

## The European Union's Southeast Enlargement: Prospects and Challenges

**Abstract:** ... And, as Christopher Patten, External Relations Commissioner stated: the choice in this case is very clear: either we export stability to the Balkans, or the Balkans export instability to us. I know which I would prefer. There is one more lesson I take from the Balkans today: never, never, never give up. Because what is happening in this region today shows how it is possible to turn failed states into successful states, how it is possible to fashion hope out of despair, how it is possible to make a difference. We have a long way to go in the Balkans: but we are getting there.

“The age of national states has come to an end. Everyone must feel that a change has taken place, that an era has vanished and that a new age is dawning in which men will look beyond the borders of their own country and work in fraternal co-operation with other nations for the true aims of humanity... “

Konrad Adenauer, End of Nationalism, 1955

### Introduction

In the twentieth century, Europe came close to destroying itself. Statistics suggested that World War I cost more than 8 million European lives, whereas in World War II more than 18 million Europeans died in battle, civilian bombing, and systematic Nazi genocide. Of course there were also troubles around the old continent. After the Cold War ended in 1989, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union collapsed into war and ethnic cleansing.

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century the European Union may offer hope of peace and stability for the continent that generated the barbarity and inhumanity of the last century. Besides fifteen actual members of the European Union, a further 25 to 30 countries are seeking membership.

So, what is the case with the European Union's South Eastern Europe Enlargement? Which are the possibilities of the South Eastern countries to be part of the Union, or more exactly, to be a virtual partner for the mission, stated above, of peace and stability? Which are both the prospects of this mission, and the challenges to meet it?

### The Enlargement Process

The European Union, with more than half a billion citizens, could be the dominant economic power of the 21st century, regardless of what East Asia or North America do. Europe as a whole does not have to adopt any foreign ideology or managerial frameworks in order to do that. But it has to solve its own problems first and it is obvious for most analysts that the Balkans is a crucial issue, if not the key to stability and prosperity all over Europe. Being the crossroads of different cultures and civilizations the Balkans represent a microcosm of the World in the middle of Europe. Europe's worst nightmares started here. Why can we not imagine, at least, that a new age for Europe could start from this region? (Maniu, 2001).

Geographically, *stricto-sensu*, South Eastern Europe stands for the Balkans. It includes Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Kosova (UN Administered), Macedonia, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro.

The area covers around 750 000 square kilometers and is inhabited by 70 million people. Adding in Romania and Hungary (as the Stability Pact does) the area exceeds 1 000 000 square kilometers and over 100 million people. Geographically, it makes sense to add the European parts of Turkey as well. (Maniu, 2001).

The enlargement of the European Union, which will almost double its membership of 15 countries, is its most important project at the beginning of this century. The other tasks, which the Union has in hand - the single currency and the development of Europe's role in foreign policy, security and defense - are of capital importance, touching as they do on key areas of economic and political activity. But the enlargement is an existential project, which, by bringing in 13 or more countries, with more than 100 million people, will literally change the shape and the dimension of the EU (Avery, 2001).

As the president of European Commission said, “[the] enlargement is an opportunity not only for the present and future Member States but for our whole continent. It is a historic opportunity to secure stability, democracy and prosperity not only throughout the enlarged Union but also beyond our new borders”. (Prodi, 2002).

The EU has on its table applications for membership from 13 countries; in geographical order, they are: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Malta, Cyprus, and Turkey. Negotiations for membership are under way with the first twelve of these countries. Turkey is not yet considered to fulfil the political criteria for membership (human rights, democracy, etc.), that are a precondition for opening such negotiations.

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Why do these countries wish to join the EU? The first motivation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, when they escaped from Soviet influence, was to turn to the European Union for confirmation of their re-admission to the European 'family', and to render irreversible their return to pluralist democracy and market economy. A second motivation was, and remains, security: having left the Warsaw Pact, they wanted to secure their independence by joining a Western alliance. For 'hard' security they wanted to join NATO, and in 1999 three of them (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic) succeeded in doing so. But for 'soft' security they also value the EU, whose mechanisms of integration - common rules, common policies, common institutions - bind its members so closely together. Last, but not least, the applicant countries want full access to the EU's market, and to the economic benefits of its common policies and common budget. (Avery, 2001).

### ***Challenges towards South - Eastern Enlargement***

The fall of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe opened up the possibility for further enlargement of the European Union. In 1993, the Copenhagen European Council took the crucial decision to offer to all countries of Central and Eastern Europe the perspective of membership, if certain criteria are met. These "Copenhagen criteria" include democracy, rule of law, human rights, minority rights and a functioning market economy. Subsequently, with ten countries of the region association agreements were signed. The so-called Europe Agreements oblige the countries to bring their legislation in line with EU standards and require them to modernize their administrations. Negotiations were opened with six of these countries in 1998 (Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Cyprus).

The Commission recommended open negotiations with Malta, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia. It is envisaged that by the time of the next elections for the European Parliament in 2004 the first Central and Eastern European states will have joined the European Union. Except for Slovenia, no country of the former Socialist Yugoslavia has obtained candidate status and full membership of the countries of the Western Balkans is not conceivable in the short and medium term. The European Union recognizes, however, its responsibility in the region and is committed to foster political and economic reform (Voss, 2002: 48).

Enlargement of the Union is about stability transfer. It is about enlarging the unique zone of stability, peace and freedom which has been grown over more than five decades in Western Europe to the East of Europe. Those countries that have already engaged in accession negotiations with the European Commission realized that they must solve the conflicts with their neighbors first, prior to accession. The new spirit of cooperation between Hungary and Romania is a good example in this respect. The encouraging new policy of Croatia toward Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia is another. (Biermann, 2002: 71).

The June 2000 European Council of Feira concluded that the main motivator for reform, including the establishment of a dependable rule of law, democratic and stable institutions and a free economy, in the Balkan countries is a relationship with the EU that is based on a credible prospect of membership. At the same time, the countries of South - Eastern Europe have to be convinced, that an orientation towards the EU alone will not suffice, but that they will have to accept the need for good bilateral relationships, which will allow greater economic and political stability in the region. At the Zagreb Summit of November 2000, the countries of the region and the EU agreed to proceed with the Stabilization and Association Process as a means to prepare the region for sustainable reform and a possible candidate status. This process has three phases: (1) Towards a Stabilization and Association Agreement; (2) Negotiating and implementing the Stabilization and Association Agreements, and (3) Assistance (Voss, 2002: 48).

#### ***1. Towards a Stabilization and Association Agreement***

The cornerstones of the long-term commitment of the EU are the Stabilization and Association Agreements. In these agreements the EU offers opening markets and significant financial and political assistance to the respective countries in turn for serious steps towards political and economic reform according to the Copenhagen criteria. Before negotiations for such an agreement can be opened, the respective countries have to show the seriousness of political and economic reform and the willingness to overcome the basic impediments for peace and stability in the region.

#### ***2. Negotiating and implementing the Stabilization and Association Agreements***

The Stabilization and Association Agreements are fashioned after the Europe Agreements signed in the 1990's with ten Central and Eastern European states. To date, two Stabilization and Association Agreements have been signed, with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on March 26, 2001 and with Croatia on July 9, 2001. The Stabilization and Association Agreements focus on the respect for key democratic principles and the core elements of the EU single market. Through a free trade area with the EU this process will allow the economies of the respective countries to begin integrate with the EU economy. The Stabilization and Association Agreements are tailor-made for the situation of each individual country. However, the final goal is the same for all: the full realization of association after a transitional period through implementation of the core obligations.

#### ***3. Assistance***

The EU will provide extensive assistance to the countries of the region in meeting the obligation in phases 1 and 2. The CARDS program for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is designed for the specific needs of each country in the course of Stabilization and Association Process. Assistance will be synchronized to the respective needs of each country and will focus on the support for the reforms and institutions-building necessary to implement the obligations entered into. CARDS has also a significant regional component that underpins the requirement of regional co-operation. The countries of the region are encouraged to develop relationships with each other in a man-

ner comparable to the relationships that now exist between EU Member States. A network of bilateral free trade agreements is strongly supported.

Although there is still a long way to go, the perspective of full membership of the countries of the western Balkan region is real. It has to be noted, however, that membership in the European Union commits all states to openness and tolerance vis-à-vis each other. It is a prerequisite of membership in the European Union that the lethal conflicts between the peoples of the region are overcome. The countries of the region must come to believe that peaceful coexistence is the key for political and economic stability. The first test will be, therefore, whether the countries of the region will be able to establish good relations amongst themselves (Voss, 2002: 48 and 49).

### ***The EU Role and Contribution in South - Eastern Europe***

The aim of the European Union is to create in South - Eastern Europe a situation in which military conflict will become unthinkable and thereby to expand to Southeast Europe the area of peace, stability, prosperity and freedom which the 15 Member States have created in the last 50 years. In the last decade the European Union has been in the forefront in bringing this about (The online information can be found on: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/see/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/)).

The European Union is by far the single largest assistance donor to the western Balkans as a whole. Since 1991 and including 2001, through its various aid programs, the European Union has provided more than 6.1 billion, while for the year 2001 over 845 million have been made available for the aid programs - Phare, Obnova and CARDS. The European Union also leads on the ground. In Kosova some 36,000 troops (80 per cent of the total force) and 800 civilian police from EU Member States serve alongside international partners. The European Commission heads the department of the UN Mission in Kosova which is responsible for economic reconstruction, while it has delegated to the European Agency for Reconstruction the management responsibility for the main EU assistance programs in the Republic of Serbia, Kosova and the Republic of Montenegro. The EU is the single largest donor to the reconstruction process. Further to the east, Romania and Bulgaria, now both candidates for EU membership, together receive approximately 900 million per year in pre-accession aid

(Also see at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/see/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/)).

The European Union has offered the possibility of full integration into EU structures. The European Union is now offering Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania tailor-made Stabilization and Association Agreements.

The European Union already had a liberal trade regime towards Southeast Europe, allowing more than 80 per cent of regional exports to enter the European Union duty-free. And on 18 September 2000 the Council of Ministers decided to extend duty-free access to the EU market for products from Southeast Europe even further. This trade liberalization took effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2000. Fully liberalized access to the markets of the European Union is also foreseen as part of the Stabilization and Association Agreements.

Far from getting out of the Balkans, the EU is getting more and more deeply involved in the region. Our policy amounts not to an exit strategy, but to an entry strategy a strategy to help the Balkan countries themselves become members, one day, of the EU. Two years ago, the European Union explicitly recognized Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FRY and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as potential candidates for membership, and put in place a policy the Stabilization and Association process - to help turn that dream into a real possibility. Romania and Bulgaria are already candidate countries in their own right (Paten, 2002).

It is early days, but the policy is beginning to work. The explicit destination has given the region a sense of direction, and a sense of momentum.

The Balkans today, as the United States Institute for Peace observed in a paper recently, are in better shape than they have been for the last decade. Compared to only two years ago, the situation has been transformed. Every country has a democratic government. Milosevic is on trial. Serbia and Montenegro are being reconciled. Kosova has held its first elections, and set up institutions of provisional self- government. Croatia is welcoming back tourists, and winning at Wimbledon and the Olympics. Bosnia has just picked up an Oscar. Tremendously talented peoples are starting to be associated with success again. This is not the Balkans of just a few years ago. But, I am sure you would acknowledge that it's still not the European Union.

The region remains desperately weak and vulnerable. Corruption and organized crime have descended like carrion crows. They pose a huge threat to the security of the European Union itself (Paten, 2002). Be as it may, there is also lots of progress.

Everywhere in the Balkans, today, there is evidence of this strategy being implemented. You see it in physical reconstruction of the bridges that EU money has re-built across the Sava from Croatia to Bosnia, for example, or the operation we are funding to clear the Danube. You see it in the excellent work of the European Agency for Reconstruction. You see it in the 16,500 homes we have rebuilt in Kosova, or in the 380 km of roads we have repaired, or in the 30% increase in main crop yields our agricultural support has delivered. You see it in the major improvements we have made to energy, water supply and sanitation facilities, or in the 600 schools we have refurbished in Serbia, or in the homes we have built for returning refugees in Bosnia. You see it in the airport terminals we have rebuilt at Sarajevo or Mostar. You see it in the high profile crisis management negotiations led by the EU, with NATO and the US, in Southern Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and in the energetic work of the EU's Special Representative in Skopje, Alain Le Roy, helping to facilitate the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement; and in the fact that the incoming High Representative in Bosnia, Lord Ashdown, will also be designated a Special Representative of the EU. You see it in the myriad meetings and task forces taking place under the Stabilization and Association process (Paten, 2002).

You see it in the customs assistance missions we are running in Bosnia, Kosova and Albania, from the new equipment we are supplying to help police the 5000 km of new borders across the region, to the advice on integrated management techniques. You see it in the help we are offering to reform the judiciary in Bosnia, Croatia and Albania, or in our help for returning refugees region-wide. You see it in the advice we are giving in Belgrade and other capitals on how to make laws business friendly and in line with EU standards. You see it in our massive budgetary assistance to help governments cope with the strains on their public finances, or our humanitarian aid to help those in dire need. You see it in the nearly 800 conflict damaged homes we have repaired in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia since the summer... In January 2003 the EU's effort will step up a further big notch when we take over the international policing mission in Bosnia from the UN, and the EU has made clear its readiness in principle to take over Operation Amber Fox from NATO. All of this adds up to a formidable commitment to the Balkans, evidence of the leadership role the EU is determined to play in rebuilding the region. Now that the emergency phase is by and large over, more and more assistance is directed towards institution building. (Paten, 2002).

Even before the horror of September 11, the recent tragic history of the Balkans has shown Europe and to the wider international community the danger that failed, or failing, states can pose to our stability and security in this small and interconnected world. The Balkans have demonstrated how instability is contagious, how quickly someone else's problem can become everyone's problem. They have reminded us that it is less costly - in political or financial capital, and above all in blood - to take early and decisive action, rather than prevaricate until matters have spiraled out of control. It is worth noting that our intervention in FYROM has cost just a fraction of our effort in Kosova or Bosnia. In the wake of September 11, these are all lessons that plainly have a wider application. They have reminded us and this too has wider application that standing up for our values when they are in danger, standing up for democracy, for others' rights, for justice, is not flabby idealism: it is a matter of hard security, and profoundly in our self-interest (Paten, 2002).

With Slobodan Milosevic no longer in power, we have before us the best prospects for a generation of building lasting peace and prosperity across the whole of Southeast Europe.

(See more at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/see/](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/)).

### ***Inter-ethnic Reconciliation as a means for European Integration***

The history of Southeast Europe, especially in the last century, is a history of failed reconciliation. Especially the last decade in former Yugoslavia has left deep wounds in so many families, which are still hurting. Every day new mass graves are detected, excavations to identify remains take place and reburials of the dead remind those left of a dreadful past. Reconciliation, thus, is the task of today and tomorrow in order to escape the cycle of violence which dominates Balkan history since the crumbling of the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empires: reconciliation between Kosova Albanians and Kosova Serbs, between Croats and Krajina Serbs, between Bosnians and Serbs, between Macedonians and Albanians, Macedonians and Greeks, etc. (Biermann, 2002: 72 and 73).

This is far from reality today. Up to now, there has been a telling absence even of political and scientific dialogue in the whole region about the failures of the past.

In Bosnia, five years after the Dayton Accords, the "inter entity boundary line" is still separating peoples hardly willing to come together (Biermann, 2002: 74).

According to Henry Kissinger, the ethnic groups have lived together peacefully only when that coexistence was imposed, as under foreign empires or the Tito dictatorship. "President Clinton has asserted that, after a brief period of NATO occupation, the ethnic groups will reconcile. There is no realistic basis for that assumption. Ethnic groups in Bosnia have not reconciled after three years of NATO peacekeeping" (Kissinger, 1999).

Educating the coming generations in a spirit of cooperation and trust will be the key to reconciliation in the long term, as well as the inter-cultural exchanges of young peoples from the whole region.

Concerning Kosova, the first two years under the international presence in Kosova has proven just how difficult reconciliation is. The incidents in Mitrovica prove that the will to reconcile and compromise is still not very strong. Still, Kosova Serb enclaves need to be severely guarded by KFOR in order to prevent new killings. Of course, the memories of genocide and expulsion, going all the way back to the time when Serb forces brutally conquered Kosova in 1912, are still so vivid and powerful. It will take a long time until reconciliation will take root in this society...

Finally, a last word about practical steps towards reconciliation. Reconciliation is about what in Germany was once called a "policy of small steps", of course with a grand design in mind. It is about confidence-building, thus creating a reservoir of trust, which could be drawn on in times of crisis. Germany and France have realized that the more contact there is among our nations, the more understanding and peace there is (Biermann, 2002: 75 and 77).

### ***The Advantages of European Enlargement***

Globalization is bringing about changes similar to those, which resulted from the discovery of America five centuries ago: the world is becoming smaller; the trade in ideas and material goods is expanding. The events of the 11<sup>th</sup> of September have had a profound impact on all of us (Prodi, 2002). In these changed circumstances, the president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi said, that the peoples of Europe enjoy at least three significant advantages:

The first is our economic and commercial size: from the common market to the single market, from the single market to the Euro, our achievements are tangible. Facing up to the challenges before us, we have gradually devised appropriate and original responses. Given the economic compartmentalization, which prevailed in Europe until recently and the maze of regulations, which impeded companies and financial markets, our economies have made impressive progress.

Our second advantage is enlargement, which will transform the Union into a continental power. Enlargement will mean the reunification of Europe, the emergence of a major focus of international life. This reunified Europe will have power behind it and will be distinguished by a keen sense of its responsibilities, having been forged by history. Enlargement will mean the end of fifty years of ideological division.

It will also be the final victory of democracy over totalitarianism, following on the defeat of national socialism and fascism and the removal of the Berlin Wall. The enlarged Union will be powerful but it will never be dominating.

Lastly, and this, in my opinion, is what is most important, the European Union has a third advantage, namely the irreplaceable intellectual capital which it owes to its diversity of cultures, the educational level of its peoples and the length of its national democratic traditions (Prodi, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

The resolution of regional contradictions and the reversing of disintegrative processes in Southeast Europe is a pre-condition for the region's accession to the European Union and its progress towards a more liberal and modern type of society. The EU has emphasized more than once that regional forms of cooperation in Southeast Europe are viewed in Brussels as a step in the right direction, and as a constructive sign of determination of the Southeast European governments to become integrated into EU structures.

In 1963, Robert Schuman said "we must build the United Europe not only in the interest of the free peoples, but also in order to be able to welcome in it the peoples of Eastern Europe who, freed from the repression under which they live, will want to join and seek our moral support". In that line, the next enlargement will be seen as a culmination of the process of European integration, leading not just to an extension of the EU, but to the reunification of the entire continent.

And, as Christopher Patten, External Relations Commissioner stated: the choice in this case is very clear: either we export stability to the Balkans, or the Balkans export instability to us. I know which I would prefer. There is one more lesson I take from the Balkans today: never, never, never give up. Because what is happening in this region today shows how it is possible to turn failed states into successful states, how it is possible to fashion hope out of despair, how it is possible to make a difference. We have a long way to go in the Balkans: but we are getting there.

So, there is a general conclusion and it is now well known: the most urgent problems have to be addressed, and for Europe, this means the Balkans.

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