

European Council

Study Guide

The Issue of Policy Re-adjustment
Towards the Western Balkan States



**PREPMUN
2022**



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European Council

Introductions



Welcome letter
Chair introductions
Council introduction



Welcome Letter

Dear Delegates,

A warm welcome to the European Council, one of the 7 institutions of the European Union (EU).

Being a unique political and economic union, the EU comprises 27 member states. Each state retains their sovereignty but all states work together to achieve common interests. This means some decision-making powers normally wielded by states are instead conferred to EU institutions. In doing so, it allows for certain issues of common interest to be discussed, deliberated and decided upon as one EU.¹ In particular, the European Council is an institution that embodies the highest level of political cooperation between EU member states. It undertakes the important role of defining the direction and policy agenda of the entire EU, by identifying areas of concern and the subsequent actions to undertake.²

The European Council now convenes in a Special Meeting with an even more special agenda, to re-evaluate its policies toward the Western Balkans (WB) states. With recent developments like the war in Ukraine, rising tensions between Serbia and Kosovo, and growing external influences, it is important for the European Council to discuss amending its policy to a volatile region sitting squarely in Europe's backyard. While the EU has continuously reaffirmed commitment to the WB states on enlargement, promises remain underwhelming or unfulfilled out of both pragmatic realism and lack of political will.

The EU currently stands at a crossroad, where its actions will have wide-ranging consequences on the entirety of Europe and its future. With the power to dictate the EU's direction and priorities, delegates of the European Council now undertake the critical responsibility to serve its interests well.

The Dais hope that delegates bear in mind the complexity of the issue at hand, and carefully consider the nuance of their stance in addressing this issue.

The fate of Europe now lies in your hands, and the Dais look forward to seeing you shape it.

The Dais of the European Council.

¹"How the European Union Works - Publications.europa.eu." Accessed November 1, 2022. https://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/bdc6e27e-e519-4308-8e47-73acd9b3977b.0022.02/DOC_1.

²"European Council." European Union. Accessed November 1, 2022. https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/institutions-and-bodies-profiles/european-council_en.

Chair Introductions

Head Chair: Ernest Goh

Ernest is a J1 Raffles student taking the not-peculiar-at-all subject combination of BCME. Initially delayed from joining MUN in Sec 2, Ernest joined only after his O levels and is now making the most out of his remaining time in the circuit.

This year's rendition of PREP will officially mark one year since his entry into the circuit, and he is glad to be back this time as a chair. With PREP'21 being the very first conference that propelled him into the all-enthraling circuit, Ernest hopes to help delegates find PREP just as welcoming as he found it to be. He looks forward to making council an enjoyable and fulfilling experience for all delegates.

Deputy Chair: Yip He Hua

Standing at a delightfully domineering height of 160cm, He Hua is a Year 3 student from Raffles Girls' School. She knew not what to include here, and so has asked some of her fellow munnors to come up with descriptions. The appalling results yielded include "not held back by social norms" (her clandestine dream is to dye her hair red and become a fighter jet pilot) and "will scold you for circular debate while waving a pen in hand, with the word compromise flashed across the screen". In her spare time, she enjoys perusing Zizek's works while listening to Russian hardbass. Her unhealthy worshipping (some may say obsession?) of past chairs has led her to return to PREPMUN in the hopes of becoming a similarly competent chair for her delegates in EUACO. Lastly, she reminisces fondly how she and Ernest were at loggerheads in PREPMUN21, as leaders of opposing blocs.

Deputy Chair: Chew Yae Ting

Seeing as the very notion kick-starting her venture into MUNning — to chase some Super-man dreams (to view the world in varying lenses, really) has begun to unravel, Yae Ting is now beginning to shift towards her sporting dreams. Not-so-secretly, she believes that a Star Athlete lies within. It is without a doubt then, however, that distinctions lie between soul-searching and skill-searching; Past attempts to actualise her budding Athlete Dreams stay testament to that. Regardless, she will Believe & Achieve through all — as she hopes delegates will. One more thing for prospective delegates: Just go for it.

Anyhow, she looks toward PREPMUN being a space to adapt, bounce back, and connect. That makes ABC, and as she develops her multitude of 'dreams' with these ABCs in mind, she looks toward the learning process we will have with the conference — delegates and staff alike. EUGO (You go) with EUACO.

Council Introduction

The EU is an established bloc of members across Europe, with co-operation in areas of economic development, free trade and regional security. The European Council is one of the 7 institutions of the EU that allows for discussion between Heads of State/Government of member states.

Hailed as its highest political body, the European Council defines the EU's priorities and overall direction. Resolutions in the European Council are known as Conclusions, and define the EU's position and policy on certain matters. Conclusions subsequently guide other EU institutions in drafting legislation. While playing an important role in policy-making, the European Council does not negotiate or adopt laws. It only sets the EU's agenda and guides EU policies.³

The European Council and leaders of WB states generally meet once a year at special EU-WB Summits where they discuss the progress of their integration into the Union. These meetings conclude with a non-legally binding Declaration, where principles and values are affirmed.

Special Meetings are called upon by the President of the European Council to discuss issues as and when the need arises, with all EU states present. For PREPMUN 2022, the European Council will convene a Special Meeting with WB states as observers. This council thus functions as a dialogue between the EU and WB states, while remaining EU-centric. In spite of the presence of WB states, EU states should continue to act in the interest of the EU and themselves.

The European Council acts as a political compass for other EU institutions. It sets the direction for institutions bearing greater legal weight, such as the European Commission and Council of European Union, which we will explore in the following paragraphs. The European Council bears too the role of 'agenda-setting' in the line of work of execution-centred institutions under the belt of the EU, in that it determines the strategic value and objectives of work within these institutions. They include the Court of Justice of the EU, the European Central Bank, and the European Court of Auditors. Together, there are 7 institutions under the belt of the EU.

As the EU's executive arm, the European Commission (EC) drafts EU laws and plays an advisory role in addressing certain issues. Conclusions from the European Council can invite the EC to come up with targeted proposals, which are then discussed once again in the European Council. One such proposal in 2020 sought to improve the accession process for WB states by making it more credible and dynamic.

³“How the European Council Works.” Consilium, September 23, 2022. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/how-the-european-council-works/>.

While the European Council is a political body, the Council of European Union and the European Parliament form the decision-making body. The Council of the European Union comprises the respective Ministers of each state. It holds a greater legislative pull — while the European Council sets the general position and guidance for EU bodies, the Council of the European Union has the power to hold member states accountable to their undertakings.



European Council

The Issue of Policy Re-adjustment
Toward the Western Balkan States



Topic Introduction

To understand specifically why the Western Balkan (WB) states seek to join the EU, it is worth delving into how the region came to be, starting with the collapse of the former Communist Yugoslavia.

At the end of World War I, Yugoslavia was formed from the merger of Croat, Slovenian and Bosnian territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with the Serbian Kingdom. Following Nazi occupation and partitioning during World War II, Yugoslavia was reunified to comprise six republics, each with distinct ethnic groups.⁴ Serbia also created two autonomous regions, the Autonomous Provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina.



Figure 1: Map of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1992)

Serbian-backed Serb minority and Croatian-backed Croat minority who sought to partition Bosnia into three ethnic states. The *Kosovo War* broke out when Serbia stripped Kosovo of its autonomy in the 1990s. Kosovo, though a part of Serbia, was predominantly ethnic Albanian, prompting fighting between Serbs and Kosovar Albanians who fought against Serbian oppression.

All these conflicts saw fighting between different ethnic groups, with the region cascading into a brutal warzone from 1991 to 2001. Genocide, ethnic cleansing and war crimes were committed, and an estimated 140 000 were killed. This violent history translates into tensions that exist to this day, with scars of the conflict still fresh in WB states. The region now consists of six WB states, excluding Croatia which joined the EU in 2013, but including Kosovo whose independence remains recognised by only 100 UN member states.

⁴ “The Breakup of Yugoslavia, 1990–1992.” U.S. Department of State. U.S. Department of State. Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/breakup-yugoslavia>.



Figure 2: Map of the Western Balkan region, including Croatia (2022)

To join the EU, states must first apply for candidacy and have their application accepted with the approval of every EU member state. This is but the first part of a long and lengthy process. It is upon a successful application that the state becomes a candidate and accession negotiations begin.

Negotiations include screening the state to determine whether it meets the Copenhagen criteria. This takes the form of 35 negotiating chapters, with each chapter representing a key policy EU states are expected to adopt. This is also known as the EU *acquis*, the “body of common rights and obligations that are binding on all EU countries”. The EC releases yearly reviews of each candidate state’s progress. Through the process, negotiating chapters are opened (where negotiations on that policy begin) and closed (upon meeting EU standards on that policy). This already complicated process is made even longer for WB states.

Drawing on the examples of Eastern European countries, Poland and Romania took 10 and 12 years respectively to gain accession into the EU. This is in comparison with WB countries like Montenegro that have taken 14 years to simply close three negotiating chapters. While in general EU integration processes span lengthy periods due to the stringent EU *acquis* and principles of the EU, such disparities with other countries remains the case for many WB states, where the accession process has been stretched out far longer than previous applicant states.

The reluctance to engage in further enlargement and the tendency to delay accession is clearly demonstrated as the EU continues to grow from its original six states to its current 27-member size. One reason for this reluctance is the struggle in supporting poorer and more fragile member states, while another reason is the deterioration of democracy in newly-minted members.

Regardless, current EU policy has not sufficiently convinced WB states of its commitment to their accession. WB states are growing fatigued at the prospect of joining the EU, with some politicians even calling to withdraw their applications. Without sufficient support from the EU, WB states are turning increasingly to Russia and China for economic assistance. For example, Serbia has received nearly two billion US dollars in Chinese investment in industry and railways.

The EU now stands at a crossroads. On one hand, strict conditions like the Copenhagen criteria ensure all member states are governed at an equal and acceptable level, given members' close integration. On the other hand, WB states are located in Europe's backyard. Such a geographically strategic presence heightens the pressure placed on the bloc to see to the accession of these WB states — and even more so with increasing Russian and Chinese influence in the region.

There is no time more critical to readjusting the EU's policy towards the WB states.

Background

Definitions

Copenhagen Criteria

The criteria a state must meet in order to join the EU. This includes the stability of key institutions in maintaining democracy and upholding human rights, a functioning market economy and the ability to implement policies and accept the intentions and obligations prescribed by the EU acquis.

EU Acquis

The common rights and obligations that are binding on all EU member states, comprising 35 negotiating chapters; including energy, taxation and social policy.

The full EU Acquis is laid out as attached:

Chapters of the EU Acquis

Enhanced / Revised Accession Methodology

The European Commission's 2020 proposal to enhance the accession process, with four key focuses: more credibility, stronger political steer, more dynamism, and greater predictability.

More details on the Enhanced / Revised Accession Methodology are laid out in the following proposal:

European Commission's Proposal for a Revised Accession Methodology

Western Balkan state (WB state)

Any of the 6 states in the Balkan peninsula who seek to join the EU. This includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (whose independence is only partially recognised), Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, but excludes Croatia, which joined the EU in 2013 (see page 8).

Accession into the EU

The final outcome of a state who has applied to join the EU, upon the closing (fulfilment) of all 35 negotiating chapters of the acquis and the ratification of an Accession Treaty.

Backsliding

Economic backsliding refers to the downturn in the economic system and state of a country in alignment with EU principles and standards. Legislative backsliding refers to the decline of the legislative, executive and judiciary system of a country from the frame of EU law and principles.

Stabilisation and Association Process

The progressive partnership between the EU and WB states, with the aims of eventual membership through stabilising the region and establishing a free-trade area. A Stabilisation and Association Agreement is also signed. It is specific to each WB state and identifies areas of cooperation.

More details on the Stabilisation and Association Process are laid out in the following document:
Stabilisation and Association Process

Past Developments

Enhanced Accession Methodology

In 2020, the European Commission (EC) released a proposal for an enhanced accession methodology for the WB states to join the EU. Four principles outlined the new methodology, namely political commitment, dynamism, capacity and conditionality.⁵ In all, it sought to make the accession process more credible, more accelerated (given certain conditions are met) and more successful. It envisaged increased involvement of the Member States in monitoring and reviewing candidates' progress, moving beyond simple requirements of their unanimity in a negotiating chapter to contribute 'more systematically' to the accession process. An additional element introducing positive (+) and negative (-) conditionality added dynamism, making the process multi-dimensional. Under this, candidate states may experience the play-out of scenarios seeing accelerated (+), suspended (-), or reversed progress (-).⁶ There thus leaves room to unpack the unfolding of these changes in the present day.

Pre-Accession Support

The EU continues to support WB states pre-accession in varying aspects. The Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans (EIP) is a substantial investment package mobilising up to €9 billion of funding for the region.⁷ It supports long-term goals of connectivity, growth, and transitions, with the European Commission supplementing the plan with guidelines for implementation of the Green Agenda. The Common Regional Market was also announced to more closely integrate WB states with the EU Single Market.⁸ It functions as a stepping stone for closer integration of the region with the EU Single Market even before accession, presenting privileged relations with the EU that WB states can leverage.

Enlargement Policy

EU policy towards enlargement has changed over the years, with the EU no longer as united in welcoming new members. This reflects the difficulties faced as the EU grows from six to 27 members, with more diverse interests needing to be represented. Prospective countries now also belong far away from Central Europe and instead in far flung corners like the Balkans and Eastern

⁵ "Enhancing the Accession Process - a Credible EU Perspective for the Western Balkans." European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, February 5, 2020. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enhancing-accession-process-credible-eu-perspective-western-balkans_en.

⁶ "Can EU Enlargement to the Western Balkans Be Revitalised? - IIEA." Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://www.iiea.com/images/uploads/resources/Can-EU-Enlargement-to-the-Western-Balkans-be-revitalised-compressed.pdf>.

⁷ "The Economic and Investment Plan for the Western ... - European Parliament." Accessed November 1, 2022. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/702561/EXPO_STU\(2022\)702561_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/702561/EXPO_STU(2022)702561_EN.pdf).

⁸ "Common Regional Market." European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. Accessed November 1, 2022. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/policy-highlights/common-regional-market_en

Europe. This feeds a growing sentiment that the EU should not expand any further, with a desire to maintain its exclusivity in Central Europe where countries are generally more developed and democratic. This same sentiment birthed the Eastern Partnership initiative which includes countries like Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine. It offered huge benefits like bilateral association agreements as well as deep and comprehensive free trade areas with the EU, yet all without the prospect of European integration.

Such proposals encourage the EU to consider how to best manage external concerns faced even as countries are stuck in accession limbo. They consider how such solutions can complement, rather than replace, full EU membership and also the message it might send. Regardless, it is important that these solutions do not signal and undermine aspirations to EU membership nor further alienate states that have seen little progress in their accession bids. Delegates are invited to explore these proposals, or any other relevant ideas worth pursuing.

A Multi-Speed Europe

A key conceptual solution put forth historically is a Multi-Speed Europe. It proposes that different parts of the EU integrate at different speeds depending on each state's political situation, hoping to balance EU enlargement with the strengthening of relations between states.⁹ This translates to practical differences in how EU policies may not apply to all countries equally or at all, for example in terms of financial integration and adoption of the Euro. Multi-Speed Europe would allow for states to join the EU, without the need for complete policy alignment, while considering political, social and practical concerns. Where one size fails to fit all, a Multi-Speed Europe could allow members specific, tailored support from the bloc. Concurrently, a 'Europe à la carte' could arise from within, where states simply take from or contribute in what they need, diminishing dynamics and mechanism of multilateral cooperation in the bloc. Actualisation of this concept could validate and make way for a hierarchical organisational structure, further allowing key members, like France and Germany, to run the show while other countries play 'catch-up'. Leaders from both states are in favour of it, with French President Macron reviving the notion in 2017, even calling for it as part of his presidential campaign then, and former Chancellor of Germany Merkel expressing support for Macron and the notion, drawing on it in various instances.^{10 11}

⁹ "Research Paper Multi-Speed Europe. A View from Romania." Accessed November 1, 2022. https://www.iedonline.eu/download/2019/IED_Article_Multispeed_MIHAI_SEBE_December_2019.pdf.

¹⁰ France 24. "Macron Calls for Multi-Speed Europe." France 24. France 24, August 29, 2017. <https://www.france24.com/en/20170829-macron-calls-multi-speed-europe>.

¹¹ Maurice, Eric. "Macron Revives Multi-Speed Europe Idea." EUobserver. EUobserver, August 30, 2017. <https://euobserver.com/eu-political/138832>.

Key Issues

Enlargement Policy

The EU's enlargement policy has evolved over the decades due to fluctuating external circumstances. Through 1995 to 2007, the EU rapidly expanded eastward, seeking to quickly inaugurate Eastern Europe and countries of the former Soviet bloc. This was partially out of fear that Russian-led alliances, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, would attempt to re-integrate these former states into Russia's sphere of influence.¹² Following three waves of enlargement that admitted a total of 15 countries, what was left unintegrated were mainly "in-between" states like Ukraine as well as WB states.

While the WB states have long indicated interest in joining the EU since the early 2000s, the EU's enlargement policy has resisted the expedition of their accession. One factor that has led to this reluctance and general lack of urgency to integrate these members is the lack of certainty that newly-joined states will be able to maintain the standards of domestic affairs in alignment with EU's expectations. The EU is not ready to risk accepting more states, lest a repeat of Romania and Croatia. Once assured of membership, Romania saw democratic backsliding while Croatia has seen graft and wide-spread corruption make a comeback.

There is no desire to repeat history by expanding the EU further and risk accepting countries that go back on their earlier fulfillments. The EU also perceives the benefits of integrating these states as small, and the potential backlash of backsliding countries to be too great. The region is simply not unstable enough to warrant more intervention, nor is it stable enough to be fully incorporated in its current state.¹³

In light of newly-minted members backsliding, certain EU members like France seek to rethink enlargement. In 2019, France stalled accession proceedings for North Macedonia, insisting on reforming the EU's accession methodology before any new plans for enlargement.

¹² "Russia's Westpolitik and the European Union." *Russia's Westpolitik and the European Union* | Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-westpolitik-and-european-union>.

¹³ Bechev, Dimitar. "What Has Stopped EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans?" Carnegie Europe. Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/06/20/what-has-stopped-eu-enlargement-in-western-balkans-pub-87348>.

Convoluting process of EU accession against the backdrop of external influences

States have also faced increasing weariness at the prospect of the long and convoluted procession of EU accession, and may instead be incentivised to turn to external forces for support. While diminished against the backdrop of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, the prospects of alienation of applicant states from the bloc remain as another area of concern. Already, there are instances of WB states expressing displeasure at the stalling of accession processes by the EU. Leaving the EU-WB Summit this June empty-handed, leaders of the WB states expressed disillusion over the stalling of negotiations, casting doubt on the credibility of the bloc. Unable to break the deadlock over the stalled EU membership bid of North Macedonia and Albania, the EU simply restated at the summit its promise made almost two decades ago, that WB states would be given membership once they enacted deep economic, judicial and political reforms.^{14 15}

Resultantly, external influences have achieved a greater reach and hold in the area. With long stretches of stagnation in accession proceedings, states have become increasingly perplexed. While the positioning of the WB states in the heart of the region allows for strategic implications and relations with the bloc, this very geographic element makes WB states a conducive environment for action against EU interests. External influences, predominantly from Russia and China, have taken the chance to build greater ties and efforts in the region, increasing the WB's reliance on them, and perhaps concurrently the alienation of these states from the EU. While sanctions on Russia from all over the bloc have and will likely diminish its work in the WB region, Moscow has both the capacity and interest to deepen their roots of support in the region, and tip the scale against EU progress in the region.

The EU has previously labelled China as a 'systemic rival'. Indeed, it continues to strategically expand its influence in the WB states - apart from Kosovo, all WB states have undertaken Memorandums of Understanding under China's expansive Belt and Road Initiative.¹⁶ With most WB states seeing substantial growth in trade with the Chinese over the past decade, China has progressively meted out development assistance in areas of infrastructure and societal sectors. Beijing has long achieved foreign diplomacy through their Official Development Assistance (ODA) schemes, with grants of to the WB region of €1 to 2 million per year, and WB states owing debts of, or close to,

¹⁴ Person, and Robin Emmott. "Balkan Membership Hopefuls Leave EU Summit Empty Handed." Reuters. Thomson Reuters, June 23, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/its-disgrace-eu-hopeful-albania-says-bulgarias-veto-2022-06-23/>.

¹⁵ Service, RFE/RL's Balkan. "Balkan Leaders Frustrated over Stalled EU Membership Bids as Bloc Moves to Grant Candidate Status to Ukraine, Moldova." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, June 24, 2022. <https://www.rferl.org/a/balkan-eu-membership-summit-frustration/31912243.html>.

¹⁶ "Asia Policy Brief - China's Economic Footprint in the Western Balkans." *Asia Policy Brief - China's Economic Footprint in the Western Balkans*, June 24, 2022. <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/germany-and-asia/news/asia-policy-brief-chinas-economic-footprint-in-the-western-balkans>.

billions to China's Exim Bank.¹⁷ In the recent two decades, China has invested about €32 billion in the region alone, with expansive infrastructure support, cooperation and development in the region.¹⁸ While support from the EU extends further, wider, and deeper in scope and extent, the threat of external influences to the solidarity of the bloc and prospective members cannot be taken at surface level.

Inconsistencies in expedited accession

The recent Russo-Ukrainian conflict has also seen an expedited accession process for Ukraine to the EU, where it has gained candidate status merely 3 months after its application, a stark contrast to WB states which have been stuck in the accession process for months or even years. Two key things have resultantly been highlighted. It sees first the increasing contention around selective expedition mechanisms for applicant states. Following moral obligations and aggressive pushing by Zelensky for expedition of the candidacy and accession process for Ukraine's membership in the EU, the European Commission granted Ukraine candidate status this June. While it is likely that accession talks will continue on indefinitely from years to decades, the decision has put the enlargement process in the foreground. Similarly, it does not diminish the increasing discontent from states who have long stagnated over the lengthy accession proceedings obligated by the EU. With such inconsistencies in decisions and actions taken by the bloc over accession proceedings, there presents irony in the apparent reason behind the lengthy accession proceedings being stringent alignment with EU principles and chapters.

Accession Process

WB states have only grown fatigued in recent years. When WB states first started their accession journeys and applied for candidacy in the 2000s, many were determined to make the necessary reforms to join the EU. Progress was hopeful and their governments were encouraged by many of the concessions the EU had granted them, such as the introduction of visa-free travel. However now with accession proceedings entering another decade, many of these larger "rewards" have already been handed out. The EU now has little to offer WB states in the immediate term, and no additional incentives to prod them along.

In its place, Russia and China's influence is growing. WB states now view the prospect of EU membership less favourably, since Europe is no longer their sole source of economic support. They

¹⁷ TJMa. "Governance, Debt and War: Reassessing Chinese Aid in the Western Balkans." Panda Paw Dragon Claw, September 13, 2022. <https://pandapawdragonclaw.blog/2022/05/18/governance-debt-and-war-reassessing-chinese-aid-in-the-western-balkans/>.

¹⁸ "China's Strategic Interests in the Western Balkans - European Parliament." Accessed November 1, 2022. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733558/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733558_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733558/EPRS_BRI(2022)733558_EN.pdf).

are more readily accepting foreign investment and pursuing greater political cooperation with them, especially since Russian and Chinese support comes without the strict conditions the EU requires. This is in part due to Russia and China having vastly different objectives in the region. While the EU seeks to foster regional peace, stability, justice and democracy, China simply seeks to engage economically with the region to win political favours amidst its strategic competition with the US.¹⁹ Through funding infrastructure projects in WB states, the Belt and Road Initiative's *China-Europe Land-Sea Express Route* would better connect the EU to Chinese exports (China is the EU's largest import partner).

While foreign influence is growing in recent years, it is unlikely to ever match or exceed the EU's weight in the area. What is concerning, however, is the clashing of principles in the areas of political, economic and security standards. Should Russian and Chinese support prove more accessible and effective than the EU's, WB states would lose incentive to honour to meet the EU acquis in the hopes of gaining membership. While EU-WB's close ties strengthen the push for integration into, and support from the bloc, it means too that should WB states fail to operate under the same guidelines, it may not be in the EU's interests for such close integration. There thus remains a need for the WB states to address concerns about democracy, civil rights and the environment, and ensure that in reaping gains from external influences, they do not position themselves as unparalleled to the bloc.

Delegates should thus consider re-evaluating the accession process towards WB states, in light of growing external pressure. Most paramount is what can be done in the short-term to convince WB states to commit to the accession process. Should the EU fail to take decisive action, WB states may turn ever increasingly to foreign powers. Similarly, WB states face the question of the extent of political will they hold in pushing for accession to the EU, and the extent to which they should draw on support from external influences.

Accession Methodology

The current accession methodology comprises three stages. States apply for candidacy, and become candidates should their application be accepted. The European Commission assesses the state's abilities to meet the Copenhagen criteria, following which the Council will decide on the state's attainment of candidacy status based on the opinion that has been given.

As a candidate, states are screened and scrutinised through the conditions for membership, otherwise known as the 'Copenhagen criteria'. The Copenhagen criteria includes having to be a stable democracy, uphold the rule of law and possess a functioning market economy that accepts all EU legislation, inclusive of the Euro, the common currency and sole legal tender of 19 EU member states.

¹⁹ "China and the EU in the Western Balkans - Netherlands Institute of ..." Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/china-and-the-eu-in-the-western-balkans.pdf>.

The Euro, projected to boost regional trade by reducing foreign trade complications, implies obligations from EU financial bodies on the states.

Once candidacy status has been granted, candidate states will have to focus on the negotiation proceedings (which are formally opened on a subject-by-subject basis), and pre-accession processes. Under the accession process, states are required to incorporate EU requirements into national legislation, in alignment with the supranational nature of the EU. With pooled sovereignties and a common currency, the EU holds greater power in dictating and imposing the regional direction. With a greater obligation to uphold the EU's principles in accessions, discussions are held in the negotiation process, where the negotiations period often spans over years due to the lengthy EU regulations obligated as well as the immense time needed to enact such reforms. Support is provided financially, administratively and technically for candidate states in this pre-accession period.

The European Commission proposed a revised enlargement methodology in 2020, with four key principles; stronger political will, dynamism, credibility and predictability.

Dynamism

Besides lacking sufficient political will, the complicated nature of clearing 35 negotiation chapters often stalls the accession proceedings. Dynamism was badly needed to address the EU's inability to accelerate proceedings.²⁰ The revised enlargement methodology thus groups these 35 chapters into six thematic clusters, allowing up to nine chapters to be opened at once, speeding up the process. However, opening benchmarks must be met before these chapters can be opened. Interim benchmarks were also introduced specifically for two chapters, Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security). Historically, these two chapters are the most fundamental and rigorous, taking the longest time to implement reforms for. The revised methodology recommends these two chapters be opened first, and closed last. The revised methodology also allows for negotiations to be put on hold or even suspended, should candidate states stall or backtrack in their negotiations. The "imbalance clause" would then allow the EU to stop negotiations if adequate reforms under Chapters 23 and 24 are not made. While the clause is not a new concept, the EU has yet to make use of it to penalise any states for failing to make substantial progress. This further erodes the EU's credibility to take decisive action, and proves available mechanisms ineffective if not used when they ought to be.

²⁰ "The New EU Accession Methodology. Is It Enough to Pull the Western ...". Accessed November 1, 2022. https://idses.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/A5_WEB_New_Accession_Methodology_EU_WB-1.pdf.

Credibility

Two other key principles mentioned in the revised methodology include credibility and reversibility. The revised enlargement methodology recommends concrete roadmaps and action plans, setting in stone expectations required of WB states, and requiring the EU to honour its commitments. Credibility also refers to the institutional and financial capabilities of both the EU and WB to deliver on their promises. A wide range of resources are offered to WB states to support reform, from Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) to Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA). Strengthening credibility does not just involve increasing financial assistance, but also building upon more intangible processes, such as public service competency and intra-government cooperation.²¹ Credibility also emphasises on making fundamental reforms first, such that the most difficult changes required do not stall the accession process. In all, it brings about mutual confidence and clear commitments from both sides.

Reversibility

Reversibility refers to both positive conditionality, where WB states are rewarded for progressing in negotiations, and negative conditionality, where WB states are sanctioned for stagnating or backsliding. This would make the process more merit-based and encourage political will through tangible incentives of “direct interest to citizens”. However, these conditions and their entailing rewards have not been outlined specifically. Moreover, incentives that the EU is willing to give are limited, with the bulk already being dished out to WB states in the 2000s. There is also growing sentiment that sanctions alone as a deterrence or penalty are not effective. The Journal of European Public Policy writes that “conditionality alone will remain insufficient to achieve deep democratisation”, and that “favouring domestic deliberation rather than incentive-driven compliance” would lead to more lasting and effective reform.

²¹ “The Role of EU Pre-Accession Assistance in the Establishment of ...” Accessed November 1, 2022. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289363897_The_Role_of_EU_Pre-accession_Assistance_in_the_Establishment_of_National_Coordination_Structures_for_EU_Funding_The_Case_of_Croatia.

Scope of Debate

Accession Process

Renewed focus on feasible steps to tackle dispute settlement

Taking into consideration contributing factors stemming from both action by member states and progress of candidate states, there arises the need for a renewed focus on taking feasible steps to address areas of dispute.

The adoption of the Copenhagen Criteria, upon introduction, pitted areas of fundamental rights and rule of law as crucial areas of progress, even as fundamental prerequisites for the commencement of accession negotiations. With such areas established as key, Chapters 23 and 24 have been placed in the centre of EU accession proceedings, often seeing candidate states meet a deadlock.²²

Both chapters raise issues surrounding the measurability of progress by states under EU acquis. Chapter 23 covers four main areas of political criteria, pertaining to the judiciary, work against corruption, fundamental rights, and EU citizens' rights in the candidate state. With its requirements centred around EU principles and standards, its contents are raised if there is a fundamental need in improving clarity for 'hard acquis', that is, the setting out of well-defined and calibratable conditions, and if further introduction of it would expedite accession proceedings at all. Chapter 24 tackles organised crime of all forms, terrorism, border control measures, migration and cooperation, once again raising the question of how progress is measured, and whether or not delays in accession proceedings should be attributed to the lack of it thereof.

Dispute settlements often pose roadblocks in the accession process as well. When bilateral disputes in particular account for stalling in states' candidacy or even applicant progress, often through the need for unanimity from member states in passage of actions taken on prospective members, questions arise on whether member states should hold such say in the process, and just how much should be held. Should the woes of a single member state weigh in on the aptness of a state acceding to the EU? Has diplomatic relations with every member state become a prerequisite to join the bloc and how has this come to be? More importantly, what balancing mechanisms should be put in place to ensure dispute settlement occurs in a fair and standardised manner?

Above all, does the oft-seen stalling of accession proceedings arise as a result of inadequacy by applicant states, or the need for a reform of arrangements within the accession process? Either way, how can it be tackled?

²² "EU Enlargement in Disregard of the Rule of Law: A Way ... - Springer." Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s40803-022-00169-7.pdf>.

Efficiency of dispute settlement mechanisms

One of the more notable disputes is between Kosovo and Serbia, when Kosovo (previously an autonomous province) declared independence from Serbia in 2008. To this day, Serbia refuses to recognise Kosovo as independent and obstructs many bilateral agreements from fruition, while Kosovo is reluctant to engage in dialogue or cooperation. This bilateral dispute makes it difficult for accession talks for Kosovo to proceed, given its limited recognition and volatile relations with Serbia.

There exists no fixed mechanism to resolve bilateral disputes, and new solutions are employed each time disputes arise or escalate. To resolve technical issues like border management and civil records, an EU-facilitated dialogue was held from 2011 to 2018 with multiple agreements drafted. This dialogue soon fell through, deadlocked with no hopes of talks resuming and with few of the agreements fulfilled. To resolve larger issues like Kosovo's sovereignty, the UN turned to the International Court of Justice, which ruled that Kosovo's self-proclaimed independence did not violate international law. Yet, Serbia declines to honour the international ruling, further supplementing the need to draw up effective dispute settlement mechanisms, as the Case Study of North Macedonia similarly reveals, raising the question of how dispute resolution mechanisms can be made more efficient.

Expedition of the accession process

Taking into account the varying factors of increasing external pressures, criticisms of double standards and prospects of alienation on both ends, it seems about time to re-evaluate accession mechanisms, and how expedition of the process should be gone about, with EU principles and standards in mind.

Given the stringent adherence to EU principles and standards being the basis for lengthy accession processes, particularly with the recent highly-expedited passage of Ukraine's application to gain candidacy, it begs the question of exactly what distinctions there are between justifiable exceptions and double standards. Ergo, questions of whether there are any circumstances under which an expedited accession process is justified, and whether any such exceptions should be allowed for, and if so, under what criteria they should function, are raised.

Key Policy Principles

Pre-accession support

Given the close ties between prospective members and the bloc, support from the EU does not begin only from the point of accession. The line of work of the EU pervades WB states, particularly as they are situated in the heart of the region. With WB states working to fulfil often distant goals in seeking accession, is EU support key in the lead-up to accession? Similarly, when states backslide or stagnate, should privileges be revoked to improve domestic affairs as aligned with EU's guiding principles?

Existing provisions pose the need for further refinement. The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) financially supports the WB states in implementing political and economic reforms needed in their accession process.²³ The new IPA III has been expanded to focus deeply on providing assistance on key priorities. These key priorities mirror the clustering of negotiation chapters as outlined in the Commission's Proposal. Upon progress towards such priorities, countries may be rewarded. The key therefore lies not in expanding the IPA, which itself is extensive, but in solidifying incentivisation for countries to continually strive for reform.

In the quest for support mechanisms, considerations the Council should take into account include what the EU stands to gain from such enhancements, and the parameters in which such benefit mechanisms are meted out. It must be established, then, the extent to which states will be supported and the manners of identification that will be put in place in defining which states need what type of help. The Council should consider the following three questions in this process.

1. Will there be prerequisites to benefits offered?
2. How will equity be ensured in meting out these provisions?
3. Will there be space to manipulate or manoeuvre within the chapters that would allow for the misuse of certain benefits (and how will this be prevented)?

In revocation of privileges, otherwise termed broadly as 'reversibility' in withdrawing benefits given during the accession process, the Council should consider what forms of punishment stagnation or backsliding will incur. While forming such 'punishments', the Council may weigh-in on the pros and cons of doing so, and at the core of it examine whether or not it would defeat the purpose of the entire accession process and remove the compulsion towards gaining EU accession. In doing so, the Council may consider the following three questions:

1. If 'punishments' are meted out, would it reduce incentivisation of acceding to the EU?

²³ "Overview - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance." European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. Accessed November 1, 2022. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/overview-instrument-pre-accession-assistance_en#:~:text=The%20Instrument%20for%20Pre%2Daccession,and%20technical%20assistance%20since%202007.

2. If ‘reversibility’ is introduced, would it defeat the very purpose of accession in recognising the state as an official member in the first place?
3. Is the incentivisation and compulsion to achieve accession to the EU a factor of consideration, and if so, how significant is it?

Moreover, WB states need to ensure, despite competing policy principles, that they recognise their priorities in adhering closely to stringent standards and conditions, all while facing pressure to accede to the EU with their key geographical position. As such, both EU and WB states need to have clarity on balancing between the core interests, needs, and acts of both parties.

External Factors

In some countries of the Western Balkans (most notably in Serbia, Montenegro and the Republic of Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina) leaders have begun to question the necessity of the EU, given the high growth rates they have achieved recently independent of the EU. Russian investment, along with the political support the Russian government has offered recently, seems to offer an alternative to the long and tedious EU accession process.²⁴

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is becoming a test for candidate states in their accession proceedings. It has also become a tool to pressurise states in taking courses of action that are more aligned with Western interests. This raises the issue that should states’ interest clash with these Western interests, they will resultantly lean towards other external powers, such as China, if their interests better align with these powers. The question remains of how these unspoken obligations imposed on the states might inexplicably make their accession bids more difficult, to the point of discouraging WB states to follow through with it. One such example is the relatively pro-Russian Serbia that has refused to join EU sanctions against Russia.²⁵ ²⁶While Serbia is not explicitly required to join Western sanctions, it signals to the EU its lack of commitment to aligning itself with policy action of the EU. It further pushes if EU’s incentives for WB states, or the lack thereof, plays a key role in prospects of their leaning toward alternative influences.

This thus gives rise to three issues the EU must address. First, the need to weigh-in between curbing external influences and risking the likely alienation of applicant states in enforcing enlargement

²⁴ “342. Greece, the Western Balkans and the European Union.” *Wilson Center*. Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/342-greece-the-western-balkans-and-the-european-union>.

²⁵ Samorukov, Maxim. “Last Friend in Europe: How Far Will Russia Go to Preserve Its Alliance with Serbia?” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://carnegieendowment.org/eurasiainsight/87303>.

²⁶ Coakley, Amanda. “Serbia Is Playing with Matches Again.” *Foreign Policy*, August 3, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/03/serbia-kosovo-russia-eu-tensions/>.

standards. Second, when, how, and even whether or not they should mete out support mechanisms to applicant or candidate states while accession proceedings are ongoing.

In sum, the European Council has to weigh between obligating candidate states to take actions aligned with the directions of the EU and risking the further alienation of such states from the EU. While such obligations serve to diminish the possibility of states turning to external influences, they are also less likely to obligate themselves to act in line with the EU's directions. The bloc faces the overall threat of losing out to external powers in the heart of its very own region, where a complete steering away from the EU to external influences would bring out significant disturbances in the dynamics, positioning and predicaments in the region.

This also opens the door to evaluating if there should be differentiated expectations in the accession process, bearing in mind the risk of diluting the EU's standards when newly-acceded states backslide. This calls to example Serbia, where should the EU lower its expectations of Serbia, it may cause Serbia to lean more toward the EU to get the longer end of the stick.

Case Studies

Accession of Croatia

From its initial application for EU membership in 2003, Croatia had been in negotiations from 2005 to 2011. The talks culminated in the signing of the accession treaty in 2011, by leaders from both the EU and Croatia. In 2013, the country officially became the 28th state to join the EU with no other state joining since.

From the interim period until accession, Croatia held a role as an active observer in the EU. This allowed Croatia to familiarise itself with the working methods of EU institutions, as well as the experience from involvement in certain decision-making processes. In its accession negotiations, Croatia utilised a defined organisational structure that included a Negotiation Team, led by a Chief Negotiator, that held responsibility for expert negotiation with EU institutions and EU member states at a technical level. The aforementioned team also ensured that EU requirements were understood in local contexts and implemented as needed. Progress reports towards full alignment to the Acquis were also made. A variety of relevant stakeholders were also grouped into Working Groups, which worked collaboratively, rapidly and decisively towards attaining EU membership by transforming the administrative, institutional and legal landscape with a strong sense of urgency and political will.

While political will and urgency were indispensable to the wide scale reform on a country level in Croatia, change management and other factors also played a critical role in achieving targeted results. Specific approaches were employed to guide the overall reform process, such as the successful alignment of the corporate financial reporting framework in Croatia with the EU acquis, as well as distinct actions taken to harmonise national and international accounting and auditing standards.

Delegates should draw upon the positive example of Croatia's accession and consider the necessary domestic measures to support accession, as well as frameworks to encourage alignment of existing infrastructure within countries with the EU acquis.

However, delegates should also bear in mind that Croatia's relative success through the negotiating chapters did not guarantee smooth sailing integration into the EU. The external pressure to align the country with the EU acquis disappeared soon after accession, leaving only domestic apparatus and political will to sustain the country's reform post-accession. Without external supervision or the need to appease the EU, there was democratic backsliding and corruption made a comeback. Delegates should thus effectively consider how, beyond empowering the accession process, new member states be encouraged to stay the course too. It is also worth considering how, while such stringent accession proceedings and requirements may be put in place, there are few mechanisms to address the

backsliding of states once they have closed negotiations and officially joined the EU. Delegates can consider how states can then be supported in preventing and mitigating economic, legislative and democratic backsliding, as well as re-examine the value of such lengthy, stringent processes if backsliding remains a post-accession issue.

Accession of North Macedonia

North Macedonia has long sought EU membership since its application in 2004. However, its accession has been blocked by Greece and Bulgaria due to nomenclature and linguistic disputes.

The former naming of North Macedonia as "Macedonia" was a point of contention between Greek and North Macedonian politicians. Citing historical and irredentist concerns, Greece opposed the use of the name "Macedonia". Greek politicians claimed that North Macedonia was appropriating symbols of Greek culture and further accused North Macedonia of promoting the irredentist concept of a United Macedonia, which involves territorial claims on Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, and Serbia. The dispute was eventually solved, after various multilateral negotiations, in 2019 with the Prespes Agreement between North Macedonia and Greece.

Bulgaria also demands that North Macedonia recognise its national language as derived from Bulgarian and include in its constitution the protection of ethnic Bulgarian minorities. Most recently, North Macedonia's parliament passed a resolution (that took notes from a French proposal) that would honour Bulgaria's demands to remove their veto on the accession process. While the North Macedonian Parliament's decision was controversial and sparked nation-wide protests, the prospect of membership after 17 long years is understandably enticing.

The case with Bulgaria highlights the importance of three elements. First, the need to resolve bilateral disputes with greater efficiency that would not compromise and stall accession talks completely. It is not the first time that EU members have vetoed accession over such disagreements, and member states face no repercussions for using this mechanism. Second, the need to incentivise states to focus on more practical concerns (such as aligning with the EU acquis) rather than historical disputes (over culture and long-standing disagreements). Not only does there need to be a proper framework to address bilateral disputes when they do arise, but to also address how to prevent such disputes from escalating and affecting the EU's credibility. Third, the concern that the EU is violating members'

rights to self-determination and practising double standards.²⁷ ²⁸ One example of such violation of self-determination is the high pressure Bulgaria placed on North Macedonia to amend its national constitution in exchange for lifting its veto. Double standards refers to how the EU has allowed one member to compromise accession proceedings endorsed by all other members. The EU also stood idly by as Bulgaria forced the hand of North Macedonia to advance its own agenda, without repercussions or backlash.

Accession of Ukraine

In light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU expedited Ukraine's application for candidacy - a powerful symbol of European solidarity against countries that break international law.

However, given the war-torn state of the country, its actual accession into the EU is arguably unrealistic and raises questions as to the fairness of the accession process. WB countries that previously applied for candidacy were met with years of waiting. In the case of Bosnia, its application was not even accepted, but instead was met with 14 key areas to work on before candidacy would be given. In contrast, Ukraine's application was straightforward and took a mere 5 months.

Notwithstanding, Ukraine is now a candidate country (although there is no set date as to when negotiations will begin). Delaying these negotiations, while most realistic, may imply the EU's lack of solidarity with Ukraine, but making hasty decisions in the middle of an unprecedented war may ruin the EU's credibility and dash the little hope WB states have left.

While this council is not discussing EU policy towards Ukraine, this case study highlights the dilemma between short-term political considerations and long-term practical perspectives. While an encouraging display of European unity, the careful consideration that Ukraine be granted candidacy is admittedly problematic considering Ukraine's actual readiness to meet the Copenhagen criteria, and the feasibility of implementing the reforms needed in the volatile state. WB states may also be left discouraged, seeing the double standards and bias of the EU towards Eastern European countries like Ukraine and Moldova who have admittedly spent far less effort to align with the *acquis*. This Case Study thus highlights the imbalance of EU interests, where enlargement is suddenly looked upon more favourably simply because it is Ukraine. While both Ukraine and WB states are threatened by Russian influence, there is a difference in the extent of this influence and the risk it poses to the EU. Delegates

²⁷ Taylor, Alice. "French Proposal Vote to Be Restructured in Macedonian Parliament Vote." *www.euractiv.com*. EURACTIV, July 15, 2022. https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/french-proposal-vote-to-be-restructured-in-macedonian-parliament-vote/.

²⁸ Kolozova, Katerina. "On the Macedonian-Bulgarian Dispute and Historical Revisionism." *European Union | Al Jazeera*. Al Jazeera, December 7, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/12/7/on-the-macedonian-bulgarian-issue>.

should consider how the EU can respond adequately to mitigate such risks and in a manner that addresses accusations of double standards.

Looking beyond fulfilling moral obligations to support Ukraine, delegates should consider how the EU can rope in the WB states, weak and at risk of foreign influence, and how necessary action that is taken in the short-term can be balanced with equally effective long-term commitments to accession.

Potential Solutions

Strengthening political will in the EU and WB

With many different stakeholders concerning the EU's actions and decisions, it is inevitable that there are instances of misalignment in the bloc, making it challenging to promptly or efficiently achieve a consensus on matters. Moreover, when the bloc or states are less incentivised to address matters, diminished political will poses issues in the actualisation stages of execution in policies. One way to strengthen the political will of the EU is to reexamine its overall policy direction, and pursue alignment within the bloc.

Alignment in the EU's overall policy direction

Given that it is difficult to align all member states on a common vision on enlargement, the creation of a European geopolitical community may raise fewer contensions. Rather than an alternative to full-pledged EU membership, it serves to strengthen political relations with all European countries regardless of membership. Though the idea has not been fleshed out in theory, such a community would bring about greater political cooperation in Europe as a whole.

Moving the focus away from membership, this community would focus on coordinating a European response to pressing issues like energy and security. Given the Russo-Ukraine conflict, such issues have become increasingly important to address, posing a possibly greater incentivised need for implementation of the concept. This would allow the WB states hold of greater presence and relevance in regional progressions, allowing for greater alignment not just intra-council, but within the region.

Zooming out on the specific implementation of a European geopolitical community, it is the case with certain instances that both EU and Western Balkan leaders lack sustained political will and commitment throughout the accession process. Without political will, accession proceedings risk stalling, or worse have its implications backslide. It is thus necessary to strengthen the political will of both the EU and WB states, seeing as it would signify greater efficiency in the accession process, and allow for more sustained and effective engagement in the long run.

Encouraging WB states' continuous engagement

The tried and tested approach the EU has adopted has been to drive reform through incentives and rewards. However, the most accessible of awards have been dished out already, such as visa-free travel between WB states and the EU. WB states are thus growing weary of the prospect of accession and increasingly turning to China and Russia for support. Foreign support comes with far fewer conditions and is more readily available. Delegates can thus consider what incentives the EU can give

that are appropriate and feasible, sufficient to satisfy WB states but also realistic for the EU to award. These incentives need not mimic foreign support, but should overall appear as a more favourable option. These incentives can also follow either a general framework, or even plans tailored to each WB state. This then entails the need to outline the specific conditions required for such incentives to be given.

Given that incentive-driven reform has proven unreliable in recent years, delegates can next consider inculcating in both the local populace as well as in state government the drive to pursue effective reform. Possible actions then include the establishment of political partners within both state governments and among the population (such as through public-private partnerships). This could take the form of increased trade involvement or even cultural exchange programmes. Concrete commitments by EU leaders to support WB states can also be considered, but delegates should bear in mind how such commitments can be matched with sufficient credibility to convince WB states to press on with reform.

Establishing clearer frameworks

As part of the Enhanced Accession Methodology, guiding principles and new mechanisms were introduced to bring about greater credibility and predictability were proposed. However, these remain insufficient to drive the accession process if they are not effectively implemented. To this end, delegates should consider outlining the specifics of their execution.

Specifics to boost political will

The Enhanced Methodology proposed more opportunities for high-level political dialogue at each stage of the accession proceedings. Stabilisation and Association Agreements would focus more on key political issues and reform, while member states were formally invited to monitor progress on the ground and offer their expertise. To strengthen the political will within the EU, delegates can explore greater involvement on various levels. On a local level, the EU can consider moving away from a leader-oriented approach and instead garner popular support among WB citizens as well.²⁹ This could come in the form of greater engagement with local media as well as direct involvement with civil society organisations.

Specifics to boost credibility

The European Commission established that the accession process must be built on elements of trust, mutual confidence and clear commitments by both the EU and WB states. They set out to reinforce credibility through an even stronger focus on fundamental reforms, unfolding from the rule of law, functioning of democratic institutions and public administration and the economy of candidate countries, pledging to honour the merit-based approach by promising that Member States should agree to move forward once the criteria is met. To better enhance credibility, delegates can look to make further refinements to the process, or unpack the various proposals that have been put forth.

Specifics to boost dynamism

To form a greater dynamic negotiating process, the EC proposed to group negotiating chapters into six thematic clusters: Fundamentals; Internal market; Competitiveness and inclusive growth; Green Agenda and Sustainable connectivity; Resources, agriculture and cohesion; External relations. After fulfilment of opening benchmarks, negotiations would be opened on each cluster wholly, rather than by chapter, directly determining the overall pace of negotiations. Delegates may scrutinise if forming

²⁹ “How the EU Can Avoid Supporting Bad Politics in the Western Balkans: The EU as a Promoter of Democracy or ‘Stabilitocracy’ in the Western Balkans?” *How the EU can avoid supporting bad politics in the Western Balkans | The EU as a promoter of democracy or ‘stabilitocracy’ in the Western Balkans?* Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2022/the-eu-as-a-promoter-of-democracy-or-stabilitocracy/4-how-the-eu-can-avoid-supporting-bad-politics-in-the-western-balkans/>.

a dynamic process lies in such changes in arrangements, if the key lies elsewhere, or a combination of varying factors in play.

Specifics to increase clarity on both sides

Across the different stages of the process, the European Commission looked to provide greater clarity on the expectations for enlargement countries, on what the positive and negative consequences can be brought about by progress, or the lack of it thereof. It hoped to encourage ‘demanding reforms’ by better defining the conditions needed for candidate states to fulfil, and providing clear, tangible incentives that concern citizens’ interests directly. It set forth to pit advancements in reforms as synonymous with advancements in progress, and in a similar vein, proposes more decisive measures to tackle backsliding. Delegates can consider more accountability through clearly communicating expectations to WB states.

Resolving bilateral disputes

In the early 2000s, Western Balkan countries at loggerheads over particular issues set up bilateral committees to address them, but these have mostly seen inactivity recently. Reactivation of these committees could possibly help to tackle this issue. Another point of significance would be having dispute settlement mechanisms that can cater to the specific natures of varying disputes, where in some cases agreements have already been achieved and simply require technical validation, while others pose greater challenges in realising mutual agreement. Delegates may look to introducing or amending bilateral dispute mechanisms, and examine if the key lies in solving these disputes, diminishing the significance of them, or both.

Expanding support mechanisms in the pre-accession period

In offering greater benefits during negotiations, possible help include extending to following areas:

1. Economic cooperation to reduce trade barriers and more closely integrate into the EU with foreign investment and jobs
2. Heightened involvement (and possibly resultantly presence) in EU bodies
3. Access to European programmes and funding, which is already in place for many fragile states
4. Sectoral approaches, which are favoured and have been considered by EU
5. Addressing the increasing need for enhancement of EU military efforts, which have been a point of discussion in recent years for the EU, especially with the possible disbalance in strength imposed by militarily prosperity

The IPA is also incredibly extensive, resulting in the important need for domestic processes in benefiting states to be capable of making use of such funding. The EU must first have stronger leverage in the process by ensuring coordination and cultural-embeddedness in the use of funding by the domestic government. Secondly, domestic governments must more closely integrate EU funding with the relevant national decision-making bodies to ensure its efficient and effective use.

In addressing controversial areas, the Council may too consider the following measures.

First, subjecting current EU member states to equal levels of scrutiny that applicant states face. This is particularly in Chapters 23 and 24, which look at the rule of law. Presumably, only when EU's principles on legislation and law are fulfilled may the EU be lent the frame of credibility. Seeing as it seeks to impose these very values on applicant countries, this would perhaps diminish the irony brought about by member states' legislative backsliding in imposition of the EU's values for candidate states.

Second, the establishment of a proper framework to address bilateral disputes, through upholding of the EU's autonomy. This would be through upholding of international law as final and authoritative in dispute resolution. A possible course of action would also be integration of the accepting of decisions of international courts as a requiem for proceeding with the accession process.

Establishing prevention and mitigation mechanisms in post-accession backsliding

The Council may consider mechanisms which would obligate member states, and candidate states who have achieved accession past a certain stage, to prevent the very real possibility of backsliding in relevant sectors.

In the economic field, a plausible option would include the posing of sanctions against stagnation and backsliding amongst existing members. This would push states to pay attention to the state's economic vibrance and competition, instead of thinking full reliance can be placed on the bloc.

In the pre-accession process, clearer and concrete conditions for accession could possibly help to mitigate the issues that come post-accession. However, in doing so, the following must be considered. First, whether or not the stepping up in stringent of accession criteria would back-fire, by adding to the bureaucracy of the entire accession discussion process and obligatory *acquis* proceedings.

Second, when and how any enhancements will be put into place. The Council is faced first with the core question of whether or not new additions to the bloc are even welcome. They are faced already

with the backsliding of member states, increasing complications posed by obligatory consensus voting in accession proceedings, and many candidate states that have waited and stalled in line for years.

In imposing such new standards, then, it should too be considered if current applicants/candidates states should go through the rigour of fulfilling newly introduced mechanisms. The implications of this would signify possible revisions in applicants' accession statuses, pertaining to which it may be considered if this would dis-centivise states from application, leading back to the aforementioned fundamental question posed to the EU, seeing as disincentivisation would not be a concern if new applications are not welcome.

In considering differentiated integration via tiered consideration for countries, it should be taken into account how that would tie in to the alienation of applicants and candidates. It banks on the concept of a Multi-speed Europe, to which it may be evaluated whether or not that is worth exploring, and if there will be proper frameworks and executives in place to support the actualisation of such a concept.

Enhancement of the Enlargement Methodology

In further enhancement of the enlargement methodology, there remains merit in exploring how improvement may be brought about by consideration of the French and 9-Country proposals.

The key distinction the French Proposal puts forth posits that negotiating chapters are opened and closed in sequential order, and the previous cluster of chapters must be successfully closed before proceeding. On a differing end, the 9-Country Proposal proposes that negotiating chapters can be opened in parallel, but chapters relating to the rule of law should be central. It also places particular importance on strengthening the role of political stakeholders and the integration of acceding states into EU bodies during negotiations. The Commission's Proposal, which is currently being implemented in EU accession proceedings, amalgamates the two, with relevant additions. It states that negotiations on fundamental chapters are encouraged to be opened first and closed last, with great focus placed on such chapters while allowing other chapters to be discussed in parallel.

Moving on from the three proposals, a possible prospect would be greater inclusion of acceding states as observers in EU meetings. This would look toward encouraging their integration into the EU whilst negotiations are ongoing.

However, a balance must be kept between protecting the privacy of EU members and ensuring that participation acceding states be conducted to a suitable extent whereby sovereignty of EU members are still protected.

Upholding equality in the accession process

Given the existing sentiments over unfair terms of expedited accession, ensuring equal adherence to accession guidelines and making sure that excessive compromise does not occur may restore credibility and faith in the accession process as a whole. Delegates may examine if there are admissible exceptions to the stringent EU principles and standards candidate states are expected to closely adhere to, and if so, what criteria should be set out to distinguish such circumstances.

Staged Accession

A novel idea gaining traction is the partitioning of EU accession into various stages in order to revive the incentivisation of WB states to take concrete steps in EU accession. Staged accession could entail partial EU membership at different stages of the process. A progressive, conditional and phased method, with graduated access to the institutions, aiming at eventual complete integration would allow “differentiated” EU integration by breaking away from the traditional “in” or “out” perspective. Delegates should consider the various stages as well as the differing requirements and benefits gained for each respective stage. One such proposal would be the European Policy Centre (CEP) Template for Staged Accession to the EU. It removes the candidacy stage and replaces it with two accession stages, an initial and intermediate stage. Delegates are invited to explore this proposal and debate it in council as well.

Key Stakeholders

France

Previously in 2019, France had stalled accession proceedings, claiming that further EU reforms were needed to improve the accession process before more states could join.³⁰ This meant putting the accession of North Macedonia on hold, despite the French President Macron's prior promises to give the green light. Denmark and the Netherlands also joined France in calling for a revised enlargement methodology, which was soon delivered by the European Commission in 2020. Having been appeased with the new methodology, France has sought to direct attention away from accession to other alternative proposals.

Such alternatives include a pitch for a proposal for a new European Political Community that would allow countries such as Ukraine that are currently outside of the EU framework to be more closely involved with the EU, without the prospect of membership.³¹

Netherlands

The Netherlands, along with France, had championed for reform to the enlargement methodology. When the European Commission released the Revised Enlargement Methodology in 2020, the Netherlands became more open to enlargement. While it had previously blocked accession proceedings with Albania and North Macedonia, it soon gave them the greenlight.

The Netherlands now plays a role as a coalition builder, reaching across the aisle to two key blocs in the EU. This is through active engagement with member states that support faster enlargement and integration, as well as member states stricter on compliance with the Copenhagen Criteria.³²

The Netherlands also actively engages WB states. It does this through the Hague that provides support on rule of law reform, and through a bilateral support programme MATRA.

³⁰ "Macron's 'Non' to EU Enlargement." CEPS, October 22, 2019. <https://www.ceps.eu/macrons-non-to-eu-enlargement/>.

³¹ Brzozowski, Alexandra, Davide Basso, and Eleonora Vasques. "Macron Teases Alternative to EU Enlargement." www.euractiv.com. EURACTIV, May 9, 2022. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/macron-teases-alternative-to-eu-enlargement/>.

³² "The Netherlands as a Champion of EU Enlargement?" Accessed November 1, 2022. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/Policy_brief_The_Netherlands_as_a_champion_of_EU_enlargement_November_2020.pdf.

Croatia

As the last state to join the EU in 2013, as well as a WB state, Croatia seeks enlargement for the rest of the region. Croatia is an example of a successful WB state in attaining EU membership, and can provide insight to WB states on how effective reform can take place. In its accession negotiations, Croatia made significant progress in aligning with the Acquis relatively quickly. This was through strong political will and effective engagement with stakeholders.

However, post-accession Croatia continues to struggle with democratic backsliding and lasting reform. Croatia can then thus provide useful insight to the rest of the EU on how to better support WB states.

Serbia

Post-war from the 1990s, Serbia sought to join the EU as a means of economic recovery and saw joining the Union as the way forward. However, their path towards accession has been riddled with challenges. Alongside cultural and historical disagreements, Croatia and Serbia continue to dispute their international borders.

Aimed to protect Kosovo's largely Muslim population from ethnic cleansing, Kosovo broke away from Serbia following a guerrilla and NATO bombing campaign, unilaterally declaring its independence in 2008. The effects of this Kosovo-Serbia dispute stay on, where Serbia and 5 EU member states continue with lack of recognition of Kosovo's sovereignty, and Kosovo has yet to submit its application for candidacy in the EU.

There has been concern that Serbia may lose interest in European integration, given that its leaders have felt that they are under constant negative scrutiny by the West. Serbia is still seen as a crucial country for the WB region, for without its participation in the EU, the whole region risks failure.³³ The EU faces the un-ideal situation where Serbian leaders have the notion of increasing alienation from the bloc. Perceiving EU stalling as deliberate, Serbian politicians have signalled discontent against the EU.

In light of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Serbia, which holds strong socio-economic and political ties with Russia, is faced with increasing pressure from both Russian and Western powers to make clear their stance, and 'pick a side'. As the EU attempts to isolate Russia from the region, the ongoing conflict has become a test of increasing significance for Serbia in its accession proceedings. Serbia's president has remarked that the country is "in an exceptionally difficult situation" where "there is less

³³ "342. Greece, the Western Balkans and the European Union." Wilson Center. Accessed November 1, 2022. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/342-greece-the-western-balkans-and-the-european-union>.

understanding than ever for the position of our nation”. Serbia continues to refuse to align itself with EU sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, despite calls from the European Commission to do so.

Serbia thus faces backlash from the West over its reluctance to impose sanctions on Russia, as well as discontent from Russia as it voted in favour to condemn its actions in Ukraine during a UN resolution. While Serbia faces an increasingly conflicting position, it has become more receptive to external influence from China, as an alternative option to the EU and Russia.

Questions a Resolution Must Answer

1. How can the EU's overall enlargement policy be updated to account for rising external influence in the region that may oppose the EU's interests?
 - a. What proposals exist that can supplement enlargement and effectively engage WB states, while not replacing full EU membership?

2. How can the EU's accession framework be enhanced to reflect its commitment to the Western Balkan states for full membership?
 - a. How should support mechanisms be expanded and implemented for candidate states in the pre-accession period?
 - b. Should prevention and mitigation mechanisms be established for member states following accession?
 - i. Does incentivisation, positive or negative, play a key role in the ties between prospective member states and the EU?
 - ii. How should the EU and its members alike act on instances of backsliding and to what extent?
 - c. Are there any circumstances posing admissible exceptions to the accession process upheld by the EU?
 - d. How may past developments supplement present mechanisms in further enhancing accession proceedings?

Conclusion

Delegates should understand the depth of their country's stance. Generally, all EU members have made generic promises about their commitment to the WB states. However, going beyond the superficial layer of these promises reveals much more. Each member has a unique take on enlargement, as well as different concerns about admitting the WB states into the EU. Delegates should take the time to research what these concerns are, in order to execute their stance effectively.

As a WB state, delegates are encouraged to explore the difficulties their country faces in enacting reform. Each WB state also holds varying levels of both EU integration and Russian/Chinese cooperation, yet never outrightly shutting one side off. To better understand their country's stance, delegates should research and compare the various factors behind their country's policies. This will allow them to voice out their interests and better convince the EU to accommodate them.

Delegates are invited to explore in further detail the many proposals raised in this study guide, many of which are especially useful in formulating concrete solutions. Both EU and WB states should contribute meaningfully to this council, given the unique opportunity offered to WB states to shape policy.

Importantly, delegates are reminded of the nature of this council. While WB states are present to share their concerns and to consult with, it is EU states that ultimately decide upon policy. A Conclusion, the EUCO's version of a resolution, will be passed without the votes of WB states. WB states must effectively convince EU members of their concerns, while EU members ought to put their interests first.

Hence, the key to this debate is a lukewarm balance of pushing for one's interests while considering the overarching context. The EU could easily push its agenda through this council without the mandate of WB states, but this would risk WB states turning even more to foreign countries for support. WB states could decide to completely ditch the EU in favour of Russia and China, but the support the EU provides simply cannot not be found anywhere else.

It is not just the fate of Europe that lies in your hands, but ever more importantly, the fate of your country. Shape it how you wish.

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