

The Whys and When enlarging EU to the Western Balkans*

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ABSTRACT

The EU enlargement process is a work-in-progress topic and a difficult puzzle to be solved. But what the article tries to propose is a simplified model that builds upon answering two main questions, the why and when enlargement occurs. Considering the Western Balkans case, I argue that the rational incentives of economic interest and reducing negative externalities of non-enlarging as well as constructivist/sociological incentives are by no doubt an important factor in the process of enlargement on both, demand and supply side. Taken alone, they may only open the way to accession and reinforce different forms of institutionalization between the two parties. Still, this is not sufficient enough to finalize the enlargement process. In order to complete the process, adjustments at both (demand and supply) sides are needed. The applicant states have to adjust to (comply with) EU requirements while EU itself has to adjust (transform) its institutions to be capable of functioning when the new countries will be accepted. Otherwise, if the candidate countries do not accomplish (at least) the Copenhagen criteria (a necessary condition) and if the EU is not being ready to accept new countries (capacity and integration issue) the enlargement process will be postponed until both conditions (sufficient condition) are fulfilled.

Key Words: *EU enlargement, Western Balkans.*

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Introduction

Being for many years divided, Europe found its historical chance to re-unite with its Eastern part only after the 'fall of the iron curtain'¹. It was this particular moment that open the way for EU enlargement eastward, seeing it rather from a rationalist point of view of managing the new created European security, economic and political order or from a constructivist point of view of a pan-European idea and values. Now, after 20 years, where the Central Eastern European (CEE) countries have become full EU members, all attention is focused into the EU enlargement towards the Western Balkans² (WB) as being the next step of fulfilling the overall 'project of unifying the continent'. Even though EU has recognised the Western Balkan countries as 'potential candidates'³, still there are doubts whether they should join EU and uncertainty about the time when they will join. Such an uncertain reality has attracted the attention of many scholarly works who try to analyze step by step the different stages Western Balkans are going through towards EU membership target. The article joins this debate on the perspective of Western Balkans' EU integration by trying to put forward the two main questions of *Why and When enlarging* EU to Western Balkans. It is of particular important to see not only what are the motivations behind the enlargement process in the WBs (the why question) but also what other conditions are required for accession to happen (the when question). Although there are some theoretical expectation about the reasons of *why* enlargement happens⁴, they are still insufficient to make us understand *when* enlargement happens. This article besides presenting the driving forces (being them rational or constructivist incentives) behind enlargement will also search for other factors that need to be taken into the analysis of when enlargement will happen.

In order to achieve its aim the article is divided into two major sections. The first one deals with the reasons that stands behind EU enlargement in the Western Balkans while the second section will discuss the reasons why enlargement in the Western Balkans is taking longer.

Before entering into the main analysis, it is necessary that some important introductory clarifications are made. First of all, it is to be acknowledged that the literature on east-

1 The term "iron curtain" was first introduced in 1946 by Churchill in one of his famous speeches (See: Churchill Winston. *Sinews of Peace*, 5 March, 1946, Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, <<http://www.hp.org/churchill/>>). Then, the term entered into common use pointing at the division of Europe into its democratic Western part and Eastern communist block. After '90s, when the communism fall, it was greatly cited as the 'fall of the iron curtain' referring to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe.

2 Any definition of the Balkans is problematic and questionable. Without entering in endless debates of who is Western Balkans, I suggest the use of the term contextually since for the purpose of this article the term above includes countries that are undergoing the same process of EU integration (although at different speed). Western Balkans (a term officially introduced in 1998 by the Austrian Presidency of the EU once Bulgaria and Romania were allowed to open membership talks with EU) includes the countries of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

3 Such perspective was given in June 2000 Presidency conclusions of the EU Council. The EU "objective remains the fullest possible integration of the countries of the [Western Balkan] region into the political and economic mainstream of Europe All the countries concerned are potential candidates for EU membership". Council of the European Union (2000) Presidency Conclusions, Santa Maria da Feira, 19 June, paragraph 67, emphases added.

4 For some theoretical considerations on EU enlargement see: Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005, pp.3-25.

ern enlargement regularly makes a split. On the one side, there is the 'enlargement literature' focusing exclusively on EU, its decisions and interest on the Enlargement issue and on the other side there is the 'accession literature' analyzing enlargement from the candidate country's perspective. (Schimmelfennig, 2002b, pp.2-3; Lendvai, 2004, pp.319-320). Taking only one side will produce a truncated analysis and will limit us to understand process as a whole. That is why, in order to make the 'linkage' between the two I consider Enlargement as the process launched by EU while accession of WBs as its final outcome.

It is of crucial importance to clarify also from the very first beginning that Enlargement here should be seen not simply as a territorial expansion of adding new states into the union but rather as "a complex and multidimensional process" (Scherpereel, 2005, p.364). For this reason enlargement will be treated firstly as a "multiple step process" (Steunenbergh & Dimitrova, 2007, p.11) and secondly as a double-side process. In order to understand better the enlargement process one needs firstly to consider the many stages the process involves and secondly investigate simultaneously both of its sides; the supply side (EU)⁵ and the demand side (Western Balkans).

THE WHYS OF ENLARGEMENT

(Theoretical) Motivations that Stands Behind Enlargement Process

The key question of the Enlargement debate regards the incentives (driving forces) that rest behind the process. The arguments have been given from both, the rationalist and the constructivist perspective. The most fundamental difference between the two is that they assume different logic of action where a rationalist argument follows a logic of consequentiality while a constructivist argument builds on a logic of appropriateness.⁶ The dominant and the most elaborated arguments in the enlargement debate derive from a logic of consequentiality and they are based on a cost-benefit calculation. Following such logic, enlargement can be seen as a mean of magnifying political strength of Europe within and in the international arena or as an opportunity to bring peace, consolidate democracy or boost economic performance all over Europe. There are these issues of economic and political concern that may sufficiently convince both actors to cooperate with the aim of a full exploitation of their own interest. The other alternative view builds on a logic of appropriateness based on norms and ideas. Following such logic, enlargement is possible on the bases of common shared European values and beliefs.

The assumptions of rational self-interest perspective for increasing material and political gains or the constructivist view of common shared values and beliefs justify enlargement but they are contextual and need detailed case examination. As Scherpereel (2005,

5 Here, EU will be referred to as the supply side of enlargement where other important factors influencing EU politics of enlargement (such as the member state or public opinion) are considered under the overall umbrella of EU.

6 For more on the issue see Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005

p.349) observes, some combination of these motivations may be present but further and thin investigation for judging which reasons matter most requires close attention to particular cases.

Economic Incentives

Economic gains and material benefits have been an argument behind the motives of a further EU enlargement. Economists seem to agree that further enlargement and economic integration (adding more countries to single European market) will benefit the EU economies in the aggregate. Such claim is reinforced by the findings of the Commission report examining the macroeconomic performance and outcomes of the enlarged EU-25 (See European Commission, 2006, p.1). The overall impression is that the enlargement of the EU, in the long term, will be positive and generate benefits for the entire enlarged Union. This optimistic view, where "enlargement is seen as a very good deal for both the EU incumbents and the new members" (Baldwin et al., 1997, p.125) comes from studies that measured the economic effects of Eastern Enlargement. There are these economic benefits of enlargements that dominate the rhetoric of the EU officials, who usually point out the importance of economic incentives in 'promoting' further enlargement.⁷

Discussing the economic incentives of EU Enlargement in the WBs case, one may argue that these incentives are more a motivation for WB countries while as far as it concern EU such incentives may be discussable. The economic calculation can work as motivations for 'the applicant countries because of their full access to the EU's market and to the economic benefits of its common policies and common budget (Graham, p.2001, p.2). The Western Balkans by joining the EU seek to raise their output and growth rates through stipulating entrepreneurship, foreign direct investments (FDI) and technology transfer, as successfully happened in CEE countries⁸. The rationale here is that "the process of accession can virtually transform a country," where the best example is the transformation of the economy in other East European countries.⁹ These economic benefits may raise the preferences of the WB countries to join the EU since a full membership will provide not only unrestricted access to the single European market but also technical and financial assistance, rapid economic growth and prosperity. Though "the economic benefits of enlargement unquestionably constitute a powerful force driving the demand for membership" (Mattli & Plümper, 2002, p.558) it does constitute a less powerful driving force if the supply side (EU) is considered. Although EU is the main trade partner of practically all the

7 The Monetary Affairs Commissioner, Joaquín Almunia, commenting the results of the European Commission report (2006) stressed that "[t]he re-unification of Europe is not only a huge political achievement it is also an economic success ... We all win as the citizens in the new Member States see their standards of living increasing ... The enlargement is helping the EU cope better with the new world economic order" (European Commission-Press Releases, 2006).

8 For the argument on CEECs see Grabbe, H. (2001). "Profiting from EU enlargement". Centre for European Reform (CER), 6/27/01, p.24.

9 Katinka Barysch, chief economist at the Center for European Reform in London cited in Kanter, J. (2006). "EU pushes its expansion forward" International Herald Tribune, June 12.

countries in the Western Balkans (Gligorov et al., 2003, p.34; WIIW, 2006, p.1) it still can be considered economically unimportant for EU. Given that the material benefits, the region brings, are very modest and not significant at all will make the economic motivations for EU to enlarge into Western Balkan an argument against rather than pro enlargement. The only economic rationale that really needs to be taken into consideration is that "the cost of enlargement is slight compared with the cost of non-enlargement" (Prodi, 2002, p.5). The question becomes one of if it would have cost less for EU to spend in accession strategies rather than in military missions or humanitarian aid in the Western Balkans? The contributions by the Union and its Member States to the region is estimated around ? 8.3 billion (1991-1999) where the largest share of these funds, almost 50%, has been in the form of humanitarian aid (Uvalic, 2001, p.16). Only in the period 1991-94 the EU spending on humanitarian aid and UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia amounted to some \$2.4 billion (Bojicic et al., 1995, p.48). Such enormous sum of money provided by EU in different forms of military or financial aid could have had better results if they could have been allocated in the processes of enlarging EU towards Western Balkans.

Generally speaking, the economic incentive argument is thick and cannot explain enlargement (the membership), it rather can lead to other forms of (economic) cooperation (like in case of Switzerland or Norway) keeping the country outside of a full membership. The only rational initiative from EU's part may be the extension of the existing Customs Union into the whole of the Western Balkans - as the case with Turkey - so to expand and penetrate more markets.

Reducing Negative Externalities of Non-enlarging

Even though the potential countries may not provided economic growth and prosperity to the union because they simply may be poor and commercially unattractive countries, a (rational) motivation for accepting these countries may still exist as a consequence of negative externalities originated by leaving them outside (Mattli & Plümper, 2002, p.553). For the EU such a negative externality of potential crisis spillover from neighbouring countries may constrain the Union to speed up Enlargement or at least seek closer ties with the outsider countries (Mattli & Plümper, 2002, p.554).

In the past decade Western Balkans had suffer from deadly violent ethnic (the dissolution of ex-Yugoslavia) and civilian ('97 disorder in Albania) conflicts. There are these events in the WBs that indeed have shaped the attitude of EU and its member states regarding the potential enlargement to the Western Balkans. It is the '*stability issue*', the new rhetoric used not only by politicians but also by academics that had dominated the discourse of European enlargement towards the Western Balkans. The risk of political and peace instability in the region had made all agree that the only and the best way to avert these potential risks is to integrate all WB countries within EU. In this perspective enlargement can be seen as a strategy to stabilize the region suffering from ethnic conflict and political unrest. The logic behind a strategic enlargement lays on the fact that the perspective of membership for the Western Balkan countries would definitely reduce the threats

to stability in this part of the region and furthermore prevent them to escalate and de-stabilize all Europe. In this context, enlargement perspective is the strongest instrument to be used by EU in order to have a full control and neutralize any negative externality coming from the region.

On the other side, the WBs itself is facing also negative externalities being left outside EU. After Bulgaria and Romania accede to EU, the countries in the Western Balkan region had become an enclave on its own, surrounded all over by EU Member States. This geographic circumstance can stand in itself as a sufficient reason for the WB countries to focus on enlargement as a matter of priority since "either non-enlargement, limited expansion, or 'differential integration' could lead to a long-term isolation and marginalization of the excluded countries" (Bugajski, 2001, p.42). Remaining out of the EU and at the same time surrounded by EU countries will cause for Western Balkans countries, above all, isolation. The negative externalities may be comparable to what Kaliningrad region¹⁰ had been suffering. The argument here is that the WBs, being surrounded by EU member states and at the same time being cut off from EU, may face various negative effects in their political, economic, security-related as well as psychological issues. This may bring about another fatigue added to the already weaknesses of the region.

Negative externalities at both sides are related and interdependent on each other. A left out of the Western Balkans may contribute negatively on the stability of the region and as a consequence on the entire European continent. This closed-end negative effect makes EU itself more sensitive to the developments in WBs since they may have severe consequences not only for the EU member states surrounding the region but also for the union as a whole. Being an enclave inside the EU borders, the region stability may have a negative domino effect at any moment if it is left alone. Having such geopolitical interest in the region is a quite enough argument to move EU towards finding tight forms of cooperation with the WB countries in order to influence the course of events there. The only and more efficient way for EU to legitimate its influence in the WBs is through the process of enlargement. The Macedonian conflict (2001) rests as the best example where the signature of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with Macedonia was the strongest incentive EU used to pressure the two parties in conflict for concluding a political deal (Piana, 2002, p.212). The same enlargement perspective were used in the most recent developments in the region where EU offered a 'fast-track' membership to Serbia (the signing of the SAA) in return for relaxing Serbian position on Kosovo.

Although some scholars seem to find some shortcomings and limitations (Mattli & Plümper, 2005, p.56) to the argument of 'negative externalities', we have argued here that they are an important factor, at least, in the EU enlargement process towards the WBs. The negative externalities deriving from non enlarging south-east of Europe are not only a

10 "There are good reasons for placing Kaliningrad in a category of its own. The oblast deserves consideration because of being cut off from the Russian mainland by foreign states. This factor has had — and continues to have — a significant effect that exacerbates various political, economic, security-related and, not least, psychological challenges". See: Perti, J., Dewar, S. and Fairlie, L., (2000) "The Kaliningrad Puzzle: A Russian Region within the European Union" Copenhagen Peace Research Institute.

matter of concern for the Western Balkans stability but furthermore they may be a serious threat to disrupt the union's stability, security, and prosperity as long as the political or social unrest in the Western Balkans is an issue of concern.

Normative Claims

Beside these tangible (economic and political) incentives of cost-benefit calculations, the Western Balkan countries are by no doubts a constituent part of Europe giving them the moral and legal right to be part of EU. Traditionally, the region has been seen as the dark other side of "western civilization" standing contrary to what may have been European values and norms (Todorova, 1994, p.482). But from the '90s on the Western Balkans had done progress, leaving back the era of 'Balkanization' and catching up with transition towards liberal democracy. Recent research has shown that "ultimately, it is Europe (its norms and values) which stands as the common denominator around which a new collective identity of the (Western) Balkans has begun to crystallise (Bechev, 2006a, p.22, emphasis added). Furthermore, beside even the many problems the WBs are facing nowadays, what is probably most important is that the process of integration is now irreversible even in a country like Serbia, where possible political changes are likely to influence only the speed but not its general course (Uvalic, 2003, p.79). All these mean that joining EU now stands as the only long-term vision for the Western Balkans. By now, the logic and momentum of European integration have made the inclusion of the Western Balkan states a foregone conclusion and strategically inevitable (Balkan forum, 2002, p.6).

A normative proximity to European values and European orientation can be detected in the rhetoric of the political elites of the WB countries. Reference to European standards and values has become the vocabulary of the politicians in the whole region. Where even in the hardest case such as Serbia (because of EU support on Kosovo independence) still the winning president Tadic's campaign was concentrated on EU integration and values.¹¹ The role of EU and its membership 'carrot' "has been a magnet and source of inspiration for the region efforts to built modern states and societies" (Bechev, 2006b, p.23). All these actual references to EU and moreover being (in future) a full member will improve the Western Balkan countries image. By referring to or coming closer to EU, the WB states may 'legitimize' in the eyes of their electorate and world wide their progress and democratic consolidation since EU is exclusively a 'club' of liberal-democracies.

On the other side, failing to bring Western Balkans to European norms and values will still harm EU 'credibility'. It was the lose of credibility which made EU member states not to oppose enlargement perspective to then CEE countries. Again, it will be the credibility cost of non-enlarging further to Western Balkans the normative claim in favour of enlargement since EU has, at least, the moral duty to 'complete Europe' by enlarging even south-eastward. At the European Council of Copenhagen 'a small' or 'a delay' enlarge-

11 The slogan was "For a European Serbia"

ment would have had a detrimental impact on the EU's credibility not only in the candidate countries but even in the international arena (Dehousse & Coussens, 2001, p.10; Grabbe, 2001, p.52&60). At the present situation, with the Lisbon treaty's ratification difficulty and as a consequence 'the rising of the enlargement fatigue', the issue of credibility for EU comes again at the fore. Moving a step back of enlargement because of the 'integration fatigue' at a time when Western Balkans needs Europe will put the EU reputation at stake. This "loss in credibility can cause severe consequences" (Schimmelfennig, 1999) for EU image of a successful actor not only in the Western Balkans eyes but also worldwide.

In sum, both tangible (economic incentives and reducing negative externalities of non-enlarging) and non-tangible (normative claims) incentives are all jointly a powerful and considerable factor in triggering EU enlargement seeing from the supply as well as the demand side. These incentives gave the Western Balkans countries only the prospective of joining EU by making them *potentially* candidate countries. Other than incentives, they are also a way that justifies any form of cooperation or even more institutionalized arrangements between both actors. They comprehensively can give us a full picture of *why* enlarging to the Western Balkans but they could not provide us with *when* enlargement will happen.

THE WHEN OF ENLARGEMENT

*Enlargement as (Many-steps) Institutionalization*¹²

The above mention motivations create opportunities for cooperation between the two actors and set the ground for possible enlargement perspective. Once the perspective is given, there is a pressure for more contractual relations toward accession target. Achieving any substantial institutional arrangement is an important step in the enlargement process but there may be various mode of institutionalization¹³ until the process concludes. Even when some form of 'special institutional relations' are achieved through different agreements, the enlargement processes will not be finalized until the Treaty of Accession¹⁴ is signed. The process toward accession (signing the Accession Treaty) involves a number of major changes and procedural steps to go through. Before entering into any contractual relation some preliminary measures through consultative task forces and enhanced permanent dialogue is needed in order to evaluate the readiness of the aspiring county for entering a Stabilization and Association process (feasibility report).

12 In a more general point of view, the enlargement of a regional organization can be conceptualized as suggested by Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2002; 2005), where the enlargement of an organization can be defined "as a process of gradual and formal horizontal institutionalization of organizational rules and norms."

13 Institutionalization in the context of the EU enlargement process can be broadly understood as "the establishment of special institutional relations" (Schimmelfennig, 2002, p.601) between the EU and the applicant states.

14 The Treaty of accession or usually called accession is an agreement between the member states of European Union and the candidate countries

The first introductory step, regards opening of the negotiations for the 'Stabilization and Association Agreement' (SAA), an international treaty in which the potentially candidate state declares its willingness to standardize with EU norms and law. After a period of negotiations the SAA is signed and a date to enter into force is set. As a next step, the Commission publish biannually the 'Accession Partnership' reports indicating the precise (democratic, economic and EU standards) obligations that each potentially candidate country should fulfil. When these tasks are carried out (evaluated in the annual commission progress reports) and SAA is fully implemented, an application for receiving the candidacy status is done by the potentially candidate countries. The commission puts forwards an opinion about the readiness of the potentially candidate country, evaluating if the accession negotiation can be started. The accession negotiations may take time as all the 31 chapters of the *acquis communautaire* need to be agreed and implemented one by one. Once the accession negotiations (all the 31 chapters), are closed the candidate state can sign the accession agreement with EU.

In the case of Western Balkans, the Stabilization and Association process (SAp) is the actual phase of EU-WBs contractual relations which lead (and will lead) the EU in signing with the countries of Western Balkans the Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAAs)¹⁵. The signing of SAA is to be considered as the first important step toward enlargement since it introduces the status of 'potential candidate for EU membership' to the Western Balkan countries with a long-term prospect of accession.

Although to date all Western Balkan countries, except Kosovo, have signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with EU, they still differ in their degree of integration (only Croatia and Macedonia have the candidate status although at different stages). The question to be asked here is why Western Balkan states, differently from CEE, present various speed and modalities of enlargement process. Can this variety in speed and modalities of the process be attributed to the different degrees of compliance with EU requirements¹⁶? What if the countries fully comply with the EU requirements, would accession happen?

Enlargement as a Double-side Transformation Process

In order to answer the question we first need to turn again to the concept of enlargement. By conceptualizing enlargement as a process and not as an event, we imply transformation. In this perspective, enlargement is not simply *adding* new states to EU by expanding its geo-

15 The SAAs are an up-dated version of the EU Agreements and resemble in term of structure and content the Europe Agreements signed in the '90s between the EU and then-candidate countries of Central East Europe.

16 The core elements of the EU requirements are the Copenhagen Criteria asking the (potential) candidate country to achieved "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to adopt the common rules, standards and policies of the Union" See: The Copenhagen Criteria, DG Enlargement – at <http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/criteria/index_en.htm>.

graphic area; enlargement here is more about substantial qualitative change (Faber & Wolfgang, 2006, pp.2-3; Hafner, 1999, p.784). It is reasonable to assume change since both actors, EU and the potentially candidate state, need not only share the same values and norms but also be ready and capable of being governed under the same institutions.

As far as it regards the demand side (candidate countries seeking membership), the transformation means above all adapting to Copenhagen criteria, that is construct a market economy, a liberal democracy and the ability to take the EU acquis¹⁷. Such requirements ask for far-reaching domestic reforms in numerous issues and various sectors. The more a non-member state tries to approximate its legislations and policies with those of EU standards, the higher its possibility of being admitted to the EU. The more a Western Balkan state complied with EU norms and policies, the more likely it is to gain EU membership.

For EU (the supply side), there is a need to further integrate and transform its institutions as to be capable of effectively functioning when the new countries will join. Even though the enlargement of EU towards CEE countries “transformed dramatically the institutions of the community” (Fierke & Wiener, 1999, p.722) there is still a necessity for institutional and financial reform that would allow the EU to continue to expand its membership further into the Western Balkans. This need for drastic reforms before other enlargement happen was also recognized by the Austrian EU Presidency Conclusions (15-16 June 2006) emphasising that where still “it will be important to ensure in future that the Union is able to function politically, financially and institutionally as it enlarges”. (Council of the European Union, 2006, p.18, paragraph 53).

Although asymmetrical, these transformations are required on both sides. On the demand-side the “change may be seen as quasi-mechanical¹⁸ since it follows from the routine application of stable criteria for entry” (Olsen, 2002, p.927), while on the supply-side the change are more of a deliberate character. The transformations at both sides are of a political as well as of a technical character. For the applicants countries, the needed transformation range from political ones regarding building a liberal democracy to more technical changes as the approximation of their legislative to EU acquis. For the EU, the more political challenges regard the further integration of the Union to more technical ones regarding the institutional adaptation so that EU institutions can function effectively when the number of member states will increase.

The Sufficient Transformations needed for Enlargement

Finally, enlargement is evidently a process of contractual relations among EU and the applicant states which before finalized puts pressure for transformations on both sides, the EU and the applicants with the later being more obvious.

17 Additional to Copenhagen criteria other administrative criteria were introduced by the Madrid European Council in December 1995. All these criteria are set up to led the candidate countries into the necessary reforms.

18 Olsen (2002, p.927) argues that “in less automatic situations the underlying process may be one of arguing and persuading”.

For the applicant countries, complying with the EU rules and norms is a necessary condition toward accession, although not all conditions have to be met before being invited for negotiations. The most important pre-condition to be fulfilled is the political accession conditionality, having stable democratic institutions and respecting human and minority rights. An empirical study shows that EU, as in the case of CEEC countries, still link progress toward accession consistently with progress toward political conditionality (Schimmelfennig, 2008). This means that aspiring countries of the WB should not hope to start association negotiation (receive candidate status) without fulfilling the political EU conditionality. In the accession period the most important conditions to be fulfilled regards the adaptation of EU legislation, alignment with EU *acquis communautaire*. Any upgrade of their status towards accession will heavily depend on their progress of compliance with EU requirements. This is still not enough to guarantee accession. Achieving substantial (politically and administratively) domestic change at the side of applicant countries is however, only a necessary but not a sufficient condition of becoming EU member state.

In order for accession to happen, besides the necessary transformation on demand side, the other transformations on the supply side are more important. On the political sphere, absorption capacity and further integrations are the two main challenges. The issue of 'swallowing' the last enlargement becomes an issue for EU next enlargement right after accession of the CEEs countries. It was at the Salzburg EU meeting where for the first time "EU notes that its absorption capacity has to be taken into account." (Presidency of the European Union, 2006). Furthermore the previous rejection of the new EU constitution by the French and Dutch referendums in 2005 and the latest "Irish no" in the reviewed version known as 'Lisbon treaty' represented a serious political obstacle also against future enlargements.¹⁹ On a more technical sphere a restructuring of the EU institutions and policies is needed. EU has to transform itself as such that a further enlargement is possible and not impinges its further integration. A study on the impact of the possible accession of the WBs on voting power within the European Council of Ministers suggests that if the WBs joined under the Nice Treaty decision-making rules the workability and efficiency of the Union would deteriorate further beyond the current low level (the decision probability, which depicts the EU's capacity to act will decline in the EU33 to 1.94% from 2.95% in the EU27), while if joined under the Reform Treaty rules there would not be much impact on the overall efficiency and ability of the Union (Mylona, 2007).

These assumptions implies that for any potential country to open accession negotiations with EU it is necessary that those countries first should have reached EU liberal values and norms before any negotiation starts and secondly adopt and implement fully EU legislation (*acquis communautaire*). In order for accession to happen, in addition to candidate country adoption, the readiness of EU is needed. The argument here is that "the exact

19 "French president Nicolas Sarkozy warned member states in the aftermath of the Irish No vote last week". It is certain that as long as we have not solved the institutional problem, the question of enlargement is stopped de jure or de facto," he said at a press conference in Brussels on Thursday night (19 June)." Vucelja, E. "Further EU enlargement not possible without Lisbon Treaty" 20.06.2008 Euobserver, Brussels.

timing of accession (when enlarge) hangs not just on the preparations of would-be members; it also depends greatly on how the EU itself will develop" (Grabbe, 2003, p.11). Although a necessary condition, complying with EU requirements is not sufficient enough to insure WB accession into EU. The key factor to bring about accession and make the necessary condition a sufficient one is the EU and its inner situation, meaning that "the EU would have the capacity to accept new members and secondly that enlargement would not come at the expense of further European integration".

All these necessary and sufficient transformations, at both sides, are gradual and may take time depending on the inner conditions of each player. The complexity of the enlargement process where the dynamics of change requires a form of mutual adjustment at both camps is an explanation of why enlargement or even the setting of the date of accession of the candidate country may delay (the Western Balkan countries is a pure example of a missing timeline of when enlargement will occur). In such a situation where necessary but more importantly sufficient transformations are not taking place, there is little hope for accession to come. Considering the most typical example of Turkey²⁰ or even Bulgaria and Romania, delaying or postponement of membership seems to be the case.

The option of postponed membership is frequently referred to as a way to keep the momentum of reforms (Steunenbergh & Dimitrova, 2007, p.9) giving enlargement a cyclic form, meaning that if sufficient transformations are not achieved we are to expect rather an upgrade institutional tie but not accession.

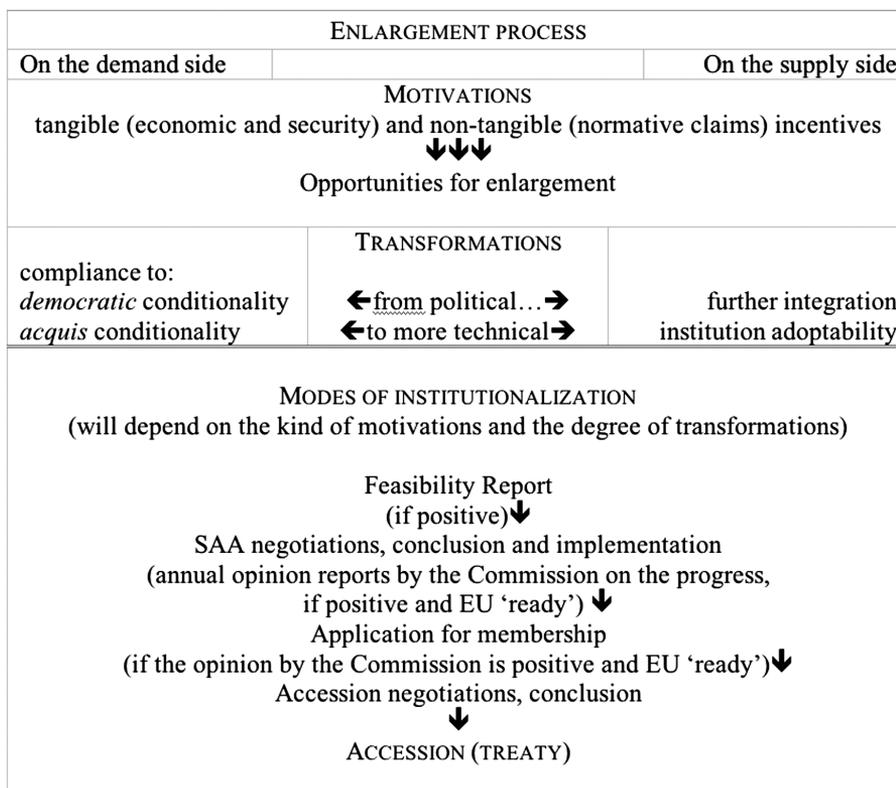
Conclusion

The EU enlargement process is an under-research (work-in-progress) topic and a difficult puzzle to be solved.²¹ What the article tries to propose is a simplified model that builds upon answering two main questions, that of why (the motivations for) and when (the transformations needed for) enlargement occurs (See Figure 1 below).

20 Turkey submitted its application for membership in June 1987 but it took more than ten years before the EU granted it the status of candidate in December 1999.

21 The reason are manifolds; bear in mind the continuous evolving EU, different timing, historical conditions and the specificity of states wanted to join.

Figure 1: Enlargement as a process... and Accession as its outcome



Considering the Western Balkans case, the article has argued that the rational incentives of economic interests and reducing negative externalities of non-enlarging as well as the normative claims, all are by no doubts an important *factor* in the process of enlargement on both, demand and supply side. Taken alone, they may only open the way to accession and reinforce different forms of institutionalization between the two parties. Still, this is not sufficient enough to finalize the enlargement process, that is signing the accession treaties. The motivations alone are insufficient to complete enlargement process as they may end up to different forms of cooperation but not full membership. The lengthy process of integrating Western Balkans and Turkey into EU is the best argument in favour of such claim. In order to complete the process, adjustments at both (demand and supply) sides are needed. For the final outcome of enlargement to come (signing accession treaty) the applicant states have to adjust to (comply with) the EU requirements while EU itself has to adjust (transform) its institutions to be capable of functioning when the new countries will be accepted. Otherwise, if the candidate countries do not accomplish (at least) the Copenhagen criteria (a necessary condition) and if the EU is not being ready to accept new countries (capacity and integration issue) the enlargement process may be postponed till both conditions (sufficient condition) are fulfilled. The experience of the previous enlargement with Bulgaria and Rumania or the case of Turkey is the best argument where delaying or blocking tactics may postpone the process until the required sufficient transformations are achieved.

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