier to understand. EU expansion has been seen by Paris as an effective means by which to extend its power. And yet, in recent years, France has been oddly absent from debates about EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. It was not involved in the British and German initiative to help try to stabilise Bosnia. Nor was it involved in the initial development of the Berlin Process. Indeed, until relatively recently, it appeared to have lost interest in the region. In part, this may be explained by the fact that, unlike Germany, policy making in this area remains firmly in the hands of officials. Also, while there are strong historical links between France and the Balkans, the contemporary ties are weaker. The community from the Balkans is small. Moreover, in a region where many still dream of emigrating, few would consider moving to France. Nor is the region given much media attention. Where it does receive attention, the focus is often negative. In recent years, though, French interest appears to have been growing again. For example, Paris hosted the Berlin Process summit in 2016. More to the point, its support for expansion appears to run in conjunction with Germany. Like Berlin, Paris is keen to stress the integrity of the European project.

The United Kingdom is a particularly interesting case to consider. Historically, it has been at the forefront of efforts to enlarge the European Union. In large part, this was based on a deep scepticism about longer-term trends towards closer political union, with the possibility that this could even lead to a federal Europe. Traditionally, European expansion was regarded by British policy makers as the best way to prevent this from happening. Widening the European Union would stave off efforts to deepen the process of European integration. For this reason, Britain led the efforts to expand the European Union in the late-1990s and early 2000s. It was also the most enthusiastic member in terms of welcoming the extension of the freedom of movement to the wave of new entrants that joined the EU in 2004. In retrospect, this would have disastrous consequences. The number of new arrivals far exceeded

expectations. Coupled with Britain's longstanding widespread mistrust of the EU, and a creeping encroachment on the UK's sovereignty, this surge in new arrivals provided a fertile ground for a rise in populist hard Euroscepticism, if not outright Europhobic nationalism. Since 2010, there has been a marked decline in Britain support for enlargement. While British officials would declare that the EU's expansion remained a British policy, the degree of support for new members from the Balkans has been tepid, at best. With few ties to the region, there was no overriding reason for London to support their entry to the Union. In a final ironic twist to the story, Britain's support for enlargement, and its willingness to extend full rights to new EU citizens from day one, laid the foundations for its decision, in June 2016, to leave the European Union. Having once been the champion of expansion, Britain now finds that its voice on enlargement has been muted.

Italy is also a very interesting case. Sitting on the other side of the Adriatic, it has long taken a close interest in the Western Balkans and has proven to be a vocal supporter of the European perspective. However, the roots of its support for EU enlargement in the region are overwhelmingly shaped by economic interests and security concerns. Italy is a major investor in the region. And yet, for all its interests in the Western Balkans, which should give it a powerful say in EU policy towards the region, Italy also represents an interesting example of how a country that has a strong belief in EU enlargement, and close ties to the Western Balkans, has been unable to convert this in to strong political significance. It is notable that Italy was absent in the early stages of the Berlin Process. It also failed to play a part in the British-German initiative on Bosnia and Herzegovina. This failure can in part be attributed to a lack of resources. While Italian officials and companies have excellent ties across the region, the government has persistently failed to prioritise the region politically. Interestingly, despite its proximity, the region attracts scant interest amongst the population at large. When it does come to the forefront of attention, it is often in a negative way. Ultimately, the picture that emerges is of a country that sees the financial and security benefits of expansion in the Western Balkans, and wants to play a more significant role, but lacks the wherewithal to convert this into a leading role in EU policy circles.

Moving beyond the larger members of the Union, enlargement also plays an important role in the national politics of many other members. One of the most interesting, and yet relatively neglected, is Hungary. It is a significant actor not only because it neighbours the Western Balkans to the north, but because of its extensive historical and cultural ties to the region. Then there are also important domestic political factors at play in the form of the Hungarian national minorities in parts of the Balkans. Budapest uses its leverage as a member of the EU to press for greater minority rights for Hungarians. It also made this a key plank of its support for Serbian accession. However, support for enlargement goes beyond narrow communal interests. It is also tied to wider Hungarian foreign policy goals. And yet, in doing so, it also exposes fundamental tensions in Hungary's relationship with the EU. On the one hand, the Hungarian government is wholly committed towards EU expansion in the Western Balkans. In the face of 'enlargement fatigue' it has sought to encourage the other members to hold the faith and continue to offer a European perspective to the Western Balkans. And yet, Hungary also has a difficult, if not wholly strained, relationship with the EU. The administration of Prime Minister Viktor Orban has taken a sharply illiberal turn in recent years and has become increasingly opposed to what they see as the influence of 'Brussels' in national affairs. As a result, Hungary's ability to press the case for the faster accession of the Western Balkans has been compromised. The situation has also been complicated by the 2015 migration crisis, which saw Hungary enforce extremely punitive measures to refugees from crossing its border with Serbia, thereby forcing them westwards to Croatia and the Slovenia.

This did considerable harm to its relations with many of its EU partners, and put ties with neighbouring Serbia under strain for a time. However, more recently, the Hungarian government has been able to use its opposition to migration to strengthen its standing amongst the more illiberal regimes in the Balkans. In this regard, Hungary could be jeopardising EU conditionality as a cornerstone of the accession process.

Meanwhile, at the southern end of the Balkans lies Greece. Like Hungary, it too has placed a high degree of emphasis on enlargement. Indeed, perhaps more than in any other EU member state, it has used expansion for its own ends. And yet its position on the issue is also oddly ambivalent. On the one hand, it remains declaratively, and even in periods of enlargement fatigue, one of the most ardent supporters of the inclusion of the whole region into the EU. In doing so, it has used this to increase its general influence in the region. On the other hand, it is also an obstructing factor, often a particularly obstinate one, whenever its multiple interests in the Balkans produce frictions and towards candidates with which Athens has disputes. In other words, it has used its power to block as a very specific tool to increase its leverage in certain cases - most notably in terms of the Macedonia name issue. As is shown, the Greek position cannot be properly understood without reference to three key factors. In the first instance, it is important to understand the particularities of Greece's foreign policy making. Secondly, it is crucial to consider the background of Greece's relationship with the region and the legacy of multiple disputes that were created or exacerbated in the early post-Communist period. Finally, there is the legacy of the 1990s of turning EU enlargement policy into a Greek foreign policy tool. Taken together, these factors not only explain the existence and persistence of Greece's ambivalent attitudes and policies, but also indicate that the factors are likely to continue to shape Greece's enlargement policy in the future. In this context, it is likely that in the coming years Greece will engage in a delicate balance of strategically placing conditionality to ensure favourable compromises with neighbours, while not jeopardizing the continuation of the enlargement process per se. In many ways, Greece is the clearest example of how an EU member state has instrumentalised enlargement to secure its national interests and foreign policy goals.

Finally, there is the case of Cyprus. Along with Hungary, it is one of the wave of the 2004 entrants to the European Union. However, while Cyprus is geographically a part of South East Europe, it has in fact taken a rather distant approach to the question of enlargement in the Western Balkans. In part, this is due to its long-standing focus on its 'national issue', the division of the island and UN-sponsored efforts to reach a negotiated settlement to the 'Cyprus Problem'. This has tended to mean that the island has adopted an instrumental and transactional approach towards foreign policy. The amount of effort its devoted to external relations with countries was directly related to the importance attached to their position on the Cyprus issue. Alongside the five permanent members of the Security Council, Cyprus has tended to focus its attention on Muslim states, which could recognise the self-declared 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus', and the large bloc of developing states that can give it votes in the UN General Assembly. Interestingly, during the Cold War, this meant that Yugoslavia had real significance given its role as a lead actor in the Non-Aligned Movement, a key body for marshalling the support of the developing world. However, in the post-Cold War era, and with the break-up of Yugoslavia, the Western Balkans ceased to be of much direct interest to Cyprus. When Cyprus did take an interest, it was to support Greece over the Macedonia name issue, or oppose Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, which was viewed as a direct threat to its national interests. More generally, it has held the region at arm's length. It has few direct contacts with the region. To this end, Cyprus has had a relatively disinterested approach towards enlargement in the Balkans, which stands in stark contrast to the

amount of attention given to the region by Greece. In this sense, enlargement in the Western Balkans is the clearest example of how, despite predictions to the contrary, Cypriot and Greek foreign policy have diverged, and how geographic proximity will not always mean that a country is interested in its neighbourhood. Ultimately, Cyprus is interesting because it has been so very uninvolved in the question of enlargement in the Western Balkans.

The national politics of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans

Taken together, the seven case studies in this volume provide some valuable findings to explain the reasons why states support EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. Beyond its generic support of the ideal of the European Union bringing Europe together, it is possible to discern specific national reasons for supporting enlargement. Sometimes, there are strong links to the region that drive support for the process. This is seen particularly clearly in the case of Germany. The large diaspora community ensures that there are significant ties. Likewise, there is a strong business case for enlargement, which is also seen in the case of Italy. However, ties of population and commercial links are a comparatively rare elsewhere. In several cases, countries support enlargement to promote their own prestige. For France, this is about building a wider Europe in which it plays a lead role. A larger, more powerful Europe means a more powerful France. For others, such as Greece and Hungary, it is about building influence amongst EU member states, as well as amongst the candidates. Greece also shows the power of EU enlargement to achieve wider foreign policy goals, such as building ties with certain candidates, such as Serbia, or using the process to exert leverage over others, as happens in the case of Macedonia, with the purpose to resolve its bilateral disputes. Perhaps most unusually, enlargement can sometimes be used as a tool to shape the EU in a direction favoured by a member state. The most glaring example is the case of Britain. Lastly, in some countries, as exemplified by Cyprus, there appears to be no discernible national reason to support enlargement over and above the wider EU goal of expansion.

Balanced against support for enlargement, there are also some interesting conclusions that can be drawn about concerns over EU expansion. ('Opposition' would be too strong a word as no state actively opposes it). For France and Germany, the European project is paramount. They want to ensure that enlargement into the Western Balkans will not undermine the integrity of the EU. This is undoubtedly driven by the many concerns that have been raised about the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, which many regarded as premature and done primarily for political reasons. This means that expansion in the Western Balkans is being driven by a much greater commitment to conditionality than was perhaps the case in previous waves of enlargement. Another common thread is concern over security. It is widely accepted that the Western Balkans plays a major role in organised crime and various forms of trafficking in Europe. Finally, concerns over migration, and the freedom of movement, has also become increasingly prominent in member states (Grabbe, 2014; Ker-Lindsay, 2017).

Conclusion

Despite the problems faced by the European Union, enlargement remains a flagship policy. However, expansion is a far more complex process than is often acknowledged, either by policy makers or by scholars. While the institutional dimensions of enlargement are undoubtedly important, and generally well-understood, it is also vital to recognise the role played by domestic political dynamics

within member states. Although meeting the basic standards of economic and political openness, and conforming to the terms of the *acquis* are both necessary conditions for membership, doing so is not wholly sufficient for accession. Member states must give their approval. This veto power is not subject to appeal or oversight. Nor can it be outdone by the collective votes of other members. It is an absolute and uncontested prerogative of members. To this extent, national politics matter enormously.

Although the role of domestic politics within member states in the accession process may be accepted in general terms, very little research has been conducted on the subject. Few efforts have been made to investigate the way in which individual member states conceptualise enlargement in a broad sense, let alone how they approach enlargement in regional or country-specific terms. This collection is an attempt to investigate the way in which a variety of member states approach enlargement and highlight the true range of differences that exist within members over the question of the future expansion of the European Union. It tries to remedy this lacuna in the literature by providing a range of case studies prepared in such a way as to maximise their comparative value. Given the range of issues at stake, the Western Balkans is therefore a valuable testing ground for examining the wide range of issues that underpin member state support or opposition towards enlargement. What it shows is that the national politics of EU enlargement are not only very different, they are driven by very different and often very specific national concerns. They are also open to change. This needs to be more explicitly recognised. The support of countries can alter over time. The EU needs to respond to this, as do aspiring members.

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