

International Workshop

**A NEW EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS  
AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE?**

Berlin; 4 April 2011  
German Bundestag – Paul-Löbe-Haus

**Observations from the workshop**

**“A New European Strategy for the Western Balkans and South Eastern Europe?”**

**Berlin, 5 April 2011**

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1. The question posed by the South East Europe Association for the workshop could only remain inconclusively answered. A review of the Stabilisation and Association process mapped out at the Zagreb Summit in November 2000 and of the membership perspective for the countries of the Western Balkans confirmed by the European Council in Thessaloniki in June 2003 is not to be expected. A strategic reorientation is not on the agenda but possibly a recalibration of the “approach” of European Union in reinvigorating the enlargement process in the region.



2. At the same time the experiences from the fourth and fifth enlargements have altered member states’ attitudes to further rounds of enlargement, including through a “creeping nationalization of the EU enlargement policy” (Hillion). The interplay of the EU internal dynamics and regional developments (further dissolution of Yugoslavia during the 2000s) have blurred and politicized the “original” Stabilisation and Association process. The political criteria of membership have moved to the front at the expense of gradual functional integration as foreseen by the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA). The management of regional political processes by the Council has taken precedent over the Community spirit of the two-staged approach of the SAAs gradually, over a ten year period, leading to the establishment of a common market with the Union.



3. The countries of the fourth and fifth enlargement face difficulties in meeting the political criteria also over time, i.e. after membership has been achieved (Szapala). As it has to be acknowledged that the Union does not possess adequate mechanisms to deal with failures of member states to uphold the Copenhagen criteria, the focus on political criteria at the early stages of the accession process becomes

understandable. This must, however, not lead to blinding out the benefits of functional integration, which has proven its transformative potential through the development of open markets and sectoral policy improvements which in turn stimulated also societal change. With regard to the countries of the Western Balkans, the relative small polities suffer from a lack of political and economic competition and openness, allowing for “elite failure” (Erlor) in delivering reforms and change. Elites may indeed try to avoid the very essence of European integration as integrated markets and open societies would threaten their power reproduction models. Models which as a result of the political processes of last 30 years have not yet outlived their usefulness both for elites and their clients.

4. As this “context matters” (Roth) it has to determine the approach. So far, over two decades, the



EU has mixed the enlargement process of the region with political crisis management, spearheaded by intergovernmental cooperation inside the EU. The prevailing *intergovernmentalism* at the same time has exposed the EU’s inherent weakness in dealing with the political problems of the region, since polyphony of member states views, at times cacophony (name disputes, recognition questions, bi-lateral issues etc.), has been the dominant feature not least among key member states. In this respect this bears the question if member states themselves are “sufficiently Europeanised” (van Meurs). The challenging integration process of the Western Balkan countries exposes “prejudice” and the EU’s lost capacity in projecting “hope and enthusiasm” into the region (Perio). The multiple crises of Balkan EU member states (Bulgaria, Greece, Romania) and constitutional and institutional challenges in neighbouring Hungary and Slovakia are additional unhelpful factors.

5. Providing substance to the requirement of regional cooperation stipulated in the SAAs, regional



cooperation initiatives have gained traction over the last years and diversified into most areas covered by the *acquis communautaire* (Milic). Paradoxically, the region, despite seeming far away from actual EU membership is *de facto* more linked to the EU than most of the CEE countries before enlargement. The Interim Agreements (IA) managed by the Commission have all entered into force (but for Kosovo). The Energy Community Treaty of the European Community and all countries, including the UN Interim Administration in Kosovo pursuant UNSCR 1244, provides for a full integration into the European power transmission grids, strategic development of energy security for the Union and the region and the full implementation of the energy-related *acquis*. The lifting of the visa requirements for all citizens (but for Kosovo) in 2009 and 2010 further facilitates people to people contacts, an important element because of multiple family and interpersonal ties created over decades. Currencies are closely linked to the EURO area. Links and exchange have often become more intense with countries of central and Western Europe than inside the region. Thus, the Regional Cooperation Council and adjacent initiatives (for instance in the area of Justice, Liberty and Security) would benefit from increased visibility and awareness also among stakeholders within the European Union (Altmann).

6. While enlargement fatigue and the institutional difficulties within the European Union have the potential to impact on the further accession dynamic, the region does not suffer from an attention deficit, neither politically nor academically. The Western Balkans countries' image among large parts of the general public in the EU remains, however, tainted and marred by the 1990s conflicts. There is also a deficit of structural integration of civil society initiatives into the European mainstream, an area where the Southeast Europe Association and its partners could assist further. This should be underpinned by recalling more visibly the “incentives” that do exist for the European Union to integrate the region. While the 1990s stability and security incentive does still resonate, a narrative of *acquis* security will have to be developed to regain ground during the “Enlargement Break” (Lippert)<sup>1</sup>. Alternative methods of integration, for instance, in terms of a “junior membership” (Altmann) seem to promise less benefits than risks generated by a further hollowing out of EU coherence and legal framework. The EU could instead turn back to what it has traditionally been good at “mobility, markets and money” to create specific offers for the elites and to capture the imagination of the general public in the region, such as the visa dialogue (Flessenkämper). The process of integration has to be perceived, understood and felt as providing tangible benefits and progress without putting full systematic reform of political and institutional deficits as a precondition for every aspect of further functional integration. Traction needs to be gained in recalling in the region that EU membership has to be gained by domestic elites to overcome the “Santa Claus syndrome” (Perio), the perception that membership would be delivered on the doorstep and that membership by its own virtue would increase living standards and life in general rather than constant adaptation and reform on the way to membership.

**COUNTRY BOX (as of April 2011)**

- **CROATIA: candidate** - applied in 2003. 30 out of 35 chapters have been provisionally closed. Accession negotiations have reached the final phase and should be concluded once Croatia has met the outstanding closing benchmarks, in particular in the field of judiciary and fundamental rights. [SAA entered into force 2005.]
- **FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA: candidate** - applied in 2004. The country continues to sufficiently fulfil the political criteria and the Commission renewed its 2009 recommendation for opening accession negotiations. As a unanimous decision of Member States is required for the negotiations to start, a negotiated and mutually accepted solution to the name issue is essential. [SAA entered into force 2004.]
- **MONTENEGRO: candidate status since Dec 2010** - applied in 2008. [SAA entered into force 2010.]
- **ALBANIA: potential candidate** - applied in 2009. In its Opinion, the Commission recommends the opening of accession negotiations, if progress is recorded in a number of key areas as set out in the opinion. [SAA entered into force 2009.]
- **SERBIA: potential candidate** - applied in 2009. On 25 October 2010 the General Affairs Council forwarded Serbia's application to the Commission, which will begin preparing its Opinion. [SAA initialed, not ratified. IA entered into force 2010.]
- **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: potential candidate** - has not applied for EU membership; the lack of a shared vision by political leaders on the direction of the country continued to block key reforms and further progress towards the EU. [SAA ratified, but not yet in force. IA entered into force 2008.]
- **KOSOVO<sup>2</sup>: potential candidate** – has not applied for EU membership. The EU supports Kosovo's efforts to fulfil its European perspective and launched the Stabilisation and Association Process dialogue in January 2011. The Commission will take forward Kosovo's participation in relevant Union programmes.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2011\\_S07\\_lpt\\_ks.pdf](http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2011_S07_lpt_ks.pdf)

7. The question of the future evolution of membership negotiations with Turkey remains on the table and contingent both to the domestic political process in the Republic of Turkey and member states. Forthcoming elections in key member states and in Turkey herself may provide indications for the further direction of travel. Yet, participants of the workshop noted with concern that the negotiations could be considered as not being led in good faith, given the hostile attitude of some member states' governments to offering a univocal membership perspective. In parallel, Turkey has developed dynamically over the last decade, initiating domestic institutional and economic reform and has taken a more active role on the diplomatic stage, including in the Western Balkans. The internal dynamics of Turkey will determine her further attitude toward enlargement internally, while at the same time the perspective of full membership cannot be given up at this stage (Onar-Fisher). The Turkish membership question sparks controversy at many levels, as different from the Western Balkans enlargement, EU leaders have declared that her membership would alter the Union's character dramatically, indeed in a manner currently not acceptable for them. Although, any further enlargement changes the character and face of the Union, the hesitation existing towards the Western Balkans turns into outspoken opposition to Turkey's full membership.



### **Southeast Europe Association (SOG)**

8. The Southeast Europe Association remains a key factor in promoting the further EU integration of the countries of the region. As the process has, in the perception and experience of many, not unfolded an automatism of reform or an unlocking of political problems (Deimel), this also poses new challenges of the Association as one of the key organizations producing knowledge, networks and advocacy. The SOG will continue established activities but will need to cater more to the dynamic policy process. This should include early intervention in consultations on EU policy tools, such as the follow-on to the instrument for pre-accession assistance in 2014. The strength of the SOG in creating networks of expertise and excellence should be harnessed in the areas of academia and civil society, but also with elected officials in particular in the Parliaments and assemblies throughout the region. In concert with partners, the SOG should study how to enhance its visibility vis-à-vis and offer its partnership to the European institutions in Brussels.

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