

THE FUTURE OF THE EU ENLARGEMENT: SOLVING BILATERAL DISPUTES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Abstract

This paper will analyze the challenges which Western Balkan countries are facing in their road of European Union integration process. The process of accession of Western Balkan countries into EU remains challenged in three different levels: within the country - delaying in fulfilling formal criteria, within Western Balkan region - because of bilateral unresolved issues and within EU - enlargement crisis due to “enlargement fatigue”, financial crisis and inconsistent enlargement policy. In the other hand the goal of the European Union for the stabilization of the region remains indispensable. Using theoretical approach, case study and comparative methods, the paper will focus on bilateral disputes in the Western Balkans which cross the way of the countries in their integration into EU. The process of the disintegration of Yugoslavia is not yet fully resolved, leaving a lot of open issues between countries. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia have yet unresolved border issues, identity issues including disputes over name, flag, language, church and even over nation and statehood. These legacies are making the way of these countries too difficult in becoming members of the EU family. The EU accession process becomes even harder in the cases of the unresolved issues between the abovementioned states and their neighbors already members of EU, which makes EU party in the dispute. Conclusions drawn out of this research consist in the argumentation that the delay in the EU integration process tends to result to the detriment of each state individually and to the region as a whole. Alternatives such as “black hole”, “neo-ottomanization”, “Balkan federation” etc. are very unpopular and even dangerous for the future of a peaceful and stabile region. The increasing role of the bilateral disputes within the enlargement process imposes serious reconsiderations within EU key institutions involved in this process.

Keywords: *EU enlargement, Western Balkans, bilateral disputes*