INTRODUCTION: EUROPEANIZATION, STATE-BUILDING AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Abstract

The Western Balkans have seen rapid changes since the end of the violent conflicts in the 1990s. The European Union (EU) has been one of the main drivers for change, focusing on the political, economic and social transformation of the region to prepare the countries for membership in the Union. This introduction to the special issue will clarify the key terms and their interaction in the Western Balkans. EU enlargement has never before been this complex and inter-connected with processes of state-building and democratization. The focus on conditionality as the main tool of the EU in the region has had positive and negative results. It can be argued that the EU is actively involved in state-building processes and therefore the term EU Member State Building will be used to explain the engagement of the Union with the countries in the region. This paper will discuss the concept of EU Member State Building, its potential and its pitfalls. It will be demonstrated that the stabilization of the region is unlikely to take place without an active role of the EU, however the current approach has reached its limits and it is time to think about alternative options to integrate the Western Balkans into European structures.

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Introduction

There is general consensus among political elites and academics that the countries in the Western Balkans[1] undergo complex transformations and witness far-reaching changes to their political, social and economic systems. This special issue will assess these complicated processes from the perspectives of Europeanization, state-building and democratization. What will be demonstrated is that while each country faces some important unique historical legacies and current problems to deal with, there are three general trends that can be observed. First, all countries of the Western Balkans want to join the European Union (EU). They are part of the EU's Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) and as such have to implement the acquis communautaire of the EU. This Europeanization process in itself will lead to far-reaching changes in the political, social and economic systems. Second, all states in the Western Balkans have weak state structures and some of them, such as Bosnia and Kosovo are contested in their very existence as independent states. Consequently it can be argued that the establishment of stateness, meaning efficient governance institutions, full control over the state's territory and good neighborly relations with other states in the region remains a key challenge. To address some of the fundamental weaknesses in these states important reforms will have to be implemented to ensure democratic decision-making, the rule of law, the protection of minorities and the establishment of an efficient economic and social system. Finally, all states in the Western Balkans are young democracies. While democracy is deeply-rooted in some of them such as Croatia, other countries are still undergoing important steps towards consolidating democratic structures. Challenges such as the enforcement of the rule of law, the fight against corruption in the bureaucracy and the establishment of cooperative patterns between government and opposition remain. As the contributions to this special issue will demonstrate, overcoming these weaknesses in democratic governance will be a long-term process and require deep changes to the political system and even the political culture.

This introduction will offer a first definition of the key terms of Europeanization, state-building and democratization and will discuss these processes in the context of the Western Balkans. In a second step it will be demonstrated how these transformations are connected and that we can talk about an EU Member State Building process in the region. Finally, part three will introduce the papers of this special issue and summarize their main arguments in the context of EU Member State Building. The majority of papers in this special issue have been previously presented at the UACES annual conference 2011 in Cambridge, UK. This also underlines how important it is to study the integration of the Western Balkans

into the EU as an essential part of European Studies and therefore demonstrates the transition of a region that used to be studied in conflict resolution classes and in courses that focused on international intervention. The main theme of this special issue is the recognition that the Western Balkans are part of Europe and that their destiny lies in the EU's hands. The challenge for the region is not anymore about peace-building but about a process of preparation for membership in European structures. The integration of the Western Balkans into the EU has the potential to become the single most successful foreign policy achievement of the Union. In its importance it is probably comparable to overcoming the century-old conflicts between Germany and France that stood at the beginning of the European integration process. Ending the violence in the Western Balkans, establishing efficient and modern democratic states and integrating these states into the EU are massive tasks. However, considering the possible alternatives of long-term instability it is certainly a task worthwhile.

Definition of Terms

Before we will be able to analyze the complex process of EU Member State Building in the Western Balkans and its main characteristics and challenges, it is important to clarify the most important definitions used by the authors of this special issue.

When describing the process of Europeanization, the most common definition refers to a

> Process of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things', and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public choices (Radaelli 30).

Europeanization in this context is understood as the influence of the EU on its Member States' political, economic and social systems (Quaglia, et.al). It is argued that the EU as a political system impacts on its Member States because decisions taken at a European level can have a long-term effect on each individual Member State (Hix). The best example of the impact of Europeanization in its classic understanding is the introduction of a new currency, the Euro as a result of the Maastricht Treaty.

However, the countries of the Western Balkans are not Member States of the EU. Nevertheless, they are affected by important changes as a result of decisions taken in Brussels. Because they are part of the accession process they have to implement the

acquis communautaire, the EU's legal foundation and they have to reform their political and economic systems to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria, which specify the conditions for membership in the Union. Therefore, as Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (The Europeanization; The Politics of EU Enlargement) have demonstrated, the EU can have a massive impact on countries before joining the Union. The process of integration into the Union therefore results in the implementation of a massive amount of EU laws, regulations and directives, changes to the bureaucracy and far-reaching changes to constitutional norms on citizenship, voting rights, property rights and the creation of a legal basis for the transfer of sovereignty to the EU (Claes).

When talking about "Europeanization, South East European style," it has been pointed out that this is an externally-driven, coercive and increasingly demanding process (Anastasakis 82). Roberto Belloni (317) has argued that the "Balkans have changed Europe and the EU as much as the EU is currently trying to change its south-eastern neighbours." He concludes that the Europeanization of the countries in the former Yugoslavia should focus on "the coherence of [European] policy towards the region, focus less on a Europeanized political elite and more on citizens and civil society organizations, and carefully deploy incentives and rewards to sustain the reform process that is already under way" (314).

The European integration of this region is complex and a long-term process. It is multi-layered and the EU itself faces completely new challenges in the region. Florian Bieber has demonstrated that there are a number of minimalist states in the region, "which barely fulfill functions generally associated with states" (1784). Bieber argues that the state structures that were created after the end of violence in Bosnia, Kosovo and the state union of Serbia and Montenegro were aimed at resolving the conflicts but were unable to provide state structures that would enable these states to establish an efficient monopoly of the use of force, democratic decision-making capacities and embedded statehood (1785-1790). States that are unable to perform basic state functions such as providing security, ensuring a basic level of social welfare and providing political incentives for economic growths are the result of the violent break-up of the former Yugoslavia. The focus of EU integration in the Western Balkans therefore is on state-building, which aims at rebuilding fundamental governance structures such as political institutions, civil societies and economic and welfare systems. The focus of state-building is on the reconstruction of whole countries and societies, including their democratization and the establishment of a functional civil society (Etzioni 102). The

EU therefore becomes an actor in the state-building process in the Western Balkans. Through the process of Europeanization it is hoped that the EU will use its influence and the final incentive of membership to promote the establishment of efficient state structures and administrations that are capable of coping with the pressures of membership in the Union. However, it has been discussed that external state-building has had only limited success in the past (Paris; Sisk and Paris; Ghani and Lockhart). David Chandler (3) argues that "international statebuilding intervention is necessary but not sufficient." Europeanization as the process of the preparation of the countries in the Western Balkans for their membership in the EU therefore focuses on the establishment of efficient state structures, including the reconstruction of economic and welfare systems after violent conflicts in the region. The "carrot" of membership in the EU is used to encourage political elites in these countries to implement important reforms to strengthen state capacity and enhance democratic decision-making. In fact, democratization is a further feature of Europeanization in the region. The first Copenhagen Criteria focuses on democratic governance, minority protection and the rule of law.[2] Democratization in this context refers to the establishment and strengthening of democratic governance. This includes free and fair elections, a professional parliamentary service, cooperation between government and opposition, civil society input into government activities and legislation and the establishment of Rechtsstaatlichkeit (rule of law). Scholars of democratization have focused on the establishment of political institutions, civil society and a changing political culture in which election results are respected, conflicts are solved by political and legal means and the judiciary is independent from political influence (Diamond, The Spirit of Democracy; Developing Democracy; Merkel; Linz and Stepan). What is clear at this point is that the process of state-building is necessarily connected to democratization in the Western Balkans, because the establishment and strengthening of democratic governance remains a fundamental principle of external (and internal) state-building and consolidation in the region. The Europeanization of the Western Balkans refers to a process, in which the EU supports the implementation of European standards (defined by the EU's conditionality) in the Western Balkans. Because of the authoritarian past and the violent break-up of Yugoslavia, democratization and state-building are fundamental elements of this Europeanization. The EU, in other words, is building states which can eventually join the Union.

EU Member State Building

The previous discussion demonstrates that the countries in the Western Balkans undergo a complicated transformation. They are deeply embedded in the process of EU integration via the SAP, which focuses not only on the Copenhagen Criteria but also on regional cooperation and reconciliation. All countries with the exception of Kosovo have signed Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAA) with the EU over the last years, which legally bind them into a process of political and economic integration. In addition, Croatia, Macedonia and Montenegro have received candidate status and Croatia has concluded EU accession negotiations in 2011. The European Commission has recently suggested that Croatia should join the EU in July 2013[3] and that Montenegro and Macedonia should start membership negotiations.[4]

The Europeanization of the Western Balkans is a process that focuses on stabilizing and reforming the political and economic systems in these countries by encouraging local elites to implement "European standards." At the same it is envisaged that the process will help to overcome the legacies of the recent past and encourage regional cooperation, reconciliation and result in cross-border synergies. To some extent this process has been very successful and since the end of violence in Kosovo in 1999 and in Macedonia in 2000 there has been no major eruption of violence in the region with the exception of the riots in Kosovo in 2004. Furthermore, the states in the Western Balkans have become stabilized and with the exception of Bosnia and Kosovo are not contested as such anymore. Important forums of regional cooperation have been created, first through the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and its successor the Regional Cooperation Council, but also in important other areas such as energy and security.

The Europeanization of the region focuses on active state-building and democratization. In contrast to the earlier enlargement rounds in 2004 and 2007, which saw 12 Central and Eastern European States join the Union, new challenges have forced the EU and its Member States to outline new criteria and new methods for the integration process. Because most of the Western Balkans countries are post-conflict societies,[5] the integration process necessarily needed to address some of the legacies of these conflicts, in particular economic reconstruction, political institution-building, reconciliation and regional cooperation. Furthermore, all states in the region with the exception of Albania have declared their independence from Yugoslavia and some of them, such as Bosnia and Kosovo, have never been independent before. Others, such as

Croatia and Serbia have never had fully democratic polities before and have never existed as independent states within their current borders. Weak statehood and weak democratic institutions are therefore characteristic for the region. The existence of semi-authoritarian regimes in Croatia and Serbia until 2000 (Zakošek) and the outbreak of violence in Macedonia in 2000 demonstrate that these political systems were far from consolidated in the first years after the break-up of Yugoslavia.

The process of EU Member State Building is multi-layered. It started in 1999, when the European Council defined the SAP and added cooperation with the ICTY and regional co-operation as additional conditions for all countries in the Western Balkans. While the European perspective for the countries of the region has been upheld by the European Council in the Feira Meeting (June 2000) and in Thessaloniki (June 2003), the need for reform in the region remained a constant and ever-visible condition. The conclusion of Thessaloniki therefore reads:

> During the last four years, the European Union's policy of Stabilisation and Association has contributed critically to progress achieved throughout the region in promoting stability and in bringing the countries closer to the Union. It now needs to be strengthened and enriched with elements from the enlargement process, so that it can better meet the new challenges, as the countries move from stabilisation and reconstruction to sustainable development, association and integration into European structures. The Union's thus enriched policy of Stabilisation and Association, including the Stabilisation and Association Agreements, will constitute the overall framework for the European course of the Western Balkan countries, all the way to their future accession (EU Commission, The Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans)

The process is clearly defined: the countries of the Western Balkans want to join the EU and the EU is willing to accept them, if they fulfill the conditions. The conditions, defined by the EU without any input from the potential candidate countries have however been specified further. Not only did the EU attempt to overcome the results and the legacies of the (most recent) past by focusing on the co-operation with the ICTY as a form of retributive justice (without encouraging local forms of reconciliation), but also regional co-operation became a way of encouraging the states of the former Yugoslavia to overcome their recent violent past and to model the EU in miniature. It is consequently not surprising that the main thing regional co-operation has resulted in is a free trade agreement among the countries of the region and some co-operation in energy, security and police matters. However, the lack of joint negotiations with the EU (as occurred in Eastern Europe) means that the incentives for true regional co-operation are low. In fact, the border dispute between Croatia and Slovenia threatened Croatian

accession at a point where membership negotiations were nearly completed. Furthermore, regional co-operation has not resulted in long-term co-operation and synergies that supported joint projects to move EU integration forward. Inter-state relations remain volatile, as the situation in Northern Kosovo demonstrates.

Furthermore, over the last ten years conditionality has become even further qualified and specified. The EU refers continuously to other organizations in their progress reports and adopts their legal framework as part of the EU's conditionality. In that respect the Progress Report for Bosnia mentions the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the Finci/Sejdic case and connects the resolution of this case to Bosnia's progress in EU integration. The Venice Commission is another institution, which has been mentioned numerous times over the last years. Their recommendations become part of the EU's reform suggestions. The International Criminal Court also features prominently in most country progress reports, because most countries have signed bilateral agreements with the USA, which forbid the prosecution and transferal of US citizens. In many respects it is easy to understand the EU's reliance on other institutions and their guidelines. On the one side it has to be mentioned that EU conditionality is very vague and even the Copenhagen Criteria are rather political than technical, leaving a lot of room for interpretation. On the other side, there has been a trend in EU enlargement to specify general conditions by referring to more specific policies of other organizations. This occurred most openly in the case of Eastern Europe, when the countries in East and Central Europe had to implement the standard minority rights suggestions of the OSCE, and the High Commissioner for Minority Issues became a key actor in minority rights legislation.

Specifying conditionality as such therefore has been common practice in EU enlargement before and so has the reliance on other institutions, what however is new in the Western Balkans is the direct intervention mechanisms for the EU when its conditionality is not met. These direct intervention practices occur on three levels. First, the EU can intervene directly in the political process, as is the case in Bosnia through the High Representative and the EU Special Representative, which were united in one position until 2011. The EU Police Mission and a small military mission mean that the EU is also directly involved in questions of internal (and external) security as well as security sector reform. In Kosovo, the EU is involved in the appointment of the International Civilian Representative, who oversees the democratization process in the country and has a right to veto legislation. Furthermore, the EU's rule of law mission

EULEX has intervened in internal investigation and local court cases. In Macedonia, the EU Special Representative has become the main moderator between Macedonian and Albanian parties and remains the main mediator in case of conflict.

Second, the EU can support certain parties, laws, actions and persons directly. The elections in Serbia in 2008 were heavily influenced by the EU's support for President Tadic directly in the Presidential election, and for his Democratic Party (DS) in the following parliamentary elections. The elections were won by Tadic and the DS, and consequently Serbia's EU integration progressed at high speed. The EU made it clear that an electoral outcome not in its favor would result in a slowdown and potential reverse of the EU integration process. Similarly, the EU continues to support openly moderate parties in Bosnia, although with less success than in the case of Serbia.

Finally, the EU can threaten to block further progress in the EU enlargement process or to stop financial assistance. David Chandler (The EU and Southeastern Europe) has pointed out, that in the fragile societies of the Western Balkans it does not matter if the EU intervenes directly or threatens to withhold some funds, both result in a crisis of local democracy and illegitimate pressure on democratically elected officials. He argues that EU conditionality has focused not on formal democratic principles but on governance and "administrative practices and policy choices of governments" (Chandler, EU Statebuilding, 596). The EU, in other words, has focused much more on policy-output rather than on the organizational principles of the polity itself. This is a clear shift from the conditionality applied in Eastern and Central Europe and is commonly connected to colonialism, international trusteeship or state-building rather than enlargement. It is in this interference in the internal affairs of independent states and the specific application of Brussels-designed solutions to the region, that the reference to the European Raj finds its truths (Knaus/Martin).

EU Member State Building therefore qualifies as a new model of enlargement. It comes, however, with a number of negative side-effects. For one, there is the obvious problem of democratic justification of extensive EU intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states (even if these states have declared to join the EU). It might be justified to argue that potential and recognized candidate countries have already announced that they are happy to pool some of their sovereignty to Brussels however, they certainly have not declared that they are happy with Brussels' involvement in sensitive policy areas. We should imagine that the EU would tell Italy that its police have failed in the fight against organized crime (which probably it has) and that it

therefore needs to reform its police units according to principles put together by officials of the European Commission. We can imagine the outcry that would occur and how Italy would defend its right to decide on the organization of its police units. Yet, Bosnian politicians were forced to agree on an EU-designed reform of the police. The Bosnian police reform also highlights a second negative effect of EU Member State Building. The EU has no common practices on policing and the attempt to design a new police structure for Bosnia failed and caused a massive political crisis in the country in 2008. Because the EU focuses more on policy, it is more likely that the EU will focus on areas where there is no European standard and consequently its conditionality and reform suggestions might conflict not only with local traditions, but also with practices in some EU Member States. The Copenhagen Criteria outline basic structural conditions that countries have to fulfill before joining the EU. When these Criteria were established in 1993 they were kept very general on purpose to accommodate the institutional, economic, societal and legal differences among the current and future Member States. By shifting the focus from these general structures towards more in-depths policy suggestions, EU conditionality attempts to fake a unity in European policies, which does not exist. Fundamentally, the EU is not a state and many policy areas remain in the domain of the Member States, which consequently will result in policy output. However, the different legal and political cultures in Europe have always been seen as a value rather than a problem, not at least by the founding fathers of the EU. By focusing on specific policies in its conditionality towards the Western Balkans, the EU pretends that diversity itself is not a value anymore, since "European standards" are the norm that needs to be fulfilled. There is thirdly the negative side effect that the EU claims to act on behalf of the citizens of the countries, yet their voice and their concerns are not addressed through EU Member State Building. If anything, they become more anachronistic with the EU, their governments and politics in general, which can be very dangerous in a region, where nationalism is still a strong force. If the EU wants to engage more actively in the region and motivate the local politicians to implement important reforms, which are desperately needed, then it should support citizens' initiatives, local NGOs and those parties that form around social and political issues other than nationalism. The core criticism of EU Member State Building however, has to be the fact that it is not building Member States. It is creating new dependencies, establishing new dominant party systems and encouraging new veto players, which will make EU integration more complex and time-consuming in the future. The reason why

Eastern enlargement went relatively smoothly is because there was a general consensus among the citizens and the elites on the advantages of membership in the EU. It was seen as the next logical step after many countries gained their full (ideological) independence only after 1989. In the Western Balkans such a consensus remains missing. While generally a majority of citizens supports EU integration in all countries, most of them do so conditionally. Serbs are willing to sacrifice EU integration if it means keeping Kosovo, while politicians of the Republika Sprska in Bosnia have made it clear that their first priority is to protect the Serbs in Bosnia. At the same time Kosovo's progress will depend on a settlement between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo and between Kosovo and Serbia on the status of the former Serbian province. Macedonian politicians want to join under the condition that the country will enter the Union under its constitutional name of Republic of Macedonia, a demand heavily contested and vetoed by Greece. It comes as no surprise that Montenegro has made the most advances in EU integration over the last five years. The country enjoys relative prosperity due to tourism and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). While the governing party DPS and the opposition agree on little, EU integration is accepted by them as the only option to ensure Montenegro's continued economic development and its future as a tiny state in South-East Europe. Montenegro's success in EU integration therefore is the result of two lucky combinations; firstly the status of the country as such is not contested either internally or externally. Secondly, while opposition and government are polarized and disagree on fundamental issues such as NATO membership, the relationship Instead of focusing on integration as a stand-alone issue, the EU should try to solve the open status questions as quickly as possible. This includes openly pushing for a constitutional reform in Bosnia, putting pressure on Serbia and Kosovo to come to a joint agreement and influencing both Macedonia and Greece to come to a joint agreement. In the light of the current financial crisis it seems as if the EU is in a particularly good position to influence Greece's negative stance. The EU and its Member States should make it clear that there will be no progress in integration if these status questions are not resolved in mutual agreement. At the same time it should be pointed out that those actors that are seen as particularly destructive to a solution should be punished for example by limiting their financial support from the EU or by isolating them and fostering new coalitions. The key remains a focus on civil society and those parties that address that focus on economic and political development. The EU should shift its focus away from political elites to local leaders, NGO representatives and

indeed local citizens and support their effects to overcome the past and work together for a better (European) future.

Structure of this special issue

The papers in this special issue all address different elements of EU Member State Building, some more directly such as Gezim Krasniqi's comparison of state and nation-building in Kosovo and Albania, and some more indirectly like Jelena Dzankic, who looks at the internal and external factors that contributed to the development of the Montenegrin party system. What all papers have in common is their focus on Europeanization, State-Building and Democratization in the Western Balkans. The authors all agree that the EU has had and continues to have a massive influence on the political development in the region. Nevertheless, it is also important to take the internal developments in the region into account, something that has not yet been understood fully in Brussels. Focusing on internal dynamics in party interaction and obstruction, Outi Keranen demonstrates how even the best attempts to implement the Dayton Peace Agreement by international actors have been resisted by different parties in Bosnia. She describes how different projects of state-building have undermined the Bosnian state and continue to contest the legal existence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As described above, this questioning of the status has resulted in heavy EU intervention, but the EU has been unable to solve the crisis, despite continued lip-service to Bosnian unity. What is needed is a new agreement on the Bosnian state, a constitutional reform that includes all actors and brings together the different demands by ensuring the creation of a functioning state and the protection of the different peoples in Bosnia at the same time. That both is not impossible can be learnt from Spain, Belgium, Canada and India. Valery Perry demonstrates how some of the ideas of the OSCE have had a positive impact on Bosnia but she also demonstrates the unwillingness of key Bosnian actors to change and contribute to the reform process. She argues that the weakness of the OSCE lies in the fact that its implementation powers were limited and that it often did not receive the support of other international organizations in Bosnia, such as the Office of the High Representative. She nevertheless concludes that external actors can have an influence if they work together with local officials and if they have the power to implement deep changes even against the resistance of local obstructers. Gezim Krasniqi discusses the role of minorities and external actors in the state-building and democratization projects in Albania and Kosovo. He demonstrates that historical

experiences and the relationship with the kin-state play a key role for the different attitudes of the Greek minority in Albania and the Serb minority in Kosovo. What however remains strikingly important is the need for willingness among the minority and majority population to live together and work together in the common state, which both claim to be their home. In particular in relations to Kosovo, Krasniqi demonstrates how international actors have influenced the state-building and democratization project and he picks up on some of the criticism on EU Member State Building. Once again it becomes obvious that it can only be the EU and its representatives that bring Kosovo Albanians and Serbs as well as Kosovo and Serbia together and solve the complex issue of Kosovo's status. The disunity among European countries on the Kosovo issues contributes to the escalation of the conflict and European ignorance can easily create the next frozen conflict. Jelena Dzankic's paper analyses the development of identity and party politics in Montenegro since the break-up of Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s. She demonstrates how identification patterns have changed and how the split of the DPS has resulted in a massive reconfiguration of identity and party politics in Montenegro. She particularly focuses on the internal factors that have led to the changes and demonstrates that while there is a deep split between opposition and ruling party; Montenegro as such is not contested as an independent country anymore, despite the creation of a party system along ethno-national lines. Marija Risteska discusses the role of the EU in good governance promotion in Macedonia in her contribution. She comes to the conclusion that good governance is an essential element of EU conditionality; however, the EU continues to focus on short-term policy changes rather than long-term structural and cultural changes. This results in a lack of deep-rooted reforms and there is little change in the actual administrative practices in Macedonia. We can see how EU Member State Building tries to change policies rather than polities (meaning the fundamental structures of a state) and instead of focusing on democratic and legal structures in the administration and the government apparatus, the EU focuses on efficiency and effectiveness of administrative processes. The EU's limited impact on good governance in Macedonia demonstrates the limits of EU Member State Building and indeed can be seen as a classic example of how EU policies fail to prepare the candidate for membership. Bernhard Stahl looks at the relationship between the EU and Serbia. He comes to the conclusion that there is a "civilizatory conflict" between these two actors. He attributes this in particular to the dominance of the national discourse in Serbian politics and the EU's character as a post-modern (indeed post-nation state)

political system. The different approaches and perspectives cannot be overcome by simply imposing the EU's will, but will ultimately have to lead to a cultural change in Serbia as well. Following the logic of argument presented above, the EU should focus on establishing democratic and liberal structures in Serbia's political, cultural and economic system and therefore contribute to its inclusion in the European market. Over time the European discourse will become more important than the nationalist discourse and old structures can change. This indeed will need time, passions and a lot of financial and political resources, but it is certainly a worthwhile exercise if we only imagine the alternative and a return of nationalist anti-democratic forces in Serbia. Finally, Jens Woelk summarizes all papers, by discussing their contextual contributions to the current debate and by looking for joint themes and further research questions.

The papers published in this special issue were first presented at the UACES Annual Conference in 2011 in Cambridge, UK and it is planned to contribute a panel on the EU and the Western Balkans annually to the UACES Annual Conferences in the future. There is much to be discussed and debated. We hope to have made some contributions that will encourage further debates.

[1] The term "countries of the Western Balkans" refers to the former Yugoslav Republics of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro (minus Slovenia, which joined the EU in 2004). It also includes Kosovo and Albania. I will use the terms "Western Balkans," the former Yugoslavia and Southeastern Europe to describe these countries.

[2] These criteria can be seen at: www.ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement.../criteria/index_en.htm (05 December 2011).

[3] See the European Commission's Opinion on the Application for Accession to the European Union by the Republic of Croatia. (European Commission Opinion on the Application for Accession).

[4] See the Progress Reports for Montenegro (European Commission Montenegro 2011 Progress Report) and Macedonia (European Commission Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2011 Progress Report).

[5] This certainly applies to Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. Montenegro was also part of the Yugoslav involvement in the Croatian, Bosnian and Kosovo War and the violence in Macedonia did not end up in a civil war because the EU and NATO intervened early. Albania has also seen numerous violent clashes in the 1990s and the breakdown of the so-called pyramid scheme ended in de-facto anarchy and violence between different social groups in Albania.

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