

From 'Balkanization' to 'Europeanization': The Stages of Western Balkans Complex Transformations

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1. Introduction

Since the fall of communism in the '90s, the Western Balkans¹ have been undergoing fundamental and multiple transformations that are complex in their nature and uneasy to be explained by a single paradigm or model. Such a complex transformation, where democratization and transition take place in conjunction with nation- and state-building and European integration, usually comes at the expense of a truncated picture of the region. Most of the literature studies the region very 'selectively', rather in terms of conflict, democratization or EU integration, focusing only in a specific process of the Western Balkans 'complex transformation'. The literature on the region although intensively engaged into these transformations, is quite disproportional. Much of the studies have been mostly and primarily focused on the nation- and state-building process, that is to say,

1. Any definition of the cases to be studied is problematic and questionable. Without entering in endless debates of *who is Western Balkans* I will use the term Western Balkans referring to what has been defined as "ex-Yugoslavia minus Slovenia plus Albania". The term Western Balkans was officially introduced in 1998 by the Austrian Presidency of the EU once Bulgaria and Romania were allowed to open membership talks with the EU. It includes Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. I suggest seeing the term contextually; since for the purpose of this paper the formula above includes countries that underwent similar processes of a) state building (the violent conflicts) b) delayed transition and c) EU perspective integration, although at very different modes and degrees.

the ‘Balkanization paradigm’ has dominated the debate; transition research has also considered the region but lately, the focus has shifted towards the Western Balkans’ integration into the EU, employing so the enlargement literature.²

This article will try to make an overarching evaluation by looking at these transformations comprehensively and trying to (analytically) distinguish the major stages that the Western Balkans has been going through. In doing so, different approaches will be employed for the purpose of analyzing the trajectories of the Western Balkan countries from 1990 onwards. This is primarily because of two main reasons. On the one hand “no single theory of transition has been universally recognized”³ and on the other hand the region’s development and dynamics cannot be fully grasped without employing different approaches throughout their course.

From ’90s onwards the region had undergone through a number of important transformative processes, moving from a Balkanization paradigm towards an Europeanization one. The paper will try to focus on the major processes and trying to analytically distinguishing among them. Although it acknowledge that the transformations have been sometimes running in parallel and that there is no clear-cut of when a process ends and when the other starts, I will propose – for analytical reasons – three main distinguishable stages to look at the Western Balkans; that of nation- and state-building (the ‘last Balkanization’), the (delay) transition and the (pre-) Europeanization process, conceptualizing so the many and complex transformations in the region as ‘multiple stages’.

In the first part I investigate what I will call the ‘last Balkanization’ stage, a period that is characterized by the nation and state building process with its main problems being the dissolution and disorder in the Western Balkans. Here I take a path-dependency approach arguing that the old-type of state-citizens relations is to be the main reason that led these countries towards disorder and dissolution. As a next stage I speak of a ‘delay transition’ that the Western Balkans experienced (at least in comparison with Central Eastern European Countries – CEEC). This is partly because of the different modes of communism the two regions experienced and partly because of the EU’s and political elites’ role. Here I argue that the Western Balkans has suffered from a governance incapacity impeding them to build a liberal democracy and be oriented toward a market economy. As the last part I will focus on the ‘pre-Europeanization’ stage that the Western Balkans has entered where institution and policy reforming (adapting to EU) is and will

2. A search by keywords on 2008-07-15 of the Social Science Citation Index gave the following results. A total of 852 articles were found including in their title *Balkan* or South* East* Europe** (Timespan = 1989-2008. Databases = SSCI). After a refined search by topic keyword the following results were shown: 1) topic *war* gave 139 articles 2) topic *transition or democrati*ation* gave 35 articles and 3) topic *integration* gave only 19 articles.

3. M. McFaul, “The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World”, *World Politics*, 54 (2), 2002, p. 215.

be the consequence of the conditionality resulting from the EU association and accession perspective of these countries.

Table 1. The stages of Western Balkan complex transformation

Stages	The 'last' Balkanization	The 'delay' transition	The 'pre-' Europeanization
The process of...	<i>Nation- and state-building</i>	<i>Institution-building</i>	<i>Member-state building</i>
Problems and challenges	<i>Violent disintegration (dissolution & disorder)</i>	<i>Governance incapacity (Institutional incapacity & De-industrialisation)</i>	<i>Compliance (Institution and policy adaptation)</i>
Causalities and Mechanisms	<i>Correlation between the homogeneity and acceptance of difference (state – citizens relations)</i>	<i>High uncertainty (because of modes of communism, role of EU and domestic political elites)</i>	<i>Conditionality (Pre-accession impact)</i>

This table summarizes the various stages and main arguments discussed in the article.

2. The Last “Balkanization”

Nation- and state building process as the 'last' Balkanization

After the fall of communism, all Eastern European countries had to undergo a dual transformation where the most notable challenges to be faced were the economic transformation and its political democratization. Apart from these transformations other concerns prioritized the situation of the Western Balkans. The region's main concern of that period was mainly related to 'state building'⁴ in the literal sense of the word albeit with the distinct profiles of the individual cases, ranging from state weakness without unfinished state building in Albania to inconclusive state and nation building in Yugoslavia.⁵ In the agenda of the

4. "State-building is principally about the creation and maintenance of the political unit, the state" P. Kopecký, & C. Mudde, "What has Eastern Europe taught us about the democratisation literature (and vice versa)?", *European Journal of Political Research*, 37 (4), 2000, p. 529.

5. Balkan Forum, *Rethinking the Balkans: Incongruities of State and Nation Building, Regional Stabilisation and European Integration*, Discussion paper final version (corrected), Bertelsmann Foundation and Center for Ap-

Western Balkans politicians less importance was given to democratic values and economic reforms since all focus was centered on the nation- and state-building process. Bringing back the question of nation-state will result in disorder for the entire region where the most acute problem to be faced was the disintegration of the Western Balkan states. During the first decade, the dissolution of Yugoslavia was accompanied also with violent conflict causing many human victims, traumas and dislocation of civilians, not to mention here the enormous economic costs it brought to the region. The process of disintegration in ex-Yugoslavia does not only regard the immediate aftermath period of the collapse of communism. It was an unfinished business, lately revealed through the independence of Montenegro and of Kosovo. Apart from the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Albanian state also underwent hard times of disorder. In the spring of 1997 the Albanian state collapsed, “representing a classic case of state failure where the structures that should have guaranteed the rule of law failed completely”⁶.

Such developments of the region often have been referred to as the process of Balkanization. The term ‘Balkanization’ in its historical usage had been used to essentially denote a process of fragmentation of larger political complexes into smaller and often mutually antagonistic entities; In the contemporary colloquialism, the use of the term ‘Balkanization’ stands contrary to what may be ‘western’ values and norms.⁷ Here, I propose the term ‘last Balkanization’ (a softer version) intending to describe the situation of the Western Balkan states in the ’90s undergoing their last disintegration process – state partition in Yugoslavia and state failure in Albania.

The Weakness of the Western Balkan states as legacies of the past

The disorder and dissolution that dominate in the ’90s in the Western Balkan countries is complex and its causes even more so. Adding to this, the specificities of each state and/or entity were different. But what can be seen as a common denominator throughout the region is the weakness of the state. Such a weakness, primary of nonrepresentation, had resulted in the collapse of the state itself (the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Albanian anarchy in 1997).

The idea of the state that has been developed in the region was that of an authoritarian and/or strongly nationalistic regime, intending to bring ‘stability’ and ‘saving’ the state from disintegrating. However, this pattern often appeared to bring opposite results (instability and disintegration) since it was unable to avoid strong confrontation with its own citizens and most notably with the minority

plied Policy Research, Berlin, 17-18 June, 2004, p. 3.

6. Centre for Policy Studies, *In Search of Responsive Government. State Building and Economic Growth in the Balkans*, Centre for Policy Studies, CEU (Central European University), Budapest, 2003, p. 36.

7. M. Todorova, “The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention”, *Slavic Review*, 53 (2), 1994, pp. 453-482.

groups. In the '90s, the strongly nationalistic and/or authoritarian states were simply unable to function according to demands of modern political institutions: as communities of free and equal citizens. "The political culture of statism and authoritarianism remained deeply embedded in the region"⁸ and as a result the Western Balkan states failed to function in the new pluralistic context. In much of the Western Balkan countries, non democratic political cultures remained dominant, in which "narrow nationalistic and populist interests had a very strong influence"⁹.

The post-communism Western Balkans undoubtedly was not a very fertile ground for the introduction of the political culture of liberal democracy primarily because of its "legacies of war, of communism, and of history"¹⁰. Employing such a 'path dependency' logic, any process can be considered as a continuum legacy problem, resulting from previous historical experience and the situations they previously experienced where "the more recent communist experience had a common impact on the political culture of the Balkan countries"¹¹. In very broad lines, the Yugoslav (violent) disintegration was explained as products of the undemocratic nature of the old political system, and specifically as parts of a clever strategy devised by former communist elites anxious to maintain their power.¹² The Albanian anarchy of 1997 and the quasi-destabilization in 1998 were also the result of the conflictual political culture demonstrated by the parties which proved to be as 'infected' as of their communists predecessors since political opponents were considered 'enemies'. Such arguments usually point out that these legacies placed several obstacles to comprehensive democratization and further developments. The question to be addressed here is why such legacies of the past brought (violent) dissolution and disorder only to some states such as ex-Yugoslavia and Albania and not to other Eastern European countries (for example ex-Czechoslovakia)?

8. J. Bugajski, *Facing the Future: The Balkans to the Year 2010*, C 86 Discussion Paper, ZEI-Center for European Integration Studies, Bonn, 2001, p. 9.

9. V. Gligorov, M. Holzner, and M. Landesmann, *Prospects for Further (South) Eastern EU Enlargement: Form Divergence to Convergence?*, Global Development Network Southeast Europe (GDN-SEE), Vienna, 2003, p. 2.

10. International Commission on the Balkans, *Unfinished Peace*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1996.

11. O. Anastasakis & V. Bojicic-Dzelilovic, *Regional Co-operation and European Integration*, The Hellenic Observatory, The European Institute, The London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 2002, p. 6.

12. I. Krastev, "The Balkans: Democracy Without Choices", *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (3), 2002, p. 43.

Correlation between the homogeneity and acceptance of difference as causes of state disintegration

In trying to answer the above question and find a bold explanation of why only some states may violently disintegrate we have to consider two aspects of the state: its homogeneity and the acceptance of difference. We have to ask firstly whether a state was (relatively) ethnically homogeneous or not? And if not, how much the diversity was accepted?

In a comparison between the Western Balkans and the Central Eastern European states, Rupnik argues that “the Central European states of the 1990s, unlike their Balkan counterparts, were much more homogeneous”.¹³ Ethnically diverse compositions characterized ex-Yugoslavia and became major disputes within and among the Yugoslavian successor states. And this was because “differences become a synonym for the ungovernability whereas homogeneity had become a prerequisite for future security and well-being”¹⁴ in the region. While in Central Europe “the absence of major minority or border issues at least partly accounts for the relative weakness of nationalist forces and for the lack of conflict among neighbouring states where Slovakia has been the exception”.¹⁵

The homogeneity argument alone is not sufficient to capture all cases (for example Albania is a homogenous country but it still went in anarchy in 1997) and it also fails to explain why other heterogeneous countries (e.g. then Czechoslovakia) did not involve into violent conflicts after its dissolution. That is why the best explanation to such a situation may be found if we look at the correlation between the homogeneity and acceptance of difference as the cause of why states violently disintegrate. In all the Western Balkans cases disintegration came as a result of the exclusion from or dissatisfaction with the state of a part of its community (being an ethnic or civil group or even a state under the Federation). The coexistence of different political groups (the Albanian case) and ethnic groups (the ex-Yugoslav case) has been impossible and conflictual, with a high degree of mutual mistrust. On the other side, the state not only didn't regulate these divergences among its citizens but in the contrary took one's part. Such an ‘improper state behaviour’ (usually referred to as ‘particularistic’ political culture) brought about the issue of *legitimacy* in citizens perceptions, creating so a huge gap between the state and (some of) its own citizens. The Western Balkan states became illegitimate in the eyes of many of their citizens, because the latter were seeing them as dominated by a different (ethnic or political) group or, even more

13. J. Rupnik, “Eastern Europe: the International Context”, *Journal of Democracy*, 11 (2), 2000, p. 118.

14. S. Bianchini, “The Collapse of Yugoslavia: Sources of its International Instability”, in Stefano Bianchini and Paul Shoup (eds.), *The Yugoslav War, Europe and the Balkans. How to Achieve Security?*, Longo, Ravenna, 1995, p. 28.

15. J. Rupnik, “Eastern Europe...”, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

importantly, as serving vested particularistic interests.¹⁶ This lack of trust to state institutions and more the state intolerance and exclusion, in the Western Balkans case, resulted into the collapse of the state itself (the disintegration of Yugoslavia and disorder in the case of Albania).

In sum, as long as the Western Balkan states failed to create 'citizenship' homogeneity when 'ethnic' or 'political' heterogeneity was the case, and as long as a degree of acceptance of difference was missing, the 'Balkanization' paradigm could be employed in the region. Positive state-citizens relationships should have been the *alpha* for building consolidated states in the Western Balkan countries.

3. The "Delay" Transition

CEEC-Western Balkans different transition

Transition, in the general meaning of the term, denotes "the interval between the dissolution of the old regime and the installation of a new regime".¹⁷ In post-communist literature, it is frequently being conceptualized as the transformation towards a pluralist democracy and a market economy. Such transformations required firstly the creation of new institutions to guarantee the separation of the state from party control, and the introduction of a market economy, abandoning thus state economic planning. Furthermore, other fundamental reforms and new legal and administrative practices had to be introduced, in order to break up with the institutional legacies of communism. In the Western Balkans, after the disintegration was (almost) over and the authoritarian rule was getting weaker and weaker the transition process (building a liberal democracy and becoming oriented toward a market economy) came up again, this time as the main issue of the day. Although some degree of democracy and some economic reforms started since the beginning of the '90s, it can be argued that the Western Balkans experienced transition later, at least in comparison to some of the CEEC countries. Rupnik in its ten-year assessment of the transition process gives "a picture of successes in Central Europe offset by setbacks in the Balkans".¹⁸

In evaluating the performance of a country in transition two main dimensions have to be considered. In the political field, the emphasis is on the formal aspects of democracy, in particular the introduction of free and fair elections while in the economic sphere, the emphasis is on liberalization, stabilization and priva-

16. D. Bechev & S. Andreev, *Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up Aspects of the EU Institution-Building Strategies in the Western Balkans*, Occasional Paper No. 3/05, South East European Studies Programme, European Studies Centre, University of Oxford, 2005, p. 6.

17. O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986, Reference from P. Kopecký & C. Mudde, "What has Eastern Europe... *op. cit.*", 2000, p. 519.

18. J. Rupnik, "Eastern Europe..., *op. cit.*", p. 115.

tization.¹⁹ With regard to the status of these regions' democracy one can notice clear differences from the very beginning. In the Freedom House ratings, Central Eastern Europe has distinguished itself from the Western Balkans countries. If the Central Eastern European countries have been considered 'free', the countries of the Western Balkans have been considered at best only 'partially free'. To give an example, in the years 1999-2000 the average democracy score was 4.83 for the Western Balkans, while 2.12 for the CEEC (smaller numbers indicating a higher level of democratic progress).²⁰ As far as the economic transition is concerned, the gap is even more profound. "The economic performance of all transition economies in the Balkans has been worse than that in the CEE"²¹, since the two regions experience opposite development. If transition economies in the Central and Eastern Europe were successful, this was not the case for the Western Balkans which "in 1998 were much worse than they were in 1989, with their GDP in 1998 representing 35% (Bosnia and Herzegovina) to 86% (Albania) of the 1989 level"²². Such developments speak for a 'delayed' transition that Western Balkan countries experience in comparison at least to the CEE region.

New challenges and the governance incapacity to handle them

The transition process, beside recovery from conflicts and disorder, brought new challenges for the region. In the political sphere, the main challenge was to establish a liberal democracy, since most of these countries were only 'partially' democracies²³. A second important challenge was the creation of a positive identification with the state by the citizens. In the social field a weak organisational

19. V. Gligorov, M. Kaldor and L. Tsoukalis, *Balkan Reconstruction and European Integration*, The Hellenic Observatory, The European Institute, Centre for the Study of Global Governance, The London School of Economics and Political Science and Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, 1999, p. 17. See also, K. Goetz, 'Making Sense of Post-Communist Central Administration: Modernization, Europeanization or Latinization.' *Journal of European Public Policy* 8 (6), 2001, p. 1032.

20. Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2006: Democratization from Central Europe to Eurasia*, 2006.

The average for the Western Balkans are my own calculation since the survey include in the average also Rumania and Bulgaria. (The average including this two countries was 4.46 where Bulgaria scores 3.58 and Rumania score 3.54.)

NOTES: The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest.

21. Gligorov *et. al.*, *Balkan Reconstruction... op. cit.*, 1999, p. ii.

22. M. Uvalic, *Regional Cooperation in Southeastern Europe*, Working Paper 17/01, 'One Europe or Several?' – Programme, 2001, p. 18.

23. For example referring to the Freedom House surveys 97, Serbia and Montenegro (then Yugoslavia) will be classified as being 'not a free' country till 1999 (with the exceptions during 90-91 and 92-92 as 'partially free'). After 1999 the country was seen as 'partially free' (till 2002) and from 2002 on it progressed to be ranked as 'free'. Bosnia and Herzegovina also was considered as 'not free' till 1996 and only after 1996 it was classified as 'partially free'. Croatia was considered as 'partially free' and only in 2000-2001, after the sequence of political change, was considered as 'free'. Macedonia and Albania were classified as "partially free" and still will remain at this status. Albania, for example, failed many times in holding free elections and that reflected also on the relations with EU, as free elections proved to be a decisive element in starting and signing SAA negotiations with Albania.

capacity of social actors and weak civil society was noticed. A key challenge to the Western Balkans economies already accomplishing a degree of stabilization was the creation of sound conditions for “self sustainable economic growth”²⁴. Along these basic challenges in the political, economical and social sphere, other problems arise, where the most challenging were corruption and organized crime.

These new challenges and the incapability to handle them showed once more the structural weakness of the Western Balkan states, which lacked sufficient governance capacities to carry out the necessary reforms. They proved to be ineffective states, incapable of fulfilling the basic functions and of handling out the new problems arising. A lack of state institutions which could carry through the transition reforms and at the same time compile with the EU standards was noticed. This process of building institutions capable of overcoming the new challenges has been one of the key issues of the post-conflict Western Balkans. But the capacity for institution-building was restricted due to limits imposed by the previous tensions as well as due to lack of political will. Yet “even when there was political will, authorities frequently lack the financial and administrative capabilities to implement reforms and policies”²⁵ for improving political and economic conditions. Regarding the economic aspects of the region, the consequence of transition strategies has been a degree of de-industrialization,²⁶ where the marginal productivity of the new private sector proved to be insufficient to offset the decline of the state sector. The “socio-economic progress along market lines is only possible if there is an effective state capable of fulfilling its basic functions”.²⁷

A more uncertain transition because of different modes of communism, the role of domestic political elites, and the EU

But what were the reasons that led the Western Balkans into a delayed transition and more importantly why did they stay behind in the process and hesitate to catch up in transition towards democracy? The literature takes a mix of approaches advancing a number of arguments. Some explanations count on the historical variables where an unsuccessful (delay) transition is as a result of the limited experience with liberal democracy before and during the onset of the communist rule.²⁸ The range of possible ‘historical legacies’ causes go from the

24. Gligorov *et. al.*, *Balkan Reconstruction... op. cit.*, 1999, p. 18. See also: M. Uvalic, “Economic Transition in Southeast Europe” in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 3 (1), 2003, p. 63.

25. D. Bechev & S. Andreev, *Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up... op. cit.*, 2005, p. 7.

26. Gligorov *et. al.*, *Balkan Reconstruction... op. cit.*, 1999, p. 17.

27. World Bank, *The State in a Changing World*, The World Development Report, Washington, 1997. Reference from Gligorov *et. al.* 1999, p. 19.

28. Such claims are opposed by latest research on democratic performance of Western Balkans countries from independence until WWII, where there is “no evidence to substantiate the blanket claim that democratisation failed in the Balkans”. A. Mungiu-Pippidi, W. van Meurs and V. Gligorov, “Plan B – B for Balkans: State Building and Democratic Institutions in Southeastern Europe” Berlin/Nijmegen/Vienna, 2007, p. 33.

Ottoman past (with its particularistic culture) to recent (authoritarian) communist history. Other explanatory arguments take a more actor-centered institutional approach pointing to the importance of domestic actors and institutional veto-points as well as the supportive role of EU. Transition itself is defined as a “highly uncertain processes”²⁹ and in the Western Balkans this uncertainty became even higher than in CEEC for the reasons mentioned above.

Firstly, this is due to different trends of communism: In the CEE countries the communist regimes were to a large extent imposed by external intervention (Moscow) while only in Yugoslavia and Albania the communist revolution was carried out by indigenous elites.³⁰ Such ‘imposed’ and ‘indigenous’ modes of communism affected differently the uncertainty of the transition process. In Central and Eastern Europe the transition was more certain and welcomed since they were ‘fighting’ for sovereignty, overthrowing not only the ‘imposed’ regime but mostly the influence of Russia, an element that was missing in Yugoslavia and Albania. Being already ‘independent’ from Russia, the issue in the Western Balkans was only the regime change; as a consequence transition was more uncertain.³¹

Adding to the “different modes of communism” argument, the role of political elites in reducing transition uncertainty needs to be acknowledged. In a number of CEE countries, for example, the transition to democracy was less uncertain, because either there was a powerful opposition having gained strength from popular mobilization against the regime (the Baltic, Slovenian, Czech, and Polish cases), and/or there were reform communists who had collaborated with an opposition committed to democracy (the Baltic countries, Slovenia, Poland, and Hungary).³² This was not the case for the Western Balkans.

The EU played an important role in reducing the uncertainty of transition, albeit not in an equal way, since it gave much greater political attention and financial assistance to the CEEC. As a consequence, the CEEC progressed confident towards institution building and reforms, while the European perspective of the Western Balkans remained far and uncertain.

29. P. Kopecký, C. Mudde, “What has Eastern Europe... *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 519.

30. G. Almond, “Communism and Political Culture Theory”, *Comparative Politics*, 15 (2), p. 134. See also: Mungiu-Pippidi *et. al.*, (2007) “Plan B – B for Balkans... *op. cit.*, 1983, p. 25.

31. Bunce give some detailed information on the support of the argument why transition to democracy in a number of CEE countries was in fact not so uncertain. First, the military was eliminated from the transition; and second, there was present a powerful opposition that gained strength from popular mobilization against the regime (as with the Baltic, Slovenian, Czech, and Polish cases) and/or reform communists who collaborated with an opposition committed to democracy (as with the Baltic countries, Slovenia, Poland, and Hungary). V. Bunce, “Rethinking Recent Democratization: Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience”, *World Politics*, 55 (2), 2003, p. 188.

32. V. Bunce, “Rethinking Recent Democratization... *op. cit.*, 2003, p. 188.

4. The “pre-Europeanization”

European orientation (integration) and pre-Europeanization

Despite the turbulence of the previous decade and the new transition challenges the Western Balkans are facing, their positive steps must be recognized. “Today, most of the problems and factors underpinning the Balkan wars seem to be over... what’s more the Western Balkans countries have achieved positive reform developments in the last couple of years”.³³ Political changes in Croatia and later in Serbia changed the regional risks and turned the region towards EU integration.³⁴ Economic development in the Western Balkans has been encouraging and the prospects are positive.

The Western Balkans could thus leave behind the era of ‘Balkanization’ and catch up with transition. Highly important at this stage is that transition towards pluralist democracy and market economy is occurring in parallel to the evolving perspective of EU integration. In 2000, at the Feira European Council, the prospect of EU membership has been extended to Western Balkans countries, where the Heads of EU States and Governments confirmed the prospect of the Balkan countries as potential candidates for EU membership.³⁵ The target of membership status has accelerated the progress and given new impetus, especially after the accession of the ten countries from Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans being now literally the next waiting in the queue (including Turkey).

In order to be admitted the aspiring countries had to strictly comply with the EU political, economical as well as legal requirements (known as the Copenhagen Criteria)³⁶. Such a relation (EU conditionality – Western Balkans compliance) implies that EU has an impact on the Western Balkans. This overall process, where European integration has an impact on to-become-member countries has been called ‘Eastern style’ Europeanization. For the Western Balkans, Europeanization

33. S. Panebianco & R. Rossi, *EU Attempts to Export Norms of Good Governance to the Mediterranean and Western Balkan Countries*, Jean Monnet Working Papers in Comparative and International Politics (JMWP) n° 53, Jean Monnet Centre EuroMed – Department of Political Studies – University of Catania, Catania, October 2004, p. 15 & 20.

34. WIIW-Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, *The Western Balkans: Economic Development since Thessaloniki 2003*, Vienna, March 2006, p. 1.

35. The EU “objective remains the fullest possible integration of the countries of the region into the political and economic mainstream of Europe.... All the countries concerned are potential candidates for EU membership”. Council of the European Union, *Presidency Conclusions*, Santa Maria da Feira, 19 June, paragraph 67.

36. The Copenhagen Criteria require that the candidate country must have achieved “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union; the ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic & monetary union.” See: The Copenhagen Criteria, DG Enlargement – Retrieved from < http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accesion_process/criteria/index_en.htm >.

means adjustment to advanced western models as well as security and prosperity for the future.³⁷ In the actual phase of the Western Balkans we can speak of a pre-Europeanization process, since the current transformations are effects of the preparation for accession. Europeanization in this context is first a member-state building process where Western Balkans states have to review much of their legislation, adapt existing institutions or build new ones conforming to the EU's legislation, policies, and standards. As a result of this member-state building process, the Western Balkan states will experience major transformations (the most direct one is the revolutionizing of the structure of public administration; the social and economic convergence to EU standards; change in the substance and processes of democratic governance).³⁸

Can the Western Balkans be Europeanized?

Many concerns and doubts have been raised on the Western Balkans readiness to join EU or furthermore if they would ever be ready for enlargement. The most sceptic observers have also questioned the region's Europeanization capacity, considering the Western Balkan countries if not part of Europe at least periphery or second-class (potential) members (or third-class if the CEECs were second-class member of the Union). The issue gets more and more complex as the conditionality is growing.

But despite all this uncertainties and difficulties regarding future EU integration processes, what is probably most important here is that these processes are now irreversible even in a country like Serbia, where possible political changes are likely to influence only the speed but not the general course.³⁹ Recent research has shown that "ultimately, it is Europe (its norms and values) which stands as the common denominator around which a new collective identity of the Balkans has begun to crystallize".⁴⁰ This means that joining EU now stands as the only long-range vision for the Western Balkans. By now, the logic and momentum of European integration have made the inclusion of the Western Balkan states a foregone conclusion, a strategic inevitability.⁴¹ Besides this very optimistic picture, where "elites and constituencies throughout the region increasingly share a

37. O. Anastasakis, "The Europeanization of the Balkans", *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, XII (1), 2005, p. 80.

38. For a more detailed argument see: ESI – no date – Member State Building.

39. M. Uvalic, "Economic Transition... *op. cit.*, 2003, p. 79, less emphasis.

40. D. Bechev, *Constructing South East Europe: The Politics of Regional Identity in the Balkans*, RAMSES Working Paper 1/06, European Studies Centre, University of Oxford, Oxford, March 2006, p. 22 (emphasis added).

41. Balkan Forum, *Integrating the Balkans: Regional Ownership and European Responsibilities Discussion paper*, Bertelsmann Foundation and Center for Applied Policy Research and Policy Planning Staff, German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Berlin, July 2002, p. 6.

European orientation"⁴², tangible measures need to be taken by the political elites since complying with EU standards and consequently the launch of the opening process rests on them. Ultimately, the political will and commitment of the regional leaders determines the success or failure of the European package "consisting of a bilateral (pre) association process, regional co-operation and proactive crisis management"⁴³.

What it is argued here is that "the Western Balkans can be Europeanized"⁴⁴, as Demetropoulou's research concludes. This does not suggest that there is not much to be done. On the contrary, the problems with the Europeanization of the Western Balkans do not rest only on the formal compliance to the EU requirements. Their greatest challenge will be to abandon practices of the past, so become 'behaviourally Europeanized'.

The mechanism of inducing Pre-Europeanization changes

The European orientation rhetoric alone does not count much unless it is turned into actions, that is, political and economic reforms. The EU, from her side, has used both 'reward' or 'punitive' incentives in order to make the applicant countries comply with the set of membership conditions. Such mechanisms, of positive or negative conditionality, have been EU's most powerful tool to induce pre-Europeanization changes in the candidate countries. Until now, EU has exercised both a positive and a negative conditionality on the Western Balkan countries. Previous EU approaches had been marked by a number of negative conditionality. The exception is the signing with Macedonia of the SAA, as a reward for the end the conflict. Anastasakis and Bechev, in examining the conditionality of the EU's approach to the Western Balkans, call for the need to move "towards a positive conditionality"⁴⁵. Such a positive conditionality would not only require the offer of a general membership perspective for the entire region, but also a more detailed road map of when each country would join. The Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAA) are a step further and reflect a move forward in approaching the EU approach, "at the same time the punitive aspects of conditionality continue to play an important role and are an integral part of each SAA"⁴⁶. It may be suggested at this point that such a 'carrot-and-stick' approach, through both reward and punitive mechanism, will still continue to be

42. Balkan Forum, *Rethinking the Balkans... op. cit.*, 2004, p. 5

43. Balkan Forum, *Integrating the Balkans... op. cit.*, 2002, p. 7

44. L. Demetropoulou, "Europe and the Balkans: Membership Aspiration, EU Involvement and Europeanization Capacity in South Eastern Europe", *Southeast European Politics*, III (2-3), 2002, p. 88

45. O. Anastasakis & D. Bechev, "EU Conditionality in South-East Europe: Bringing Commitment to the Process", *European Balkan Observer* 1 (2), 2003, p. 3-4

46. C. Pippan, "The Rocky Road to Europe: The EU's Stabilisation and Association Process for the Western Balkans and the Principle of Conditionality", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 9 (2), 2004, p. 235

the ‘inherent’ strategy for bringing the Western Balkans if not (in the near future) into the EU, at least next to closer to it.

A point to be argued is not much the conditionality *per se*, but which type and how to successfully use such incentives for Europeanizing the Western Balkan countries. Anastasakis and Bechev consider the application of conditionality in the region problematic.⁴⁷ EU is finding itself in a deadlock position, since on the one hand it is putting hard conditions to the Western Balkan countries, and on the other hand it cannot offer much to the region because the EU itself faces challenges of consolidation (especially with the latest failure of the Irish ‘No’ to the Lisbon treaty). But as scholars have been stressing out, the EU conditionality can be effective only as long as the prospect of joining the EU is considered a realistic one.⁴⁸ This is the best incentive for the region. The role of the EU in Europeanizing the Western Balkans countries, and even more its membership “carrot” is crucial in accelerating the reforms, since “Europe (EU) has been as a magnet and source of inspiration for their efforts to built modern states and societies”.⁴⁹ ‘Reinforcement by reward’ seems the best model to get the Western Balkans Europeanized. On the contrary freezing or any postponement of EU enlargement “would discourage the Western Balkan countries which are using the prospect of membership as a motivation for painful reforms”.⁵⁰

5. Conclusion

Scholars dealing with South-Eastern Europe have been heavily engaged in trying to explain the transitory period the region has been going through after the fall of iron curtain. Many paradigms and arguments have been put forward helping us understand the many transformations the region is experiencing. An attentive review and a careful consideration of the literature shows that the many arguments and explanations given are nothing but pieces of a complex puzzle that need to be considered all, in order to give the full and true picture of the region, its many transformations, challenges and causes. Processes in the Western Balkans have been not only prolonged but most of the times they have been running parallel to each other. Even though the Western Balkans political situation has not yet settled down in a new stable equilibrium and is still in a period of transformations, one thing seems certain: that the region is moving away from its old negative Balkanization paradigm towards a new more positive one, that of Europeanization.

47. O. Anastasakis & D. Bechev, “EU Conditionality... *op. cit.*, 2003, p. 3.

48. J. Rupnik, “Eastern Europe... *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 126.

49. D. Bechev, *Constructing South East Europe... op. cit.*, 2006, p. 23.

50. H. Grabbe, *Profiting from EU enlargement*, Centre for European Reform (CER), London, June 2001, p. 60.

This paper has tried to bridge the literature on Western Balkans reflecting the region's dynamics and reality. It has proposed (for analytical purposes) to break up the complex Western Balkans transformation into three main processes, namely 'Last Balkanization', 'Delay Transition' and 'Pre-Europeanization'. Each of these processes makes a constituent part of the overall transformation happening in the Western Balkan and has been exposed with all its major specific elements, challenges as well as causalities. Although for analytical purposes the models can be kept separate, in the real context of the Western Balkan transformation, it is difficult to distinguish clearly when a process starts and the other ends since they overlap and may run together in parallel. That is why this paper has modest aspirations when it comes to speak of their interdependence and influence on each other. The aim of these paper was mainly to highlight the significance of the existing as well as new 'processes', by showing their causes and specific elements.