Master's Thesis

Post-Graduate Studies in Politics and Economics of Contemporary Eastern and South-Eastern Europe

Does civil society strength facilitate EU accession for the Balkans? Lessons from Slovenia and Croatia

Yogambigai Rajendra
MPE16011

Supervisor:
Professor Ioannis Armakolas
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Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies
UNIVERSITY OF MACEDONIA

Abstract

This thesis centres on the Balkans' accession to the European Union by placing focus on civil society strength. In order to determine if civil society strength does indeed facilitate the countries' accession to the European Union, case studies were conducted on Slovenia and Croatia's paths to accession. As a result of the findings obtained, it was concluded that civil society along with the strength and significance of its efforts did indeed facilitate the accession of Slovenia and Croatia and hence is likely to do so for the rest of the Balkans as well. The paper also concludes with discussions on Serbia which has commenced accession negotiations most recently as of December 2015. The chapter on Serbia also attempts to highlight areas for the country to improve on as part of analysing its current state of civil society and its strength in facilitating the country's accession to the European Union.

Keywords

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The European Union is by far one of the largest and most influential actors on the world's political and economic arena. The European Union is made up of member states in Europe where the six founding members of the Union in 1957 were Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Several other West European countries joined after 1973. Following the collapse of their regimes in 1989, many former communist countries from Central and Eastern Europe became members of the European Union in 2 of the entity's largest enlargement waves, namely in 2004 and 2007. In 2013, Croatia became the 28th and most recent country to join the body (European Commission, 2016). According to the Treaty of the European Union, any European country may apply for membership if it respects the body's democratic values and is committed to promoting them (European Commission, 2016). The accession process is completed when candidate countries conclude their accession negotiation chapters to a sufficient and satisfactory level as deemed by the European Commission in addition to fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria. Candidate countries are able to achieve this by means of the government or by other actors including civil society. Civil society is generally envisaged as a vehicle of social capital and a promoter of positive social change (Bežovan & Matančević, 2011, p. 39). Hence, by encouraging certain values and norms, the involvement of a sturdy civil society can be expected to positively influence the candidate country in its efforts to eventually successfully accede to the European Union. Also, the process of harmonization with the standards of the European Union is a great challenge for aspirant countries and therefore there is a clear demand for a greater inclusion of civil society in order to provide expertise as well as ensure accountability and openness of the process (Drakic & Kajganovic, 2012, p. 2). As such, the main proposition of this paper believes that civil society strength does facilitate the European Union accession process for the Balkans. Research findings to support this proposition will be drawn from case studies from countries Croatia and Slovenia.

In addition to this, Chapter 1 will provide an insight on several concepts such as the Balkans and the enlargement of the European Union, civil society and the European Union and civil society in the Balkans before ending with a brief explanation of the research objectives and methodology to be applied in this paper. Chapter 2 will critique existing literature concerning the civil society in the Balkans and its contribution to accession to the European Union. Chapter 3 provides a theoretical introductory overview to the concept of civil society in a bid to explain the term itself and its relation to relevant concepts such as democratization and Europeanization. The core of this paper is present in both Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 presents the research findings obtained from Croatia and Slovenia while Chapter 5 summarizes the lessons learnt and identifies the implications of the findings for future accessions to the European Union from the Balkan region. Also, before concluding the thesis in Chapter 7, Chapter 6 of the paper opens up discussions on the strength of civil society in Serbia, the newest Balkan state to have commenced accession negotiation chapters with the European Union as of December 2015.

1.1 Balkans and Enlargement of European Union

According to the European Union's Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn (2005), the Balkans are seen in the European political arena as a region full of instability and transition, far away from a real proud face of the continent but as 'a piece of land that is neither Europe nor is it outside Europe'. This being said, amongst the member states of the European Union, enlargement is still perceived as the best way to overcome the legacy of ethnic, social, political, and religious conflict in the Balkans, and to anchor long-term stability and peace in the Union (Balfour, 2015). As such, in recognition of the regional turmoil in the Balkans over the last two decades, the European Union has introduced additional conditionality for the Balkan candidate countries prior to accession. The enhanced conditionality as stated in the Stabilisation and Association Agreement introduced by the European Union uniquely for the Balkans varies from country to country. This has undoubtedly made the accession to the European Union increasingly demanding for the countries of the Balkans (Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group, 2014). The Council of the European Union (2013) had clearly stated in its general affairs council meeting on 17 December 2013 that "regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations are essential elements of the stabilisation and association process" and reaffirms that the Stabilisation and Association Agreement remains the common framework for the European Union relations with the Balkans up to its accession. Through this, it is evident that the European Union acknowledges the regional turmoil that the Balkans have been susceptible to from their recent history of war but also stresses the need for the countries to put in the effort to resolve these issues prior to joining the European Union not only for the purpose of resolving disputes but also for the desire for good bilateral and interregional stability. One lesson of the 2004 enlargement was the disappointment surrounding the accession of Cyprus as a divided island. Although the Copenhagen criteria do not deal with the status of national borders and internal disputes, it has made the European Union more conscious of the potential problems of the accession of new members with unresolved frontier and internal disputes, especially in the Balkans where some of these issues still persist to this very day.

Additionally, there is a criticism that the Stabilisation and Association Agreement is a "one-size fits all" policy where it is assumed that each region of the Balkans can be strengthened and Europeanized in the same framework (Wakelin, 2003). However, it is important to look at the individual features of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement signed for each country which clearly defines and emphasizes the differing aspects that the countries should work on to fulfil the conditionality that is required to accede to the European Union. Hence, while critics may argue that the Stabilisation and Association Agreement is a "one-size fits all" policy, the European Union places different degrees of emphasis on the same set of matters that constitute the conditionality. The specific areas in the conditionality that have been given more attention and emphasis are dependent on the aspirant country's specific needs and areas for improvement pertaining to accession. Therefore, by fulfilling to a sufficient and satisfactory level, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in addition to the Copenhagen criteria, the Balkans then have a better chance at acceding to the European Union. Despite the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker ruling out any possible form of expansion of the European Union during his tenure, Montenegro being the front-runner from the region to join as a member state and Serbia's commencement of accession negotiation talks as of December 2015 does

show that enlargement of the European Union is not entirely off the cards but perhaps only being postponed till a more favorable and feasible time for both the candidate countries concerned and the entire European Union (European Commission, 2014). Moreover, it must also be acknowledged that realistically no state can join the European Union within Juncker's tenure which then gives enlargement the earliest possible date of 2020, should Juncker not be re-elected as President of the European Commission.

While skeptics may view this statement by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker as a negative one towards enlargement prospects of the European Union, this can also be seen as one that allows the Balkans to "buy time" and make necessary changes in order to better be a candidate worth consideration by the European Commission for enlargement. After all, the European Commission seeks to have a satisfactory enlargement instead of an expansion with perfect members (Balfour & Stratulat, 2015). This shows that the European Commission understands that it is unrealistic a view to expect perfect fulfilment of the stringent accession criteria from aspirant countries. Incidentally, in 2006 where the European Union's 'renewed consensus' introduced strict conditionality at all stages of the accession negotiations and in 2012, it adopted a 'new approach', under which the chapters of the negotiations concerning fundamental rights and justice, freedom and security were treated as a priority (Balfour & Stratulat, 2015). Thus, it is not surprising that the countries of the Balkans feel that they are subjected to stricter rules than preceding applicants. The new approach is the result of the European Union's failure in the past to effectively handle the conditionality of membership. Balfour and Stratulat (2015) see this from a viewpoint shared by the European Union itself where the Balkans are held to high standards as part of an approach that is seen as a win-win situation where enhanced conditionality can help to turn applicant countries of the region into worthy member states, but can also ensure to a large extent that enlargement does not backfire internally in the same way that the 2007 expansion to Bulgaria and Romania did. When Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union on 1 January 2007, shortcomings remained regarding judicial reform and the fight against corruption while in the case of Bulgaria, the fight against organised crime. Moreover, the political and economic situation in both countries post-accession, has seen little improvement, much to the disappointment of citizens and the European Commission. Moreover, during the 2014 Greek Presidency in the Council of the European Union, it was further reaffirmed that the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit remains as the political agenda that the European Union pursues towards the Balkans which can be seen as a positive sign that the European Union will, in time to come, indeed make good of its promises in the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit (Armakolas & Triantafyllou, 2015, p.132).

However, this expectation must also be viewed with caution since at present, there are on-going Brexit negotiations with the European Union which ultimately affects all member states and also potential entrants' accession negotiation processes. Perhaps, a set of more and stricter conditionality may be further imposed on candidate countries or the accession process may be further extended to either deal with Brexit negotiations or to prevent a similar breakaway case from member states in future.

Additionally, the economic crisis, 2015 refugee crisis and migration crisis from the 2004 and 2007 enlargement waves are part of the current problems plaguing the European Union. Coupled with a rise in populist and nationalist groups, the supranational body is challenged with the need to instill its identity while the context of European Union enlargement is also constantly changing as a result. As such, the last thing policy makers of the European Union want at the moment is to remind their body of voters that more Balkan states will become member states too. Nonetheless, this being said, the European Commission insist that the enlargement promise given to the Balkans in 2003 as part of the Thessaloniki Summit is still in place. Hence, the Copenhagen criteria and the enhanced conditionality listed in the Stabilisation and Association Agreement are just part of the matters that the Balkans have to cope with in its accession process to the European Union.

1.2 Civil society and the European Union

The European Union endorses democracy and embraces Europeanization while also believing that civil society can help achieve these two elements by bringing candidate countries closer to this expectation and standards of the supranational entity (European Parliament, 2016). Civil society is a concept with various meanings and connotations. Some stress the importance of civil society as a realm free of state intervention while others underline the role of civil society as an intermediary between citizens and the state. Regardless of how civil society is understood, it always has a positive implication which suggests that civil society is advantageous to democracy is widely shared by scholars and practitioners alike.

Democratization refers to the transition from an existing regime to a more democratic regime. As the European Economic and Social Committee (2013) asserts, a strong civil society is one of the pillars of the house of democracy. This view is further supported by Bernhard (1993) who views civil society as a necessary condition for the existence of representative forms of government including democracy. An empowered civil society is a crucial element of any democratic system and is an asset in itself (European Commission, 2012). It represents and nurtures diversity and can contribute to more effective policies, equitable and sustainable development and comprehensive growth. Also, by the mid-1990s, European Union officials were repetitively asserting that countries without a well-consolidated democratic rule would not be admitted as new members to the European Union (Wood & Yeslada, 2004). Candidate countries were then more engaged in suppressing conflicts while also establishing a substantial level of democracy in their countries by introducing freedom in media, democratic elections and transparent voting processes among many others. Therefore, a strong civil society can be viewed as a vital player in fostering peace and in conflict resolution which are important accompaniments of democratization.

Additionally, Huntington (1991) supplements this explanation by stating that there are three waves of global democratization starting from the 19th century, during the interwar period and after World War II. With regards to Europe as a whole, the democratization period begun in different segments of time. In the Balkans, it can be understood that democratization began to formally commence after the end of the Cold War and the breakup of Yugoslavia. Also, democratisation across the post-

communist Central and Eastern Europe region was quite varied, with some new democracies being consolidated and others experiencing either stagnation or reconsolidation of authoritarian rule (McFaul, 2002). Considering the relationship shared between civil society and democratization, incidences of a strong civil society and its part in helping establish democracy in the state are filled throughout history and even till today. Using an example from the Balkans, the Serbian civil society group, Optor, meaning "Resistance", had provoked and contributed to the overthrowing of the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic in a bid to tear away from its democratic-authoritarian hybrid regime to instil a more democratic regime in the country (Nikolayenko, 2012).

This being said, Bernhard (1993) also stresses that within Europe, how autonomous civil society became and how much influence it was able to exert upon the country varied from state to state. Thus, similar to the relationship civil society shares with Europeanization, civil society and democratization also constantly influence each other. In my opinion, the relationship between civil society and democratization seems to be of that likened to a cycle where civil society has the capacity to positively contribute to democratization of a state while the democratic regime is also able to further reinforce and play a part in the development of civil society strength.

Furthermore, research done via the World Values Survey (2016) have identified how the empowerment of citizens and civil society can lead to democracy. This process of human development allows and stimulates people to claim democracy, leading to regime changes that allows for the mutual betterment of the people and the state (World Values Survey, 2016). This is especially relevant to countries from the Balkans with a war-torn history where democracy and elements of democracy such as freedom of speech are still contested issues. Achieving and instilling a high level of democracy by means of civil society strength and action should therefore not be neglected by aspirant countries such as the Balkans who wish to accede to the European Union, a body that holds great regard for democracy in a bid to maintain stability and nurture prosperity in the region.

On the other hand, Europeanization in its most explicit form is a central organizing concept in the study of what is happening in Europe and is thus conceptualized as the process of adopting and internalizing European Union directives, regulations and institutional structures at the domestic level (Howell, 2002). The concept of Europeanization became increasingly relevant after the collapse of European empires at the end of World War I, where successor states were transitioning to a more democratic regime along with complementing Western-style laws (Bernhard, 1993, p. 310). From this period onward, there was much study into the spectrum of multilevel governance. With it emerged the beginning of European integration which has eventually paved the way for studies on the European Union (Pirro & Zeff, 2005, p. 209). With regards to Central and Eastern Europe, in the aftermath of the fall of communism, international organisations became increasingly involved in the political and economic transformations in the region. The idea of European integration as a linear concept is used in middle range theorizing about Europeanization. This notion brings forth the idea that the end goal is the complete unity of Europe indicating a United Europe or in some cases a United States of Europe. An additional organizational principle of European integration is the general agreement on the

impact of Europeanization on the "deepening and widening" goals of the European Union. Deepening refers to expansion of the European Union's policies to cover a wider range of governing areas. This includes areas of shared competence, which directly impact the member states' operating procedures such as their regulations. Widening means a commitment to adding new members and enlarging the purview of the formal institutions. Most scholarly work agree that increasing Europeanization includes both deepening and widening the European Union. As such, it can be viewed that Europeanization is not only being undertaken by countries in Europe but it is also a change that is being adopted by the European Union itself. Concerning aspirant countries, the driving force behind its Europeanization primarily comes in the form of the conditionality that is required to be fulfilled in order accession to the European Union (Petričušić, 2008, p. 81).

According to Harwood (2006), the degree of Europeanization depends on the general commitment of the government to European integration and the national importance given to decision-making in accordance with the European Union. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the European Union being the primary agent of Europeanization in modern day Europe also gives great importance to civil society and recognises the contributions it makes to Europeanization. Candidate countries that are expected of to adopt the Acquis Communataire of the European Union are also aided by the European Economic and Social Committee with its own joint consultative committee for civil society at the domestic level (European Economic and Social Committee, 2013). Despite this being an additional step apart from accession negotiation chapters used to integrate candidate countries into the values of the European Union, it nonetheless stresses the importance of the relationship shared between civil society and Europeanization and the resultant effect on the candidate countries' eventual accession to the European Union. Hence, the significance of civil society as the 'third' sector is being recognised by the European Union in its efforts to promote Europeanization. This is especially the expectation held towards aspirant countries since Europeanization is an Europe-wide phenomenon originating from the West which still has yet to successfully spread out its full effects on the whole of Europe. Often, for aspirant countries, Europeanization begins well before the actual accession process where countries are expected to in a sense, conform largely in the realm of policies, to the European standards held in the European Union and the rest of Western Europe.

Also, it was found that while Europeanization brings about change, it does not appear to have brought about a diminishing of the role of civil society within the domestic arena (Harwood, 2006, p. 175). Europeanization and civil society can then be seen as interacting dynamics where either one regularly influences the other. With aspirant countries strengthening their respective civil societies, it may be easier to adopt and internalize European values and directives of the European Union. On the other hand, Europeanization itself when being embraced to a large extent is expected to allow for the continued growth and strengthening of civil society in the countries.

Hence, democracy and Europeanization by means of civil society also contributes to both domestic and regional progress which is therefore of great interest and

importance to the European Union which gives value to a dynamic, pluralistic and competent civil society and recognizes the importance of constructive relations between states and civil society organisations (European Commission, 2012). According to a journal published by the European Economic and Social Committee (2013), it was concluded by Brussels-based journalist Emily von Sydow that civil society has an important role to play in constructing a democratic European Union. The general principle is stated in Article 10.3 of the Lisbon Treaty of the European Union, which says that every citizen has a right to participate in the democratic life of Europe (European Economic and Social Committee, 2013, p. 8). One way of achieving this would be through a strong civil society that acts as an efficient actor and mediator between citizens and state. On the end of the European Commission, in addition to grants provided by the European Union for civil society actors, the body has adopted a new communication on how to work more effectively with Civil Society Organizations in member states of the European Union and neighbouring countries in a bid to engage civil society in its efforts (European Commission, 2016). Therefore, it can be understood that the policy arm of the European Union gives great importance to civil society and recognizes the contributions civil society has to offer for the Union in terms of democratization at a domestic and regional level. As such, fulfilling the Acquis Communataire, Copenhagen criteria and accession negotiation chapters can be made possible through the building and efforts of a strong civil society that is willing to work hand-in-hand with the government as the country's third sector. This is especially applicable to the European countries wanting to accede to the European Union, including the Balkans. By strengthening civil society at a domestic level, aspirant countries may possibly fare better when assessed by the European Commission on the countries' readiness and capacity to commence accession negotiation chapters. This also gives confidence to the European Commission and member states of the European Union that the candidate countries will be able to contribute effectively to regional growth and prosperity post-accession. It is also important for the member states of the European Union to view the candidate countries as ready for accession since the member states are able to veto the aspirant countries.

Moreover, when opening and working on accession negotiation chapters, a strong and vibrant civil society is important as it allows for regular and efficient intermediation between state and the citizens in the form of adopting or implementing domestic or regional reforms which are also of relevant importance to the country and the European Union even after accession. Civil societies in the respective countries are then better enabled to address both domestic and regional issues with the support given by the European Union in the form of various initiatives targeted at civil society development in member countries. Apart from this, one other function of civil society is to promote political participation (Diamond, 2004). Civil Society Organisations can do this by educating people about their rights and obligations as democratic citizens, and encouraging them to listen to campaigns and voting in referendums related to the country's accession to the European Union. This is an important role of civil society apart from being a voice for the people. In this case, civil society also takes on the role of being an informer and an educator. Additionally, Samaržija (2009) argues that the transposition of the Aquis Communautaire into practice and the possibilities of its' effective implementation is highly dependent on cooperation and participation of

social partners such as civil society. This is relevant to the aspirant country before and especially after acceding to the European Union where the Aquis will have to be continuously maintained.

While assessing the relationship shared between civil society and the European Union, it was also found that not only is the supranational entity a staunch supporter of the inclusion of civil society in the accession process of candidate countries, the body also provides a considerable amount of funding to civil society pre and post-accession. When establishing the priorities for funding projects in the process of programming future European Union assistance programmes, Civil Society Organisations in candidate countries are essential partners for the European Commission. Therefore, in previous candidate countries' Civil Society Organisations had many opportunities within the available pre-accession assistance programmes (Phare) to learn and to prepare for working in partnership with European Union institutions after accession (Petričušić, 2008, p. 94). The Phare programme proved to be a valuable opportunity for interacting with similar organisations in the European Union, as well as with its institutions, and for strengthening the capacities for monitoring the implementation of European Union legislation in the sectors where civil society plays an important role (Vidačak, 2006). As Petričušić (2008) explains, for the period up to the end of 2006, the European Union provided support under the three pre-accession instruments to candidate countries namely Phare (Council Regulation 3906/89), ISPA (Council Regulation 1267/99), and SAPARD (Council Regulation 1268/99). These instruments were supposed to serve as a training experience for a future use of structural and/or cohesion funds. Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), which initiated in 2007, is a single framework to integrate those three pre-accession assistance instruments and aims at preparing candidate countries for the membership by progressively adopting the rules and principles of structural and regional development funds after accession. Subsequently, the IPA has also partnered with civil society in candidate countries for the implementation of joint projects.

1.3 Civil society in the Balkans

Civil society in the Balkans is infamously perceived by scholars and authors to be weak. The weakness of civil society in the region is largely attributed to the legacies of the previous regime. The cultural heritages of the communist past left their strain in political traditions, attitudes and behavioural patterns apparent in post-communist societies and are widely believed to inhibit the upspring of self-organized social activity (Abele, 2006, p.53). Political changes in the demise of communism and state socialism had a momentous impact on the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Throughout the post-communist Balkan region, new political parties formed and democratic elections took place. People were assured the freedoms of speech and association. Non-governmental organisations began to establish themselves. During the communist era, most social and cultural organisations were controlled or closely monitored by the government (Wolchik, 1991). However, these groups could now form and act independently, a change that played a vital role in fostering democratic practice and stability in the countries that were freshly out of communist rule. Hence, it can be asserted that civil society and its agents presented these post-communist

countries a new perspective of lifestyle, one that was not under constant suppression or scrutiny of the ruling powers. Despite this, it must also be acknowledged that this change and perspective was not always welcomed amidst the general public due to lingering bouts of skepticism and distrust in such entities, all of which were remnants of the previous communist regimes. Also, the socialist and communist system under which the citizens used to live sought the control of society by the state, praises social homogenization, and blocks social differentiation. The official ideology and practice distorts group interests leading to low levels of voluntary participation by citizens in civic organisations.

The space offered by civil society is seen as crucial for geographical territories that are in need of democratization (Conces, 2007, p. 201). From 1999, the first wave of post-communist regime transition ended and the Balkan region became more deeply involved in the challenges of democratic consolidation (Cohen & Lampe, 2011). With regards to the history of civil society in the Balkans, the autonomous social organization that did emerge in the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was destroyed, except in Greece, when the region fell under Stalin's sphere of influence (Bernhard, 1993, p. 311). This then gives rise to and explains the reason behind the varying levels of civil society strengths amidst the Balkan nations. With the breakup of Yugoslavia, some Balkan states such as Croatia were plagued with constant wars and disputes while others such as Slovenia had more peaceful grounds post-war and independence to allow for civil society to develop and interact with the state. These occurrences had undoubtedly shaped the way civil society had developed or even existed in the various Balkan states. This inevitably affected the current development of civil society in these states due to the fact that the challenges faced by civil societies in the respective countries varied all throughout history and even at present.

However so, in addition to criticism towards the state of civil society in these post-communist countries, there seems to be a wide consensus that the Balkans' past is against them and that resultantly, their endeavors towards improving bilateral ties for accession to the European Union is affected as well. As such, there appears to be the need for a strong civil society presence in the Balkans due to the hope that perhaps a strengthened civil society can free the region from the complicated reins of its past to aid it in making fruitful progress for an eventual accession to the European Union.

Furthermore, as civil society actors and Civil Society Organisations are gaining momentum in the Balkans, the notion of a strengthened civil society in the Balkans can possibly be an attainable reality in a medium to long term future. However, this being said, it must be also acknowledged that there is still greater political activism as compared to civic activism in most of the Balkans (Vurmo, 2013). Until this and the environment for civil society has changed to a significant extent that is conducive for the growth and development of civil society, a strengthened civil society and the prospects of it contributing to accession to the European Union is expected to remain unfavorable.

1.4 Research Objectives

This section of the chapter looks to clarify the research objectives of the thesis and to provide an insight on how the research will be conducted. The main research objective of this thesis would be to display that civil society does in fact facilitate the accession of the Balkans to the European Union. Other accompanying research objectives of this thesis would be part of addressing the main research objective itself. The accompanying research sub-objective is as follows:

1.4.1 Research Sub-Objectives

1.4.1.1 To what extent is a strong civil society a contributing factor to the European Union accession processes of Croatia and Slovenia?

A vital concept behind this thesis would be civil society and its role in the accession process of countries wishing to accede to the European Union. In order to understand how civil society strength has allowed for the sector's contribution and facilitation of the country's accession process, Chapter 4 will study how civil society strength has contributed to and facilitated the accession processes of fellow Balkan countries Croatia and Slovenia. This will aid in addressing the main research objective of this paper.

1.5 Research Methods

Due to the nature of this thesis, the methodology that was adopted largely consisted of documentary and secondary data analysis. The data that was studied included but was not constrained to government policy records, leaflets, collections of newspaper articles, reports, case studies and journals by scholars as well as European institutions. Importantly, the study highly benefits from country-specific research findings by CIVICUS Slovenia and CIVICUS Croatia.

Also, while interviews, questionnaires and observations are popular methods that being used as part of a research, this paper is more suited to using the method of documentary and secondary data analysis. An analysis of documents and secondary data will allow for a better understanding of if and how civil society strength facilitates the accession of aspirant countries to the European Union. When collecting data, public domain and freely accessible documents and data was primarily used. However, documents that are classified, confidential or unavailable to public access was used only upon contacting the original holder or author of the document and reaching an agreement regarding the manner in which the contents of the documents will be used. Furthermore, personal discretion and confidentiality regarding the documents and data assessed was exercised where necessary.

At the same time, when engaging the use of documents and secondary data, a common pitfall would be overlooking the use of data containing an observer-bias. An observer-bias occurs when the researcher's cognitive bias subconsciously influences the participants or interviewees concerned, resulting in a biased data set. Another

disadvantage of observer-bias is that it may not be that easy to spot in documentary and secondary data analysis. In a bid to avoid this, data that has been examined, re-examined or verified by more than one researcher, where available, was preferred for use in this paper.

Since this paper draws lessons from Croatia and Slovenia's European Union accession paths, it is also important to highlight the basis for selecting these two countries as case-studies. These case studies were chosen in an attempt to investigate if and how civil society strength facilitated the countries' accession to the European Union. Importantly, Slovenia and Croatia are both the only two Balkan member state countries which are not considered to be of a failed enlargement unlike their Balkan counterparts and fellow member states, Bulgaria and Romania. Additionally, Slovenia was chosen to be one of the case studies for this paper since it was the first Balkan nation to accede to the European Union in the 2004 enlargement wave that is also the single largest expansion of the Union to date. Similarly, Croatia was chosen to be the other case study of the paper since it is the most recent Balkan entrant to the European Union as of July 2013. Also, two case studies were chosen over the use of a single case study to provide a larger picture on civil society's strength in facilitating accession to the European Union and to also compare the findings between Slovenia and Croatia so as to eliminate the fallacy of generalization and to also draw on unique experiences of the countries so as to obtain relevant lessons and apply them accordingly to other aspirant Balkan countries. In addition to the secondary data analyzed, this paper also provides chapter based on theoretical and contextual concepts (*i.e. Chapter 3 provides a theoretical background on concepts such as civil society, democratization and Europeanization*). The purpose of this would be to make clear or simplify the terms and complex concepts used to allow for an overall flow and coherent understanding of the text.

Furthermore, the last sections of the paper open up discussion on Serbia as the Balkan nation that has most recently commenced accession negotiation chapters with the European Union as of late 2015. As such, data concerning Serbia was being analyzed from the 2014 USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia Civil Society Organisation report. Simple quantitative calculations were also carried out to compare the standing of Serbia with the rest of the Balkans in an attempt to identify the current state of civil society and its strength in facilitating the country's accession to the European Union. While analysing the data for the calculations required in Chapter 6, due to a lack of data for countries Greece and Turkey, the Balkan average calculated was based on the remaining 10 Balkan countries as follows: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, FYROM, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia.

Chapter 2
Civil Society

2.1 What is 'civil society'?

The concept of civil society is understood as a realm distinct of the state developed in the 18th and 19th century. Previously the terms civil and political society were used as synonyms in relation to Greek philosopher Aristotle's 'politiké koinonia' or 'societas civilis' in which the public realm of equal citizens was at the same time the realm of politics and the state (Abele, 2006, p.26). As a result, the term civil society was less determined by the distinction between society and the state than by the distinction between the public and the private. In the 18th century, renowned political thinkers such as Adam Ferguson, Alexis de Tocqueville, Thomas Paine, John Locke or G.W.F Hegel raised the question of the relationship between civil society and political authority anew and differentiated between civil society and the state (Keane, 1988). Starting in the end of the 19th far into the 20th century, the concept of civil society was nearly forgotten. However, it celebrated a resurgence in the last two decades. Civil society most importantly appeared to flourish following the fall of communism. Civil society thus described a utopian state, specifically the utopia of a society free of communist rule.

This being said, civil society can be seen as a social sphere that contains all components between the family and the state excluding political parties and firms. It thereby consists of Non-Governmental Organisations and institutions that manifest the interests and will of citizens. Civil society is often seen as an advocate of values such as democracy, tolerance, peace and non-violence, transparency and trustworthiness (Bežovan & Matančević, 2011, p. 32). Civil society also acts as a vital partner to the state in terms of decision-making where their role comes as implementation partners and sharing responsibility on various issues (European Commission, 2016). Looking at the roots of the term civil society, it first began to take shape in late medieval-early modern Europe and by the late eighteenth century, certain political forces within civil society became strong enough to successfully challenge the power of monarchies (Bernhard, 1993, p. 308).

More often than not, civil society is defined vaguely. Additionally, civil society is understood in various ways. As a result, the concept is not easily open to empirical scrutiny. Acclaimed political theorist John Keane (2009) describes civil society as a sphere that is contrasted with the government and referred it to a realm of social life which includes market exchanges, charitable groups, clubs and voluntary associations, independent churches and publishing houses that are institutionally separated from territorial state institutions. Keane (2009) goes on to elaborate that civil society is a term that both describes and anticipates a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected non-governmental institutions that tend to be nonviolent, self-organizing, self-reflexive, and permanently in tension, both with each other and with the governmental institutions that in a sense, frame, constrict and enable their activities.

In addition to this, civil society bears the criticism of being a normative concept. Abele (2006) proclaims that the aim of civil society is less to describe an actual state, but to point to a utopian ideal or the way reality should be. The author also explains that in consequence, the concept has rightly been criticized for escaping any analytical and empirical verification.

On the other hand, authors Rakar, Deželan Vrbica Kolarič Črnak-Meglič and Nagode (2011) assert that there is often little consensus on the general meaning or understanding of what is meant by civil society. Additionally, the authors also acknowledge that the concept of civil society is indeed difficult to define (Rakar et.al, 2011, p. 19). With respect to the country-case studies of this paper, it is found that the civil society definition provided by authors Rakar et. al (2011) on behalf of CIVICUS Slovenia and Bežovan and Matančević (2011) on behalf of CIVICUS Croatia, both suggest the concept to be the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests (Bežovan & Matančević, 2011, p.14). In addition to the above mentioned definition of civil society, one other account of civil society by Wedel (1995) asserts that a civil society exists when individuals and groups are free to form organizations that function independently of the state, and can mediate between citizens and the state. In my opinion, this explanation of civil society by Wedel best succinctly summarizes the concept and primary functions of civil society which were otherwise extensively defined by Rakar et. al (2011) and Bežovan and Matančević (2011).

The importance of a strong civil society is often overlooked but notably gaining momentum in recent years. According to Krishna and Prewitt (2000) the importance of civil society is often seen in the promotion and protection of democracy. Additionally the authors also state that civil society is linked with economic development and poverty reduction. Through an increased strength in civil society, the performance of government programs is improved and the impact of state policy is enhanced which thereby allows citizens to be better able to derive greater benefits from the government and its initiatives. Furthermore, the importance and strength of civil society increases when civil society acts through social capital (Doraisamy, 2007). As Doraisamy (2007) explains, social capital is strong in a homogeneous, egalitarian society where people are willing to act collectively in their common long-term interest. Also, civil society participation in public policy procedures and in policy dialogues leads to comprehensive and effective policies, if conjugated with sufficient allocation of resources and thorough supervision (European Commission, 2012). Hence, civil society can be seen as a bridge that allows for the demands of society to be addressed to the government in exchange for a supply of services and reforms required and requested by citizens themselves for the improved wellbeing of society and the state as a whole.

Moreover, Conces (2007) explains that the associations and networks of common interest that form civil society occasionally allow for people to leave the confines of their homes and workplaces to enter into a more expansive common life, whereby civility can be furthered and good life can be pronounced. Additionally, Howard

(2002) states that active voluntary participation in organisations and a strong civil society is able to provide institutional representation and political leverage for citizens. This then provides another perspective to view civil society as a sphere that allows for citizens to pursue recreational activities on a voluntary basis without facing suppression by the state and its democratic regime.

Apart from these, Diamond (2004) also brings to light that civil society is not simply in tension with the state because it operates independently from the state. A common misconception of Civil Society is that it must always criticize and oppose the state. In fact, by making the state at all levels more accountable, responsive, inclusive, and hence more legitimate, a vigorous civil society strengthens the citizens' respect for the state and promotes their positive engagement with it. This is particularly important for citizens from countries coming out of post-authoritarian or post-communist regimes who are often found to be abiding by the state but not necessarily respectful of it. Also, such citizens tend to shun direct engagement with the state, resulting to the confines of their homes.

A main representative to civil society as a whole would be Civil Society Organisations who have also become vital actors for distribution of social services and execution of other development programs therefore effectively acting as a complement to government action (Worldbank, 2013). According to the International Monetary Fund (2016), Civil Society Organisations include business forums, faith-based associations, labour unions, local community groups, Non-Governmental Organizations such as charitable foundations, and think tanks. As such, government bodies, individual businesses, political parties, and the media are typically excluded. The environment in which Civil Society Organisations operate in, the quality and quantity of interactions between such organisations and the government are often signs of strength of civil society in the country. Civil Society Organisations also play the role of being the supplementary implementer in policies and reform efforts that are being undertaken by the domestic government or international bodies such as the United Nations, International Monetary Fund and the European Union. Hence, it can be asserted that a powerful actor in the civil society 'third' sector would undoubtedly be Civil Society Organisations. Through Civil Society Organisations, civil society can functionally contribute to good governance both domestically and regionally as well. According to Doraisamy (2007), Civil Society Organisations are able to act as watchdogs, advocates, agitators, educators, service providers and mobilisers and thereby contributing to good governance. This shows the various portrayals and forms of civil society and its agents which may have always existed but less known to the public as civil society.

Chapter 3
Literature Review

The literature review chapter of this paper will be conducted in two parts, namely reviewing previous work done on i) civil society in the Balkans and ii) civil society and the European Union accession. The purpose of having a section of the literature review being dedicated to reviewing civil society in the Balkans was to highlight the current state of affairs in the region pertaining civil society which has often gained the reputation of being weak and problematic. Thus, in order to access the strength of civil society and its impact on facilitating the accession process to the European Union, it is important to understand the state of civil society in the Balkans from a critical viewpoint. Also, it is essential to establish knowledge of the existing work done on civil society and the accession to the European Union so as to identify avenues to contribute to and further fortify the research domain.

3.1 Civil society in the Balkans

The bulk of existing literature suggests that civil society in post-communist Europe, the Balkans inclusive, is weak. Howard (2002) asserts that civil society in post-communist Europe including the Balkans is distinctively weak as characterized by low levels of voluntary participation in recreational activities in the state. However, it must be taken into account that this observation of the state of civil society in the Balkans was made by Howard (2002) over a decade ago and the current state of affairs may perhaps be different or at the very least not as dire as it was recounted previously. Making a cross- reference to the World Values Survey 2005 - 2008, figures show that countries in post-communist Europe, seem to be performing at an average level and at times better than other regions in the World (World Values Survey, 2014). Comparing the figures, post-communist Europe voluntary associations' participations appeared to have been higher in contrast to regions such as Middle East and Latin America in the context of religious organisations, recreation, labour unions, professional organisations and humanitarian organisations (World Values Survey, 2014). Reasons for this could possibly be due to a younger generation living under a more democratic regime that is less affected by legacies of the past and more able and eager to engage in such recreational activities. Similarly, civil rights and political liberties in Europe are seen to be increased over the last two decades post-communism, and appear to be on an increasing trend (Ekiert & Ziblatt, 2013). While there lies variation in improvement levels across the post-communist European countries, including the Balkans, there is undoubtedly overall improvement which is also substantial and an indication of civil society being gradually strengthened over the years.

On the other hand, for the generation that had lived under a suppressive communist regime, adopting a new way of life involving participation in recreational activities is definitely not an easy task. This could possibly explain why the trend of participation in voluntary associations was low even at the time when Howard (2002) made his observations as it was barely a decade after the fall of communism. Additionally, this

time span was probably too short to see any fruitful change in attitudes, perception and an overall change in lifestyle. However so, it must be noted that since the trend of voluntarily participation in recreational activities has been improving over the years as seen by comparing the figures from the World Values survey 2005 – 2008 and the World Values Survey 2010 – 2014 where there is a marked improvement in the level of active voluntary participation and membership in the same recreational organizations previously assessed in the survey (World Values Survey, 2015). This view has also been extended by Ekiert and Foa (2011) who state that the combination of surviving old and emerging new organizations should generate a stronger and not weaker civil society, especially in comparison to post-authoritarian democracies. The decline of older organizational forms is also balanced by the arrival of new organizations and expanding ties to international civil society which could help explain the increase in voluntary participations over the years in some Balkan countries such as in Romania (Ekiert & Foa, 2011). From my viewpoint, it is the conjoint emergence of both the younger generation and new organizations that allow for civil society in post-communist Europe to gradually strengthen. With the inculcation of external global actors and integration pressures such as the European Union and globalization, the state of civil society in these states are required to expand and respond to the international civil society and international democratization standards. There is hence the need to continue improving and strengthening the respective civil societies which has been thus far made possible with a wave of newness in terms of generation, generational mind-set, institutions and organisations.

Furthermore, while Howard (2002) presents his main stand that civil society in post-communist Europe is weak and backs it with arguments centering around the low levels of participation in voluntary associations, in my opinion, levels of participation in voluntary associations are not to be the only factor to be assessed in order to make such a claim about the overall strength of civil society in the region. Civil society consists of many aspects, out of which participation in voluntary associations form only but part of an idea of how civic-minded a society is. Therefore, in my opinion, it is unjust to classify post-communist Europe, including the Balkans, as a region with a weak civil society due to just an observation of low levels of participation in voluntary associations.

Rose (2009) also shares the view that civil society in post-communist Europe is weak. The author explains that many ex-communists have not changed and that they used old networks to create social democratic and populist parties. While this has undoubtedly affected the state of civil society in the countries out of communist rule, it must also be acknowledged that the mindsets of the younger generation in the countries are changing and they are less attached to the way of life and the attitudes instilled during the Communist era. Additionally, East Germany, a post-communist state had also successfully assimilated into West Germany and reunified Germany now has a relatively strong civil society. This, in my opinion, stands testimony to the very likely outcome for most of post-communist Europe, the Balkans inclusive, that as times change and a younger generation takes over the generation that had lived during the Communist era, the way of life undeniably changes and there is greater ability to devote more attention and importance to the existence and development of civil society by realizing the contribution it stands to make to state building and the

welfare of citizens. Although the case of East Germany may be considered by skeptics to be an anomaly since West Germany was an available and ready-made state which resulted in no need for the rebuilding of a state, the rest of post-communist Europe and the Balkans despite having a delayed starting point back when Communism fell, are now in a much better position to further make feasible advancements towards state building and the strengthening of civil society. Additionally, it has only been a short two decades of democratization and accompanied efforts to transition after the fall of communism. As such, since democratization is a process that can take generations to fully establish and function well, judging the strength of civil society in post-communist Europe based on just a short two decades is very much unforgiving.

On the flip side of the coin, although it is but a handful, there is also literature arguing that civil society in the Balkans is not weak as often perceived to be. Interestingly, this literature is relatively recent as compared to older and more noted work such as the ones by Howard (2002). This thereby stands as a challenge to the widely perceived notion that civil society in the Balkans is weak by presenting more recent literature that assert otherwise.

Ekiert (2012) explains his viewpoint that civil society in post-communist Europe and the Balkans is not weak since countries in the region have produced outcomes that were hardly expected of when they had come out of communist rule. Several countries have also developed consolidated democratic systems, functioning market economies and efficient democratic states with extensive welfare policies and relatively low inequality (Ekiert, 2012). Additonally, as Ekiert (2012) explains, there seems to be a variation in the degree of civil society with some countries perceived to be a success while others as failures. I concur with Ekiert (2012) on the varying degrees of civil society in some of the post-communist western Balkan countries since no two countries are the same and can be the same. This is especially applicable for countries such as Slovenia and Croatia who were both part of Yugoslavia but had encountered vastly different post-Yugoslavia transition environments where Slovenia had a more peaceful post-transition while Croatia continued to be plagued by war which deterred much of its progress for years. This would have undoubtedly affected the existence and development of civil society in these countries. Also, post-communist European states such as Slovenia and other Baltics such as Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia were countries which had quickly developed consolidated democratic systems and functioning market economies out of communist rule, an outcome that was barely anticipated for the region.

Like Ekiert (2012), Kubicek (2012) also asserts that civil society in the Balkans is not frail. Kubicek (2012) explains this viewpoint by stating that these states are merely in transition to democracy but not necessarily weak. With the fall of communism towards the end of the 1990s, East Central Europe and the Baltic states had successfully transitioned to democracy and capitalism while others such as Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia were perceived to be reform laggards. However, by the 2000s, even these countries had made significant progress. Also, Albania exhibits a hybrid regime with both democratic and non-democratic features. Kubicek (2012) also remarkably highlights the variance in the timing, pace, and success of regime

transitions including legacies of the previous regime, socioeconomic conditions, institutional choice, political culture, ethnic diversity and conflict, and policies of external actors such as the European Union which undeniably alter the condition of civil society in post-communist Europe and the Balkans. I agree to a great extent with Kubicek (2012) as it is imbalanced an argument to make a sweeping statement about post-communist Europe as a whole being weak. In my opinion, stating that post-communist Europe as a whole is weak discredits the efforts made by some post-communist states which have made substantial progress in building a strong civil society and likewise for states that are trying to build their respective civil societies.

Similarly, Ekiert and Foa (2011) raise an interesting aspect to the discussion about civil society strength in post-communist Europe by stating that post-communist civil society as a specific singular phenomenon does not even exist. The authors explain this by asserting that since specific dimensions of civil society in various countries may exhibit different levels of development and different qualities contributing to how some post-communist countries have vigorous public spheres and active civil society organizations strongly connected to transnational civic networks and are able to shape domestic policies actively while building their own associational structures without suppression. In my opinion, this is a view of civil society strength in the region that is often looked over. This can then be the case of a faulty generalization in which a conclusion about all post-communist European states are based on outcomes or trends in occurrences in just a few of them. Additionally, this affects the outlook that is held for the Balkans which is then subjected to the hasty generalization of critics who may assert that countries of post-communist Europe display attributes of a weak civil society. Since the Balkans are part of post-communist Europe, the region must also therefore similarly have a weak civil society, thereby placing it under constant scrutiny and comparison to its western counterparts.

As emphasised by Kubicek (2012), various factors do play a part in the strength of civil society before and after the fall of communism with some states having it easier than others. In my opinion, it is important to acknowledge the weakness of civil society in some states but it is also important to acknowledge the strength of civil society in others instead of collusively terming post-communist Europe and the Balkans as possessing a weak civil society. Furthermore, in my opinion, post-communist Europe may be seen as a region with a weak civil society because it is being compared to the rest of Europe that has a stronger civil society. Hence, civil society in post-communist Europe will always be perceived to be weaker than its western European counterparts only because it is being consistently compared to. However, it must also be taken into account that civil society in post-communist Europe is weaker than the rest of Europe due to the very factors mentioned above by Kubicek (2012).

Rose (2009) also contributes to the existing literature on civil society in the Balkans being not as weak as thought of to be. Rose (2009) reminds that a bulk of these post-communist countries are now members of the European Union which values democracy and requires member states to have fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria prior to accession. This then acts as testimony to the level of democracy and perhaps even

the state and strength of civil society in these countries to have met the requirements of the European Union under the scrutiny of fellow member states. However, at this point, it is important to note that while 10 of post-communist Europe are members of the European Union, only two states are from the Balkans while the rest of the Balkans are still awaiting to accede to the Union or have yet to even commence accession negotiations with the exception of Serbia which has most recently commenced accession negotiations as of December 2015. This then questions the progress and competence of rest of the Balkans who appear to be lagging behind even amidst the post-communist European states in terms of democratization, Europeanization and civil society strength, all of which are instrumental factors considered by the European Commission for accession

Rose (2009) also presents a concept known as the sovereign democracy of the Russian Federation that was coined by Vladimir Putin and compares it with the European democracy. In the sovereign democracy, institutions that are visible from the bottom-up view of post-Soviet citizens are different from those in the new European democracies. As such, this raises the question if civil society is weak in the Balkans only because it is viewed from the eyes of the European democracy while it may not be actually as weak as it is often perceived to be. Rose (2009) also backs this argument by bringing to light that there are often competitive elections in these post-communist European states where citizens, instead of voting as per the government's commands, have exercised their democratic rights to turn the government out. While it must be acknowledged that this may not necessarily always bring democratic outcomes, if freedom in voting rights is an exhibition of democracy and civil society strength, then it, in my opinion, it can also be asserted that civil society is not as weak as perceived to be in the Balkans.

3.2 Civil society and European Union accession

There has been a considerable amount of literature tying civil society and European Union accession primarily in the domain of Europeanization. The field of Europeanization is closely linked to the European integration studies. Literature on Europeanization suggests that it is concerned with the impact of policy outcomes and institutions at the European level on domestic policies (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005, p.5). More importantly, the authors suggest that the extension for European Union membership to countries of Central and Eastern Europe itself is a process of Europeanization which is of fundamental domestic change in response to rules and regulations of the supranational entity. Additionally, the Europeanization process in the Western Balkan countries is expected to lead to domestic changes as well, not only normative, but also policy-related and structural ones (Petričušić, 2008, p. 80).

Despite this, civil society as an instrument that contributes to the European Union accession is a view that is seen as relatively new and often overlooked by states and scholars alike. Most of the literature that speaks of ways to accede to the European Union for aspirant states often focuses on economic and political aspects while overlooking this third element of civil society. This can also be due to how the

concept of civil society is only gaining momentum and recognition in recent years which explains the lack of literature equating it and European Union accession. Heidbreder (2012) also brings to light a plausible reason for this lack of literature that for the longest time, the participation of civil society was not an area of interest for neither researchers dealing with the European Union nor political decision-makers until the rising interest in the democratic credentials of the European Union where civil society served as the possible remedy to bridge the gap between the supranational governance and its citizens. Hence, even though Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005) assert that Europeanization via European Union accession to candidate countries requires important changes on the domestic level, in my opinion, perhaps civil society was simply not given sufficient attention and viewed as not as important as compared to other political and economic aspects which are often popular answers to achieving the required change needed for accession.

As such, with regards to the contribution by civil society towards accession to the European Union, the European Commission is clearly one of the biggest advocates of this. Żornaczuk (2014) observes that within the new approach of the European Union towards enlargement, the body pays special attention to chapters 23 and 24 of the negotiations, that is, to Justice and Home Affairs. The author further explains that an important condition under the political criteria remains cooperation between a country's government and its civil society during the accession process (Żornaczuk, 2014, p. 7). Correspondingly, to supplement the importance of the relationship shared between civil society and the European Union accession process, the European Commission asserts that the involvement of civil society in the pre-accession process can contribute to deepening citizens' understanding of the reforms a country needs to complete in order to qualify for membership to the European Union (Đokić & Sumpor, 2013, p.30). This can help ensure accession to the European Union is not just a government exercise and stimulate a balanced public debate. Instead, it is believed that the inclusion of civil society prior to the accession negotiations is an aspect that is crucial to achieving a well-informed decision on membership to the European Union. On the end of the European Commission, the Civil Society Facility was established in 2008 to upkeep the growth of civil society financially (European Commission, 2013). It comprises of both national and multi-beneficiary initiatives. Of the outcomes that is hoped to be achieved by means of the Civil Society Facility, support for national and local civic initiatives and capacity-building to strengthen the role of civil society in the region are a few to name. As put forward by the European Commission (2013), the aim of the Civil Society Facility is to support the development of a civil society which is participating actively in the public debate on democracy, human rights, social inclusion and the rule of law, and has the capacity to influence policy and decision making processes and likewise has an influential position in the aspirant country's accession process. In my opinion, this is essential for countries who desire to accede to the European Union by having a robust civil society to allow for a successful and satisfactory accession and enlargement of the supranational body.

Schutter (2002) also argues that the contributions of Civil Society Organisations can result in and further enhance good governance in the European Union. Civil society is then believed to play a part in contributing to good governance domestically and extend this impact to the rest of the European Union. This view is also shared by

Doraisamy (2007) who explains that civil society and its agents are capable of this role by taking on the forms of being a watchdog, advocate, agitator, educator, service provider and mobiliser, all of which lead to good governance. This aspect of civil society is of special importance to the European Union and its enlargement policy which has been known to promote good governance by default (Borzel, Pahmuk & Stahn 2008, p. 22). As Borzel et. al (2008) state, the enlargement policy of the European Union for over the last 15 years has developed into the most comprehensive foreign policy framework for encouraging domestic reforms in non-member states and good governance is said to have marginally influenced this process. Moreover, this is important for the Balkans who wish to accede to the European Union as the European Commission has put more emphasis on the administrative core of good governance specifically for this region that has been ridden with ethnic violence and lingering bilateral conflicts (Borzel et. al, 2008, p. 23).

Additionally, Drakic and Kajganovic (2012) share a viewpoint that is crucial to the main hypothesis of this paper. Of the existing literature on civil society and European Union accession, the work by Drakic and Kajganovic (2012) are of direct relevance to the core of this thesis. In their work, the authors assert that civil society does in fact hold the capacity and capability to facilitate an aspirant country's accession to the European Union before moving on to explain that this is possible since Civil Society Organisations, with their detailed knowledge and broad experience of their representatives, can contribute by a large extent to the quality of the accession process. The inclusion of experts from civil society is also trusted to be beneficial for public administration in the process of the country's accession (Drakic & Kajganovic, 2012, p. 4). In my opinion, the authors highlight one of the quintessential functions of Civil Society Organisations and how they can both value-add and facilitate a candidate country's accession to the European Union.

Despite the above, there also appear to be critics of the inclusion of civil society in the European Union accession process. Vurmo (2013) argues that civil society involvement in the accession process to the European Union is one that is too optimistic. The author lists his reasons which include civil society failing to deliver an impact, low levels of citizens' engagement and the legal and policy environment in which civil society operates in the Balkans being still problematic. As such, Vurmo (2013) argues that it may be too heavy a burden for civil society to push for effective reforms under a relatively unconducive environment for civil society. These could also constitute part of the reasons behind the lack of literature equating civil society's involvement in the aspirant countries' accession to the European Union. From the viewpoint of Vurmo (2013) and considering the background of civil society in the Balkans, the worry of the author and his criticism towards it does hold to a certain extent. However so, in my opinion, the weakness of civil society in the region should not remain as a matter that is neglected and shunned away. Instead, civil society in the Balkans should be developed as the country's third sector to aid in domestic ventures and also during the accession to the European Union to an extent and over a duration by which it can deliver.

One other criticism entails with regards to the inclusion of civil society in the Balkans' accession processes. Żornaczuk (2014) argues that although adequate legislative and policy frameworks that encourage partnerships between governments and civil society agents are in place in all of the countries of the region, Civil Society Organisations largely fail to establish sustainable mechanisms of cooperation and consultation. The author goes on to reason that this is due to two main factors mainly being the diversity of the stakeholders in these Civil Society Organisations and the view that Civil Society Organisations do not always act in unison, despite positive examples of relevant networks and councils (Żornaczuk, 2014, p. 11). Hence, it appears that the author understands that civil society is an asset to the accession process to the European Union but strongly believes that this may not be the best option for the Balkans where the general health, strength and aptitude of civil society across most of the countries in the region is highly debatable.

Chapter 4
Research Findings

This chapter presents the research findings of how civil society strength had helped facilitate the accession of country-case studies Slovenia and Croatia to the European Union. As such, this section will be separated into two sub-sections to individually document the findings of each of the countries. Chapter 4i will present the research findings for Slovenia while Chapter 4ii will do the same for Croatia. Additionally, the sub-sections of this chapter will also include a brief history of the countries. The purpose of this would be to acknowledge the countries' histories which have indefinitely shaped civil societies' existence and strength along with how it has contributed to the respective accession processes to the European Union. Furthermore, one important finding from both the case studies of Slovenia and Croatia was the significant contribution of Civil Society Organisations which had continuously worked towards the implementation of reforms in the respective countries as part of democratization, Europeanization and accession to the European Union. As such, in both countries, it was found that Civil Society Organisations were the most prevalent representatives of civil society which had a significant positive impact on the countries' accession path to the European Union. Also, comparing the findings from the case study of Slovenia and Croatia, it was found that not only did civil society strength help in the fulfilment of the accession negotiations, civil society had also acted as a bridging force to the state before and after accession to the European Union in spite of criticisms over the strengths of civil society in the countries concerned.

Chapter 4i: Case Study of Slovenia
Slovenia declared its independence from the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on 25 June 1991. Looking at the history of the Slovenian civil society, as asserted by Rakar et.al (2011), Slovenia has a long and extensive tradition of people's

interest associations and self-organisation. In the period of an undeveloped welfare state until the end of World War II, Civil Society Organisations played the main role in the providing of public goods and services to the people of Slovenia (Rakar et. al, 2011, p.22). However, the socialist revolution resulted in the stoppage of traditional activities of the Civil Society Organisations and the services they provided to the general masses.

During the period of self-governing socialism in the 1970s, Civil Society Organisations became more independent while communication with the state still continued to be insufficient. Nonetheless, it was the period of new social movements in the 1980s that saw the progress of Civil Society Organisations in Slovenia and civil society was then slowly being recognised as an alternative to the official political structure (Rakar et. al, 2011, p.23). This then gave rise to 'Socialist Civil Society' in Slovenia which was also otherwise known as the 'Alternative Scene' in the country which dates back to 1983 (Mastnak, 1990). Civil society, which was a widely discussed concept in Central Europe at the time proved to be invaluable in setting in motion the democratic transition of the region, especially so for Slovenia. Interestingly, Cox (2005) also asserts that because civil society is essentially a tolerant and voluntaristic approach to modern life, it left a deep imprint on Slovenian nationalism, which had led civil society to undoubtedly be thought of as one of the main tributaries of the national independence movement in Slovenia. In the 1980s, the Slovenian civil society, as part of the Alternative Scene, flourished with a surge in new artistic movements to Non-Governmental Organisations and self-help organisations which promoted many new ideas and concepts including environmental rights, feminism and equal rights for gay and lesbians (Cox, 2005, p. 72). At the same time, the Slovenian civil society in times of the former Yugoslavia, and particularly in the second half of the 1980s showed an explicit sensitivity to the interference of the armed forces with the civil sphere, and to attempts of militarising the society (Jelušič, 2007, p.10). A substantial part of members of the civil society associations bore the accusations of opposing the former Yugoslav military incentives to militarise society when Slovenia was developing the plural political system and becoming independent. Resultantly, this event was considered to be a momentous one for civil society activism in Slovenia. This being said, it can be proclaimed that the present Slovenian civil society sector, to a large extent, had interestingly reserved its past structure from its socialist period. This had given rise to sports and recreation, culture and arts, and professional and expert organisations still vibrantly prevailing over organisations providing services concerning social protection, education, research and healthcare (Rakar et. al, 2011, p. 21).

Concerning the breakup of Yugoslavia, after a brief war of less than two weeks the Yugoslav People's Army retreated from Slovenia, sparing the country the massive destruction that would soon visit Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (Cox, 2005, p. 72). This early and rather peaceful departure of the Yugoslav Army also in a way happened to play a part in shaping the existence of civil society in the country after the breakup of Yugoslavia. It is also noteworthy to mention that even during the existence of the old Yugoslavia, Slovenia was always more developed than the other

five Republics[1] of Yugoslavia clearly showing its aspiration for political and economic reforms and moving towards the European Community in both European ideals and values. Following the first free elections in 1990, Slovenia began undergoing a major transformation of two major systems namely political and economic. The political transformation of Slovenia saw the country make the switch from a non-party system of decentralized self-management to a west European-style parliamentary democracy with about a dozen of political parties (Wagner, 1995). On the economic front, the country moved from a socialist to a capitalist free market economy. The economic and political prosperity that followed after the breakup of Yugoslavia helped Slovenia make an easier path in transition.

This being said, according to Mastnak (1990), during most of the transition, civil society actors such Non-Governmental Organisations in Slovenia had acted in a fragmented and disunited way, which added to the difficulty of establishing a solid partnership between Non-Governmental Organisations and the state, especially in the field of decision-making. However, during the accession process to the European Union, there was heightened awareness regarding the importance of partnerships with Non-Governmental Organisations. It was then that the Slovenian Government had caved in and supported the idea of establishing the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations of Slovenia. Additionally, the Slovenian Government had also committed itself to financing this centre for precisely specified and commonly agreed activities related to the civil society sphere in Slovenia, therefore pledging financial commitment towards the development of civil society in Slovenia (European Commission, 2013). This was an instrumental move by the Slovenian Government since financing was always known to be a common problem amongst Non-Governmental Organisations who often feared for consequences if the financing from sources were reduced or stopped together (Rakar et. al, 2011, p. 63).

The European Commission (2013) also highlighted that in Slovenia, Non-Governmental Organisations, being agents of civil society, played a vital role in informing and improving the knowledge of institutions of the European Union, European policies and European values among the masses in the country. During the accession process, the Slovenian Government Communication Office had collaborated with multiple Non-Governmental Organisations to inform the public about European institutions and other related issues. Also, Non-Governmental Organisations—Government collaboration concentrated mainly on making the accession process as open as possible, with considerable participation by citizens and their organizations (Gerasimova, 2005). By having a rather open accession process, the Slovenian citizens were better aware of what contributions they could make and how they could make it via their respective Civil Society Organisations.

One key event that had ensured the continued support of the Non-Governmental Organisations in the accession process of Slovenia was the Statement of Intent that was signed by the Non-Governmental Organisations and the Government Office for

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[1] The five republics of Yugoslavia, excluding Slovenia, are namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

European Affair. Through the signing of this Statement of Intent, Non-Governmental Organisations were able to make use of the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations of Slovenia to primarily gain updates on the progress of the accession process and about participation in the formation of European policies (Cerne, 2003). The Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations of Slovenia acted as a platform to pool Non-Governmental Organisations in the country together and form a network where they could jointly contribute their efforts to work alongside the Slovenian Government to complement its efforts in the accession process to the European Union. The organisations were then able to participate in the preparation of common policies.

Importantly, findings by Cerne (2003) reveal that the beginning of closer cooperation between the Slovenian Government and Non-Governmental Organisations in the country happened to coincide with the launch of the European Union accession negotiation process, which was based on the principles of transparency and participation of all interested parties. All Non-Governmental Organisations in Slovenia were reportedly given a public invitation that was published in the media, to actively participate in the preparation and adoption of negotiating positions. The purpose of this was to spark discussions amidst civil society and its agents so that these organisations would contribute by proposing initiatives and stating their view of the negotiating positions, give an in-depth view into the actual problems in individual areas (Cerne, 2003, p. 156). The approach adopted by the Slovenian Government to reach out to Non-Governmental Organisations was considered and applauded to be a success, drawing in 164 of such organisations who then took part in 31 working groups in-charge of preparing negotiating positions. This newly found relationship between civil society and the state was particularly important in Slovenia since the former existed in a disunited and fragmented manner during the country's transitional period. Apart from this, this renewed relationship also showed the state's willingness to entrust civil society with a say and acknowledge its insights and expertise pertaining to the country's accession process.

Additionally, on the end of the Slovenian Government, there was immense support to include civil society in the accession process despite a general lack of political involvement and attention towards civil society in the country. However, the importance of the European Union accession process and the contributing capacity of civil society was being given sufficient and due attention together with a platform to work from. During the accession process, the Slovenian Cabinet authorized the Government Office for European Affair to cooperate further with civil society and Non-Governmental Organisations (Gerasimova, 2005, p. 4). Consequently, by creating a favourable legal and financial environment for the civil society organizations to operate in, the Slovenian government had expected that Non-Governmental Organisations would demonstrate improved expertise and as a result be better partners in collaborative efforts for the country's accession to the European Union. This expectation of the Slovenian government was not let down by the country's 'third' sector which effectively worked alongside the government in the accession process by taking advantage of its vast expertise and often playing a consultative role to the Government. Moreover, the financial and political backing by the Government towards Non-Governmental Organisations in Slovenia was very

much needed since these organisations were typically young organizations with most registered after 1990. As a result, these organisations did not have large memberships and most did not have paid staff. Also, Slovenian Non-Governmental Organisations lacked financial resources with most in an unstable, poor or very poor financial state. As such, funding the Non-Governmental Organisations in the country allowed the Slovenian Government to help this sector stay both operationally afloat and also be able to contribute effectively to the accession process without having major financial hindrances. Apart from this financial backing, the Slovenian Government also enabled Slovenian Non-Governmental Organisations to participate in the Common Consultative Committee of Socio-Economic interest groups, comprising of members from the Socio-Economic Committee of the European Union, representatives of social partners, the Chamber of Agriculture as well as a representative of the Slovenian Non-Governmental Organisations. This hereby displays the remarkable initiative of the Slovenian Government to recognise the capacities of civil society and include it in interactions with European institutions as part of the accession process.

However, there is a finding by authors Szczerbiak and Taggart (2005) who suggest that while civil society in Slovenia was largely pro-European Union and had assisted the government in its accession efforts, civil society was reportedly not engaged in the European Union accession referendum campaign to any large extent and hence gaining the criticism of not playing any momentous role as opposed to its more marked and evident role in the country's accession referendum campaign for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Similar findings were also suggested by Dr. Michael van Hulten, an adviser from the Netherlands who was invited by the Slovenian Government Office for European Affairs within the framework of bilateral cooperation with the Netherlands Government. Hulten had found that while some of the Non-Governmental Organisations in Slovenia cooperated well with relevant organisations in the European Union and are undergoing preparations for tenders with the European Union, most of these organisations lacked the knowledge required to be able to have an influence on government policies in Slovenia or on European Union policy making via participation in European platforms (Cerne, 2003, p. 159).

One other pressing worry as highlighted by Rakar et. al (2011) was the treatment and existence of Civil Society Organisations in the country. According to the report, Civil Society Organisations are fighting for survival and therefore are unable to engage on a wider scale. Hence, the way in which civil society could continue to participate in the post-accession efforts was also affected due to the limited effects of these organisations. This worry was especially significant since the Slovenian government was also criticized for being generally unresponsive to initiatives and proposals from civil society even though civil society actively is said to have actively put forward proposals and initiatives (Rakar et. al, 2011, p. 63).

Chapter 4ii: Case Study of Croatia

Croatia declared its independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1991. But unlike Slovenia, Croatia was the subject of a bloody civil war that lasted for four years before finally ending in December 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Peace

Agreement[2] (Gaetas, 1996). The combination of a war torn history, the autocratic regime of nationalist Franjo Tudjman[3], a high-level of organized crime and corruption as well as poor cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia[4] in the 1990s, identify to be the main reasons to have significantly influenced Croatia's European integration and slowed down political and economic reforms (Grbic, 2010). Of the reasons mentioned above, the country's poor cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was a major obstacle to its membership to the European Union. During the 1990s and under the rule of Franjo Tudjman, Croatia was prepared to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia only if it was recognized as a victim of war and if its military operations "Flash" and "Storm" were exclusively under Croatian jurisdiction and not that of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (Fischer & Simic, 2016, p.83). As a result, in 1999, the president of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia reported Croatia to the United Nations Security Council for failure to cooperate and collaborate in investigations of these military operations. A new government led by Prime Minster Ivica Racan, was however elected in the year 2000, and was determined to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in order to come closer to membership to the European Union (European Stability Initiative, 2012). However, again, Croatia failed to fully cooperate with the Tribunal when Croatian military generals were being indicted. Eventually, as Croatia started to cooperate with the proceedings of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, in 2005, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia Chief Prosecutor assessed Croatia and reported that the country was now fully cooperative. This then led to the European Council concluding that the last remaining condition for starting accession negotiations was met. As a result, the country's accession negotiations to the European Union were launched on the same day (European Commission, 2016).

Civil Society Organisations in Croatia that were active during the period of the late 1980s and the 1990s were most notably humanitarian organisations who aided in addressing issues related to the war, specific social problems and needs (Bežovan & Matančević, 2011). As a result, civil society in Croatia became largely characterised by the presence of foreign organisations, humanitarian work and a high level of cohesion during this volatile period. However, by the second half of the 1990s, this solidarity in the third sector of the country was noted to have clearly decreased and civil society started to face the negative eye of the public. The relationship between

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[2] After four years of conflict which cost almost 300,000 lives and can be viewed as the worst conflict in Europe since World War II, the Agreement put a term on hostilities. Held at Wright-Patterson Air Base in Dayton, Ohio, a breakthrough was reached after a three-week negotiation marathon. The final text was signed in Paris on December 14, 1995.

[3] Franjo Tudjman was a Croatian politician and historian. Following the country's independence from Yugoslavia he became the first President of Croatia and served as president from 1990 until his death in 1999. In 1995 he authorized a major offensive known as Operation Storm which effectively ended the war in Croatia. In the same year he was one of the signatories of the Dayton Agreement that put an end to the Bosnian War.
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the Croatian Government and civil society was now branded by a mutual distrust while a negative attitude was also cultivated towards Civil Society Organisations. Most infamously, the Croatian Government in this period had used the media to defame Non-Governmental Organisations. This had thereby contributed, by a great extent, to the negative attitude that citizens had towards Civil Society Organisations. Remnants of this cultivated negative attitude are still said to be present to this day, in smaller towns in Croatia. On the whole, it can be asserted that civil society in Croatia was developed from a top-down approach where initiators were principally Civil Society Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations. Additionally, the political environment in which the state's civil society had operated in over the years was found to be mostly unfavourable, restrictive and not stimulating (Bežovan & Matančević, 2011, p.15). The literature on civil society in the late 1990s in Croatia identifies a number of problems of civil society development, of which some are still present (Bojicic-Dzelilovic, Ker-Lindsay & Kostovicova, 2013). The authors go on to explain that some of these problems included inadequate funds for sustainable development, lack of professionalism and trained leadership, limited organisational transparency and membership levels, poor networking and a low level of cooperation between the organisations themselves and with the population at large. From the late 1990s, however, things started to take an upturn when the newly elected Croatian government had affirmed its commitment to cooperate with civil society by including civil society representatives in different governmental advisory boards (Bežovan & Matančević, 2011, p. 15). Several institutions on the side of the state such as the Government Office for Associations, the Council for the Development of Civil Society, the National Foundation for Civil Society Development were set up to allow for the functioning of civil society, demonstrating the willingness of the state to recognize civil society as credible factors for the implementation of common policies and accomplishment of broader societal goals (Petričušić, 2008, p. 98). Furthermore, with civil society representatives having both a consultative role and direct participation in governmental advisory boards, civil society was able to have its say and effectively include its input in various areas. In October 2001, Croatia signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement in preparation to be considered as a candidate country to accede to the European Union. The country was formally accepted as a candidate country in February 2003. In 2005, war crime fugitive Ante Gotovina was arrested and this ultimately had opened the door for European Union accession negotiations now that the country was found to be fully cooperative with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (Deutsche Welle, 2005).

According to Bežovan and Matančević (2011), the process and prospects of accession to the European Union had resulted in the Europeanization of many domestic policies including that towards civil society. As said by the European Commission, civil society participation is a key factor in ensuring a good quality comprehensive legislation and developing sustainable policies that not only reflect the needs of the people but are also accepted by those most concerned by them (Đokić & Sumpor, 2013, p. 15). This also applies to the reforms a country needs to implement in order to qualify for membership to the European Union. This being said, having adequate structures and mechanisms for civil society cooperation with public institutions as well as free, clear and accessible information on matters of public interest are of critical importance. In the case of Croatia, Civil Society Organisations' active

involvement in the accession process can be said to have represented the strength of civil society in Croatia. Civil Society Organisations in the country were most concerned with negotiations on Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and partially Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom and Security and Chapter 27 – Environment (Bosanac, n.d). Bosanac (n.d) explains that at the start of the negotiation process, some Civil Society Organisations devoted all their energy to trying to declassify the negotiations and increase transparency so that greater numbers of citizens could be continuously informed on everything that was happening behind closed doors. However, this initiative was not very welcomed by both the ruling authorities and the European Commission out of fear that negotiation information would be manipulated through media coverage and lead to the citizens' loss of confidence in the supranational body. Furthermore, there was fear of political parties using the media to politicize the negotiation proceedings. After unsuccessful attempts to make the negotiations more open to the general public, Civil Society Organisations continued to advocate resolving democracy and human rights protection issues either independently or in small partnerships.

Subsequently, in line with a survey conducted by Đokić and Sumpor (2013), the most common mode of participation by Civil Society Organisations was through active engagement in preparation and/or implementation of European Union projects. Additionally, as the survey records, almost 32% of respondents had actively and continuously participated in preparation and/or implementation of European Union projects, while 22.4% of them had occasionally participated in preparation and/or implementation of European Union projects (Đokić & Sumpor, 2013). A small number of Civil Society Organisations were directly and continuously involved in programming processes on the national level in Croatia. These continuous and sturdy efforts by Civil Society Organisations in Croatia proved to be a remarkable example of civil society's strength in facilitating the country's accession to the European Union. In addition, while the figures in the survey conducted may appear to be less than fifty percent, taking into account the struggles of civil society in Croatia including the government and public's perception of the sector, the figures indicate a growth in the strength of civil society and a positive change in the treatment of civil society in the country, at least during the European Union accession process. The full survey and its results are shown below in Table 1.

Mode of participation in the EU accession process	Continuously	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	None of the above	Response Count
Active engagement in PREPARATION OF EU FUNDED PROJECTS	52	38	19	12	27	148
Active engagement in IMPLEMENTATION OF EU FUNDED PROJECTS	42	28	25	19	33	147
Direct involvement in programming processes on national level in Croatia	12	33	22	46	34	147
Indirect involvement in programming processes on national level in Croatia	28	64	29	11	18	150
Other activist approaches e.g. advocacy, lobbying, media campaigns	16	60	28	17	24	145
Our organization tried to participate, but an attempt(s) was/were not successful	6	28	24	16	50	124
In case you participated in some other mode of participation, please, specify.						12
answered question						150
skipped question						101

Source: Authors' calculation, 2013.

Table 1: Civil Society Organisations' mode of participation in European Union accession process

Civil Society Organisations also came together in 2011 to draft the Joint Opinion of the Croatian Civil Society Organisations on the readiness of the country for the closing of accession negotiations for Chapter 23 concerning justice and human rights. (Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations, 2011, p.30). The Joint Opinion of the Croatian Civil Society Organisations hence proved to be an important mark to show that civil society and its opinion, beyond having the capacity to facilitate the country's accession proceedings to the European Union, does in fact positively contribute to it. Additionally, the willingness of Civil Society Organisations to involve themselves in the accession proceedings displays the unity in the sector, at least specifically and notably during the accession. Also, complementing aspirant nations' governments' decision to include civil society in the accession process is undoubtedly the European Union itself, where the inclusion of civil society is both expected and acknowledged. Often, due to the expectations of the supranational body, Civil Society Organisations found themselves being obliged to partake in various avenues related to the country's accession. While this obligation allows for greater involvement and rallying the efforts of these organisations, it must be also cautioned that not all of the Civil Society Organisations possessed the skills and expertise to positively contribute to the accession process, as highlighted to be one of the pitfalls of their inclusion and contributing capacities.

In relation to the data received and analysed in the report on the implementation of regulatory acts in the country, in the year 2012, 4,786 written comments on law and regulations proposals by the public were received, which is, in my opinion, more than a significant improvement as compared to the 173 written comments received during the year 2011. This marked improvement in the responsiveness of civil society's call-to-action was, to a large extent, due to educating the masses about their role in contributing to the country's accession process and the conducting of public hearings by the state in partnership with Civil Society Organisations (Đokić & Sumpor, 2013).

The great response by the public has also shown their interest and willingness to contribute to the country's accession process and the need for civil society to be a bridge between the state and its people, relaying information and educating them.

Also, as an additional example of satisfactory involvement by Civil Society Organisations in policy making, the European Union – Croatia Joint Inclusion Memorandum is often highlighted. This process was in line with the obligations of the country's European Union candidate status and was characterised by a long and intensive consultation process which included different ministries, government agencies and Civil Society Organisations (Stubbs & Zrinscak, 2010). Civil Society Organisations were then formally required as per the European Union to engage in the accession process where they often played consultative roles to matters at hand. By this formal requirement by the European Union to include civil society organisations, the Croatian Government was able to seek out Civil Society Organisations effectively to enlist them in joint efforts. Additionally, in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Union – Croatia Civil Society Joint Consultative Committee was formed. The Joint Consultative Committee was an important tool for supporting civil society along the country's path to accession (European Economic and Social Committee, 2012). This is particularly important as social partners such as civil society have a crucial role in the process of developing policies in the European Union, gaining even more importance during the accession process of the aspirant state (Samaržija, 2009, p. 92). Samaržija (2009) further elaborates that the enlargement process of the European Union promoted the new understanding of such dialogue between the supranational body and civil society, not primarily as a means for mediation and conciliation, but as a new form of policy making, as a collaborative governance mechanism.

Concerning human rights, the Croatian civil society has been playing an important role since the 1990s not only in supervision of the implementation of human rights legislation and in providing information for the monitoring bodies of international human rights instruments, but also in the realisation of numerous projects and programmes that allow for the realisation of human rights in the country (Petričušić, 2008, p.98). This persisting issue in Croatia drew much concern from the European Union even during the country's accession process. The European Union was also criticised for naming Croatia as a candidate country due to the then-unresolved human rights and war crime problems. Resultantly, coupled with the efforts of civil society, the supranational entity financed democracy and human rights projects through 2 programmes, namely CARDS 2002 and EIDHR 2001, to which there were funds of 1.5 million euros being channelled to (Petričušić, 2008, p. 94). Both programmes were implemented by civil society organisations in 2004 and 2005 and covered relatively small-scale human rights and democratisation projects at local level. Their aim was to promote and protect human, minority and civic rights and to enhance democracy and civil society.

This being said, there also exist criticism with regards to the actual commitment of the Croatian government with regards to civil society's participation in the accession process to the European Union. Đokić and Sumpor (2013) highlight that the

government's institutional capacities for engaging Civil Society Organisations are often not matched with the comparable capacities of these organisations to engage with the government. This then simply means that Civil Society Organisations are very seldom able to exercise a considerable impact on the public agenda. Therefore, it is very likely that there is a constriction in the impact and the extent of reforms that can be pursued by Civil Society Organisations and civil society as a whole in aiding the accession process to the European Union.

Additionally, a report conducted had revealed that Civil Society Organisations in Croatia were often consulted on important issues but their role in most cases remained consultative and dependent on individual sensitivity, knowledge and the capacities of politicians and civil servants to co-operate with these Organisations (Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations, 2011, p. 23). This criticism was also evident from the findings of the Civil Society Index study conducted by Bežovan and Matančević (2011) where it was acknowledged that there have been considerable improvements in the impact that civil society has on policy and Civil Society Organisations are now being regularly consulted on important issues but their role in most cases remains consultative and therefore limiting their impact.

In regards to accession negotiations with the European Union, almost three quarters of the respondents (71.6 percent) in a survey conducted think that Civil Society Organisations are not sufficiently involved in the activities of the negotiating teams or the consultation processes due to reasons such as not being invited for discussions, not being interested in negotiations or lacking in specific knowledge and access to basic information (Target, 2010). This figure is a worrying one because it also gives the impression that Civil Society Organisations lack the initiative and impetus to voluntarily partake in efforts towards the European Union accession process. Also, the lack in specific knowledge and access to basic information could have been part of the reasons behind the apparent low levels of initiative and impetus of the sector.

Moreover, as mentioned above, in the late 1990s, there began to form a negative public perception of civil society organisations. According to Bežovan and Matančević (2011), there is still a certain level of distrust towards Civil Society Organisations by the public and the media rarely understands the mission of civil society and often does not play a role as partners in its development. As a result of persistent low levels of trust in Civil Society Organisations, voluntary membership to these organisations are also affected. Without much people-strength, Civil Society Organisations in Croatia continue to be handicapped in both their internal operations and also to translate efforts to the general public which at large, does not trust the organisations. While there is reportedly a higher level of trust in Civil Society Organisations in larger cities such as Zagreb, smaller cities should not be ruled out from understanding what civil society means and how it helps to be a link between society and state.

Chapter 5
Lessons learnt and consequences for future accessions

This chapter presents the lessons learnt from studying civil society strength in facilitating European Union accession for Slovenia and Croatia. As seen in Chapter 4, civil society strength has proved to be capable of facilitating the accession process for both Balkan case-study countries – Croatia and Slovenia. Hence, in this Chapter, lessons learnt will be drawn from these two case studies in an attempt to apply them to the current Balkan aspirant countries who wish to accede to the European Union as well. Since it has already been established in the previous chapter that a civil society of significant strength is found to facilitate the accession, this chapter will gather the strengths and weaknesses of civil society as related to the accession process. By doing so, the rest of the Balkans will be able to emulate the positive aspects while being able to identify and work on similar weaknesses in their own civil societies.

As such, Chapter 5i will present lessons learnt from Slovenia with regards to civil society's input in aiding European Union accession while Chapter 5ii will do the same holding Croatia in perspective. In addition to the individual lessons attained by assessing the countries Slovenia and Croatia separately, lessons were also learnt from the CIVICUS civil society index 2008 – 2011. CIVICUS is a world coalition for citizen participation. It is hence an international alliance of members and partners constituting a powerful network of organisations at the local, national, regional and international levels, spanning the entire field of civil society (CIVICUS.org, 2016). Through the findings from the reports by CIVICUS, lessons applicable and essential to future accessions to the European Union can be drawn. Hence, Chapter 5iii will be dedicated to lessons obtained from the overall findings in the CIVICUS reports. Findings from Rakar et. al and Bežovan and Matančević on behalf of CIVICUS Slovenia and CIVICUS Croatia will thus be included in Chapter 5i and 5ii respectively. Concluding this section, Chapter 5iv will speak about the consequences that lie ahead for future accessions to the European Union as a result of the findings in chapter 4.

Chapter 5i: Lessons learnt from Slovenia

Prior to the commencement of the accession negotiations to the European Union, it was reported that civil society actors such Civil Society Organisations in Slovenia had acted in a fragmented and disunited way (European Commission, 2013). However, during the accession process to the European Union, there was greater awareness given towards the importance of partnerships with Non-Governmental Organisations. This increased level of awareness resulted in the Slovenian Government supporting the idea of establishing the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations of Slovenia. This initiative headed by the Slovenian Government is a stellar example which shows

that apart from the importance of civil society and Civil Society Organisations to be highlighted to both the state and the public, Civil Society Organisations should also work in a complementary and supportive manner instead of being disunited and fragmented, so as to achieve and exist as a cooperative and efficient network. Also, without the adequate understanding of this crucial third sector of the country, both the state and the public may be unaware of its value and its potential contributing capacities. It was only after introducing openness to the Slovenian accession process that citizens were better aware of how they could contribute to it. Hence, since the civil society is essentially made up by the people and for the people, it is utmost important for the very public to understand what civil society is, why it is so important and how to effectively complement the accession process to the European Union.

The Slovenian Government Communication Office had also collaborated with multiple Non-Governmental Organisations to inform the public about European institutions while this collaboration with the government concentrated mainly on making the accession process as open as possible. This then shows the need to inform and educate the public on their contribution and participation which can indeed make a significant impact to the country's accession process to the European Union. Also, transparency and openness are key factors to allow for civil society and the general public to better understand the accession process and key issues on hand before being able to contribute in an appropriate and complementary manner.

The Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations of Slovenia was also instrumental to Civil Society Organisations in the country as they were able to gain updates on the progress of the accession process and about participation in the formation of European policies. The presence of the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations of Slovenia acted as a one-stop information ground for the Non-Governmental Organisations which were then able to make use of this to form clear and organised conjoint efforts with a common goal. This also speaks of the cooperation from the Slovenian government by allowing the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations of Slovenia to act as a bridging ground to engage the inputs of Non-Governmental Organisations in the formation of European policies. In my opinion, this was a wise decision by the Slovenian Government as they were able to pool together most of the Non-Governmental Organisations in the country to take advantage of all the services available and provided by them without having to seek individually as many organisations as they could to help in consultations and other procedures towards the accession process. As such, the decision to draw together all the Non-Governmental Organisations in a bid to include their collective efforts in the accession process by setting up a centre for them to gather and act as one is most definitely one of the important lessons to draw from Slovenia's handling and engaging of civil society to facilitate the country's accession to the European Union. Undoubtedly, this also shows the strength of civil society in Slovenia that had assisted the country in its accession negotiations.

Political and financial support always seemed to be the most recurrent and immense of worrying problems for Non-Governmental Organisations in Slovenia. The Slovenian Government was often criticised for the lack of political interest and involvement in the country's civil society and in Non-Governmental Organisations. However, during the accession process to the European Union, the Slovenian Government was praised for the efforts to include civil society by also providing financial backing, through the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations of Slovenia, to support operations related to the accession process. Since financial problems often appeared to cripple the operational capacities of Non-Governmental Organisations in Slovenia, by aiding these organisations monetarily to take part in efforts related to the country's accession proceedings, the civil society organisations were then able to have expanded abilities to directly involve themselves in the process without qualms about financial and political obstacles. As seen in Chapter 4, it is after the setting up of the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations of Slovenia that Non-Governmental Organisations in the country were able to possess increased capacity and capability to facilitate the country's accession process. Without the political and financial support of the Slovenian Government, efforts undertaken by these civil society organisations may just have been dwarfed in intended and optimal magnitude and effect. With lesser financial and political obstacles in its way, civil society not only attains more strength, it is also able to better engage in ways to facilitate the country's accession to the European Union. As such, this is one of the important lessons to be learnt from the case of Slovenia where the government had directly stepped in to create a favourable financial and political environment for civil society and its agents to operate from, especially during the accession proceedings.

Chapter 5ii: Lessons learnt from Croatia

In the case of Croatia, the key links between the strength of civil society and its facilitation of the country's accession to the European Union seemed to lie in the environment in which civil society operates in and the recognition it gets from the Croatian Government. During Croatia's accession to the European Union, the Croatian Government not only treated civil society as a consultative platform but as a platform worth engaging in order to carry out intended reforms. With only a consultative role, there is only so much influence that civil society and Civil Society Organisations can have on the government as part of an attempt to aid in the accession process to the European Union. Hence, the decision by the Croatian Government to treat civil society as a significant partner in the accession process is commendable as compared to the late 1990s where the previous Croatian Government had used the media to de-fame Non-Governmental Organisations, contributing largely to the negative attitude harboured towards civil society in the country.

Notably, with the inclusion of civil society in the country's European Union accession proceedings, there was often constant engagement by Civil Society Organisations especially in the implementation of European Union projects related to the accession process. The effects of this involvement by civil society was seen particularly when

there was a large increase in public feedback regarding law and regulations that were required for the closing of Chapter 23 (Regulatory Acts Implementation) in the accession negotiations. In the accession path of Croatia, this is a remarkable example to the rest of the Balkans as to how and what extent civil society strength is able to facilitate a country's accession to the European Union.

On the end of the European Union, the body has often called upon aspirant countries for the inclusion of their respective civil societies during the accession process. By this formal requirement by the European Union, countries are obliged, most of the times, to comply and include civil society in the accession process by delegating consultative roles to them. Croatia, however, took a step further by not only allowing civil society representatives to perform in a consultative role but also take on the responsibility of conducting direct implementations of European Union projects. Despite criticisms that the roles of Civil Society Organisations are merely consultative, this nonetheless is a display of the country's willingness to include civil society in the accession process to Union as compared to the previous government which would have been reluctant to do so. Political interest towards civil society and the inclination to include civil society in the accession process has very much gathered positive feedback and action towards the country's accession negotiations. As such, in addition to the obligation introduced by the European Union to include civil society in accession proceedings of aspirant countries, the countries' governments' interest and disposition to include this sector has most obviously brought about benefits especially in the closing of some accession negotiation chapters as seen in the case of Croatia. Without the swift response by Civil Society Organisations to the Croatian Government's call-to-action, the closing of Chapter 23 would have most likely been completed at a much slower pace. As such, it is seen here that civil society strength in Croatia has indeed directly facilitated the country's accession to the European Union.

Findings from the Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations Report (2011) also indicate that, unlike in Slovenia, the public image of civil society in Croatia is generally favourable, although public knowledge and understanding of the sector is at best incomplete. The public appear to be familiar with the activities carried out by Civil Society Organisations, but do not have a deeper understanding of civil society and its role in society. As such, it is important to introduce the concept of civil society to the public in a manner that is comprehendible and how they can partake in the activities of the Civil Society Organisations during and after the accession process to ensure a continued bridge between the organisations and the public.

Another research conducted by the Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (2013) gathered recommendations on the role of Civil Society Organisations in the European Union accession process. The conclusions found that it is important for Civil Society Organisations themselves to invest extra efforts in the creation of cooperation and partnerships and through this, increase their capacities to operate and engage in the accession process. Additionally, it was also concluded that the Government's office, National foundation for development of civil society as well as local community foundations such as municipalities should create activities so that

the general public will get familiarized with the notion of civil society and the important concepts related to the country's accession to the European Union that Civil Society Organisations strive to educate and make clear. Hence, the idea behind this would be an interconnected societal effort carried out from a top-down approach so as to reach out to all tiers of society. This recommendation being suggested during the research conducted by the Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations shows that there is probably an absence of such an interconnected network between Civil Society Organisations and other organisations or foundations such as municipalities which are better able to reach out to the public to educate, inform and call for participation in the accession process wherever applicable and necessary.

Bosanac (n.d) also highlights the strength of mutual action between civil society and the state, where the end period of the negotiation process brought about the realization hat acting together can make much more of an impact on decision makers than expert, individual work. In February 2011, a group of Civil Society Organisations, having come into possession of closing benchmarks for Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, issued a mutual opinion on Croatia's readiness to close negotiations on the judiciary and fundamental rights, claiming that the country was not ready to close Chapter 23. This example shows the importance of Civil Society Organisations having an insight into at least the opening and closing benchmarks of chapter negotiations. This valuable contribution by civil society in Croatia also shows that documents in the accession proceedings need to be supervised not only by the European Union but also by the citizens of the negotiating country through their involvement in civil society. Unfortunately, at the same time, Civil Society Organisations gained the criticism of attempting to block the country's accession to the European Union.

Chapter 5iii: Lessons learnt from CIVICUS

According to the key finding of the CIVICUS 2008 – 2010 report, many established Civil Society Organisations are struggling under the weight of multiple economic and political challenges, but are also shown to be disconnected from many citizens, and particularly from new and informal forms of participation and activism (Mati, Silva & Anderson, 2010).

As per Rakar et. al (2011) along with Bežovan and Matančević (2011) on behalf of CIVICUS Slovenia and CIVICUS Croatia respectively, the recommendations suggested for Civil Society Organisations to facilitate the European Union accession process lie largely within the scope of improving the organisations and their capacities themselves. When Civil Society Organisations improve themselves and contribute to the overall strength of civil society, they will be better able to facilitate and contribute to the aspirant country's accession process since the findings in Chapter 4 show that civil society strength has the capacity to facilitate the European Union accession process. Additionally, civil society is often not allowed to develop due to the various obstacles it encounters. Hence, improvements are to be also made to the environment in which civil society operates so as to allow for increased civil society strength which

can in-turn assist the European Union accession process. In light of this, Rakar et. al (2011) and Bežovan and Matančević (2011) on behalf of CIVICUS Slovenia and CIVICUS Croatia had put across a number of improvements to be made, out of which, eight that were seemingly more applicable to the involvement of Civil Society Organisations in the European Union accession process and were chosen to be further elaborated on in this section.

1. Rakar et. al (2011) and Bežovan and Matančević (2011) recommend that Civil Society Organisations should empower themselves by increasing their competitiveness via means such as attracting experts and promoting links with academia. This way, the knowledge and know-how of Civil Society Organisations will improve with better informed information and a professional eye towards contributing to the accession process especially in the form of implementing projects related to the European Union. Additionally, by including experts and academia, the reputability of Civil Society Organisations will also improve therefore allowing for more trust to be gained from the government, media and amidst the people. This is crucial to Civil Society Organisations as there is an evaluation done by Bežovan and Matančević (2011) who assert that these organisations do not easily achieve impact and when they do, the state does not always appreciate their achievements. With more credibility, Civil Society Organisations will then have greater say in the proceedings and have greater success at facilitating the country's accession to the European Union.

2. Improving Civil Society Organisations' image in the media seems to be still a work-in-progress matter. This is due to how the media often appears to neither complement nor have a positive outlook on civil society and Civil Society Organisations. This is largely due to the criticism that the media rarely understands the mission of civil society or is unwilling to play a role as partners in its development or facilitation of the European Union accession process. Hence, there is a need to improve the way media views civil society since this perception has the power and ability to educate and positively influence the masses' insight of civil society, their civic rights are and how they are able to engage in them. With respects to the European Union accession process, improving the image of Civil Society Organisations in the media will also increase the trust and confidence among the public. With increased trust and confidence from the public, reforms and projects that are to be implemented are likely to be successful to a greater extent. Thus, it is ideal for media to not only be a partner of civil society in the accession process, but to also act as a medium to call upon the public to involve themselves in the various ways for the accession process, wherever possible. For example, Civil Society Organisations by being more active in media can present their project activities and open up for increased volunteerism or participation by the public to aid in the country's accession proceedings.

3. Designing a plan for the long-term development of civil society was also listed as one of the recommendations towards civil society's role in facilitating aspirant countries' accessions to the European Union. With civil society being developed gradually over the years, it will continue to supplement both the country and its partnership with the European Union in many ways which include increased public communication between the public and the government and/or the European

Union. Having a transparent and open plan for the long-term development of civil society will also allow for heightened trust and awareness from the government, media and general masses who now know what Civil Society Organisations in the country have intended to contribute over the years. Also, a plan for the long-run will also help Civil Society Organisations follow through on their decisions and obligations with a target in mind to ensure a satisfactory and successful accession and post-accession to the European Union.

4. One very worrying problem raised by Rakar et. al (2011) is the lack of public understanding regarding civil society, civic responsibility and rights. While the term civil society and civil society itself have been present in the recent decades, the term may still be relatively new to some while also often garnering negative notions. With weak civic awareness and civic participation, civil society continues to remain weak or insignificant in its efforts. The lack of understanding can be worked on if Civil Society Organisations, the government, the other sectors in the country and media were to work together to increase the education for civic responsibility and rights. However, in order to do this, the rest of the parties themselves need increased understanding of civil society and associated concepts prior to engaging in efforts to educate the public and to rally their support to cooperate with Civil Society Organisations during the accession to the European Union.

5. Strengthening the links between Civil Society Organisations aids in building a network for these organisations to share information, resources and human capital whenever necessary. Civil Society Organisations are often independent from the government and hence, with a collective network for all Civil Society Organisations to work as one, tap on resources and expertise allows for greater cohesion amongst the organisations to work towards contributing to the accession process with lesser transactional costs. With improved links, Civil Society Organisations will then effectively be able to function as a proper closely-knit and strong third sector of the country without having divisions amongst themselves. Better links between Civil Society Organisations will also follow through even after accession to the European Union where it will be easier for Civil Society Organisations to collaborate with each other in implementing both domestic and European Union related projects.

6. Civil Society Organisations are often reported to be plagued with financial issues. In a bid to address this problem, strengthening Civil Society Organisations' support structures via means of a Non-Governmental Organisation Fund was suggested. The purpose of this appears to lie in the independency of Civil Society Organisations. During the accession process, the Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations of Slovenia was backed politically and financially by the Slovenian Government. However, this has raised some questions regarding the actual independency of civil society in the country. As such, a Non-Governmental Organisation Fund will also allow for Civil Society Organisations to pool financial resources to embark on necessary work related to the European Union accession. This is especially important as a Non-Governmental Organisation Fund will ensure co-financing when additional funds need to be raised for the implementation of projects during the accession or even post-accession to the European Union. Also, while in the case of Slovenia where there was financial support from the

Government, it is crucial for such a fund for aspirant countries that may not have such a significant and willing financial contribution from the government. As such, an independent fund for a politically independent sector of the country will allow for the financial and operational stability of Civil Society Organisations where accession efforts are not being crippled due to a lack of financial capacity.

7. Another trend of civil society in the Balkans is widely referred to as the low levels of civic participation. While civic participation and volunteerism has increased over the years, it has to be acknowledged that there is still to a considerable extent, low to moderate levels of civic participation and volunteerism in some of the Balkans. Since a strong civil society will be better able to facilitate the accession process, it is also important to look at how to increase the strength of civil society in the Balkans. Hence, civic participation and volunteerism needs to have more attention and improvement in order to contribute to the strength of civil society which in turn can positively assist in the aspirant country's European Union accession. The culture of civic participation and engagement is not fully embedded in local communities while on the other hand, only a small proportion of organisations actively promote core civic values in the public domain. To work on increasing the levels of civic participation and further nurture the trend of volunteerism, Rakar et. al (2011) proposed the facilitation of organising and developing volunteerism by for example, determining the formal status of a volunteer. In Slovenia, this proposal was adopted and the Volunteerism Act was introduced in the year 2011 (Rakar et. al, 2011, p. 64). Bežovan and Matančević (2011) suggest that civic values and the culture of volunteering need to be promoted within the education system and curriculum, continuously and from an early age. Aspirant countries from the Balkans wishing to accede to the European Union should consider improving the trend of active volunteerism in their respective countries prior and during the accession process since changing the mind-set and culture of volunteerism will not be a task that can be attained overnight. Active volunteerism and civic participation contributes largely to the strength of civil society which can then facilitate the accession process more effectively and by a grander scale.

8. One other suggestion is for Civil Society Organisations to continuously respond to their environment and actively take part in policy and decision making processes. Referring to a survey conducted by Target (2010), during the accession process to the European Union, Civil Society Organisations in Croatia were being criticised for not being sufficiently involved in the activities of the negotiating teams or the consultation processes due to reasons such as not being invited for discussions, not being interested in negotiations or lacking in specific knowledge and access to basic information. This also displays the lack of initiative that Civil Society Organisations may at times have. On the other hand, in Slovenia, Civil Society Organisations are reported to have continuously put across ideas but are often not being given the sufficient attention by the Slovenian Government. Nonetheless, this brings about the conclusion that Civil Society Organisations have to either way continue to actively take part in policy and decision making by taking the initiative to do so despite of facing obstacles from the ruling governments. In order to achieve this, Civil Society Organisations are being suggested by Bežovan and Matančević (2011) to strengthen the mechanisms for dialogue between parties involved, including the governments. Additionally, these mechanisms are to be

developed in a sturdy manner such that they are not affected by changes in the ruling powers in the country. This is essential to civil society in general where it will continue to be independent of the state's political structures while being able to strongly facilitate the country's accession process through consistent involvement in policy and decision making, either domestically or related to the European Union in the form of regional development.

Chapter 5iv: Consequences for Future Accessions

This section of the chapter relates consequences to the Balkan states who aspire to be part of future accessions to the European Union. I have come up with suggestions on what should be done, aspects to be modelled after and improved on based on the lessons drawn from the case studies of Croatia, Slovenia and authors Bežovan and Matančević and Rakar et. al on behalf of CIVICUS Croatia and CIVICUS Slovenia. The suggestions have been drafted in ways that are, in my opinion, largely relatable and relevant to aspirant countries of the Balkans since they have been primarily based on lessons drawn from fellow Balkan states who are part of the European Union. The suggestions have been split into 7 points as follows:

1. Political support and collaboration

As observed from the above sections, political support and collaborative efforts initiated and supported by the government is instrumental to the efforts undertaken by civil society and Civil Society Organisations during the accession process to the European Union. As such, the Balkan states who wish to accede to the European Union during future rounds of enlargement should ideally focus on building a bridge between the government and civil society in their respective countries. This relationship between the two parties should also not be affected if there was a shift in power between the ruling parties in politics. Through this, there can be continued cooperation and support from the government to civil society agents such as Civil Society Organisations. This will then prove essential during and after the accession proceedings, as shown in the case studies above. Hence, countries from the Balkans who wish to accede to the European Union should begin working on increasing political support and collaboration with civil society and its agents as part of increasing the strength of civil society in the country and such efforts are ideally to be conducted well before deciding to commence accession negotiations with the European Commission. By the time accession negotiations are being officiated, the countries would have already built up a sturdy relationship between the governments and civil society. This sturdy relationship will allow for civil society to effectively contribute to and facilitate the accession process for the countries.

2. Financial support

Financial inadequacy appears to be a recurring problem for Civil Society Organisations as seen in the case studies of both Croatia and Slovenia above. This problem is also one that is directly tied to the strength of civil society and is a large part of the problem behind a generally weak civil society in Croatia and Slovenia. It is

thus very likely that Civil Society Organisations in the other Balkan countries are also being plagued with similar problems. In order to combat this, if a Non-Governmental Organisation Fund was set up ideally prior to the accession process, it will allow for Civil Society Organisations to continue contributing to various initiatives for the development of the country. Additionally, it will also operate as a form of financial backing for their efforts in facilitating the country's accession process to the European Union especially in the event where the government is unwilling or unable to provide some monetary resources to aid this sector in its initiatives towards the accession process. Hence, instead of starting to pool resources during the accession process, if Civil Society Organisations were able to come together and have a unified Non-Governmental Organisation Fund well before the commencement of the accession negotiations, it will allow for some planning that can be done on how to use these funds effectively before setting foot into the accession process. To manage and disburse the funds, the organisations can hold elections amongst themselves to democratically elect a committee. Also, if the government was willing to contribute financially to Civil Society Organisations engaging in the accession proceedings, this committee can also be in-charge of handling the funds and matching it with the plans that Civil Society Organisations wishes to undertake to facilitate the European Union accession process.

3. *Public understanding of civil society and benefits of European Union accession*

Established beliefs and attitudes are often ingrained in the mind-set of people and this can last for generations. While the term civil society has only been gaining recognition in recent years, Civil Society Organisations have been operating in many of the Balkan states for decades. For example, in Croatia, these organisations have been around since the breakup of Yugoslavia while in Slovenia, they have been operational for an even longer period of time. However, over the years, there may be many contributing factors to how the public perceives civil society. In Croatia, the media and the previous government have been instrumental in the negative attitudes of the public towards civil society and Civil Society Organisations. This may also be the case for other Balkan countries. Even if this wasn't the most accurate portrayal of the public's treatment of civil society in the country, there is still a need to further increase the public's understanding of civil society. This is especially important for the Balkans that are characterised by a low level of civic participation. If perhaps, when people understood what civil society is and what it does, there may be increased levels of civic participation in these regions. Similarly, if the public has a better idea on what benefits the accession to the European Union can bring to the country, they will be better informed on engaging in efforts facilitating the country's entrance to the European Union. Like established beliefs and attitudes that are lasting for generations and even transcended from one generation to the other, a change that has to be fostered also takes time to have any visible effect. If civil society and Civil Society Organisations in the Balkans wish for the general public to be able to contribute in their efforts during the country's accession to the European Union, there has to be greater efforts undertaken prior to the accession process to increase the public's knowledge, awareness of civil society and how to work alongside it. This education and its effects can take years to have any marked improvement in attitudes and beliefs. However, with the persistent input by civil society and its agents, there can be notable progress in the attitudes and perception by the public which will strengthen

civil society and also be beneficial to Civil Society Organisations who may require the support of the public in initiatives that are part of facilitating the country's accession to the European Union.

4. *Public trust and confidence*

Similar to beliefs and attitudes the public exhibit towards civil society, the trust and confidence of the very public in civil society at times are not very optimistic. Gaining the public's trust and increasing its confidence in civil society and its agents are undoubtedly part of the responsibilities of civil society. If civil society and its agents need the participation of the public in efforts and operations towards facilitating the country's accession to the European Union, then it is essential to increase the trust and confidence of the public in civil society or Civil Society Organisations. In the case of Croatia where there was a negative attitude being fed to the public under the previous government and the media, there were resultantly low levels of public trust and confidence in civil society and Civil Society Organisations despite the latter's existence in the country since the late 1980s and through to the early 1990s. However, this had changed when the new government had come into force and was pro-civil society which allowed for increased recognition towards civil society and its efforts. This allowed for civil society and Civil Society Organisations to work on the level of trust and confidence that the public had in them. The fruits of their efforts towards increasing public trust and confidence was seen when there was a large participation by the public in providing feedback towards Chapter 23 of the European Union accession negotiations concerning the country's regulatory acts, an effort that was headed by Civil Society Organisations in the country. Likewise, it is important for countries of the Balkans to increase the public's trust and confidence in civil society and its agents so that it will be easier to rally the support of people via these mediums when necessary, as part of facilitating the accession processes for their respective countries. While it may not be that much of an easy task to accomplish, it is not entirely to be written off as well as seen in the case of Croatia where such a change in attitudes of the people contributed to and facilitated the closing of accession negotiation chapters. This is crucial for aspirant countries in the Balkans such as Serbia where the confidence towards Civil Society Organisations is only 31.8% (Drakic & Kajganovic, 2012, p. 3). Additionally, Vurmo (2013) states that public trust in civil society is well below 50% in the Balkans which is indeed a cause for concern and an area to work on for countries in the Balkans looking to improve civil society strength and harness the inclusion of civil society in the European Union accession process.

5. *Media trust and support*

One important partner of civil society other than the country's government would very likely be the media. As highlighted by Rakar et. al (2011) and Bežovan and Matančević (2011), media is a powerful educator and a medium which can partner with civil society and its agents. Mass media affects public opinion by making it possible for large groups of people to develop collective attitudes regarding public affairs. Mass media also tells people what issues are important and motivates the public to action. Exposure to media then activates people's convictions or causes them to form new ones. As a result, those who control the mass media have the capacity to

sway public opinion. Hence, by having the trust and support of media, a greater proportion of the public will be able to understand what civil society is, how it works and also take part in the advertised efforts of Civil Society Organisations as part of the accession proceedings. Media's trust and support also directly make up the environment in which civil society operates in. As such, with increased cooperation and understanding between the media and Civil Society Organisations, there can be an increase in the number of joint efforts that can be undertaken to facilitate the accession process to the European Union.

6.   *Increased cohesion between Civil Society Organisations*

For countries in the Balkans who wish to accede to the European Union in the future rounds of enlargement, as part of creating a strong civil society, a solid network of Civil Society Organisations is one of the crucial elements. When there is greater cohesion between Civil Society Organisations, enduring and mutually beneficial relationships are being built. This then allows for Civil Society Organisations to leverage on the joint facilitation of the accession process to the European Union by tapping on resources within this network of Civil Society Organisations. By having a centre for Non-Governmental Organisations like in Slovenia, Civil Society Organisations in the country were able to come together to share information and take part in efforts towards the accession proceedings in Slovenia. Similarly, countries in the Balkans can set up such a centre or a network for Civil Society Organisations in the country either with the help of the respective governments or as an entirely independent centre for such organisations. This also makes civil society stronger in the country and act as one with a common goal of facilitating the country's accession to the European Union.

7.   *Embarking on change early*

For many of the above mentioned consequences that countries intending for future accessions to the European Union should take note of, embarking on change early in the accession route is ideal. The reason behind this suggestion would be that many of the above mentioned can take anywhere from months to years to have any fruitful outcome. For some countries it may be faster, while for others not. As such, as soon as a country expresses its desire to gain membership into the European Union and officially submits a membership application, the aspirant country should begin working on internal reforms and towards the European standards being advocated within the European Union. This will also very likely allow for the aspirant country to be more qualified when being assessed by the European Commission on the country's readiness to commence accession negotiations. Additionally, the aspirant country will find it easier to close the accession negotiation chapters by identifying key challenges in the country and working on them by drawing on similar lessons and obstacles found in other European Union countries that were prevalent prior to their accessions. In the case of the Balkans, other Balkan aspirant countries should learn from the obstacles and lessons of Croatia and Slovenia during their respective accession processes so as to identify any similar issues in their countries. Many problems and solutions to them were only realised midway or towards the later stages of the accession process especially in the case of Croatia. This can be avoided and reform can be started early so as to have a more effective and efficient accession process. Hence, embarking on change early and working on issues dedicatedly prior to or very

early in the accession process, with substantive results, may just allow for a hastened completion of the accession negotiation process and a quicker accession to the European Union with full domestic support and confidence from the European Commission and fellow member states.

Chapter 6
Lessons and Outlook for Serbia

In conclusion, the findings as presented in Chapter 4 along with the lessons drawn from the findings in Chapter 5 support the hypothesis of this paper that civil society strength does facilitate the European Union accession process for the Balkans. However, at the same time, it must be acknowledged that the findings from the case studies of Slovenia and Croatia also display the weaknesses of civil society and the challenges faced by it in the respective countries' accession processes. This is particularly an interesting find when contrasted to the literature review that also suggests that civil society in the Balkans is not always weak as popularly asserted. As such, the findings from the case studies of Slovenia and Croatia can also be viewed as lingering evidence of the weakness of civil society in the Balkans albeit a gradual improvement in the region's strength of civil society. Despite this, civil society does have the capacity and capability to facilitate the European Union accession process, as seen in the cases of Slovenia and Croatia where civil society and the strength of Civil Society Organisations did in fact contribute to a significant extent to the accession proceedings.

Hence, it is in the best interest of countries in the Balkans who wish to accede to the European Union to firstly focus on improving the strength of their respective civil societies. It is only with a significant and sturdy civil society that the accession process will be facilitated in a successful and commendable manner. In order to achieve this, all sectors in the country have to recognise civil society and work alongside it. Additionally, a culture of trust and confidence in civil society needs to be cultivated amongst the general public who will have to primarily better understand what civil society is, its importance and the roles it plays in the development of the country and the accession process to the European Union. This increased awareness amidst the public will also pave the way for greater and fortified civic participation in the country. As such, for the Balkan countries to make use of civil society's strength and ability to facilitate the accession process, the various components in the country must come together and work as one towards the common goal of acceding to the European Union. Ideally, if this cooperation begins well before or early in the accession negotiations, there is the possibility of a quicker and successful completion of the various accession negotiation chapters along with a subsequent accession to the European Union.

Having in mind the lessons learnt and improvements suggested, this paper concludes by opening up discussions on Serbia which would be the next probable entrant to the European Union just behind front-runner, Montenegro. The basis for selecting Serbia to provide an outlook for was due to the country's most recently commenced accession negotiations in late 2015 coupled with the importance and need to begin the reform process early on in the accession proceedings as learnt from the previous chapter using the examples of Slovenia and Croatia. This chapter thereby attempts to apply lessons learnt and introduce suggestions to aid Serbia in achieving a smoother, more informed and consequently successful accession process.

6.1 Serbia's accession efforts to the European Union

Over the last decade, Serbia has made a huge effort to reform its institutions, legal framework and economic regulations, in order to comply with international and European standards and to promote an open and efficient market economy (European Economic and Social Committee, 2013). The Stabilisation and Association Agreement for Serbia was signed on 29 April 2008 and as of January 2009, the Serbian government had started to implement the obligations listed under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with a unanimous decision (Government of the Republic of Serbia European Integration Office, 2016). The Stabilisation and Association Agreement for Serbia indicates that the country should make efforts towards normalisation of relations with Kosovo and also to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia with the extradition of war criminals Ratko Mladić[5] and Goran Hadžić[6]. Negotiation talks with regards to accession to the European Union were previously halted in 2008 due to Serbia's failure to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. However, since Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžic have since been extradited in 2011, accession negotiation talks for the country were resumed by the European Commission (Töglhofer, 2012). As the European Commission (2010) reports, Serbia had officially applied for membership to the European Union on 22 December 2009 and the European Commission had recommended making it an official candidate on 12 October 2011. After the votes of 27 European Union foreign ministers with 26 votes for Serbia's accession and 1 against, Serbia received full candidate status on 1 March 2012 (Government of the Republic of Serbia European Integration Office, 2016). The new Government, which took office in 2012, has confirmed Serbia's commitment to accede to the European Union. As highlighted by the European Economic and Social Committee (2012), the new Serbian government has taken practical steps to pursue the reforms undertaken so far, focusing in particular on the fight against corruption, the consolidation of the rule of law, the protection of minority rights and economic recovery. It has also pursued efforts to improve regional cooperation. In April 2013, there was a historic agreement reached by Serbia and Kosovo which stood as a "strong and visible testimony of the

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[5] Ratko Mladić is a former Bosnian Serb military leader accused of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide

[6] Goran Hadžić is a former president of the Republic of Serbian Krajina who was in office during the Croatian War of Independence

transformative and stabilising effect of the enlargement and stabilisation and association process" to the European Council (Council of European Union, 2013). The success of this historic agreement and efforts towards normalisation of relations with Kosovo was seen in January 2014 where the Council of the European Union had approved the opening of negotiations for Serbia and the negotiation talks have officially begun most recently on the 14 December (Government of the Republic of Serbia European Integration Office, 2016).

6.2 History of civil society in Serbia

According to Milivojevic (2006) on behalf of CIVICUS Serbia, the development of civil society in Serbia can be divided into four distinct phases namely the period before the Second World War, after World War II, in the late 1980s to 1990s and the period after October 2000.

In the period before the Second World War in 1941 up to the early 20th century, civil society in Serbia manifested itself in traditional forms of solidarity in rural communities where the Eastern Orthodox Church and the royal family played a significant role in these organizations since many were founded under their patronages. In the period after World War II in 1945, the communist regime that was characterized by "governmental" Non-Governmental Organizations, had virtually erased freedom in the country. Additionally, as a result of the communist regime, the establishment of association was extremely restricted while all interest groups and associations of citizens focusing on recreation, sports and culture became part of the state-controlled system (Milivojevic, 2006, p.15). However, civil society in the country reappeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s where civil society was linked to the creation of a multi-party political system, with a number of civil initiatives, such as the Association for Yugoslavian Democratic Initiative which sought a democratic solution to the deep crisis in which the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was established (Djokic, 2003, p. 300). In spite of a number of democratic initiatives, events led society in the opposite direction. This period was characterized by the break-up of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, armed conflict and a consequent influx of internally displaced persons and refugees. Increasing numbers of citizen groups and associations formed to oppose hatred, to limit and then put an end to war and violence, to assist its victims and to protect elementary human rights. Finally, the series of demonstrations and campaigns against the wars and the regime, organized throughout the 1990s mostly by national Civil Society Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations reached its peak on 5 October 2000, when Civil Society Organisations played an important role in ousting the authoritarian regime and installing a democratic political system (Milivojevic, 2006, p. 15). While civil society in Serbia was known to be suppressed by the regime during the 1990s, since the year 2000, civil society has started to gain legitimacy, a recognized role and acknowledgement for its impact on governance processes and on key political and social issues.

6.2.1 Previous Concerns with civil society in Serbia

In this section, I have identified and gathered 3 main concerns with civil society in Serbia as part of the findings by Milivojevic (2006) on behalf of CIVICUS Serbia. However, due to the findings of Milivojevic (2006) being a decade old, the main areas of concern with civil society have been documented as 'previous' concerns in this section. These concerns will be then compared with the current standing of civil society in Serbia in Chapter 6.2.2. *Current state of civil society's strength in facilitating Serbian accession* to check for changes, if any.

1. *Lack of financial resources*

Similar to the cases of Slovenia and Croatia, the major concern with regard to the structural dimension of civil society in Serbia was the limited sources of finance available to Civil Society Organisations. A majority of Civil Society Organisations were strongly characterized by foreign donor dependency and international donors were phasing out their financial commitment to the country. This then indicated a big problem for Civil Society Organisations in Serbia since the lack of financial stability jeopardizes the very existence of Civil Society Organisations. The poor financial health of Civil Society Organisations in Serbia also risk crippling its possible contributions and future efforts in the country's accession process to the European Union. Additionally, Milivojevic (2006) reported that Civil Society Organisations in the country obtain modest funding from the state, primarily as a condition posed by international multilateral and bilateral donors. However, there were seemingly no clear guidelines to oversee the allocation of grants to Civil Society Organisations. Furthermore, informal links were said to still control the relationship that civil society and the state share. This could have also given rise to another potential problem for civil society during the course of the country's accession to the European Union where there would have been issues concerning the disbursement of the funds to the efforts of civil society to facilitate the accession process.

2. *Poor relationship between civil society and state*

Milivojevic (2006) also found that, at the specific period of study, the relationship between civil society and the state was largely problematic as there was hardly any space for social and political dialogue between the two parties concerned. Additionally, the relationship between the state and civil society was further weakened by the absence of a clearly demonstrated political will to recognize the role of civil society in the country's development. However, civil society, on the other hand, despite its large number of actors, had not developed sufficient awareness of the political importance of its role in the wider community.

3. Public trust and confidence

Milivojevic (2006) identified that there was a significant level of distrust among citizens with regards to their perception and confidence in Civil Society Organisations. As a result, the public were said to view the influence of the organisations' work as rather insignificant. With low levels of public trust and confidence in civil society, it would be a difficult task for Civil Society Organisations to rally the support of the public where needed to support its efforts towards the Serbian accession to the European Union. Public trust and confidence is also needed when civil society wants to aid in the implementation of reforms or even work hand-in-hand with the government on issues that are part of the accession proceedings.

6.2.2 Current state of civil society's strength in facilitating Serbian accession

In this section, I have put across suggestions that are based on the concerns highlighted in the above segment Chapter 6.2.1 *Previous Concerns with Civil Society in Serbia.* As such, the suggestions which are focused on 3 main aspects will identify the current state of civil society's role in the Serbian accession process by comparing the previous concerns identified in the year 2006 as part of the CIVICUS Serbia Study against the *2012 Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the role of civil society in the European Union and Serbian relations* and the *2014 US Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Europe and Eurasia's Civil Society Organisation Report.* One important finding by the 2014 USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia Civil Society Organisation report was the financial capability of Civil Society Organisations being the worst performing indicator for the country followed by the sector's public image. The breakdowns of the individual scorings by the 10 Balkan nations assessed are found in Table 4 under the section Appendixes.

1. Financial standing of Civil Society Organisations

Figures from 2011 reveal that little funding was allocated and actually disbursed for co-financing programmes and projects, despite the fact that such funding is critically required by Civil Society Organisations in Serbia. Additionally, in 2012, the European Economic and Social Committee urged the European Union Delegation to Serbia to continue allowing re-granting for smaller Civil Society Organisations through bigger counterparts as a step forward in making these funds available to the wider Civil Society Organisations' community. Hence, it appears that funding for Civil Society Organisations is still a persistent problem in Serbia. This not only affects the financial standing of these organisations but also risk their very existence in civil society. This is especially important to civil society in Serbia since as of the end of 2014, two of Serbia's largest international donors USAID and Global Fund closed their civil society programs (USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia, 2014). At present, the financial standing of Civil Society Organisations in the country appear to be based on short-term survival as opposed to obtaining diversified funds including that from the

government. In the year 2014, the USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia also scored the Serbian Civil Society Organisations' financial viability to be the worst performing indicator in the sector.
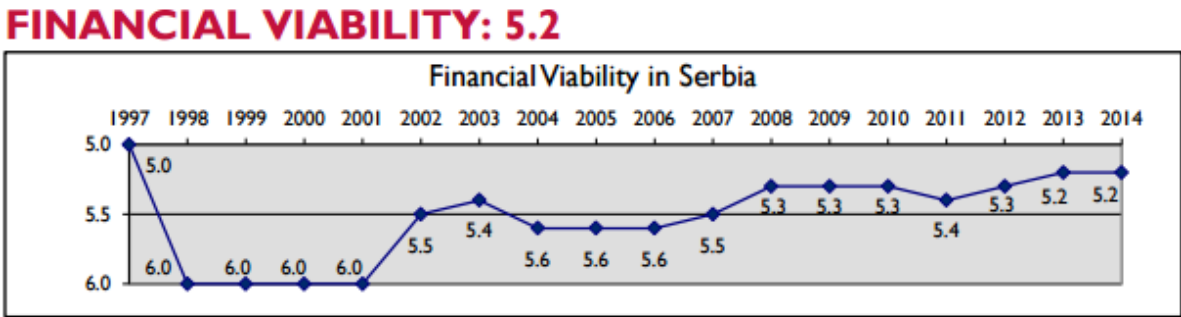

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 5.2

Table 2: Financial Viability of Civil Society Organisations in Serbia

The 2014 USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia's Civil Society Organisation Report scores Civil Society Organisations in Serbia on various categories on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 being the best score and 7, the worst. As seen from Table 2 above, the financial viability of Civil Society Organisations appears to have improved over the years on a marginal scale but is still in a bad shape. Compared to the Balkan[7] average of 4.62, the civil society in Serbia is not in a good or healthy financial standing.

Therefore, as suggested in Milivojevic (2006), the establishment of an efficient Civil Society Organisations funding policy by the central state, in partnership with local authorities, which targets key policy issues, should be a priority. Hence, at this point in time, based on the data collected by USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia (2014), the financial health and strength of civil society in Serbia is still not favourable for Civil Society Organisations to facilitate the country's accession process to a sufficient and satisfactory manner despite having the expertise and knowledge to do so. Until a commitment by the Serbian government has been made to improve the financial well-being of civil society in Serbia along with Civil Society Organisations themselves making the resolution to resource from more diversified avenues other than only international donors, civil society will be unable to financially facilitate the European Union accession of the country to a significant extent.

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[7] The countries used to calculate the Balkan average in the USAID report are as follows: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, FYROM, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia. Data for Greece and Turkey were not available.

2. State-civil society relationship

In light of the relations between the state and civil society in Serbia, both parties should take efforts towards the improving of relations. The state should recognise the potential contributions and political importance of civil society in its facilitation of the country's accession process and its overall contribution to national development. Also, civil society should make increased efforts to establish sufficient awareness of its political importance of its role in the community. The European Commission has also emphasized the importance of civil society in reforms to Serbia for which the Serbian Ministry of Justice and the Serbian European Integration Office held a workshop involving Civil Society Organisations for the negotiation proceedings of Chapter 23 (Legal and Judicial Reform Program, 2014). This then shows that the Serbian government, albeit in a sense being obliged by the requests of the European Commission, is willing to recognise the potential contributions and importance of civil society's facilitation of the accession process. As such, since the relations between civil society and the Serbian government has improved in the 6 year period between 2006 and 2012, it can be expected to continue improving through the course of the country's accession process. At the same time, this continued improvement in relations between the state and civil society in Serbia is required because there is also the criticism that state support is neither sufficient nor based on well-defined priorities (European Economic and Social Committee, 2012).

3. Public trust and confidence

In the year 2006, it was found that there were significant levels of distrust and low levels of confidence amidst the public with regards to Civil Society Organisations (Milivojevic, 2006). Similarly, in the year 2014, the USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia found that public image was the second worst performing indicator for the Country. While the figures have reportedly increased from the year 2006 up to 2014, the increase is only but marginal and has been long stagnant for the past few years as seen in Table 3 below.
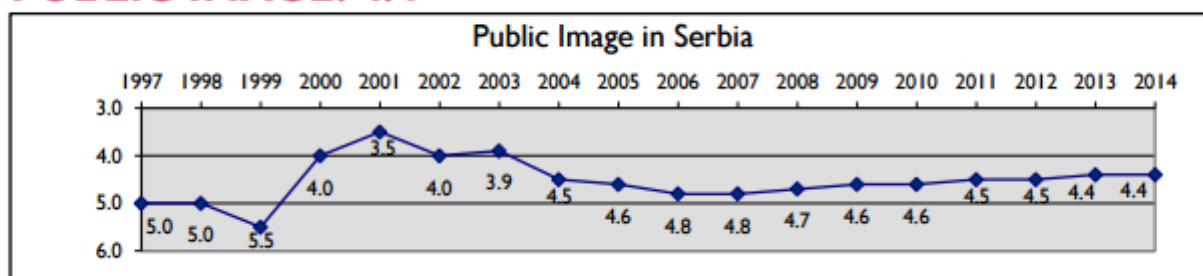

Table 3: Public Image of Civil Society Organisations in Serbia

Keeping in mind that the 2014 USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia's Civil Society Organisation Report scored Civil Society Organisations in Serbia on various categories on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 being the best score and 7, the worst, comparing to the Balkan average of 3.74, Serbia is again a laggard in improving the image of civil society amidst the public. Hence, as seen above in Table 3, the public image held by Serbian citizens on Civil Society Organisations is rather low and is a cause for concern should Civil Society Organisations require the help of the public as part of civil society initiated reforms or efforts to facilitate the country's accession to the European Union. Additionally, while the public's perception of civil society and Civil Society Organisations are rather negative in Serbia, efforts can be undertaken by the government and civil society itself to change this over a period of time. This is essential to increase civic awareness and civic participation to build the strength of civil society in the country. This is especially relevant to Serbia since, as understood from the cases of Slovenia and Croatia, civil society strength is found to facilitate the accession process of countries wishing to accede to the European Union.

6.2.3 Outlook for Serbia

At present, from the findings of the above sections in this chapter suggest that civil society strength in Serbia appears to be between low to moderate. Nonetheless, it has to be acknowledged that over the years, there have been improvements in the strength of civil society. However, when comparing to the rest of the Balkans, many aspects of civil society in the country seem to be lagging behind. Three main concerns in the Serbian civil society were found above in the year 2006, namely the financial standing of Civil Society Organisations, State and civil society relations and the public image of Civil Society Organisations. Unfortunately, when comparing with the findings over the years 2012 and 2014, these very aspects of civil society identified to be problematic in 2006 are still causes for concern in the country in spite of marginal improvements over the years. This then gives the impression that civil society strength in Serbia is not only weak but is also on a long and hefty path to improvement and at this point in time, will not be of much help in facilitating the country's accession to the European Union despite the opening of negotiation chapters as of December 2015. In my opinion, this is worrying since the country has already commenced negotiation proceedings with the European Union but is still lacking a strong civil society to be a partner in the accession process.

Additionally, it may also be the case that civil society in Serbia will follow the paths of Slovenia and Croatia by gaining momentum only as more negotiation chapters are opened and the accession process gains a greater drive. Interestingly, Serbia at present experiences similar problems and problematic aspects of civil society that were faced by both Slovenia and Croatia before and during their respective accession processes. However, in my opinion, instead of waiting for the accession proceedings to gain more drive before stepping in to complement the process, Civil Society Organisations should focus on self-improvement and should plan ahead on how it will engage itself in the accession process. This is important since a weak civil society, despite attempts

to engage itself in the accession will only be realistically able to achieve a limited level of facilitation towards the country's accession as learnt from the case studies of Slovenia and Croatia.

As such, I stress the need for the Serbian civil society to commence on change and reform early in the pre-accession process so as to improve the strength of civil society to prepare it to be an indispensable and worthy partner to the state during the accession to the European Union. The primary reason behind my strong emphasis for this lies in how change and reform can be both difficult and may even take years to implement and can take an even longer time to produce an intended outcome.

In addition to the opening of Chapters 32 "Financial control" and 35 "Other issues - Item 1: Normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo" in December 2015, Serbia has also opened negotiations on Chapters 23 "Judiciary and fundamental rights" and 24 "Justice, freedom and security" as of July 2016. Hence, there is the impression that the accession process of the country is gradually speeding up and Serbia may be expected to accede to the European Union sometime in the medium to long term. As such, it is essential that the country has a clear plan in mind to tackle current and anticipated problems in order to close accession negotiation chapters to a successful and satisfactory manner. Despite civil society strength in Serbia not being very positive at the moment, given that improvements within the sector are adopted at the soonest, civil society can be expected to strengthen considerably. The improved strength of civil society can then fruitfully facilitate the country's accession to the European Union like in the cases of Slovenia and Croatia where it was learnt that civil society and its strength are laudable catalysts to an aspirant country's accession process.

Chapter 7
Conclusion

The main proposition of this paper proclaims that civil society strength does facilitate the European Union accession process for the Balkans. Drawing from studies done on the accession paths of fellow Balkan and European Union member states, Slovenia and Croatia, it can be concluded that civil society strength does indeed facilitate the European Union accession process for candidate countries and can be expected to do so for the Balkans as well. However, at the same time, it must also be acknowledged that civil society strength in the Balkans need to be further improved despite gaining momentum over the last decade. The purpose of this would lie in the considerably more impactful contribution of a stronger civil society towards the country's accession process. Hence, in my opinion, most of the work that has to be done by

Balkan aspirants should primarily focus on the strengthening of civil society before engaging the sector in accession efforts.

Another important observation and pointer that is very relevant to the Balkan states would be the need to introduce change at the soonest. At present, of the Balkan countries, Montenegro and Serbia are the only 2 candidate countries of the European Union from the region who have successfully opened negotiation chapters with the supranational entity. Holding in consideration that the European Union had promised the region membership in the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit and trusting that the Union will upkeep its word, the Balkan states should ideally embark on relevant efforts that will increase civil society strength. Through this, a stronger civil society will be better able to facilitate the countries' accession processes by contributing in efficient and feasible ways. Moreover, as part of efforts towards acceding to the European Union, the Balkan states should identify and learn from the strengths and weaknesses of Civil Society Organisations in Slovenia and Croatia so as to better be able to improve on similar weaknesses and capitalise on similar strengths. Coupled with the lessons learnt from these two Balkan countries, fellow aspirant countries from the region should launch change early with a plan in mind for the pre-accession process. The next earliest enlargement of the European Union may be in 2020 or even later subject to the tenure of President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker. This gives aspirant countries of the Balkan region a good 4 years at the very least to introduce and assimilate change within their countries. The much needed improvements and reforms in the countries, especially for the civil society sector, will be a strong precursor to being successfully assessed by the European Commission as a candidate country that is ready for accession.

At the same time, it is important to note that while the prospects of an actual membership to the body may be feasible only in the medium to long term, in my opinion, it is wise to begin preparations for it apart from merely fulfilling the conditionality towards the Copenhagen criteria and the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Hence, should the Balkan aspirants greatly desire to accede to the European Union, the countries will need to be more forward-looking and be more attentive to the finer details of the accession process. For a start, in my opinion, the Balkan states can prepare themselves for the accession negotiations by identifying, out of the 35 negotiation chapters, possible ones that they feel need to be worked on to be in line with the expectations of the European Commission and the European standards. Furthermore, the Balkan states will also need to acknowledge the capacities of civil society and each state has to work alongside their respective civil societies as partners towards change and the overall goal of accession to the European Union. Therefore, from an optimistic point of view, the Balkan aspirants can be expected to be more than ready when the accession negotiations commence, should the European Union indeed make good of its promise to the region from the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit.

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Appendixes

Table 1: Civil Society Organisations' mode of participation in European Union accession process

Mode of participation in the EU accession process	Continuously	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	None of the above	Response Count
Active engagement in PREPARATION OF EU FUNDED PROJECTS	52	38	19	12	27	148
Active engagement in IMPLEMENTATION OF EU FUNDED PROJECTS	42	28	25	19	33	147
Direct involvement in programming processes on national level in Croatia	12	33	22	46	34	147
Indirect involvement in programming processes on national level in Croatia	28	64	29	11	18	150
Other activist approaches e.g. advocacy, lobbying, media campaigns	16	60	28	17	24	145
Our organization tried to participate, but an attempt(s) was/were not successful	6	28	24	16	50	124
In case you participated in some other mode of participation, please, specify.						12
answered question						150
skipped question						101

Source: Authors' calculation, 2013.

Table 2: Financial Viability of Civil Society Organisations in Serbia

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 5.2

Financial Viability in Serbia

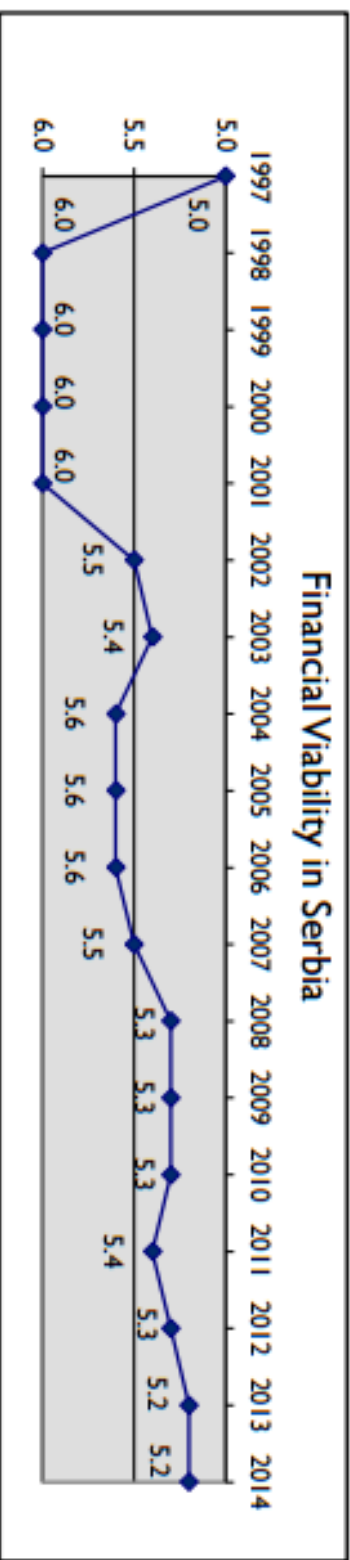| Year	Value
1997	5.0
1998	6.0
1999	6.0
2000	6.0
2001	6.0
2002	5.5
2003	5.4
2004	5.6
2005	5.6
2006	5.6
2007	5.5
2008	5.3
2009	5.3
2010	5.3
2011	5.4
2012	5.3
2013	5.2
2014	5.2

Table 3: Public Image of Civil Society Organisations in

PUBLIC IMAGE: 4.4

Public Image in Serbia

Year	Value
1997	5.0
1998	5.0
1999	5.5
2000	4.0
2001	3.5
2002	4.0
2003	3.9
2004	4.5
2005	4.6
2006	4.8
2007	4.8
2008	4.7
2009	4.6
2010	4.6
2011	4.5
2012	4.5
2013	4.4
2014	4.4

Table 4: Balkan Civil Society Organisations' scorings

Below Balkan average

ata for countries Greece and Turkey, the Balkan average used was based on the 10 above countries