

## EU's role on the Western Balkan Democratization

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### **Abstract:**

This article overviews democratization process of the Western Balkan countries by the assistance of the EU. Democratization firstly should be developed in the region by the domestic willingness and later by the external assistance. The EU's vision toward the future of the Western Balkans is accepting the region's countries to the EU, after completing their democratizations by using Stabilization and Association Agreements as a carrot. This external assistance has developed South East European countries democracies like Bulgaria, and it is still working in the region like Macedonia. Democratic developments are very beneficial for the region and also for the EU on her target of encompassing the continent.

**Key Words:** Minority Rights, Balkan Democratization, Europeanization, Ohrid Framework Agreement.

### **EU'S ROLE ON THE WESTERN BALKAN DEMOCRATIZATION**

#### **1- INTRODUCTION TO BALKANS: COMPLEX HETEROGENEITIES**

For thousand years Balkan area had/s multiethnic heterogeneity. Under the Ottoman rule, these ethnicities had lived in peace for a long time. During the Ottoman period, today's ethnicities divided according to their religions and denominations. Long lasting mutual tolerance among the peoples and religions yielded Balkan peoples to live together without a conflict. Certainly, even before the region fell victim to the nationalism, Ottoman state did not live in a certain undisturbed environment, however all Balkan groups lived

together for centuries under a state.<sup>65</sup> At that time Ottoman State did not have a terminological word of her vocabulary because every person was counted as her people, until the recent times of her collapsing. After independence, within the region, nations, nation-states, majority and minority groups and related issues have flamed up. Because, the idea of nation-states and nationalism has brought “our” and “others” approach, rigid policies/politicians and ignoring the others’ rights.

There are a lot of meanings of “Balkan” term. One of these explanations says “Balkan” is a term of combination of two words in Turkish; “bal” is honey, “kan” is blood. These meanings explain that, Balkan area can be a honey-world or a bloody-world because of its heterogenic features. The region is still exactly heterogenic in terms of religion, denomination, ethnicity, culture, ideology and so on. If one of these entities struggles for being a dominant power without giving the importance to the others, the area could transform to a conflict region quickly. But as its history happened, if the tolerance is used as a key and main tool among the peoples by the policy-makers, the region could be a perfect sample of the peace and good neighborhood.

Under the communist ideology and governments the nations were pressed on ideology, so the nationalism was diminished for a limited time. But after 1990s, new world order and its thoughts have brought again nationalism with new versions, such as micro-nationalism and tribalism to the region. Like early 19 and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries’ nationalism, at this time tribalism carried out the “blood” to the Balkan area with Croat, Serb and Bosnian conflict between 1992-95 years, Kosovo conflict in 1999 and Macedonia conflict in 2001. Right that time, EU offered “Europeanness” to the region countries. Being a European was a better and bigger idea than tribalism and it could be a way of getting rid of negative aspects of micro-nationalism, right along with the economic benefits of the EU.

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<sup>65</sup> Hans Georg Majer (2007), “*The Ottoman Heritage Revisited*”, Proceedings of the International Conference on Minority Issues in the Balkans and the EU, in M. Hacısalıhoğlu and F. Aksu (eds) Proceedings of the International Conference on Minority Issues in the Balkans and the EU, Istanbul: OBIV Istanbul, 26, 33.

## 2- CARROTS TO THE BALKANS: CHARM OF DREAM

All Balkan countries were dreaming of being member of the EU, because of mostly economical reasons. Even today, in some countries and especially in the Western Balkans unemployment rate is very high; for example 36% in Macedonia and 49% in Kosovo. On the one hand, because of exaggerated misunderstanding of the workers and young university generations about unemployment rate will fall down, new business sectors will open, and the workers can go to the Europe to work immediately, all Balkan countries, except Serbia, are under the public opinion pressure for joining to the EU. On the other hand South East Europe (SEE) and Western Balkans is the natural geographical enlargement for the EU to encompass the continent. Also this enlargement will bring diplomatic prestige and the higher sound to the EU within the international arena. However, the EU wants to go carefully and with strong steps with Western Balkans and does not want to cope with the internal or international conflicts like Cyprus. Because of this reason, the EU on the one hand has started to put a lot of economic, but especially political criteria as obligatory conditions in front of these countries before their accession to the union, on the other hand it has started to frustrate them economically to do these criteria.

For the accession calendar, the EU divided the Balkans as SEE and the Western Balkans according to their economic, security and democratic situations. Western Balkans term includes Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania. The SEE term is used for Western Balkans, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Turkey by the EU. The most important specific feature of the Western Balkans is to be unsecure and unstable area within the Europe. Even today, there are still very serious political and security issues in the Western Balkans, such as intolerance, micro-nationalism xenophobia, underdeveloped democratic and political culture, ill-governance, corruption, organized crime, illegal trafficking, over one million refugees and displaced persons.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Anton Bebler (2008), "The Western Balkans and the International Community", *Avrasya Dosyası*, 14, (1), 11.

During the Bosnia War, in 1993, EU declared the Copenhagen Criteria including of stability of the institutions, guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect to the minorities and their rights. Madrid European Council, in 1995, has also enlarged above mentioned lines with the adjustment of administrative structures, transformation and putting into force the EU legislation into the national legislations.

In May 1999, the EU launched the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) for the five Western Balkan states. The SAP has been using as a tool to reinforce the region's countries' economic and political reforms on the way of the EU. (EU has provided 7 billion Euros donor to the Western Balkans, to establish peace, stability and economic prosperity in the region, since 1991 until now.) Under the SAP, Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) was put into force. The SAA's purpose is to provide technical and financial assistance and trade preferences to the Western countries to get close them to the EU's legal and economical system on bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. The SAA is a key for the region's states right now.

In June 2003, EU Thessalonica Summit has presented to richen regional cooperation and strengthen the stabilization process like a key in the Western Balkans. After the 2004 enlargement of the union, pre-accession progressing and assistance became a necessity in accordance with the EU model for the Western Balkans. Instrument for the Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) was built for the region again in 2007. The purpose of the IPA is establishing transition and institutional building assistance on cross-border cooperation, regional and human resources and rural developments. Another very important step was taken by the CEFTA Agreement which was put into force in 2007. The CEFTA aims to establish Balkan regional free trade area in the whole Balkan region. Lastly, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) was established in Sofia, in February 2008 to ensure regional, economic and security cooperation.<sup>67</sup> These all agreements have become beneficial keys, but also obligatory conditions for the Western Balkans.

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<sup>67</sup> Enika Abazi (2008), "Albania in Europe: Perspectives and Challenges", *Avrasya Dosyası*, 14 (1), 239-242.

### 3- FUNDS AND DEMOCRATIC PROGRESS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The EU's pre-accession demands and also assistance and funds have made economical, political and cultural progress and transformation toward liberalization and democratization in the Western Balkan countries. It is well-known that the democratization cannot be exported by the external power, but can be imported and developed by domestic will in accordance with the internal habitat. Iraq and Afghanistan experiences have shown this fact explicitly. The EU has chosen more democratic and rhetorical way; to be a member of the EU; she put the democratic conditions in front of the candidates to seed and raise their own democracies.

In the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, Central and Eastern European countries became candidates. And for the Western Balkan countries, the door was going to be open to be a candidate until accomplishing the SAA targets. Today two Western Balkan countries gained candidate status and the others are the potential candidates. In 2006, Salzburg Declaration has brought two additional conditions for the Western Balkans: Copenhagen Criteria, SAP responsibilities and cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Albania has signed the SAA in 2006. She has taken a lot of way on the cross-border inspections and the international cooperation. Albanian perspective and working together with the Europe on the Kosovo's independence was/is very constructive.<sup>68</sup> In addition to this, she has hesitated from escalation with Serbia and unification with Kosovo. Unlike her neighbors there is no internal conflict in Albania, and she has more stable environment in compare with the other regional countries. Montenegro also has signed the SAA in 2007. To strengthen public administration and state control, the EU has founded Regional School of Public Administration in the country.

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<sup>68</sup> European Commission (2007), "*Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges*", 2007-8 COM (2007) 663 Final.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina there is *sui generis* situation. Dayton Peace Agreement has ensured the peace in the country, but it could not establish a normal state to work. That's why it can be said that, Dayton is a peace agreement, but not an establisher treaty of a natural country. In spite of that the EU has made different and beneficial services in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 2003, EU has created EU Police Forces for three years, instead of UN Police. This duty has become the first mission under the European Security and Defense Policy. After the UNSC Resolution 1575, the EU Military Forces has been also established and deployed into the country in 2004. Because of the Serb Republic's resistance within Bosnia-Herzegovina, nationalism and dividing lines have risen in the country, so reform process has declined. However at the end of 2007, Bosnia-Herzegovina has also signed the SAA with the EU.

In Serbia, majority of the young generation desire joining to the EU. Previous elections had shown that fact. Although the last election shows the nationalism is rising, Serbian government also wants to be a member of the EU because of the first economic, later political reasons. With this aim Serbia started the SAA negotiations in October 2005. Six months later, negotiations were cut because of the lack of the cooperation about Mladic's capture and Kosovo's status. But after the Karadzic's capture the SAA was signed with Serbia, as a green light on the promise of the EU. As a result, Serbia's eagerness to become a member, yielded Karadzic's capturing, Montenegro's independence; but the most importantly she has chosen the diplomatic way against Kosovo's independence instead of war.

Croatia firstly has started the negotiations with the EU by signing the SAA like the others. In June 2004, Croatia was declared as a candidate country. Membership negotiations have started in October 2005. During the negotiations she has taken a long way on ensuring Copenhagen Criteria and working with the International Criminal Court. The EU also demands from Croatia to solve some issues which inherited from the war time. These issues are generally European Human Rights Agreement, protection of the minority

rights, protection of the Serbian minorities, inspection and punishment ethnic discrimination and returning issue of the refugees.<sup>69</sup>

Recognizing Kosovo's independence is a huge democratic development by itself. Although a few numbers of members reject the recognizing because of their similar internal minority issues, today 22 members of the EU have recognized Kosovo. Even Montenegro, Serbia's traditional friend, has also recognized Kosovo on 15 October 2008 to establish warm relations with the union. Also Macedonian Parliament, another friend of Serbia, has accepted a draft about recognizing Kosovo in the same day. Today Kosovo Parliament has 10 Serbian Member of Parliament and one them says "it is good we are presented in Kosovo institutions, participation in institutions has provided Serbian community with results thus far."<sup>70</sup> As former UN Envoy for Kosovo Status, Marti Ahtisaari says, Serbia's current resistance to recognize Kosovo will change sooner or later, stressing that both countries intend to become members of the EU. International community, particularly the EU will support an independent Kosovo, as it builds its democratic institutions.<sup>71</sup> The EU has appointed EULEX and Special Representative to Kosovo to ensure and cope with the security issues before independence, in February 2008. Police Forces, judges, and custom officers have been also sent under this mission by starting 1 billion Euros assistance for this mission. These all EU supports have been giving the way democratic developments in Kosovo.

#### **4- "SAMPLE" FROM THE EAST TO THE WEST BALKANS: BULGARIA**

Bulgaria had very bad history on human and minority rights by the all aspects before the candidacy. In 1984 under the "Bulgarization Process", more than one million Turks' names were changed with the Bulgarian names, Islam religion and Turkish speaking were banned, so 350.000 Turks flowed to Turkey under these assimilation superimposes. During these negative developments, international community and the EU isolated Bulgaria. Bulgarian economy almost died, foreign debts increased, international

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<sup>69</sup> European Commission, Enlargement Strategy...

<sup>70</sup> Kosara Nikolić, (July 2008) *We Still Have to Fight For Own Rights and Place in Society*, Assembly Support Initiative Newsletter (ASI), 32 (1), 7.

<sup>71</sup> The Kosovo Post, September 16, 2008, (15), 1.

financial credits were cut. These all (especially external) developments started the beginning of the end of the communist regime. By the domestic resistance and international aids, Rights and Freedoms Movement (RFM) was established as a Turkish minority's ethnic party.

The RFM joined the creation of the democratic constitution during the seventh session of the parliament. New constitution has established independent management system, multiparty political system, independent judiciary and guaranteed human and minority rights. In 1990 first democratic election was held and FRM gained 24 Members of Parliament. In the last 18 years the FRM and Bulgarian Governments have built mutual tolerance and understanding and working together culture. In the following elections, the FRM became the coalition partner consecutively. After 2005 election FRM gained "equal partnership" within the coalition government by the representative power of 8:5:3. The FRM was represented by 1 Deputy Prime Minister, 3 Ministers, 14 Deputy Ministers, 4 Mayors and 5 Heads of Parliamentary Commission in the government. On the other hand FRM has succeeded an quite transition from being an ethnic party to the national party. In the last election, FRM got 456.000 votes and 11% of it came from Bulgarians not from Turkish minorities<sup>72</sup>. Joint-working of the FRM and the other majority parties in the government has brought giant steps on the way of the democratization and also economic welfare by the mutual trust. As a result "reward" came to the country: on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2007, Bulgaria became a full member of the EU. On this process, it should not be forgotten of the EU's contributions, guidance, political and economical pressure and aids.

##### **5- THE BEST PROGRESS OF THE WESTERN BALKANS: MACEDONIA**

Unlike the other federate states of the former Yugoslavia, Macedonia became an independent state bloodlessly by 1991 Referendum. According to 2002 Census the country's demographic structure comprises 64% Macedon, 25%

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<sup>72</sup> Younal Lutfi, "*FRM Participation on Bulgarian Government and Bulgarian Ethnic Model*", Istanbul Kültür University, Istanbul, 27 March 2007.

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Albanian, 3% Turks and 2% Roman, Serb and the others.<sup>73</sup> During the foundation of the new state Albanians did not support the independence, referendum was boycotted by the Albanians and participation rate stayed around 72%. But Ethnic Albanians and Turks have involved into drafting of the new constitution. Under socialist constitution Macedonia was the country of the Macedonians, Albanians, Turks and the other minorities, however during the negotiations on the new constitution, by the nationalism winds, Macedonians ignored this point and it was not put into the new constitution by mentioning the minorities' names explicitly. Important political amendments and forms of the democratic institutions did not take place in Macedonia and Macedonian politicians avoided mutual negotiations with the Albanian and Turkish colleagues between the years of 1991-2001. On the contrary, at times the government undertook drastic measures to uphold laws that were deemed controversial. So, before 2001 adoption of the amendments to the 1991 constitution could not consolidate the democracy.<sup>74</sup>

Then 2001 Macedonian Conflict came. National Liberation Army, formerly Kosovo Liberation Army fighters, rebelled against Macedonia Government. Conflict enlarged and escalated quickly and could not be controlled by the authorities. Peace could be ensured by the US (James Pardew) and intensively the EU (François Leotard) mediation. The EU drafted Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) and made pressure on the Macedonian Government to put it into force. Before this agreement Macedonia and the EU had signed the SAA in April 2001. But to start the membership negotiation, the EU envoys stated beyond the screens, Macedonia should have signed the OFA. By this struggle, the peace could be obtained and OFA was signed by the sides. After signing the agreement and monitoring it's putting into practice for three years, in November 2005, Commission decided that Macedonia ensured Copenhagen Criteria and she was a democratic country. In December 2005, Macedonia was first recognized as an official EU candidate.

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<sup>73</sup> Macedonia State Statistical Office (2005), *Census Population, Household and Dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia*, V: I, Skopje, 176.

<sup>74</sup> Zhidas Daskalovski (2008), "The Future of the Peace Process in Macedonia", *Avrasya Dosyasi*, 14 (1), 99.

The OFA has given extended rights to the minorities, especially Albanians. Government has been reserving millions of Euros to improve the equalities and to keep her promises in favor of the minorities in the agreement. Today all state institution employment rates are 13% Albanians, 2% Serbs and 1.4% Turks.<sup>75</sup> The OFA has brought very democratic conditions to the minorities about representation, language, religion, express of idea, education and establishing institutions by the amendments of the constitution.

According to the OFA, language other Macedonian, spoken 20% of the population is also counted an official language, any person living in a unit of local self-government in which at least 20% of the population may use any official language to communicate with the officer of the government or municipality, for less than 20% of the population of a unit of self-government, local authorities shall decide on their use in public bodies.<sup>76</sup> The freedom of religion confession and the right to express one's faith freely are guaranteed also by the OFA. According the agreement, Orthodox, Catholic and Islamic Communities are separate and equal before law and they are free to establish schools and institutions.<sup>77</sup> State guarantees the protection of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all communities.

Members of the communities have right to express, foster and develop their identity and community attributes and they can establish primary and secondary education schools in their own language.<sup>78</sup>

Two institutions were established by the OFA. The first is Ombudsman (Public Attorney) to protect the constitutional rights of the citizens when violated by the state bodies. Second is the Committee for Inter-Community Relations which consists of 7 members, 5 of them should be from Turks, Vlachs, Romans and the other two minorities. Also 1000 police officers from

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<sup>75</sup> Kenan Hasipi (2008), "Socio Cultural and Politic Situation of the Macedonian Turkish Minority" 9 January 2008, Istanbul Kültür University, Istanbul.

<sup>76</sup> Article 7, *Ohrid Framework Agreement, Constitutional Amendments*, 13.08.2001, Skopje, Macedonia.

<sup>77</sup> Article 19, *Ohrid Framework Agreement...*

<sup>78</sup> Article 48, *Ohrid Framework Agreement...*

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the minorities have hired and trained by the OSCE, US and the EU until July 2003.

Although the OFA has given the little consideration to the small minorities, its changes have been geared toward improving the position of the especially Albanian community.<sup>79</sup> Macedonia State TV Channel-II broadcasts 2,5 hours, radios 5,5 hours Turkish programs.<sup>80</sup> In addition to the OFA, Badinter system has brought an obligation of making a coalition with a minority party to establish a government in Macedonia.

## 6- CONCLUSION: FURTHER ON THE RIGHT PATH

Democracy does not come easily to, or establish in an environment quickly. Consolidation of a democratic regime, especially in the multi-ethnic countries like whole Balkan region, is more difficult than homogenous countries. Firstly it should be desired by the domestic people and governments, later external assistance could be taken. The EU has become that external server for the SEE countries such as Bulgaria. Then today, it is still assisting to the Western Balkans on their democratization process and transition guidance by its experts, financing, mediations and using the SAAs. During the political assistance, The EU has been using the “membership card” to the regional countries. This technique and aim has brought a lot benefits to the EU and the Western Balkans. That’s why it should be continued that the regional countries actively to encourage for the further develop. Within a decade, Western Balkans will be a fully-democratic, respective to the minority rights and peaceful and tolerance world by the assistance of the EU.

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<sup>80</sup> Hasipi, *ibid*.

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