



INSTITUTE  
FOR POLITICS  
AND SOCIETY

# The Western Balkans on their Path to the European Union:

*What Steps Can Be Taken to Speed up  
the Accession Process*

---

POLICY PAPER / APRIL 2020

BISSER ANGELOV

[WWW.POLITIKASPOLECNOST.CZ](http://WWW.POLITIKASPOLECNOST.CZ)

[OFFICE@POLITICSANDSOCIETY.CZ](mailto:OFFICE@POLITICSANDSOCIETY.CZ)

**Contents**

The Western Balkans Enlargement: a next step on a long journey of eastern expansion ..... 2

Common issues and proposed solutions..... 4

    Judicial independence..... 5

    Empty husk reforms..... 5

    Political clientelism ..... 6

Montenegro ..... 7

Serbia..... 8

North Macedonia ..... 9

Albania ..... 10

Bosnia and Herzegovina..... 12

Kosovo ..... 13

Conclusion..... 14

Bibliography ..... 16

Annex..... 23

---

# The Western Balkans on their Path to the European Union: What Steps Can Be Taken to Speed up the Accession Process

Policy Paper – Bisser Angelov, April 2020

Ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of communist regimes throughout Europe, the European Union has been active in its expansion towards the East, with the three most recent enlargements – of 2004, 2007 and 2013 – all granting access almost exclusively to former Eastern Bloc states. Still, this initiative is seen as incomplete: already in 2003, the Union declared that the future of the Balkans lays within the EU and that the approaching accession of the CEE countries should serve as an example for the Western Balkans to follow (European Union, 2003). The following accessions of Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia left a small island of six Balkan countries surrounded by EU borders: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. This group, which is often referred to as the Western Balkans (WB) despite the unclear definition of the term (Žižek, 1999), and their ongoing progress towards entering the EU will be the object of this policy paper which will aim to provide policy recommendations to accelerate that process. For this purpose, the present paper will first place the WB accession project within the overall context of the European Union's eastward expansion and provide an overview of its most recent developments. Afterwards, concrete issues and proposed solutions for them will be presented, in two stages. First will be discussed issues which are common to all Western Balkan states and therefore could be solved via similar policies; second, each state will be viewed individually in order to highlight their individual areas of priority.

## **The Western Balkans Enlargement: a next step on a long journey of eastern expansion**

Following the collapse of the Communist regimes throughout Central and Eastern Europe the European Union scrambled to realign the countries within this region with the West and quickly make them part of the Union (Veleva-Eftimova, 2019). The reason for this haste was the strategic interest held by the then-members of the EU and the new candidates: a fear of potential regional instability which would be detrimental to the whole of Europe and the possibility for either aggression from Russia towards those newly-independent states or a recapture of the state and return towards an eastern alignment (*ibid.*). Because of these pressing worries, which were however not shared by all of the then-members of the EU, many compromises had to be made both within the Union, both between supporters and opponents of the enlargement and between the EU and the candidates. These compromises have had a lasting effect on the subsequent functioning of the EU, as not all candidates had achieved satisfactory results in every area by the time of accession and therefore some experienced backsliding post-accession (Veleva-Eftimova, 2019), as well as impacting the enlargement process itself in ways which will be discussed further in the present paper.

The current enlargement project shares an overall similar logic as the 2004/07 ones: it also aims to improve regional stability and avoid any potential conflicts, as well as for the EU to align the potential new members with itself before other foreign actors achieve such a goal. The latter is a real concern, especially with the strengthened US presence in the Balkan region after President Trump assigned not one but two special US envoys to the WB (Burazer, *The Game of ...*, 2019), the ever increasing presence of China in the region (Bechev, 2019) and the strong ties between Russia and the most developed state of the WB, Serbia (Associated Press, 2019)

(Zivanovic, 2019). As the European Commission said in its own Communication of 2018<sup>1</sup>, the accession of the Western Balkans is in the Union's own political, security and economic interests. However, 2019 was a rather weak year for the WB enlargement project as many expected milestones were not reached – no official EU-mediated meetings took place between Serbia and Kosovo to discuss the resolution of the issue of recognition and the resulting trade tariffs (which will be discussed further in this paper), only two accession negotiation chapters were opened and none were closed signifying slow progress for the two negotiating states, Serbia and Montenegro, and the next two in line, Albania and North Macedonia, were blocked from starting negotiations by France (EWB, *From protests in...*, 2019). There was hope that 2019 and 2020 can be considered transition years which will set up the foundations for the next few years of progress, thanks to the European Parliament elections of May 2019, followed by general elections in Kosovo in October 2019, in North Macedonia and Serbia which were set for April 2020 and those in Montenegro set for October 2020 at latest, which were expected to bring new faces and, hopefully, a reinvigorated political environment to the enlargement process. However, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic the elections in North Macedonia (Marusic S. , 2020) and Serbia (Reuters, 2020) have been pushed back indefinitely. What is more, since France vetoed Albania and North Macedonia from starting negotiations because of its desire to reform the accession mechanism, these suggestions have been made on how to achieve that – a non-paper by France itself, followed by another non-paper by a group of 9 member states (including Czechia), and finally a reform proposal by the European Commission in February 2020, which has been quickly approved by France itself (EWB, *France welcomes the...*, 2020) and by most groups in the EP (EWB, *EP groups welcome...*, 2020). The proposed enlargement framework is said to give more flexibility to the EU to pause or even reverse the negotiation process, provide a better reward/punishment mechanism and put a stronger focus on the political nature of the process resulting in a more effective system overall (Wemer, et al., 2020). In late March, this proposed revision to the enlargement mechanism was officially endorsed by the Council of the EU, as well as by the European Council (EWB, *New enlargement...* , 2020). At the same time, the two councils also approved the opening of negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia (RFE, *EU Leaders Give...* , 2020).

Of course, the question of whether the process of EU enlargement eastwards should continue is an open one. The EU itself has maintained the same position since 2003 – that the WB region *will* join the Union at some point, with 2014-2019 EU chief of foreign policy Federica Mogherini stating in 2017 that this process is not one of European “expansion” but rather of European “reunification” (Mastrolilli, 2017). However, European citizens are less convinced – according to Eurobarometer data, public support for further enlargement has been split for decades, with a stable lead of c. 50% of the European public being “against” versus c. 37% “for” the idea throughout the 2011-2016 period. Since then public opinion has been gradually shifting, with the most recent poll showing that as of 2019 46% of EU citizens support further enlargement, contrary to 42% who are against (Eurobarometer, 2020). The Czech public has been slightly more sceptic towards further enlargement, with an average of 55% against the idea over the last 5 years, versus an average of 35% in support throughout the same period (*ibid.*). Still, support in Czechia has been increasing over the last 3 years. It is interesting to note that Czechia is the only former Eastern Bloc state where support for further enlargement is below the EU average; typically, these states exhibit much higher levels of public support for

---

<sup>1</sup> The Communication titled “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans”

expansion, a fact which is demonstrated by the average level of support within non-Euro area countries lying at 50%, significantly higher than the Eurozone average of 41% (*ibid.*).

Some observers have even said that the recent veto of North Macedonia and Albania signals the end of the EU's goal to integrate the Western Balkans (Less, 2019). The logic follows that while most WB states have large ethnic minorities and significant groups within them call for redrawing borders within the region and establishing nation states, until now the EU has had a two-pronged strategy to resolve this issue without violence – on the one hand, investing in the region's development in order to replace ethnic tensions with economic and social prosperity; on the other hand, aiming to integrate all WB states within the Union with the purpose of reducing the significance of (contested) national borders. However, with the EU supposedly giving up on this approach, the region could quickly revert to the goal of establishing nation states, with Albania aiming to consolidate the majority-Albanian-populated regions in Kosovo and North Macedonia, Serbia wanting to reclaim the Serbian-populated parts of Kosovo and the Republika Srpska entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina aiming to secede and join Serbia – changes which would signify a very considerable, and most likely violent, redrawing of borders. Such a development would ensure the short-term instability of the region and could even develop to a proxy war between the US and Russia, as both powers already have strong historic and military ties with states within the region. An example of this possible development is the 2016 attempted coup in Montenegro for which 13 persons, including two Russian intelligence officers, were found guilty of attempting to kill the Prime Minister and to install a pro-Russian government (Vasiljevic, *Russians, opposition figures sentenced...*, 2019); Russia has denied any involvement. Such events demonstrate the potential instability which could result if the WB region is left to settle its ethnic conflicts under the influence of other foreign powers instead of attempting to overcome those conflicts as members of the same political and economic union.

## Common issues and proposed solutions

When discussing the long and difficult road of former Eastern Bloc states to EU membership, it is important to point out that the enlargement process itself has room for improvement in many regards. One of the biggest issues which is often brought up both by academics studying the accession mechanism and by politicians who are experiencing it is that of clarity and consistency of the criteria. As was already mentioned earlier, the Copenhagen criteria which served as the foundation for the future accessions in the East were the result of a compromise between the member states supporting this direction of enlargement and those who opposed it; as a result of these tensions, the adopted criteria were unclear and possible to interpret in different ways according to the circumstances (Lippert, et al., 2001) (Sedelmeier, 2005). While this issue is not so much present in the field of transposing the European acquis, thanks to the fact that the latter is based on thousands of pages of legal text, it is somewhat felt in respect to the economic targets to be met by potential members and especially in respect to political targets – the main source of complaints for lack of clarity and consistency (Damjanovski, et al., 2019). While this issue has been brought up many times by various actors throughout the accession process of virtually every WB country, it hasn't been deeply studied by academic scholars (*ibid.*). In that context it becomes clear that the European Union should take steps to correct the problem, first by having it studied by scholars in order to gain a better understanding of its specificities and effects, and afterwards by reforming accession criteria in a way which is clearer and more consistent and therefore easier to follow and more convincing for potential new member states.

## Judicial independence

Another slight adjustment which the EU could make to its accession mechanism is to mix up its approach in the sphere of independent judiciary. The capture of the judiciary by political parties and its use to further strengthen their grip on the state has been a leading problem in all WB countries – a trend which has been noticed by the electorate. As Fig. 1 of the Annex shows, people have lost trust in the independence of the judiciary with two thirds of the population of the WB region believing that there is at least some political influence exerted over it. External observers have noticed that Serbia, for example, is already three years late with submitting its negotiation position on chapters related to the judiciary despite multiple EU invitations and, after years of leading the process of amending the constitution, the government's latest proposal for constitutional reform has been labelled a step backwards (Georgievski, 2020). This trend, visible in all WB countries, indicates that the EU's strategy on the issue of independent judiciary has not achieved the results it had hoped for and therefore merits certain changes. It is visible that there is a certain misalignment between the heart of the problem, i.e. the lack of political will to provide a credible solution, and the current strategy of the Union which has been based on capacity building of the judges and focusing on a number of technical aspects such as establishing centralised criminal records registries and reducing the backlog of cases (Damjanovski, et al., 2019). Not only did their efforts remain fruitless, as those attempted reforms produced meagre results signified by the fact that backlogs were not substantially reduced in any WB state other than North Macedonia (*ibid.*), but they also failed in achieving the goal of actually strengthening the judiciary against political influence. Perhaps then the European Union needs to reconsider its tactic of capacity building and technical assistance and begin also providing political assistance by acknowledging major scandals such as the 2015 leaked recording exposing the range of control of the Macedonian government over the judiciary (Marusic, 2015) or the selective application of justice towards political opponents of the government of Albania (Elbasani, et al., 2018). In order for judiciary independence to be achieved, it is important that the European Union calls out such cases of blatant political meddling in the justice system and publically shames the actors involved in it. While the EU has begun to take steps in that direction with the most recent country reports of the European Commission including harsher criticisms, a stronger and more public approach would produce more pressure and, hopefully, help overcome the lack of political will for change.

## Empty husk reforms

Another frequently cited problem of Europeanisation is the phenomenon of the “empty husk reforms”, signifying the legal adoption of an EU norm without its implementation in reality. One reason for this style of policy adoption is the so-called “gold-plating”, i.e. the inclusion of additional, much stricter regulations by the state when transposing EU norms. Such regulations are often adopted despite the impossibility to be consistently enforced (Lavrič, et al., 2019). This produces an overall scepticism towards EU regulations of the less well-informed parts of the public, an erosion of the principle of rule of law due to witnessing a selective or dysfunctional enforcement of the law and an increase in corruption as any citizen caught breaking such unenforced regulations can at any time become a target when an inspector decides to enforce them in order to potentially receive a bribe. A very similar issue is that of non-indigenisation of norms according to the local economic context and culture which occurs when the Union wants to introduce regulations without properly understanding local specificities, potentially designing them in an unsuitable way. The negative impact of this phenomenon resembles the one caused by gold-plating: the regulations are often left unimplemented, leading to erosion of public trust in the rule of law and creating opportunities

for corruption, as well as reinforcing the view of the EU as a threatening entity which endangers local customs. Two main steps can be undertaken in order to reduce both of these phenomena. Firstly, both EU representatives and local governments need to actively participate in the process of adjusting formal regulations to the local realities in order to preserve traditions and minimise cases of gold-plating. At best, new regulations will be based as strongly as possible on current local practices in order to reduce the administrative and social strains. Secondly, the EU should be more vocal in educating the public by providing information about its efforts in protecting local customs and, in cases of gold-plating, about the discrepancy between the requirements demanded by the accession process and those adopted by the will of the government.

### **Political clientelism**

Another common issue of all WB states is that of political clientelism, i.e. the provision of goods, employment or other benefits by a political party in exchange for electoral support. There are two types of political clientelism – *electoral* which is short-term, occurring around elections and typically involving small rewards as in the case of vote buying, and *relational* which is long-term and includes more considerable incentives such as patronage in employment or lasting benefits, often at the expense of public resources (Popovikj, et al., 2019). Typically, this distinction is only studied in academic works while it often gets ignored in policymaking, resulting in a strong focus on combatting electoral clientelism while leaving relational clientelism out of the spotlight (*idib.*). However, data visible in Fig.2 and Fig. 3 of the Annex suggests that both the former, which is typically initiated by the party, and the latter, which is more often initiated by the client, are strongly present in WB countries. In fact, when comparing the number of people involved in clientelism to the number of votes received by the winning party in Fig. 4 it becomes obvious that clientelism is a strong factor in deciding the outcomes of elections. With that in mind, it becomes clear that a mechanism is needed which addresses political clientelism in a way which can overcome the state capture by governing parties. A possible solution, as described by Popovikj et al., is to establish a mechanism within the legislative branch, composed of an opposition majority, a chairman elected by consensus, and participation of CSOs, independent experts and journalists as associate members without voting rights but taking part in discussing and setting the agenda. The goal of this mechanism would be to indirectly monitor the executive branch in all aspects related to clientelism by ensuring that existing institutions tasked with prevention, monitoring, oversight and suppression of abuse of power (including ministries, agencies and bureaus, as well as independent and regulatory bodies) function properly and coordinate with one another in order to achieve tangible results. This would be achieved by demanding frequent reports from those existing institutions and performing yearly assessments of their work, including an overview of the risks of abuse of public office for party gains; the yearly report would then have to be discussed and adopted in a plenary parliament session. The effectiveness of the mechanism itself would have to be supported by the EU through conditionality for accession based on its results. Hopefully, the political character of such a mechanism would ensure that outcomes are not simply administrative but also carry a political weight and generate political will.

Having discussed several of the most pressing issues which are common to most or all Western Balkan states and proposed solutions for them, this paper will review the states individually and focus on some of the particular steps that they have to take on the path to EU accession.

## Montenegro

Montenegro is currently a frontrunner of the WB enlargement as it is one of two countries, alongside Serbia, which has officially begun negotiations with the EU. The state has opened 32 of the 33 Chapters with the only one remaining being Chapter 8 on Competition policy, for which it has met the Opening Benchmarks, and it has provisionally closed 3 Chapters (EWB, *Council of the EU...*, 2019). In addition, the state joined NATO in 2017, following Albania and Croatia's accession in 2009, and is also using the euro currency. This has actually generated friction with the EU, as Montenegro adopted the currency unilaterally and without fulfilling the Maastricht criteria for entering the Eurozone; still, it hopes that by meeting the criteria by the time of its EU accession, the country will avoid further complications such as having to revert to its pre-euro currency before adopting the euro once again through a bilateral decision (Bogavac, 2013).

In terms of Freedom of the Media, the IREX Index shows Montenegro as having a stable score since the early 2000s, hovering around 2.45/4 (IREX Montenegro, 2020). The Index also shows that this score is consistent for each of the five measures areas with no measure lagging behind the others. The ranking of Reporters without Borders confirms the stability of the freedom of the press, however, it puts the country at a lower overall level, ranking it around 110<sup>th</sup> in the world, out of 180 examined cases (RSF Montenegro, 2020). What is more, the recent political interference in the national public broadcaster Council and the Agency for Electronic Media is a cause for alarm, alongside the lack of effective protection of journalists against violence, as noted by the EC Report of 2019<sup>2</sup>.

The country is heading for an election in 2020, after two waves of protests in the past year – the first sparked in February 2019 over the alleged corruption and abuse of power of the DPS party which is the successor of Communist party of Montenegro and has been power since the very first democratic elections in the beginning of the 1990s (Vasiljevic, *Thousands in Montenegro...*, 2019); the second began over the planned (and subsequently adopted) religion law which would see the state claiming ownership over a number of properties of the Orthodox church (Vasovic, et al., 2019). Dissatisfaction also escalated within the parliament, resulting in a brawl caused by the pro-Serbian *Democratic Front* party which led to the detention of all 18<sup>3</sup> members of the party (*ibid.*). Within this context, a main priority for Montenegro will be to conduct the 2020 elections fairly, freely and transparently. Whatever the result of the elections may be, a key goal must be the reestablishment of political dialogue and returning genuine cooperation to a fragmented and polarised political landscape.

As per the 2019 EC Report on Montenegro, the country has achieved moderate progress with its public administration reform while issues still remain with de-politicisation of the public service, the delegation of decision-making and the development of policy based on evidence and inclusivity. The country's judicial system is moderately prepared although the legislative framework aiming to strengthen judiciary independence remains to be fully implemented. Montenegro has achieved some progress in the fight against organised crime, especially in terms of international cooperation, however, more results are needed in cases of organised crime with local vested interests at stake as well as in seizing proceeds of crime. In terms of the economy, the EC report noted that while the country is moderately prepared and progressing towards developing a functioning market economy there are still concerns with

---

<sup>2</sup> European Commission Country Report on Montenegro.

<sup>3</sup> For reference, there are 81 seats in the Montenegrin Parliament with the leading party currently holding 35.

the large account deficit, the tight lending conditions which lead to limited access to finance for small companies and a private sector constrained by a weak rule of law and strong informality. While the development of infrastructure is a promising factor for future economic competitiveness, more investments need to be made in human capital development. In terms of transposition of the European acquis, Montenegro has achieved moderate progress in most areas, however, it is lagging behind in the fields of environmental, social and competition policy, as well as the overall strengthening of its administrative capacity to ensure thorough implementation of European regulations.

## Serbia

Serbia is the other frontrunner in the WB group, as it has officially begun negotiations for its accession and has opened 18 out of the 33 chapters, although progress on that front has been gradually slowing as 2017 saw the opening of 6 chapters, 2018 saw 4 chapters open and last year only 2 chapters were opened, alongside comments that this action was more of a symbolic gesture of goodwill from the EU rather than the result of any objective progress (EWB, *Opening new Chapter...*, 2019).

Serbia has exhibited a strong backslide in terms of freedom of media in recent years. The freedom of press index of Reporters without Borders shows a stable ranking around the top 60 countries worldwide in the period 2013-2017 before sharply declining to 76<sup>th</sup> in 2018 and then again to 90<sup>th</sup> position in 2019 (RSF Serbia, 2020). This trend is consistent with the IREX Index which shows Serbia's score as being stable around 2.4/4 in the period of 2002-2009 before decreasing and stabilising at a level of 1.85/4 for the 2012-2017 period and further collapsing to reach a lowly 1.45/4 in 2019 (IREX Serbia, 2020). The worst areas according to IREX are the financial management of the medias, which is crucial for their independence, and the objectivity of journalists – as of 2019, both stand barely above 1/4. The issue of freedom of the press is intertwined with that of free and fair elections, both of which are top priorities for Serbia in light of the legislative election coming up on April 26<sup>th</sup>. The importance of media freedom in the context of the upcoming elections has been highlighted by Tanja Fajon, Chair of EP Delegation for Serbia, who recently emphasised that the media situation in the country is getting worse (EWB, *Várhelyi and Fajon...*, 2020). The same sentiment was expressed by EP Rapporteur for Serbia, Vladimir Bilčík (EWB, *Bilčík and Fajon...*, 2020). Interestingly, the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, has taken a different line, claiming that overall Serbia is on the right path towards free and fair elections, a goal which he claims has almost been achieved (EWB, *Várhelyi and Fajon...*, 2020).

The lack of media freedom has also been highlighted by a number of opposition parties, including the main opposition Alliance for Serbia coalition (SzS), and declarations have been made of boycotts of the election unless freedom of media and freedom and fairness of elections is restored (EWB, *Elections in Serbia...*, 2020). In this context, a top priority should be the immediate reestablishment of party dialogue and increasing of political trust and cooperation, as well as the long-term adoption of policies to strengthen the financial independence of medias and the effective protection of journalists.

Another top priority for the Serbian accession into the EU is the solution of its conflict with Kosovo. Ever since the small country declared independence in 2008, following years of violent conflicts, Kosovo and Serbia have been fighting a long diplomatic war for the recognition of Europe's newest country. In recent years there have been both positive and negative developments, with an amicable territory swap being discussed as a potential solution since late 2018 (Walker , et al., 2018), followed by an imposition of tariffs by Kosovo against Serbia

and Bosnia and Herzegovina in November and December 2018, first at 10% and soon after at 100% (Bytyci, 2018). While there have been promising development lately, as the two countries recently agreed upon restoring the flight path between Pristina and Belgrade for the first time in over 20 years (Eddy, 2020), strengthening the connection between the two countries quite literally, they have also continued their fight for recognition of Kosovo with Serbia's MFA proudly announcing in late November 2019 that it has convinced another, 17<sup>th</sup>, country to reconsider its recognition<sup>4</sup>. In any case, the position of the EU has been consistent and clear – “the EU cannot and will not import bilateral disputes”, as per the EC's Communication of 2018. As such, an irreversible mutually-acceptable agreement will have to be reached before Serbia can convert its current frontrunner status into a full EU membership.

Other than its relationship with Kosovo and the state of elections and media freedom, Serbia has a number of challenges to resolve before its accession into the EU. Public opinion in the country is largely divided on the topic of EU membership and it has worsened over the last five years, according to the Standard Eurobarometer surveys number 82 (Autumn 2014) and number 91 (Spring 2019). The surveys show that the view of EU membership as a good thing has increased from 39% to 40% over the last 5 years, while its view as negative has increased from 21% to 28%, signalling an overall drop in support which has to be addressed before the accession can be completed. Other than that, the key issues as outlined by the EC Report of 2019<sup>5</sup> are the urgent need for more cross-party dialogue, the establishment of a serious track record in fighting corruption through independent prosecutors and finalising high-level corruption cases, addressing the lack of effective investigations, prosecutions and final convictions in cases of organised crime, improving quality of education and its relevance for the labour market, urgently addressing the issues of non-compliance with the SAA in terms of state aid control, restriction to competition in the card-based payment system and fiscal discrimination on imported spirits, and, of course, realigning its foreign and security policy with that of the European Union.

## North Macedonia

North Macedonia is one of the two states which are official candidates but have yet to start the negotiation process. Alongside Albania, it was vetoed from progressing to this next step in the summer of 2019, however, it is expected to overcome this hurdle and begin negotiations in 2020, especially with the EU's quick progress with developing a new enlargement framework (EWB, *EU and the...*, 2020). North Macedonia has made substantial progress over the last few years, led by the progressive Social Democratic Union (SDSM) which in 2016 managed to form the first government since 2006 which was not led by the nationalist VMRO party. This development allowed the country to end its complex dispute with Greece by changing its name from Macedonia to North Macedonia, in a move which was welcomed by the Western world and lauded as an example for future peaceful solutions of national identity conflicts in the Balkans. While the name-change removed the Greek veto over North Macedonia's entry into NATO and the EU, only the former was achieved while the latter was blocked by France, as was discussed earlier in the present paper. This perceived failure of the government to achieve what it promised was the reason for calling snap elections to be held on April 12<sup>th</sup> 2020 which were later postponed indefinitely because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, holding the elections in

---

<sup>4</sup> Republika Nauru je 17. zemlja koja je povukla priznanje tzv. Kosova. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia*. 2019. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.rs/sr/index.php/pres-servis/saopstenja/22048--17-?lang=lat>

<sup>5</sup> European Commission Country Report on Serbia.

a free, fair and transparent way and maintaining political dialogue throughout them remains a top priority for North Macedonia. The electoral delay could end up benefiting the governing coalition as March 2020 saw North Macedonia both entering NATO and taking another step on its path to European accession, resolving the main issue over which the government announced its early resignation.

North Macedonia has achieved progress in other areas as well, notably in freedom of media. According to Reporters without Borders, while it was stable around 120<sup>th</sup> in the world between 2013 and 2017, since then the country has experienced substantial improvement to reach 95<sup>th</sup> place in 2019 (RSF North Macedonia, 2020). This trend has been confirmed by the IREX index which shows the country having a stable score of around 1.6/4 for the period of 2009-2017 before making rapid progress to reach an average score of 2.26/4 for 2019 (IREX North Macedonia, 2020). Still, some issues remain notably in the areas of financial independence of media and objectivity of journalists. As outlined by the EC Report of 2019<sup>6</sup>, North Macedonia has made very good progress in most areas as the SDSM-led government has taken steps to strengthen checks and balances, democracy and rule of law, as well as improving political cooperation with the opposition and non-governmental stakeholders. The inclusion of CSOs in the policymaking process remains a high priority for future improvement. While the capacity of the public administration has improved, its accountability still remains relatively weak and further steps are needed for its depoliticisation. While there have been promising reforms in the judiciary sector, it remains to be seen how successful their implementation will be as the country strongly needs to improve public trust in the independence of the judicial process. North Macedonia has also made good progress towards a functioning market economy, however, certain issues remain. Namely, the business environment is facing problems with a skill mismatch between supply and demand, necessitating education reform in that direction, as well as being pressured by a large informal economy. Further investment is also needed in public infrastructure. The country has shown a good level of preparation in most areas of membership obligations, however, more efforts are needed in the spheres of financial and budgetary provisions and free movement of workers, as well as an overall strengthening of administrative capacity.

## Albania

Albania is the second WB state, alongside North Macedonia, which was expected to progress into official negotiations for EU accession in 2019 and was blocked by France's veto, which French officials claimed was based on wanting to reform the EU enlargement process rather than a desire to block the negotiation process for the two countries. Still, its position is more complicated than that of North Macedonia as the question was raised if negotiations with Albania should be opened regardless of the enlargement reform, with certain states holding the opinion that further progress is needed before Albania could proceed to the next stage (Lilienström, 2020). Even after agreeing to open negotiations with both countries in March 2020, the European Commission stated that further progress is expected from Albania before its first intergovernmental conference (ICG), especially in the spheres of electoral and judicial reforms and in the fight against organised crime and corruption (EWB, *EC: Albania to...*, 2020).

A notable recent development in Albania has been the creation of a working group composed of all three major political parties with the goal of addressing the electoral issues which have been underlined numerous times by international observers (Erebara, 2020). This working

---

<sup>6</sup> European Commission Country Report on North Macedonia.

group will aim to finally address the electoral problems which have caused years of political tension between the governing party and its opposition, culminating in the local elections of June 2019 in which opposition parties refused to participate and many voters were left with a single option on the ballot (BBC, 2019). The working group will aim to address the typical winner-takes-all-mentality which has seen electoral victors severing all political dialogue with the opposition for the duration of their terms (*ibid.*) as well as the opposition claims of the government's participation in voter buying and politicisation of the electoral staff which has resulted in voter disillusionment with the democratic process and the low turnout of only 21.6% at the local elections of June 2019 (Koleka, 2019). The working group is said to be focusing on the recommendation of the OSCE Report based on the OSCE's supervision of those local elections (Erebara, 2020). Those recommendations include adopting laws to regulate the spending of public resources for electoral purposes as well as for ensuring the lack of pressure on individual voters to vote for a certain candidate, review of the voting procedures, capacity training for electoral commissions on the topic of protecting ballot secrecy, adopting non-political formulas for nominating members of the electoral administration, establishing effective procedures for public administration employees to report political pressure exerted upon them, as well as conducting thorough and transparent investigations by the law enforcement bodies regarding all allegations of electoral misconduct (OSCE, 2019).

Another concern for the Albanian progress on the path to the EU has been its judicial reform. Back in 2014 the state declared that it would implement the biggest judicial reform since the fall of communism, which would re-evaluate a total of 800 judges and prosecutors as well as establishing new institutions which would allow the judiciary to govern itself without political influence (Lukić, et al., 2019). While the reform has been somewhat successful, in that the institutions – the High Judicial Council, the High Prosecutorial Council and the Justice Appointment Council – have indeed been established and the vetting process has begun (*ibid.*) the results have been mixed. As of November 2019, vetting has been completed for 185 judges and prosecutors, resulting in the dismissal of 80 of them over various uncovered offences and the resignation of a further 29 of them (*ibid.*). However, this development combined with a number of judges and prosecutors quitting in order to escape trial as well as the still developing functionality of the new institutions, have resulted in a judiciary which doesn't have enough judges to function, highlighted by the presence of only two judges on the Supreme Court (which should normally have 19 sitting judges and had 17 before the vetting process began) as of June 2019 (France 24, 2019) which then fell to just one. This has effectively blocked the judicial system, causing the backlog of cases at the Supreme Court to almost triple from 11,357 to almost 30,000 cases between 2015 and 2018 (Exit News, 2019). Efforts have been made to alleviate this issue – a new methodology is currently being developed for an easier and more transparent process for promotion of judges and prosecutors and the hierarchy of prosecutors has been decentralised in order to make individual prosecutors less reliant on the general prosecutor (EWB, *Judiciary under reconstruction...*, 2020). Additionally, three new judges have been appointed to the High Court (EWB, *President of Albania...*, 2020). While the EC has welcomed the vetting process in its 2019 Report on Albania due to its strong approach against corruption in the judiciary sector and the country has continued its efforts in 2020, there is still a notable need to replace dismissed judges and prosecutors and fully restore the effective functioning of the judicial system.

The EC Report of 2019<sup>7</sup> also underlines that efforts need to be strengthened in a number of areas, including tackling money laundering, confiscating assets seized from crimes,

---

<sup>7</sup> European Commission Country Report on Albania.

implementing the adopted regulations on protecting fundamental rights and freedom of expression, reducing the share of the informal economy, increase access to education for rural populations and vulnerable groups and strengthening the capacity of public administration and enhancing its accountability and transparency in preparation for the adoption of the European acquis.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), which has been a potential candidate for future EU membership since the 2003 Summit of Thessaloniki (European Union, 2003), officially applied to the EU in 2016. Its application process, however, has not gone very smoothly so far, as the state has taken longer than anticipated to submit its answers to the EU's questionnaire (Kovacevic, *Bosnia Leaves Gaps...*, 2019). This slow course of action has become par for the course for the Balkan state, as its governmental structure, based on 2 entities within the state and 3 Presidents – one for each of the major ethnicities within the country – has been notorious for its political deadlocks. At the time of the 2014 general elections, an NGO compared the number of laws adopted by the governments of BiH compared to those of the region (Jukic, 2014). The results were telling: the 2006-2010 government had only adopted 180 laws, while the subsequent government had adopted a shocking 106 laws over the course of the 2010-2014 period; other regional governments had adopted around 350 (Montenegro), 500 (Serbia) and 750 (Croatia) laws for the same 4-year timeframe. The formation of government since the most recent elections, in October 2018, also took more than a year before the members of the Presidency agreed upon a Chairman of the Council of Ministers, i.e. *de facto* Prime Minister, in November 2019 (Kovacevic, *EU and US...*, 2019) – a slow process which also caused a delay for Bosnia's bid for NATO accession as the country failed to adopt its first Annual National Program (Lakic, 2019). Such frequent delays and deadlocks are one of the major problems on BiH's path to European Accession and should be a top priority for future institutional reforms to address. The EC outlined in its 2019 Report on BiH that while the country's decentralised character is not an issue in and of itself, its effectiveness needs to improve before being admitted into the Union. In order to achieve that, institutional reforms should be considered, aiming to streamline and potentially further centralise the country's system of governance. At the same time, the importance of increasing cross-ethnicity political dialogue and cooperation cannot be overstated.

Following an eventual increase of political dialogue and subsequent institutional reforms, other concrete priorities emerge in order to advance Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU membership bid. Concrete steps can be taken such as improving the rate of implementation of the SAA, specifically in establishing the Parliamentary Committee and the development of a national plan for the adoption of the European acquis. Further targets have been outlined by the EC Report of 2019<sup>8</sup> in almost every area, including the improvement of the electoral framework and strengthening the judiciary, increasing measures in the fight against organised crime and especially against money laundering and terrorism and improving the protection of fundamental rights of all citizens – a key step, considering that a massive 25% of BiH citizens would most value EU membership for its provision of social protection, much more than any other WB state (Balkan Barometer 2019). In terms of economy, BiH should aim to remove the factors blocking the functioning of the market, namely by improving rule of law, combatting corruption, streamlining long and complicated administrative procedures and addressing red tape as well as the high fragmentation of the internal market.

---

<sup>8</sup> European Commission Country Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Kosovo

Kosovo is the country which has the longest way to go until its eventual EU membership. The young country has signed an SAA with the Union in 2016 although it has not yet applied for membership. The most obvious obstacle lying in its path is its non-recognition by five current member states, namely Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. While the recognition by those states cannot be achieved by Kosovo alone, a potential bilateral agreement with Serbia and recognition by the latter could be enough for the five member states to change their stance. That being said, achieving such an agreement with Serbia will also not be easy as Kosovo doesn't have much leverage other than the EU's requirement that the conflict has to be resolved before either of them can become an EU member – an incentive which only works insofar as Serbia is committed to becoming one. A new government was recently formed in Kosovo, led by the Vetëvendosje (LV) party which was in power for the first time and which was expected to bring a fresh and, hopefully, effective approach to Kosovo's internal and regional policy. However, disagreement within the governing coalition of LV and LDK regarding the tariffs on Serbia quickly led to instability (EWB, *Kurti apologises for...*, 2020). The tariffs have made political discourse between the two countries even more difficult although their economic impact is uncertain as current analyses have concluded that lack of data makes it difficult to measure the tariffs' impact on welfare, employment and prices (Gashi, et al., 2019). While LDK wanted a complete removal of the tariffs, PM Kurti of the leading party LV announced on February 27 that Kosovo would partially lift the tariffs for a 90-day period, in exchange for Serbia removing trade barriers and ending its efforts to convince other states to withdraw their recognition of Kosovo; if these demands are not met by June 15 the tariffs would be reapplied, alongside political measures (RFE, *Kosovo To Partially...*, 2020). This move was met with disapproval by LDK as well as by the US, both of which insist on a full lift of the tariffs (Grenell, 2020). Another problem arose from the COVID-19 pandemic – President Thaçi, member of the main opposition party, wanted to announce a state of emergency to deal with the situation, a move which would also greatly expand the powers of the otherwise rather symbolic position of president (RFE, *Kosovar Parliament To...*, 2020). PM Kurti declined this allegedly political manoeuvre and instead undertook a number of other measures, including the introduction of a curfew – a measure which is constitutionally allowed only during a state of emergency – leading the country towards a constitutional crisis (*ibid.*). Ultimately, LDK sided with the president and called for a vote of no-confidence, bringing down the government of which it was part (*ibid.*). This has caused further instability, as the constitution typically calls for new elections within 45 days after a successful vote of no-confidence (based on Art. 66/2 and 82/2), however, this is currently not possible due to the pandemic (*ibid.*). In the meantime the president should give the chance to LV, the biggest party, to form a new government, however, Thaçi has decided to first consult all other parties and attempt to form a unity government to rule during the pandemic; the legality of this move has been questioned by the LV party, although the constitution doesn't provide enough clarity on the matter (Bami, 2020). The situation continues to develop. In the meantime, Kurti, as caretaker PM, has lifted the tariffs on Serbian imports (Kurti, 2020). However, this was criticised by Serbia for two reasons: firstly, the lift is conditional upon Serbia easing its restrictions on Kosovo (eg. allowing the entry of cars with Kosovo number plates into Serbia and the entry of foreigners from Kosovo to Serbia) and, secondly, the lift was accompanied by new requirements on the import of goods from Serbia, matching the requirements which Serbia has for imports from Kosovo; while PM Kurti claims that such reciprocity is fair, Serbia fears that the requirements could include featuring “Republic of Kosovo” on trade invoices which would make them impossible to meet without recognising Kosovo's statehood (RFE, *Kosovo Lifts...*, 2020).

The current top priority for Kosovo is to resolve this constitutional crisis in a legal and transparent way. Once that is achieved, its focus should be mainly on normalising relationships with Serbia. Additionally, its next government should aim to address the priorities outlined by the latest EC Report<sup>9</sup>, many of which remain identical with previous years' reports due to lack of progress. Most notably, the new government should aim to deescalate the political polarisation and improve internal political dialogue and cooperation in order to hopefully achieve wide parliamentary support in negotiations with Serbia, address the issue of state capture by strengthening the independence and increasing the capacity of the judiciary, as well as prosecuting corrupt politicians while ensuring fair, transparent and apolitical trials. Improving the capacity of the judiciary, strengthening rule of law and decreasing corruption would also benefit the business environment, combined with a reduction of the informal economy. An increase in administrative capacity across all sectors is also necessary for the implementation of desired reforms.

In addition, on a visit in Serbia in September 2019 president Zeman made comments that he would raise the question of Kosovo recognition by the Czech Republic (RFE, *Czech President Tells...*, 2019). He stated that a country led by war criminals has no place in a community of democratic countries (*ibid.*), referring to the then-PM of Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, who had been called up by a Hague-based court for questioning related to potential war crimes (NYT, 2019). Haradinaj has already been cleared of war crimes charges twice, in 2008 by a UN tribunal and again in 2012 after a re-examination of the case (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, Haradinaj resigned from his leadership position when he was called up for questioning, leading to the October 2019 elections which produced a new government led by an untainted PM. While this development should ease Zeman's explicit concerns, it is important to also underline the danger of undermining the bilateral resolution of the conflict. As the EU has made it clear that neither country will enter before a bilateral solution has been found, it is important that member states foster an environment of reciprocity and compromise. Czechia potentially withdrawing its recognition would serve to move both Serbia and Kosovo away from finding a compromise solution and therefore from EU accession, while also weakening the EU's negotiating position by bringing more division within the Union; it would also give legitimacy to more radical groups calling for a Serbian retaking of Kosovo and would overall hurt regional stability.

## Conclusion

The expansion of the EU in the Western Balkan region is the next step of a long process which started three decades ago and aimed to reunite post Eastern Bloc states with the West for both pragmatic and ideological reasons. While these reasons still remain as the process is halfway finished, it is important to not take it for granted and keep track of the individual steps which need to be taken in order to arrive at its end. These include both necessary adjustments of EU policy in order to more effectively combat issues such as lack of clarity and consistency of the criteria, judicial abuse, empty husk reforms and short- and long-term political clientelism, as well as specific efforts by potential member states in order to strengthen democracy, rule of law, freedom of the press and a number of individual issues within each state. What is more, Brexit has provided an important change of context for the future development of the enlargement process. The UK had been known as the champion for enlargement for decades, with a leading role in the 2004, '07 and '13 expansions, despite accusations that the reason for its support of further enlargements was to hinder deeper European integration by introducing

---

<sup>9</sup> European Commission Country Report on Kosovo.

more potential for disaccord (Ker-Lindsay, 2017). By the early 2010s, as euroscepticism and anti-immigration narratives were beginning to dominate its national political scene, the UK slowly gave up on this position and by 2014 it was Germany who led the initiative of Western Balkan enlargement (*ibid.*) with the gradually increasing support of France (Balfour, et al., 2017). While the two states have different reasons for supporting the enlargement – Germany having strong economic ties with and a large number of migrants from the WB region, and France wanting to expand the EU’s influence and, by extension, its own – they share a similar view on the importance of following the process strictly and not allowing the accession of countries which are underprepared and could harm the integrity of the Union (*ibid.*). With this in mind Brexit is likely to have a strong impact on the course of future European enlargements, however, considering the bilateral benefits of the WB region’s eventual accession, some of which are already visible today, and the possible impact of abandoning this process in terms of regional instability and potential resurgence of violent conflicts with involvement of foreign actors, the enlargement project should remain a target for both the EU and its prospective new members, to be achieved through constructive dialogue, cooperation and effective reforms.



### BISSER ANGELOV External Analyst

Bisser Angelov is a graduate of SciencesPo Paris where he acquired a Master’s degree in Public Policy. A common thread throughout his education was the focus on EU Affairs and the CEE region.

Following his studies, he has gathered experience in the fields of Strategic Intelligence and Policy Evaluation, working on projects for the ICMPD, EEA and Norway Grants and the French Ministry of Defence, among others.

## Bibliography

- Associated Press. (2019, July 26). Romania says Russian military equipment for Serbia blocked. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Associated Press: <https://apnews.com/b780669496674536b8d2e24b0bd9030e>
- Balfour, R., Stratulat, C., Armakolas, I., & Ker-Lindsay, J. (2017). The national politics of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=fbss20> Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 17(4), 511-522. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2017.1424398>
- Balkan Barometer 2019. (2019). Balkan Barometer 2019. Regional Cooperation Council.
- Bami, X. (2020, April 01). Kosovo President Presses Leaders Over Unity Govt. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from Balkan Insight: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/01/kosovo-president-presses-leaders-over-national-unity-govt/>
- BBC. (2019, June 30). Albania votes amid opposition boycott. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48763803>
- Bechev, D. (2019, August 28). China enters the Balkans. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Al Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/china-enters-balkans-190827100236857.html>
- Bogavac, A. (2013, February 7). Montenegro's peculiar path to EU membership. Retrieved February 25, 2020, from Deutsche Welle: <https://www.dw.com/en/montenegros-peculiar-path-to-eu-membership/a-16583842>
- Burazer, N. (2019, December 26). How will enlargement reform affect Serbia and Montenegro? Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/12/26/how-will-enlargement-reform-affect-serbia-and-montenegro/>
- Burazer, N. (2019, November 08). The Game of Envoys: Are the EU and the US taking the Western Balkans more seriously? Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/11/08/the-game-of-envoys-are-the-eu-and-the-us-taking-the-western-balkans-more-seriously/>
- Bytyci, F. (2018, December 28). Amid recognition row, Kosovo hits Serbia with more customs tariffs. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-serbia-tariffs-idUSKCN1OR18Q>
- Damjanovski, I., & Kmezić, M. (2019). Europeanisation and Institutionalisation of EU Rules in the Western Balkans. In E. Gordy, & A. Efendic, Meaningful reform in the Western Balkans : Between formal institutions and informal practices (pp. 21-64). Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Warszawa, Wien: Peter Lang. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3726/b15146>
- Eddy, M. (2020, January 20). Serbia-Kosovo Flights to Resume Under U.S.-Brokered Deal. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/20/world/europe/serbia-kosovo-flights-resume.html>
- Elbasani, A., & Šabić, S. Š. (2018). Rule of law, corruption and democratic accountability in the course of EU enlargement. Journal of European Public Policy, 25(9), 1317-1335. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2017.1315162>

Erebara, G. (2020, January 14). Albania Parties Agree to End Electoral Reform Dispute. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Balkan Insider: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/14/albania-parties-agree-to-end-political-impasse-over-electoral-reform>

Eurobarometer. (2020). Eurobarometer Interactive. Retrieved February 25, 2020, from Eurobarometer Interactive: <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/chartType/lineChart//themeKy/29/groupKy/186/savFile/190>

European Union. (2003). EU-Western Balkans Summit Thessaloniki, 21 June 2003. Retrieved February 12, 2019, from [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES\\_03\\_163](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_03_163)

EWB. (2019, December 6). Council of the EU: Opening of Chapter 8 with Montenegro not expected this year. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/12/06/council-of-the-eu-opening-of-chapter-8-with-montenegro-not-expected-this-year/>

EWB. (2019, December 28). From protests in the region to the French “no”: The most important events of 2019. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/12/28/from-protests-in-the-region-to-the-french-no-the-most-important-events-of-2019/>

EWB. (2019, December 12). Opening new Chapter with Serbia was mostly a message of good will to the region. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/12/12/opening-new-chapter-with-serbia-was-mostly-a-message-of-good-will-to-the-region/>

EWB. (2020, February 7). Bilčik and Fajon call for plurality of media for fair elections in Serbia. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/02/07/bilcik-and-fajon-call-for-plurality-of-media-for-fair-elections-in-serbia/>

EWB. (2020, March 25). EC: Albania to make further progress on elections and judiciary before its first ICG. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/03/25/ec-albania-to-make-further-progress-on-elections-and-judiciary-before-its-first-icg/>

EWB. (2020, February 3). Elections in Serbia to be held on 26 April, biggest opposition parties boycotting. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/02/03/elections-in-serbia-to-be-held-on-26-april-biggest-opposition-parties-boycotting/>

EWB. (2020, February 6). EP groups welcome the EU enlargement methodology proposal. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/02/06/ep-groups-welcome-the-eu-enlargement-methodology-proposal/>

EWB. (2020, January 6). EU and the Western Balkans in 2020: The Year of Decisions. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/01/06/2020-a-year-of-decisions/>

EWB. (2020, February 7). France welcomes the new EU methodology proposal. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/02/07/france-welcomes-the-new-eu-methodology-proposal/>

EWB. (2020, March 03). Judiciary under reconstruction. Albania's EU-orientated reforms in progress. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/03/03/judiciary-under-reconstruction-albanias-eu-orientated-reforms-in-progress/>

EWB. (2020, March 16). Kurti apologises for not revoking import tariffs and introducing reciprocity. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from European Balkan Insight: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/03/16/kurti-apologises-for-not-revoking-import-tariffs-and-introducing-reciprocity/>

EWB. (2020, March 27). New enlargement methodology officially endorsed by the Member States. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/03/27/new-enlargement-methodology-officially-endorsed-by-the-member-states/>

EWB. (2020, March 12). President of Albania appoints three High Court judges. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/03/12/president-of-albania-appoints-three-high-court-judges/>

EWB. (2020, February 6). Várhelyi and Fajon send different messages on electoral conditions in Serbia. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/02/06/varhelyi-and-fajon-send-different-messages-on-electoral-conditions-in-serbia/>

Exit News. (2019, May 23). Albanian High Court Down to Two Judges, Becomes Completely Dysfunctional. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Exit News: <https://exit.al/en/2019/05/23/high-court-down-to-two-judges/>

France 24. (2019, July 6). Albanian justice on pause as judges fall victim to graft probe. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from France 24: <https://www.france24.com/en/20190706-albanian-justice-pause-judges-fall-victim-graft-probe>

Gashi, P., & Berisha, B. (2019). The Impact of 100% Tariff on the Import of Goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. GFA Consulting Group GmbH. doi:DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.28941.38885

Georgievski, J. (2020, February 7). A Step Backward: Drawbacks of the Serbian Judiciary Reform. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/02/07/a-step-backward-drawbacks-of-the-serbian-judiciary-reform/>

Grenell, R. (2020, February 28). U.S. Envoy Calls Kosovo's Decision To Partially Lift Serbian Import Tariffs A 'Serious Mistake'. Retrieved February 28, 2020, from Radio Free Europe: <https://www.rferl.org/a/u-s-envoy-calls-kosovo-s-decision-to-partially-lift-serbian-import-tariffs-a-serious-mistake-/30459227.html>

IREX Montenegro. (2020). Media Sustainability Index. Retrieved February 25, 2020, from Media Sustainability Index: <https://www.mediasustainabilityindex.org/?country=ME&year=2019>

IREX North Macedonia. (2020). Media Sustainability Index. Retrieved February 25, 2020, from Media Sustainability Index: <https://www.mediasustainabilityindex.org/?country=MK&year=2019>

IREX Serbia. (2020). Media Sustainability Index. Retrieved February 25, 2020, from Media Sustainability Index: <https://www.mediasustainabilityindex.org/?country=RS&year=2019>

Jukic, E. M. (2014, September 29). NGO Report Gives Bosnia Govt Low Marks. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Balkan Insight: <https://balkaninsight.com/2014/09/29/bosnian-top-govt-marked-worst-so-far/>

Ker-Lindsay, J. (2017). The United Kingdom and EU enlargement in the Western Balkans: from ardent champion of expansion to post-Brexit irrelevance. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 17(4), 555-569. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2017.1397958>

Koleka, B. (2019, June 30). Albanian mayoral vote boycotted by opposition unfolds peacefully. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-albania-election/albanian-mayoral-vote-boycotted-by-opposition-unfolds-peacefully-idUSKCN1TVoDg>

Kovacevic, D. (2019, March 4). Bosnia Leaves Gaps in Answers to EU Questionnaire. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Balkan Insight: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/04/bosnia-leaves-gaps-in-answers-to-eu-questionnaire/>

Kovacevic, D. (2019, November 20). EU and US Welcome End to Bosnia's Political Impasse. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Balkan Insight: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/11/20/eu-and-us-welcome-end-to-bosnias-political-impasse/>

Kurti, A. (2020, March 31). Incumbent Prime Minister Kurti: We will commence gradual application of reciprocity, as a substitute to the tariff. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from The Prime Minister Office: <https://kryeministri-ks.net/en/incumbent-prime-minister-kurti-we-will-commence-gradual-application-of-reciprocity-as-a-substitute-to-the-tariff/>

Lakic, M. (2019, April 25). <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/04/25/bosnias-post-election-deadlock-stalls-progress-towards-nato/>. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Balkan Insight: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/04/25/bosnias-post-election-deadlock-stalls-progress-towards-nato/>

Lavrič, M., Senjković, R., & Klanjšek, R. (2019). Implementation and Enforcement of EU Rules in. In E. Gordy, & A. Efendic, *Meaningful reform in the Western Balkans : Between formal institutions and informal practices* (pp. 65-84). Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Warszawa, Wien: Peter Land. doi:DOI 10.3726/b15146

Less, T. (2019, October 17). EU Enlargement: The Balkans Brexit Fallout. Retrieved February 25 2020, from Balkan Insight: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/17/eu-enlargement-the-balkans-brexit-fallout/>

Lilienström, S. (2020, January 8). Dutch foreign minister: "We believe in EU path for North Macedonia and Albania, and are willing to assist the two in their additional reforms". Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Jutarnji: <https://euractiv.jutarnji.hr/en/politics-and-society/dutch-foreign-minister-we-believe-in-eu-path-for-north-macedonia-and-albania-and-are-willing-to-assist-the-two-in-their-additional-reforms/9829921/>

Lippert, B., Hughes, K., Grabbe, H., & Becker, P. (2001). *British and German interests in EU enlargement : conflict and cooperation*. London and New York: The Royal Institute of International Affairs.

Lukić, F., & Cuckić, N. (2019, November 13). Vetting process in Albania – the marching failure. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from European Western Balkans: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/11/13/vetting-process-in-albania-the-marching-failure/>

Marusic, S. J. (2015, February 15). Macedonia Opposition: Transcripts Show ‘Staggering’ Interference in Courts. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Balkan Insight: <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/02/15/opposition-macedonia-govt-appointed-judges-influenced-verdicts/>

Marusic, S. (2020, March 17). North Macedonia Postpones April Polls Over Pandemic. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from Balkan Insight: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/17/north-macedonia-postpones-april-polls-over-pandemic/>

Mastrolilli, P. (2017, 11 May). Mogherini: “Ue forte anche dopo Brexit e populismi. Ora avanti con l’adesione dei Balcani”. Retrieved February 23, 2020, from La Stampa: <https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/2017/05/11/news/mogherini-ue-forte-anche-dopo-brexit-e-populismi-ora-avanti-con-l-adesione-dei-balcani-1.34598495>

NYT. (2019, July 19). Kosovo Leader Resigns After Being Called to War Crimes Court. Retrieved February 25, 2020, from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/19/world/europe/kosovo-leader-resigns-after-being-called-to-war-crimes-court.html>

OSCE. (2019). Republic of Albania : Final Report on the Local elections of 30 June 2019. Warsaw: OSCE. Retrieved from <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/albania/429230?download=true>

Popovikj, M., Gjuzelov, B., & Bliznakovski, J. (2019). How to Sustainably Decrease Clientelism and Ensure Fair Political Competition in the WB? The Case for Introducing Standing Parliamentary Committees. In E. Gordy, & A. Efendic, *Meaningful reform in the Western Balkans : Between Formal Institutions and Informal Practices* (pp. 103-116). Peter Lang. doi:DOI 10.3726/b15146

Reuters. (2020, March 16). Serbia postpones April 26 elections due to coronavirus outbreak - state election commission. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-serbia/serbia-postpones-april-26-elections-due-to-coronavirus-outbreak-state-election-commission-idUSL8N2B99BP>

RFE. (2019, September 11). Czech President Tells Serbia He Will Seek To Withdraw Kosovo Recognition. Retrieved February 25, 2020, from Radio Free Europe: <https://www.rferl.org/a/czech-president-zeman-kosovo-recognition-serbia-withdrawal/30159152.html>

RFE. (2020, March 27). EU Leaders Give Final OK To Begin North Macedonia, Albania Membership Talks. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from Radio Free Europe: <https://www.rferl.org/a/eu-leaders-give-final-approval-eu-membership-talks-macedonia-albania/30512156.html>

RFE. (2020, March 25). Kosovar Parliament To Vote On No-Confidence Motion Raised Over Coronavirus Restrictions. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from Radio Free Europe: <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-parliament-confidence-vote-kurti-government-ldk-thaci/30507307.html>

RFE. (2020, April 01). Kosovo Lifts 100 Percent Tariff On Serbia; Belgrade Calls It 'Fake News'. Retrieved April 02, 2020, from Radio Free Europe: <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-lifts-serbia-tariffs-belgrade/30521305.html>

RFE. (2020, February 27). Kosovo To Partially Lift Serbian Import Tariffs. Retrieved February 28, 2020, from Radio Free Europe: <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-to-partially-lift-serbian-import-tariffs-in-show-of-goodwill/30458542.html>

RSF Montenegro. (2020). Reporters without Borders. Retrieved February 25, 2020, from Reporters without Borders: <https://rsf.org/en/montenegro>

RSF North Macedonia. (2020). Reporters without Borders. Retrieved February 25, 2020, from Reporters without Borders: <https://rsf.org/en/republic-north-macedonia>

RSF Serbia. (2020). Reporters without Borders. Retrieved February 25, 2020, from <https://rsf.org/en/serbia>

Sedelmeier, U. (2005). Eastern Enlargement: Towards a European EU? In H. Wallace, W. Wallace, & M. A. Pollack, Policy-making in the European Union (pp. 401-428). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vasiljevic, S. (2019, May 9). Russians, opposition figures sentenced over role in 2016 Montenegro coup attempt. Retrieved February 25, 2020, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-montenegro-court-idUSKCN1SF144>

Vasiljevic, S. (2019, March 2). Thousands in Montenegro rally against President Djukanovic. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-montenegro-protests-idUSKCN1QJoLC>

Vasovic, A., & Vasiljevic, S. (2019, December 27). Montenegro's parliament approves religion law despite protests. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-montenegro-lawmaking-protests-idUSKBN1YVOWT>

Veleva-Eftimova, M. (2019). The compromises involved in the EU's eastern enlargement and the quality of the result: implications for the western Balkans? . SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe, 22(1), 87-104. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5771/1435-2869-2019-1-87>

Walker, S., & MacDowall, A. (2018, September 3). US-backed Kosovo land-swap border plan under fire from all sides. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/03/us-backed-kosovo-land-swap-border-plan-under-fire-from-all-sides>

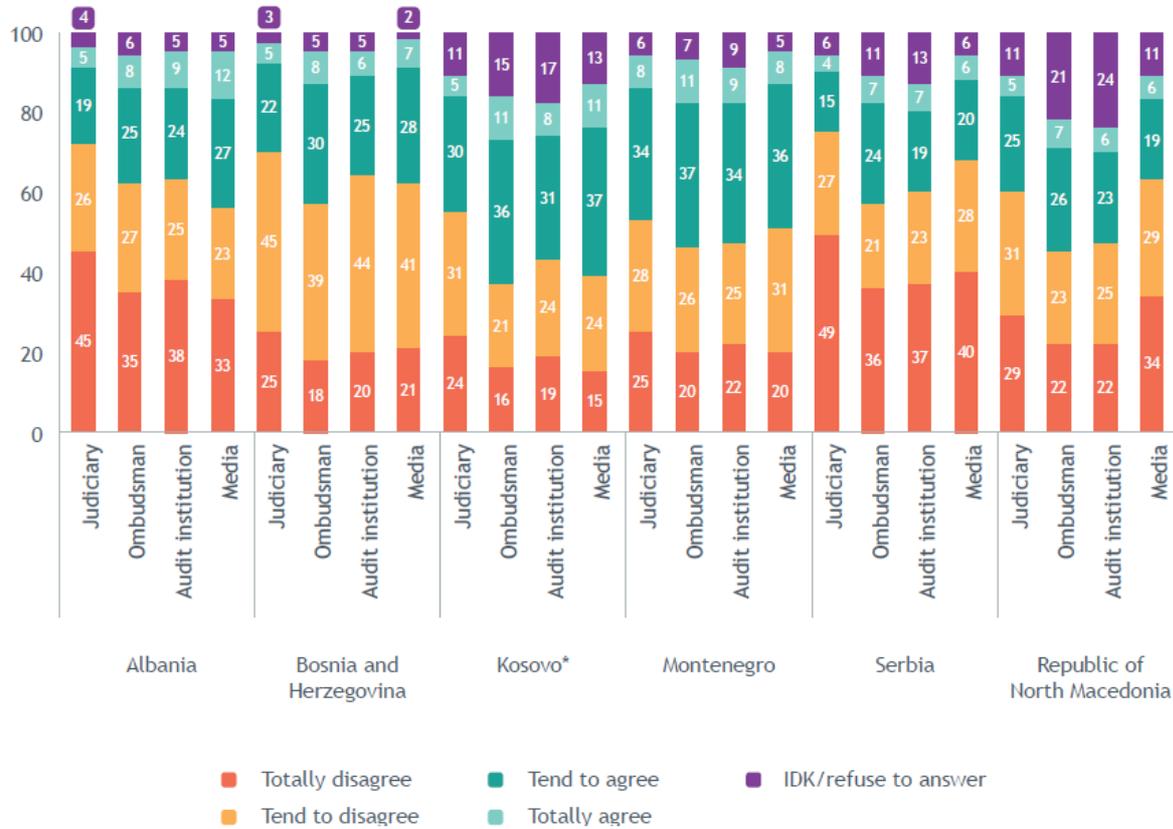
Wemer, D. A., Bel, O.-R., Bechev, D., & Marusic, D. (2020, February 10). Will the Commission's new EU proposal revive Western Balkans enlargement? Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Atlantic Council: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/will-the-commissions-new-eu-proposal-revive-western-balkans-enlargement/>

Zivanovic, M. (2019, December 10). Serbia Backs Russia Over UN Resolution on Crimea. Retrieved February 12, 2020, from Balkan Insight: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/12/10/serbia-backs-russia-over-un-resolution-on-crimea/>

Žižek, S. (1999). The Spectre of Balkan. *The Journal of the International Institute*, 6(2).

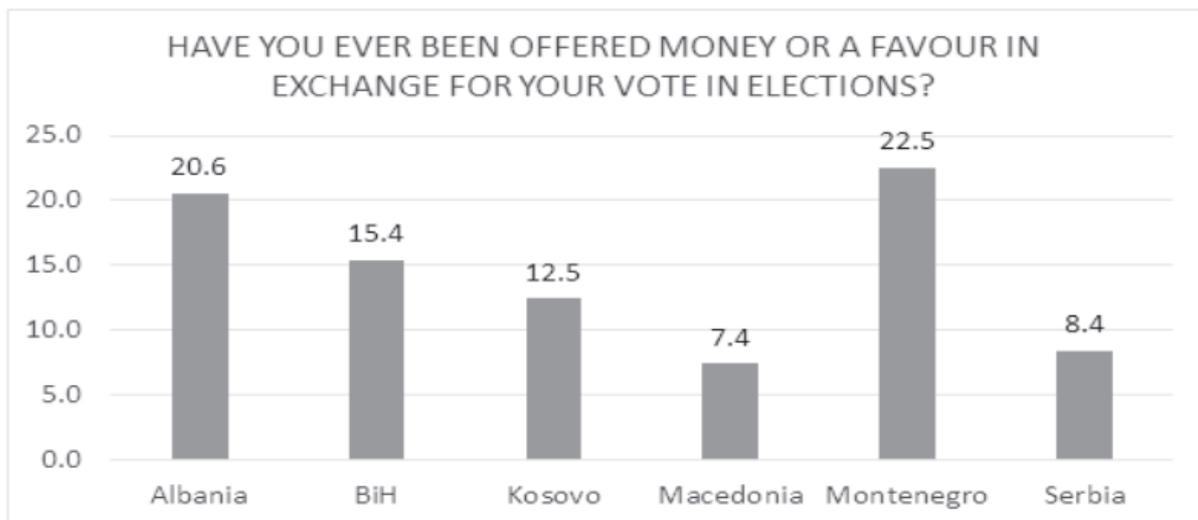
## Annex

**Figure 1:** Do you agree that the following institutions are independent of political influence?  
 A – Judiciary system; B – Ombudsman; C - Supreme audit institution; D – Media;



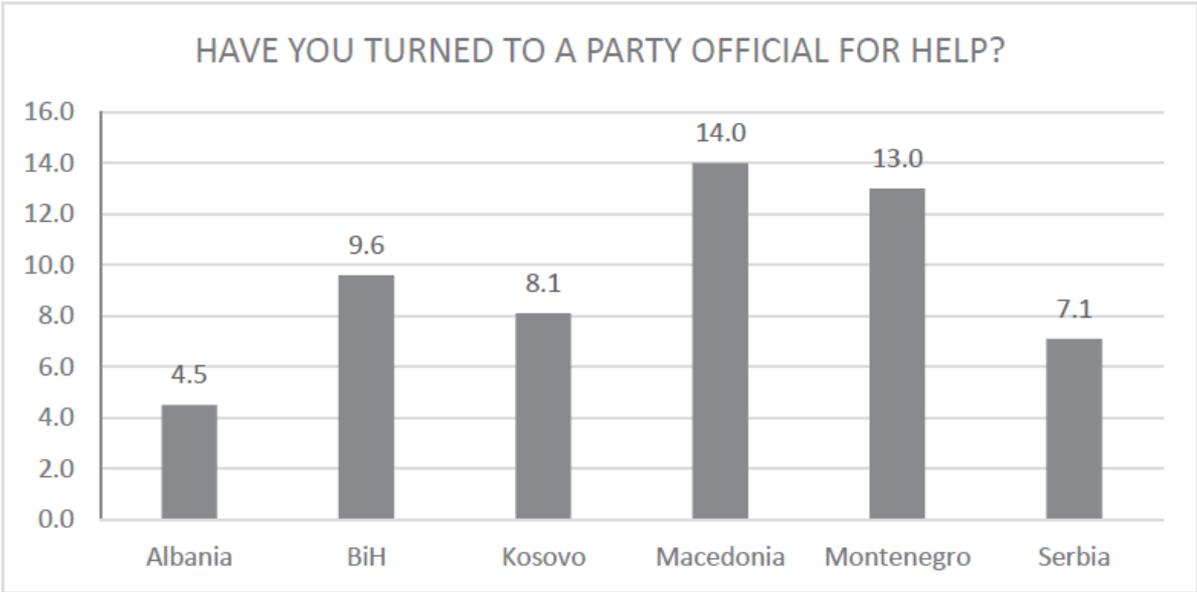
**Source:** Balkan Barometer 2019, Regional Cooperation Council.

**Figure 2:** Presence of electoral clientelism in the Western Balkans



**Source:** (Popovikj, Gjuzelov, & Bliznakovski, 2019).

**Figure 3:** Presence of relational clientelism in the Western Balkans



**Source:** (Popovikj, Gjuzelov, & Bliznakovski, 2019).

**Figure 4:** Comparison between participants in clientelism and votes for the winning party

	ALB 2013	BiH 2014	KOS 2014	MKD 2016	MNE 2016	SRB 2016
Registered voters*	3,271,885	3,278,908	1,799,023	1,784,416	528,817	6,739,441
% of reported pressured voters**	20.6	15.4	12.5	7.4	22.5	8.4
Projection of pressured voters	674,008	504,952	224,878	132,047	118,984	566,113
Votes: election winner (seats/total)*	993,904 (83/140)	274,057 (9/42)	222,181 (37/120)	454,577 (51/120)	158,490 (36/81)	1,823,147 (131/250)
Votes: last party entering parliament (seats/total)*	7,993 (1/140)	22,088 (1/42)	645 (1/120)	30,964 (2/120)	1,802 (1/81)	16,262 (1/250)

*Sources:* \*National electoral commissions and \*\*INFORM 2017 survey.

**Source:** (Popovikj, Gjuzelov, & Bliznakovski, 2019).