

The European Perspective of the Four Western Balkan Countries

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Abstract

The integration of the Western Balkan countries with provides new members with many benefits in political as well as in economical part. The liberalization of inter-regional trade will help countries in the region to improve their mutual cooperation economically and politically. The membership in the European Union would motivate all countries in the western Balkans to improve and correct the existing problems and opened issues, and to actively undertake and participate for a better future of the Balkans.

Joining the European Union has been the main goal of the Western Balkan countries, no matter of their differences in their political and economical development for almost two decades. Therefore, European integration is almost recognized universally as the key strategy for achieving peace, stability and prosperity for the all countries of the Western Balkans.

Keywords: Western Balkans, European integration, stability, development

1. INTRODUCTION

The Western Balkans refers to the region of Southeastern European countries involved in the EU Stabilization and Association Process: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The fragility of the Balkans is one of the main objectives of the European Union agenda. The turbulent history of the region implies more concern about the preservation of democracy, peace, and stability. The development of the region requires a good political stability and reconciliation between countries with their neighbors.

The Balkans with its favorable geographic features and economic opportunities has attracted people since the ancient times due to geopolitical situation. It has always been a ground for co-existence of different culture, religions and peoples over a small territory, making the Western Balkans as a multicultural and multiethnic conflict region.

The fact of integration into European Union would save the Balkan region from further interethnic conflicts. The issues like, border issues, ethno – religious conflicts, cultural and historical tensions and legal disputes will be solved when the western Balkans countries will join the EU family.

One of the EU's greatest missions and challenges concerning external relations is the integration of the Western Balkan countries¹ into the Euro-Atlantic structures. There is a

mutual interest of EU member states and the Western Balkans to implement reforms and to form a framework for long-term stability which can counteract these negative trends. All the Western Balkan countries have become either candidate countries or potential candidate countries but the whole Balkan countries becoming part of EU is far from reality. The accession process requires both efforts from the candidate countries and the willingness of EU members and institutions to accept newcomers in their EU family integration and enlargement.

As a need for the integration for securing stability and economic development many countries in the region have become members of various new regional European integration like the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA), the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII) or the Danube Commission. But also they intend and wish to become members of the EU, and NATO.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper concentrates on secondary sources and analyzes the secondary data, previous research conducted on the field of integration, and what integration first occurs, whether the political integration precedes the economical integrations or they complement each other. The main focus of the paper is the idea behind the integration of western Balkans.

According to the previous literature, there is a lot of evidence that countries entering a certain regional or international integration benefit a lot from that membership. Both political and economical integration are very vital for countries in today's globalization activities. It is still arguable the question of whether political integration needs to take place in the beginning and to pave later the road to a potential economical integration. Some scholars argue that the political integration precedes the economical integration and the some other scholars think that in close economy countries the political integration helps businesses to enter there by removing the political barriers for conducting business there. But they also argue that in societies with market driven economies, it is easier to overcome even any political barriers that companies may encounter in the business activities.

The readings chosen for this paper were sourced from leading authors in the field, as well textbooks and electronic academic sources. Therefore, in order to understand the need for integration of the Balkans states, secondary information will be collected, and the data will be compared and analyzed. Finally, the research propositions will be submitted.

2.1 Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to find an answer to the following research questions about the integrations of the western Balkan countries, and the importance of political and economical integration of the Balkan region itself. Therefore, the paper will focus mainly on answering the following research questions:

1. Why are the opportunities and challenges of the western Balkans countries?
2. What are the advantages of forming regional and worldwide blocks of integration?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Bosnia and Herzegovina

The country is among those most behind (accompanying Kosovo) in its European and Euro-Atlantic integration since the beginning of transition. Among the main reasons for this situation

according to many analysts are specifics on the political system, established in the country since 1995 with the Dayton Agreement. These are two separate parts (entities) with very low interconnection - the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (this includes areas heavily populated by Bosniaks / Bosnians, Bosniaks /and Croats) and Republika Srpska (the Bosnian Serbs -dominate). The shortcomings of almost all systems (political, economic, social, security) of this artificial state structure were long known not only to specialists, but the mechanisms by which its founders created, can hardly be corrected. In this case the one that lags behind is the condition that all decisions related to Bosnia and Herzegovina, ought to be adopted by consensus. Because of the diametrically opposed interests of the two entities this is extremely slow and associated with a lot of work, and in some cases - virtually impossible.

When the situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is analyzed there should many important characteristics taken into account. Because of the role of European Union and especially of NATO in the events in Kosovo and around the one ethnicity – Republika Srpska demonstrates only *relative preference for European Integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina and strong negative attitude towards eventual membership of the country in the Organization of the North Atlantic Treaty*. This foreign policy orientation of the Bosnian Serbs, including at the highest political level, is a direct function of the proximity of the predominant population of Republika Srpska with the population of the Republic of Serbia. To change these attitudes will take many years, proper work, especially the creation of a range favorable circumstances. Even that does not guarantee a successful approximation of Sarajevo to Brussels.

Highly negative is the relation of the Republika Srpska, especially the strong personality at the moment - President Milorad Dodik, towards the latest Balkan country - Kosovo. Due to the above mentioned constitutional requirement that all decisions should be made by consensus, recognition of Kosovo's independence by Bosnia and Herzegovina becomes virtually impossible. Moreover, very often - not only in the media, appear suggestions and even claims that if Kosovo gets the status of an independent state, there are no reasons not to provide such status to the Republika Srpska. That may explain the negative feelings of Bosnian Serbs to NATO and the EU, and the countries that are members of them, especially those who supported the NATO intervention in 1999 and in 2008 quickly recognized the independence of Kosovo. These factors the European Union and NATO cannot undermine when they plan and implement their future activities related to the integration of the country into two unions. It will have a crucial impact on European and Euro-Atlantic integration not only of Republic of Srpska, but also of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole.

That's why to some extent the statements in the mentioned report of European Commission can be considered as kind, saying that Bosnia and Herzegovina continues in the application of the strategy for reforms in the public administration; that progress has been made (if only limited) in fight against corruption. This impression is reinforced by the European Commission which estimates that the reform of public administration does not get the necessary political support, and coordination between different administrations at all levels remains weak; that political attacks continue to adversely affect the independence of the judiciary, corruption is still widely widespread in the private and public sector remains a serious problem for the country.

The kind tone was however still kept by an expert and politician of lower level. On 9.10.2012 Tanja Faion, member of The Commission of EU exterior expressed concerns about the progress

of Bosnia and Herzegovina in European integration and the unfulfilled promises made during high-level dialogue on the accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the EU. "Obviously last year (2011 - M.N.B.) politicians have not shown enough willingness to sweeping reforms and citizens already feel the consequences of bad decisions by politicians," says T. Faion and adds that the internal situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina block its European path "(Oslobogjenje, October, 2012).

Immediately after the presentation of "strongly discouraging Progress Report on Bosnia and Herzegovina," deputy head of the EU Delegation in Sarajevo Renzo Davidi (Renzo Davididi) warns: "The European Union is concerned that Bosnia and Herzegovina can fall behind other countries. In this context, he said, the European Commission recommends Bosnia and Herzegovina to make additional, enormous efforts to achieve political consensus.

Even more explicit is the criticism of the head of the delegation and the same time EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Peter Sorensen, who, after meeting with the President of the Republic of Srpska Milorad Dodik said that politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina are responsible for everything that is stated in the annual EU report on Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Peter Sorensen there is a lack of political will for membership in the EU. (Faion cited in Oslobogjenje, October, 2012).

Probably it is a coincidence that almost at the same time in Sarajevo was held a two-day international conference on "Constitutional and legislative changes", organized by the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the support of the Foundation "Konrad Adenauer" and the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. We mention this forum, because it involves many scientists whose opinions deserve no less attention to the opinions of politicians. An interesting comment in that sense offers the quoted Sarajevo daily "Oslobodjenje" on 31/10/2012. "Accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the European Union is topic of discussion for many years now on which opinions are divided, according to the commentary. While some are for accession think that our accession to the Union at this time will bring us unforeseen consequences. Such an example are Romania and Bulgaria as states that went unprepared in the community, going through consequences, and when it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, as some think, things could be worse. " "Such, as we are now, for us certainly won't be better to enter the EU, and will only occur a mess. Young people will try to escape somewhere and we won't be able to save those basic principles and attitudes, which they ask for. We will become poorer, and will descend another step down ... *With such leadership at all levels, an approach with such awareness of Bosnia and Herzegovina will certainly take another 15-20 years to join EU-* says sociologist from Banja Luka Ivan Sijakovic (Oslobogjenje, October, 2012).

Different positions are stated by a professor from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo Dr Asim Mujkikj. According to him, the Western Balkans need EU for safety reasons first. Here however it comes to *Euro-Atlantic* integration and for the accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina in NATO. But the EU is needed also for social and economical aspect, for Bosnia and Herzegovina aspires to be democratic country state and it won't be wrong to be found in a democratic society. When it comes to negative things, they refer to Europe itself, because she obviously has a problem with the Western Balkans.

„In Europe, continues A.Mujkikj, enter stable nation-states, but the situation in Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina makes it obvious that such a principle does not apply. This

applies to disputes in Europe itself. What can be done with such countries ...?Irresponsibility, corruption and lack of vision in any area of the economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not bring anything encouraging for EU integration, as long as we remain in this state, our country will not enter the EU unless such things are cleared " , he said.

Interesting is the opinion of Professor of Philosophy at Sveučilište (also Croats call University) in Mostar Mile Lasić. "Twenty wasted years after the war, he says, without the process of approaching the EU and NATO, this country (Bosnia and Herzegovina - M.N.B.) remains "appendicitis", eaten by the internal misunderstandings. EU to us is a process of self transformation, prerequisite of not being a failed state, but to have a stable democracy.. What we have today is nothing but a demokracija "(KM - M.N.B.).

The culmination of discussions was not only with the report of the European Commission but also the European and Euro-Atlantic perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was the flash visit to Sarajevo, of the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, accompanied by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Catherine Ashton (KM - M.N.B.) This is not a protocol mistake, but for obvious desire to emphasize the leading role of Washington, not of Brussels). The visit continued only a few hours in meetings that were held with senior international officials (Valentin Inzko and Peter Sørensen), members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Information on the meeting is quite poor, but there is no doubt that Clinton and Ashton pointed out "the urgent need for political leaders to serve the interests of the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to make the necessary reforms." Hosts were asked to consider the importance the international community has given to the Dayton agreement, to respect this document and not question about the future of the country. Particular emphasis is placed on the need to implement urgent reforms in all spheres. In front of reporters who accompanied Secretary of State, a senior U.S. official said: "We are disappointed by the fact that the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina didn't put in the first place the country's interests". Hillary Clinton herself was no less harsh when she said "it is totally unacceptable to conclude that 17 years after the end of the war some question the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina". U.S. highest diplomat stressed that the best way to stability in Bosnia Herzegovina is its accession to the EU and NATO because "the EU and NATO provide the best opportunity for stability and prosperity." "Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be a member of the EU and NATO. This will ensure a brighter future of the country, especially the youth. "In this context H. Clinton said that the U.S. and the EU have the same opinion when it comes to the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Euro-Atlantic integration (Clinton, H. cited in Utrinski vesnik, December, 2012).

3.2. Serbia

After a long delay in the accession process of Serbia to the European Union in 2012 was noted an impressive progress in this regard. In March of the same year, the European Council gave Serbia the status of candidate country. This act proved too favorable for the country. For two years (2011-2012) the European Union gave more than 2.2 billion euros in grants and 5.8 billion euros in the form of soft loans. Assessed at the same time with other benefits, these amounts are accepted by some analysts as next "carrot" after many "sticks" that Serbia received over many years under Slobodan Milošević. Among other authors there is still a tend to look at the

constant trend, which supports the conclusion on better understanding and cooperation between Brussels and Belgrade.

Our personal opinion coincides with the second thesis, because it is supported by the contents of the progress report on Serbia in 2012 towards the European Union (EU reports, October, 2012). Overall, these reports are prepared with a "matrix" that is the same for all countries:

first the achievements are highlighted, after that emphasizing (sharper or softer - depending on the specific country and the specific situation) the gaps and unresolved problems. That's the case with the progress report on Serbia that is considered here. It was concluded for example that the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2012 are "competitive, professionally organized and calm in the country", the the previous and the new government worked actively to implement the strategic task - the European integration of the country, after which immediately is passed to the comments and recommendations: progress in the area of human and political rights is "known", but in public administration, civilian control over the security services, the reform of the judicial system, fight against corruption and other similar - "insignificant". To restore the confidence of citizens, governments need to discuss additional measures to strengthen the independence, competence, responsibility and efficiency of the judiciary ... To address these challenges, it is necessary to adopt a new strategy for reform of the judicial system and action plan for achieving this strategy, based on functional revaluation of justice ". Conclusion of insignificant progress in the fight against corruption is supplemented with preciseness that the government has not yet completed a national strategy to combat corruption for the period 2012 - 2016, and the corresponding action plan for this area. Due to these flaws corruption is still prevalent in many areas and it's a "big problem". The assessment of "some progress" regarding human rights in practice revoked by the claim that violence and threats against journalists continue to cause concern.

In light of the problems that are discussed in our research, of special interest are issues of interethnic relations, the situation in the municipalities of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja; implementation of the Dayton-Paris Peace agreement, regional cooperation, bilateral relations, especially relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Therefore we think it will be useful to pay a little attention to each of these topics.

The European Commission does not refer serious complaints regarding ethnic relations. They are assessed positively. The province of Vojvodina as interethnic situation continues to be good, but with different ethnic incidents. The situation in the municipalities of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja generally continues to be stable, although there are "sporadic incidents". Situation of the Roma is "somehow improved."

Some curious details are seen in the pages dedicated to the situation in Sandzak. It is regarded as "generally stable". Belgrade is still (even overly) sensitive to this issue and that explains why it is not only the media, but also serious and profound analysts immediately focused their attention precisely to this troubled round. In a kind of "mini discussion", Belgrade daily "Politika" published a few posts which are three of the possible aspects of the EC recommendation Serbia to resolve issues with the Bosniak National Council, to provide conditions for it's work on religious and for professors of religion. Analysts put special emphasis on the report said "unequal representation of Bosniaks in government, recognizing the Bosnian language and the problems of the Islamic community." Here are opinions of:

1. *Laszlo Varga* Union of Hungarians of Vojvodina, vice-president of the Commission for European Integration of Parliament of Serbia, is convinced that it is not the first comment of the issue of Bosniaks "in the previous report was mentioned the problem for Bosniak National Council, but then it had no other details". L. Varga still doesn't consider that the EC report sets some new conditions because "respect for the rights of minority communities" is not just that old. It is one of the main conditions for the EU. According to the MP, the EU insists on pursuing adopted laws in this sense can be considered the problem of the Bosniak National Council, because it is the only national council, which is not constituted after the elections and it is undoubtedly a problem.

2. *Mero Omerovik*, president of the commission for human and minority rights, assesses the formulation of the report as "conclusion of the problem regarding the Bosniak National Council and the relations of Islamic Community, in fact it is about the religious education and the election of teachers in this area. The newspaper stops especially in the next part of the answer of Omerovik " These are no new conditions at all. Everybody knows the conditions that Serbia should fulfill. It's not good if someone tries to add eventually new condition on the notes of the report of EC. That would be untrue and with bad intentions.

3. *Esad Djudjevic*, president of the BNC, also, doesn't think that it's about a new condition, though some details are mentioned for the first time. He points out that these details in the report are a result of the activities of the council, respectively of the appeal against former Prime Minister Mirko Cvetkovic, against some MPs and the director of RTS related to deprivation of the opportunity to use the collective rights of minorities guaranteed by the Constitution and laws. "These are complaints regarding the use of language, the right to education and information in the Bosnian language and the protection and preservation of cultural heritage. Djudjevic claims that the mentioned independent institutions responded positively to their complaints, and the EC report is the result of that. He does not think that this is a new condition. "Nothing of that sort had ever been in the reports, it appears for the first time, but I do not see a condition in it and accept as correcting errors and giving the Bosnians possibility to enjoy their collective rights "(Cekarac, 2012).

No less interest showed the EC comments for relations between Serbia and Kosovo. "Serbia has made some progress towards visible and steady improvement of relations with Kosovo" is written in the report. Simultaneously conclude that "Serbia continues to contest the unilateral proclamation of Kosovo's independence and actively opposes its recognition of third countries, but since March 2011 participates in the dialogue with Pristina. " Out of the large number of publications we will separate two. The first one is the already quoted from newspaper "Politika" (2012). The author of the article claims that the visit of William Hague in Belgrade, the head of British diplomacy, is the debut of the first echelon diplomatic initiative in the West, who now wants to encourage the government of Belgrade to make additional compromises in relations with Pristina ". It is also mentioned the visit to Belgrade of "US-European couple - Hillary Clinton and Catherine Ashton, who - according to unnamed Washington and Brussels circles, inform Serbian officials that if by the beginning of December the dialogue continues between Belgrade and Pristina and if there is made quick progress on other technical matters at the end of the year the European Council could determine Serbia a conditional date to start negotiations with the European Union. Expressed is the view of a former Serbian ambassador and editor of the magazine "Challenges of European Integration", according to which it is possible for Serbia to

gain not only a specific date to start accession negotiations with the EU but also other "bonuses" if of course the cards are played well." Although the political priorities of the EU and the U.S. in the Balkans is Bosnia and Herzegovina, they cannot afford to "lose" Serbia, which will then be isolated and will be oriented towards Russia. Things become clearer if we consider the message of the British Embassy in Belgrade after visiting Foreign Minister William Hague. In this document has been said that the next steps of Serbia should be "implementation of the agreements reached earlier, the execution of parallel structures for Kosovo security and opening of parallel structures for health and education.

Events after the European Commission report the commentators of Deutsche Welle Ivica Petrovic and Alexander Metodieiev evaluate them from the different angle of observation (see <http://www.dw.de/референдумот-за-ев-би-бил-автогол-за-србија/a-16250017>). If it happens the EU to insist in the recognition of Kosovo as a condition for the continuation of European integration, this solution could bring Serbian citizens to a referendum. Such a policy would have a high price, is written in their comments. Recalls that if policy of Belgrade "both Kosovo and the EU" failed, "especially after the German proposal for Serbia to establish good neighborly relations with Kosovo. If this requirement is retained, it is not excluded to schedule the referendum question" Kosovo or Europe? ... "Government officials give contradictory statements on the subject. At one point say that there will be no referendum, and then say that the referendum remains the last possible means of expression of the democratic will of the people ". Quoted is the opinion of the Director of the Centre for Foreign Policy Aleksandra Joksimovic that "If the answer of the referendum is NO for the European Union, what means that for Serbia? It's necessary to address the possible outputs in this context there should be a plan B. Of course the same applies if the answer is the opposite.

Commenting similar outcomes, the already mentioned Professor and former ambassador of Serbia in France, Predrag Simik is convinced that the Plan B already exists. If Serbia rejects EU, says Simik, they will connect even stronger with Russia and will try on this base to build its position. Practically, it means that Serbia would proclaim not only war, but political neutrality and that would be official policy. In that sense Serbia most probably would continue what Vuk Jeremic (former Minister of exterior of Serbia, momentarily president of the Parliament of ON b.m – M.N.B), and that's strengthening ties with the non-aligned. In other words, Serbia will be highly risked of isolation of Europe and this would push her towards Russia, China, the non-aligned, regardless of the length and rationality of these decisions.

More often in Serbia is discussed the topic which was taboo – possible division of Kosovo. Similar option now it's not rejected even from government officials. At the same high level, in Kosovo, this is unacceptable. It's now hard to foresee how things are going to flow, but it's obvious that there is a complex diplomatic battle going on, and the main actors are not in Belgrade and Prishtina, but in Brussels and Washington instead. In the report of EC again it is paid attention to the regional cooperation and bilateral relations like a crucial element in the process of bringing Serbia closer to EU. Generally assessed, Serbia has good bilateral relations with other countries in the process of broadening with neighbor countries members of EU, it's written in the document. (authors of the report M.N.B) However, it seems that we should not underestimate some details that cannot correct that grade, but still can make it more clear. Relations with Croatia for example are stable, but there are a number of unsolved issues; with Macedonia relations are continuing to be good, but there is no solution of the dispute between

two Orthodox Churches; and almost in the same way are considered the relations Montenegro-Serbia. There are the good traditional relations between Romania and Serbia, without forgetting the not-so-old reaction of Bucharest related to the minorities (not only the Roma). At the moment, there are no indications that EU and Serbia are worried from the activities of Bucharest, but an eventual inter tension in Romania with participation of compact Hungarian minority in the country could reflect in the relations between two countries, by means a double complication of Serbia's access in the EU.

The two other member states of EU – neighbors of Serbia, Bulgaria and Hungary, also have their minorities in the territory of Serbia (the Hungarian one is especially larger) but for now Sofia and Budapest do not put any obstacles for the integration of Serbia in the EU and all the time they declare their support in this direction.

We will finish this short overview with few sentences for the last visit of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Serbia (31.10.2012). It happened during the visit of Western Balkans. Though the visit in Belgrade lasted only few hours, it conveyed several important messages. In the first comment of the journalist J. Cerovina it is written exactly the following: „Brussels and Washington won't ask from Serbia to recognize the Independence of Kosovo, but they will insist to implement agreements between Belgrade and Serbia, in order to normalize the lives of people in Kosovo, that's how is the basic message of the meeting between the Prime Minister and the President of Serbia, Ivica Dacic and Tomislav Nikolic and the US State Secretary Hilary Clinton and the high representative of EU Catherine Ashton.

Clinton and Ashton praised all that what Serbia is doing on its European path and encouraged to continue this kind of policy. "The high level guests, as Dacic said after the meeting, did not come to Belgrade to set ultimatums or conditons". K. Ashton declared that the dialogue with Prishtina – known as normalization, does not mean recognizing Kosovo, we understand the constitutional and political problems, but this dialogue presupposes that the two governments make possible to their people the realization of their interests (Cerovina, 2012)

Just a day earlier, however, during her journey H. Clinton said that "as a U.S. red lines are defined two positions:

1. U.S. gives strong support to Kosovo as an independent state and its sovereignty and territorial integrity ",
2. Serbia cannot join the EU " if supporting (in northern Kosovo) its security forces and what is called parallel institutions." It is stated also that European leaders have clearly demonstrated that no state may enter into EU without recognized boundaries, which, in addition means, without proper control and where there are problems with smuggling, corruption and regional tensions." For the meaning of these messages there are some analyzes, which are claimed to be a platform for negotiations in Belgrade (Misic, n.d).

The U.S. Ambassador to Belgrade Michael Kirby argues that the visit is not pressure on the government of Serbia. According to him, the U.S. and EU have equal access on the future of Serbia. The head of the EU mission in Serbia Vensan Degert evaluated as "excellent" the fact that H. Clinton and K. Ashton came together, especially after a recent meeting between Prime Minister Dacic and Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci with C. Ashton in Brussels. According to K.. Vensan Serbia's accession depends on a key point - the visible progress of relations between Belgrade and Pristina (Cpajak, 2012).

The fact that H. Clinton was accompanied by senior EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton is interpreted as a confirmation that it was a "mutual project in which the main role, however, will be played by Brussels" (Misić, n.d.). We tried, but didn't find declarations of high representatives that support such a conclusion.

Even without that blurry picture the situation is further complicated by some politicians of the "second echelon", which obviously have statements on their heads different than their bosses'. The edition of "Politika" of 31.10.2012 was published an interview with Alexander Vulin, Director of the Office of the Government of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, which says: "Serbia is obliged to act in accordance with international agreements. But the opinion of this office and the government is that negotiations (with Brussels - M.N.B.) have flaws and we insist to repair them. Serbs in northern Kosovo and Metohija should have a committee member for negotiations with the EU ... The main question is which law will apply. Cabinet insists it to be the law of UNMIK, which is the only legitimate under Resolution 1244. "This position, however, is categorically rejected by Kosovo politicians (Pesić, n.d.).

3.3. Croatia

Unexpectedly in the mid October the topic of its European perspective became very interesting. Until then it was logical to think that Zagreb will calmly wait the accession of the country in the EU. The reasons for this were few:

1. Croatia was already a member of NATO and lived with the feeling that successfully overcame the hardest obstacles on the way to Brussels, and its membership in North – Atlantic alliance is a serious prerequisite for the next step – full membership in the EU.

2. Not only had the official decision for joining the EU, but it was also known the date of the official ceremony – first July 2013.

3. The hardest problem in the pre-accession phase – the territorial dispute with Slovenia for the Piran Peninsula, was successfully solved. With the participation of Brussels and under the decisive pressure of Washington, Ljubljana decided not to open that issue anymore. The latter problem, related to Ljubljanska banka, seemed easy to overcome. It is about a former bank of Yugoslavia with headquarters in Slovenia. The dispute was about 170 mil euro, which according to Zagreb, the bank of Ljubljana, owes to the Croatian savers. As it can be seen, the amount is relatively small to think that it is impossible to be solved.

4. The process of ratification was very normal and without any complication.

5. The report of EC on 10.10.2012 shouldn't have unnerved the Croatian political leadership. It really showed that Croatia still hasn't fulfilled the requirements in the ten fields, including exclusively the reforms in privatization, but the assessment that the EC opinion is positive, made it harder.

And then something unexpected happened. Germany - the country that was most active defender of Croatia since its recognition as an independent state, a surprising warning that Croatia is not ready for membership. The shot was more difficult because it came from a politician in a very important position - President of the Bundestag Norbert Lammert, who said: "We have to stop the process of EU enlargement, including postponing of planned for next year (2013 - M.N.B.) accession of Croatia, because of the experience with Bulgaria and Romania.

It was followed by a sharp reaction of the main opposition force in Germany - the Social Democrats and the statement by the spokesman of the German government as a result of the

situation. (See Financial Times, 201.2012; Germany against enlargement of EU <http://www.megeanews.bg/ЕСнови/табид/1642/Article/d/2045.aspx>).

Just few days later, Croatian Foreign Minister Vesna Pusic met with his German counterpart Guido Westerwelle and said that all the problems related to this topic are solved. In a similar way spoke Croatian President Ivo Josipovic (Novilist, 2012).

Soon however it became clear that the expectations of the first Croatian diplomat and head of state of Croatia, were too optimistic. Again comments started to be heard- both domestically and foreign, that the country is faced with growing skepticism about EU membership. More important however is another fact. In early November, during the debates in the British Parliament, dedicated to ratification of the accession of Croatia to the EU, MPs from the ruling party (the Conservatives) and the opposition Labour party, said that Croatia risks turning into door for traffickers and illegal immigrants. There were expressed doubts that the Croatian police won't deal with these and other hazards. One of the deputies was still more categorical. "We get strong warning signals that Croatia is still not in a good position to enter the European Union," he said (Utrinski vesnik, November, 2012). In this situation is easily explained the interest which expected the visit of the Secretary of State in Zagreb. Mrs Clinton met separately with President Ivo Josipovic, Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic and Foreign Minister Vesna Pusic and emphasized throughout the U.S. "strongly support" for Croatia's EU accession on 01.07.2013 year. (Klinton,H cited in Utrinski vesnik, 2012).

Summasummarum: Taking into account the sharp reaction of Germany against the claim of Norbert Lamert and especially the categorical support of US State Secretary Hilary Clinton, it can be surely said that Croatia will join the EU family on the confirmed date 01.07.2013. With nearly the same confidence, it can be said the next country that will join the EU will have that chance one or two decades later.

3.4. Montenegro

It is one of three praised Western Balkan countries of the EC (along with Albania and Macedonia), but after closer reading of the report is the conclusion that it is the "excellent" of the group. The high "grade" is not surprising and can be explained by two main reasons:

1. USA and Europe (especially the EU) owe Montenegro, specifically the powerful man Milo Djukanovic who in Podgorica gave invaluable assistance in the final discrediting (even some authors use the word "demonize") of Slobodan Milosevic and his removal from power, the decomposing the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the creation of artificial subject, state union of Serbia and Montenegro (contemptuously called "Solanija" for active participation of Javier Solana in its birth) to the proclamation of Montenegro as an independent state in 2006. The help of Podgorica began in the late 90's of the last century - the beginning of a relatively discreet, and later - quite pointedly.

The most important outcome of this process was the final foreign policy reorientation of Montenegro. To a large extent it rejected the traditional devotion to his protector – Russia, and today is pro-European and pro-American among Western-oriented countries (including Croatia), up from Bosnia and Herzegovina (where local Serbs are prone to rusofilia, Bosnians look to Ankara and Croats followed the policy of Zagreb) and Albania (where the undoubted pro-Americanism is followed by sympathy towards Turkey and France).

2. Regardless of its small territory and population, Montenegro has a very important strategic position as an Adriatic country and that makes it especially attractive for USA. Except that, the expected solid American accommodation in Montenegro (without excluding the military presence, similar like in Kosovo), will fade the positions of Russia, which in the last years did more than enough by entering in some of the most important spheres of Montenegrin economy (e.g. tourism).

The progress report of EC for Montenegro in its European Integration is the first of this type. That's why every serious analysis should take into account few important circumstances.

1. The short period since the beginning of negotiations on Montenegro's EU and the development of EC. Montenegro declared its independence in June 2006. Negotiations began on 29 June and the EC report was completed in late September or early October. There was not, is not and will not ever be in the future other Western Balkan country that went through such a long way for such a short time. Hence it is a special relationship of Brussels with Podgorica and very indicative precedent. The explanation for that rush is the result of negotiations conducted in the time when Montenegro was part of FRY (later - the state union of Serbia and Montenegro), some authors define as "pretty much frivolous." Most likely the real reason for high speed stresses already mentioned the role of Milo Djukanovic for the removal of Slobodan Milosevic from power and the collapse of the FRY.

2. Completely according to the expectations, the report has more positive estimations. In the document it's noted the progress in establishing a functional market economy, improving the prospects of Montenegro to take and successfully fulfill its obligations arising from EU membership, good fulfillment of the political criteria for EU accession.

3. At the same time as somehow said that negotiations for the future membership of countries in the EU will be focused primarily on the evidence of the irreversibility of the reforms and the rule of law.

4. In the same way it's just indicated the need to fight corruption in the higher echelons of the government and organized crime. Right here is concentrated the sharpest criticism of opposition parties in Montenegro, NGOs in the country and abroad. Their accusations are directed not only to the high echelons of power, and the highest point of political and economic power - the sovereign leader of Montenegro, which manages nearly two decades - Milo Djukanovic. The positive attitude of the European Commission can also be characterized by a kind of precedent of it's type.

5. Even more impressive is the third precedent - the launch of negotiations for accession of Montenegro to the EU back in the day when state and government heads of EU member states in their meeting at the highest level in the summer of 2012 to accept the appropriate solution. Although the motives of the aforementioned leaders to understand, the above solution can hardly be considered a

full and fair enough of good purpose. Therefore it won't be met with approval by the public in other Western countries, who were waiting for their accession to the EU.

"Conclusion" in one sentence: If any unforeseen circumstances appear (which currently seems impossible), Montenegro will be the first (but not last to stay off) state of the Western Balkans, which will be admitted to the European Union after Croatia.

4. CONCLUSION:

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, practice once again is not in line with theoretical constructs. The process of Euro-Atlantic integration "stuck" when the agenda came with the question of admission of other countries in the Western Balkans. Their Euro-Atlantic perspective clearly complicated it. It became clear that *Bosnia and Herzegovina* has virtually no chance of success, until it solves the extremely complicated internal problems: territorial (presence of two confronted entities), ethnic (constant tension between Bosnians, Serbs and Croats), economic, social. Currently the country is not able to deal with any of them (even having sincere desire) despite strong pressure from the world's most influential factors, firstly most of the United States. It should be taken into account the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a protectorate, causing additional complications, including formal and legal.

Easier forecasting at the moment is the Euro-Atlantic future of *Montenegro*. This opinion is confirmed by yet unknown acceleration of all pre and affordable procedures. Issues and problems that are required for the other countries of the Western Balkans are disregarded. That's why the prognosis looks convincing enough that Montenegro will be the next NATO and then the EU member.

These arguments for Euro-Atlantic fate of the Western Balkans are totally valid of their European perspective. The current practice (without being officially formulated and argued) confirms that accession to the European Union is preceded by full membership in the Organization of the North Atlantic Treaty. Currently there are no serious indications that this practice will be changed. So here are just some added details.

The second problem is common to all countries of the Western Balkans: weaknesses in the judiciary, corruption in the higher echelons of power, lack of effective fight against organized crime. Because of that it's easily explained the sensitivity of the European Union to these problems and its intention not to allow import of the problems of the Western Balkans on its territory. That's why likely the EU accession of the new countries of the Balkan region will be seriously removed.

It makes sense to immediately raise the issue of Euro-Atlantic and European perspective of the *region as a whole*. The conclusion that if the just given pessimistic forecast will be realized, it will remain in the European periphery and will continue to be marginalized, not even off to become a kind of ghetto.

Marginalization and ghettoization of the Western Balkans can bring some benefits to non-European countries, alliances, informal groups and other similar. For the development and modernization of the European idea and of European Union yet it may prove fatal. Because we want the final of this research to sound optimistic, hoping that all of Europe - as the part that is united in the EU and the other two (those who are rich enough and feel completely comfortable and without members of the EU, and others - who tend to fully valuable and full integration with its structures) will find the strength not only to deal with the worst crisis in its history, and even out of it even stronger, more unified and more solidarized.

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