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**“Evaluation of the EU Enlargement Process:
The case of North Macedonia (1993-2020)”**

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1. ABSTRACT

The main aim of this thesis is to evaluate the enlargement process of the European Union. First of all, it will present and analyze the first form of the enlargement process and its evolution throughout the previous years. Then it will focus on the current form of the process by evaluating it and finding the points that need to be changed and further evolved. In order to do that, there will be a case study, the case of North Macedonia¹, which has recently opened talks for its complete EU membership, but has been facing the disagreement of some members, and also, the French President of the Republic Emmanuel Macron stated that there must first be changes in the EU enlargement process before the Union is ready to accept new members efficiently.

The methodology that is going to be used in the thesis is the following: First of all, all the official documents that are related to the topic are going to be studied from EU sources, notably from the European Commission, as well as the Greek and North Macedonia parliaments. Then, specific interviews and statements from European ministers that are in favor and others that are not favorable to the idea of a reform of the EU enlargement process will be analyzed. It should also be noted that, due to the global pandemic of COVID-19, many websites and online sources have been used. Finally, with all the materials that have been gathered, I will attempt to give answers to the following questions: Does the EU enlargement process need changes? Why? And if yes, at which points?

The first part of the thesis will include the theoretical framework of the subject. The European Union's enlargement process since 2004 will be presented, together with the relevant legislative framework and the changes that have taken place in the process. This part will also contain the philosophy, values, aims, and detailed processes of EU enlargement. The second part will include the proposals and attempts that have been made to change the EU enlargement process, also including reviews and evaluations of these proposals and attempts. The third part will consist of the key study. It will start with the historical review of the history of the Balkans regarding their relations vis-à-vis the EU. After that, I will present the complete process that has been followed for North Macedonia in order for this country to become a full member state of the EU since 2000, when North Macedonia initiated negotiations via the EU's Stabilization and Association Process, and since then, by evaluating and criticizing the process in total. Finally, the last part of the thesis will present the conclusions of the research, as well as some suggestions and proposals for changes of the EU enlargement process.

2. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I want to thank my professor Ioannis Papadopoulos for his crucial assistance throughout the whole process of my thesis. Only thanks to his understanding, patience and guidance through times of a worldwide health crisis that affected and changed everything was this assignment possible to get carried through. I also owe thanks to my family that supported me by all means and my fiancée who supported me emotionally the most, providing me the will, motivation and psychological

¹ The names, which are going to be used in the total of this thesis regarding today's North Macedonia, are: "North Macedonia", "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (F.Y.R.O.M.)" and "Macedonia". The choice of the name used in each situation only depends on the official name used by the European Union, or the name used in any official document. The use of a specific name is not chosen regarding any political agenda or interest.

strength to carry on when most needed. Finally, I sincerely thank all my professors of my Masters program for their valuable knowledge and contribution, especially professor Nikos Zaikos who inspired me by his lectures for the present thesis.

3. INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) is a unique economic and political union between 27 European countries. The predecessor of the EU was created in the aftermath of the Second World War. The first steps were to foster economic cooperation, the idea being that countries that trade with one another become economically interdependent, and thus more likely to avoid conflict. The result was the European Economic Community, created in 1958 with the initial aim of increasing economic cooperation between six countries: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Since then, 22 more countries have joined (and the United Kingdom has left the EU in 2020), and a huge single market (also known as the ‘internal’ market) has been created and continues to develop towards its full potential (The European Union What it is and what it does, op.europa.eu).

One of the main functions of the EU since its beginning has been its enlargement. Enlargement is the process whereby countries join the European Union. In order for a country to become a member state of the EU, there has been established a specific process, starting from the first application for membership from the candidate state and ending with the granting of full membership. In this process are included the criteria that have to be met and the obligation from the EU’s part to assist each candidate in their achievement.

The basis of these criteria, and the overall principles and values that characterize them, have not changed throughout the evolution of the Union. However, following the needs of each period, the international political changes and the needs of the member state countries, the process and the criteria for the integration of new states into the EU have changed several times in order to respond in the best possible way to the challenges posed and to give the desired results.

Currently, most of the countries in the European Continent are member states of the EU. The countries that are not part of the Union are states that either have not expressed the will to join, like Iceland, Switzerland and the Vatican, or are in complicated political situations, like Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, the United Kingdom that has left the Union, and finally Turkey and the Western Balkans, i.e. Kosovo², Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. From all these countries, only Turkey and the

² This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence (Western Balkans, ec.europa.eu)

Western Balkan countries are candidate member states, and from them, the two (Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina), do not yet fulfil the requirements for EU membership³ (The European Union and Countries in the EU, schengenvisa.info.com).

This practically means that when we are talking about the EU enlargement in recent years, we mainly refer to the integration of the Western Balkans. This group of countries generally has always been complicated in terms of internal and external politics. The main reasons that the Balkans differentiate from the rest of the European countries mainly come from their history. The majority of these countries were not independent states until recently, and also many of them did not have a clear history and culture of their own, as they were parts of bigger states that dismembered after the Balkan Wars, WW1 and WW2. Also, some lands are being claimed by more than one country. Lastly, due to the already mentioned wars, there is much historical hatred among neighboring countries that is being used even now by radical right parties, which rekindle nationalism for their own gains, worsening thus the bilateral relations of the states.

Knowing all these problems, the EU tried to make some changes and established some special assistance mechanisms throughout the years for the Balkan States, like the SSA (Stabilization and Association Agreement). Despite these attempts, according to the decisions of the European Council, the Western Balkan states, which have applied for EU membership since some decades, and are currently in a state of candidacy to become member states, are not yet ready to integrate, as they do not fulfill the necessary criteria, as required by the EU's legislation.

This became crystal clear in the European Council that took place on 17-18 October 2019, when, discussing the enlargement and the stabilisation and association process as regards Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia, the president of France Emmanuel Macron blocked the two countries from accessing the next stage of their integration. The main issue that the French president put forward was that the EU has to reevaluate the principles and approach of the Union regarding its enlargement process, as it is no longer responding to the current needs and may present dangers and risks for the member states of the Union, its economy, and even the Union itself.

³ Up until this day (13 September 2023).

This decision may have faced a lot of negative criticism, but in the process, has also found large acceptance and support. The problem was known, but it was being ignored in the name of stability and unity, as it was considered a better strategy for the Union to accept as new members the Western Balkans in order to stabilize the Balkan area.

This thesis was originally inspired from Macron's veto to the integration of North Macedonia and Albania, and his call for a reevaluation of the European Union's enlargement process policy to address the following questions: What is the current EU enlargement process? Is it valid? Do the EU member states approve this process? Does this process respond to the needs of the Union or does it need to be changed? Is it potentially harmful for the member states to continue the same enlargement tactics? Are there better proposals and more improvements that can be applied? Which are the best alternative solutions?

In order to answer these questions, this thesis will review the enlargement phases of the EU, the changes and updates that have taken place through the years of the process's evolution. Also, we will reconsider the problems and the flaws that have been pointed out by political leaders and researchers. Finally, taking the case study of North Macedonia and its integration history into the EU, we will try to find out if there have been mistakes, and/or if there are any changes that can be made to the Union's enlargement process in order for it to become better.

4. EUROPEAN UNION ENLARGEMENT PROCESS

The European Union (EU) has gone through five rounds of enlargement throughout its history: from a mere six it has grown to twenty-seven member states. Still, the actual enlargement process is not as clearly laid down as one might have expected; it does involve the accession of new member states, which will then be incorporated into the Union. For a nation-state to join the EU, a set of criteria must be met, both economic and political, collectively known as the Copenhagen criteria, i.e. overall requirements focusing primarily on a stable democratic government centred around and abiding by the rule of law, with its corresponding liberties and subsequent institutions. The bibliographic contributions on this matter are to a considerable extent outstanding, like those of Friis⁴, Sedelmeier⁵, or Sjørusen⁶.

⁴ Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, often referred to as Uffe Friis, is a Danish politician who served as Denmark's Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1982 to 1993. He played a significant role in Danish and European politics

Existing member states and the European Parliament must agree to the enlargement under the Maastricht Treaty. The phrase “enlargement” or “expansion” is sometimes used to describe the process of European integration.

There is a considerable mass of evidence demonstrating the force and the profound impact of the process of enlargement or integration upon and throughout the European Union. Some, like Schmitter⁷ or Wallace⁸, point out how odd it is that even so and after all of the above, the actual studies on European integration theory have remained somewhat neglected.

The phrases “enlargement” or “expansion” are often used to describe the ongoing process of European integration, where countries join the EU and collaborate with existing member states. However, the term “enlargement” has also another connotation. It refers to an increased level of cooperation between EU member states, wherein governments willingly engage in a gradual effort to work together on complementary areas.

By focusing on these complementary areas, such as economic policies, security cooperation, or social regulations, member states aim to achieve a broader strategic objective. This objective involves institutionalizing national laws within the EU framework. In other words, they seek to establish a harmonized set of laws and regulations that apply uniformly across all participating nations.

Through this process of cooperative integration, EU member states align their regulations, policies, and legislation to ensure consistency and coherence. By doing so, they strive to create a unified legal framework that facilitates smooth functioning and effective

during the 1980s and 1990s. He was a prominent advocate for European integration and played a part in shaping the European Union’s foreign policy.

⁵ Ulrich Sedelmeier is a German political scientist specializing in European Union politics and international relations. He has conducted extensive research on EU enlargement, Europeanization, and the foreign policies of EU member states. He has also written about the impact of EU institutions on national governments and the role of ideas in European integration.

⁶ Marianne Riddervold Sjørnsen is a Norwegian political scientist specializing in European integration and EU foreign policy. She has conducted research on topics such as the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Union’s role as a global actor, and EU-NATO relations. She has published several articles and books on these subjects.

⁷ Philippe C. Schmitter is a prominent political scientist known for his work on comparative politics and European integration. He has made significant contributions to the study of EU politics, democratization, and theories of regional integration. Schmitter has explored topics such as the democratic deficit in the EU, the role of institutions in integration processes, and the challenges of enlargement.

⁸ Lord William Wallace, also known as William Wallace of Saltair, is a British academic and politician who has extensively written on European politics and the EU. He has been involved in policy advisory roles and has written on various aspects of EU integration, including the historical development of the European Union, the role of member states, and the challenges facing the EU’s governance and decision-making processes.

governance within the EU. This collaborative approach towards enlargement enables the EU to expand its scope and deepen integration while maintaining a shared set of rules and principles.

The above statement can be explained in the following five points:

- European integration studies have often placed a strong emphasis on empirical analysis, examining real-world events, policies, and institutions within the EU. This focus on empirical research may have overshadowed theoretical explorations of European integration, resulting in a relative neglect of theoretical development.

- Policy-oriented research: The field of European integration studies has been closely tied to policy concerns and practical implications. Researchers often prioritize addressing policy issues and offering practical recommendations over developing and refining theoretical frameworks. This policy-oriented approach can contribute to a relative neglect of theoretical advancements.

- Interdisciplinary nature: European integration studies draw from various disciplines, including political science, economics, law, and sociology. This interdisciplinary nature can lead to fragmentation and diffusion of theoretical efforts, making it challenging to develop a unified and cohesive theoretical framework. As a result, theoretical developments may be perceived as somewhat removed or scattered.

- Complexity and dynamism of the EU: The EU is a complex and evolving political entity with multiple layers of governance, diverse member states, and ever-changing challenges. This complexity and dynamism make it challenging to develop comprehensive and universally applicable theoretical frameworks. The constantly shifting nature of the EU may contribute to a sense of neglect in theoretical development.

- Emphasis on other research areas: European integration studies encompass a wide range of topics, including economic integration, institutional dynamics, decision-making processes, and policy areas. Researchers may prioritize studying these specific areas rather than focusing explicitly on theoretical aspects, which could contribute to a relative neglect of European integration theory itself.⁹

⁹ It's important to note that the perceived neglect of European integration theory may vary depending on individual perspectives and the specific scholarly community.

In 1972 Puchala compared the scientific study of the integration and enlargement process with the old Indian tale of the three blind men. Specifically, the tale being completely ironic, has the three men all describing an elephant to each other but after touching different parts of the animal, as such everyone thinks of something completely different. In all fairness, let's consider how this process has developed over the past few decades, starting with the predecessor of the EU, the European Economic Community, which was created by the original six member states, considered the innermost states of the Union, in Rome under the treaty by the same name back in 1958. Since then, it has tripled in size and as we have mentioned, the Union has grown to twenty-seven member states, the latest member state being Croatia, which joined in July 2013. Apart from that, in 2014, the EU made another territorial enlargement with the incorporation of Mayotte. However, these are not the only processes the EU has witnessed. There have been cases of reductions, most notable are: the independence of Algeria in 1962, the withdrawal of Greenland in 1985, and the withdrawal of Great Britain in 2020. Nevertheless, the process is not over yet and as of 2020, negotiations are underway North Macedonia (2020 or later), Serbia (2014 or later), Turkey (probably the oldest of the lot as it is dating back to 2005). The last round of enlargement was in 2004/2007, and after that accession processes came to a halt. Nevertheless, as both the former European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn have asserted, Serbia and Montenegro, as the two front-runners, are in fact highly anticipated that both will eventually join by 2025 when the next European Commission term is expected to take place. As such, many have pointed out that the EU has shown signs of fatigue after all the enlargements.

The so-called "European fatigue" and what it means for European institutions rose to acquire critical status in the relevant discourse fields. There has been a major shift in describing the enlargement and integration policies as actual success stories, events like the Brexit have made such voices even louder and more relevant, and as the heyday of regional integration theory came to an end before the European Community's enlargement in 1973, the bibliography struggles to catch up with the events and to position them critically in the axis of historical and political analysis. However, despite the subsequent shift towards conducting meaningful policy analysis and the significant influence it has had, particularly in the adoption of various theoretical frameworks within comparative politics, such as neocorporatism and network analysis, it has not significantly contributed to further research

on issues related to political construction, particularly the process of expansion or enlargement.

While the adoption of theoretical foundations from comparative politics, such as neocorporatism and network analysis, have brought new perspectives and methodologies to the study of European integration, they have not extensively advanced research on the specific aspects of political construction associated with expansion or enlargement.

Therefore, despite the evolution of theoretical frameworks and methodologies in the field of European integration studies, there remains a relative neglect of in-depth research on the intricacies and dynamics of political construction within the context of the EU's expansion or enlargement processes.

This suggests that further attention and research are needed to explore and understand the specific challenges, processes, and outcomes related to political construction during periods of EU expansion or enlargement, such as expanding (Friis & Murphy, 2002, p. 213). Within this context, narratives such as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) have started to rise as the continuation, or saga, of the original "success story".

The intriguing aspect lies in the ambiguity surrounding the two initially distinct policies: expansion and the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). This ambiguity arises from the interplay between two significant factors: the resurgence of research on international regional integration in the early 1990s and the philosophical concepts of "intergovernmentalism" and "supranationalism." It is remarkable because it goes beyond a mere theoretical debate, presenting practical implications and complexities for these policies within the EU. Both still focus on issues of expansion or deepening, such as the Single European Act, the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), or legal union.

First and foremost, it is important to define what is meant and/or implied by the enlargement of an organization in the specific context of a process characterized by gradual and "formal horizontal institutionalization of organizational rules and norms" (Schimmelfennig F. S., 2002).

- The process by which the activities and interactions of human contexts become normatively patterned is known as institutionalization.
- The other matter of importance here is, as Schimmelfennig describes it, the difference between "horizontal" and "vertical" institutionalization, these two

types of institutionalization corresponding to the common usage pertaining to the “expansion” and “deepening” of an organization, and more specifically a union. It’s important to note that horizontal institutionalization can be detected on a macro-level, meaning that it is required for institutions to expand beyond their established parameters in order to observe this level of institutionalization.

- On the other hand, regulatory membership and regulatory standards are officially rejected. Instead of focusing on regulatory membership and standards, the text suggests concentrating on formal and horizontal institutionalization procedures. Examples of these procedures within the European integration context include signing and ratifying cooperation agreements between existing members and potential new members. Additionally, signing and ratifying accession treaties are formal processes that outline the terms and conditions for a country to join the EU as a full member.

- While regulatory membership and standards may be rejected, the norms and practices of the organization still propagate informally beyond its official boundaries. This informal propagation can affect aspiring members who seek to align with the norms of the organization even before formal membership. Additionally, countries that choose not to join the organization may still adopt certain organizational norms and practices on a voluntary basis for cooperation or other reasons. As a result, it’s reasonable to concentrate on formal and horizontal institutionalization procedures, such as signing and ratifying cooperation agreements or signing and ratifying accession treaties. Organizational norms, on the other hand, propagate informally (“unevenly”) outside organizational bounds, to aspiring members as well as countries that refuse to join.–This proliferation occurs when there is a one-sided adaptation to address the negative effects of regional integration or to adopt a non-member’s institutional model in response to various challenges. It may be a result of practices converging. To ensure alignment, objectives should be tailored to the organization’s rules – narrower for accession or broader if changes in institutional practices directly respond to regional integration.

- Horizontal institutionalization is a question of scale, and expansion is best thought of as a progressive process that begins before and continues after the organization’s admission of new members. External actors may follow the norms and rules of a particular organization even without full membership. Non-members are required to follow membership conditions expressed by the organization (in this case

the EU) or create the conditions within which these rules can become formal agreements that create institutional relationships with the countries that are not full members, such as for example federation agreements and agreements to participate in the organization's selected policies. In simple terms, being embodied corresponds to the organization's regulations (e.g., the European Economic Area (EEA) agreement or Swiss-EU treaties). New members of an organization may, on the other hand, negotiate post-accession transition periods before implementing certain of its standards, or they may begin engaging in several of the association's objectives at separate times – as in the EMU or the Schengen Agreements.

In this context, enlargement is defined as “institutionalization”, a perspective that also binds with the historical and ideological perspectives regarding the EU. Specifically, however, the reason for connecting enlargement with institutions is to highlight the explicit link between the analysis of enlargement and theories on the establishment and effects of institutions. To put it concisely, exploring how the process of EU enlargement influences the creation and functioning of institutional structures. By studying this connection, we gain insights into how enlargement impacts the governance, decision-making, and policies of the EU.

Another reason is to widen the field beyond the scope of the narrow focus on studies on decisions on memberships. Horizontal institutionalization (minus membership), the further development of the organization's basic objectives, and the impact of horizontal institutionalization on applicants, member states, and the organization itself are likely to be among the topics covered by such a wider perspective. The literature on EU expansion focuses on three aspects of the process, which all entail the decision to codify horizontal institutionalization or the process leading to enlargement. These dimensions may respectively be termed as (1) the applicants' own expansion policy; (2) the foreign policy of member states and the extent to which this foreign policy aligns with the enlargement policy of the bloc; and finally, (3) the EU enlargement policy. For the latter dimension pertaining to the EU's enlargement policy as a separate tool and initiative than the aforementioned two dimensions, it makes sense to distinguish between (a) the macro, or sometimes referred to as polity, dimension, and (b) the content or policy dimension. Arguably, a dimension that has received relatively little attention involves expanded influence, the influence of these formal behaviors. For example, the establishment of new regional forms of cooperation has been used to blur the line between European Enlargement policy and European Neighborhood

policy. These two technically different types of policies have actually been merged into a single integrated institutional unit in the form of alliances around areas of geopolitical interest such as the Mediterranean, Black Sea or Eastern Partnerships.

The ENP was the solution inspired by the UK and Swedish model and was officially adopted back in 2003. This neighborhood policy came to support, and even complement, the enlargement process. Many cross-sectional studies compare the politics of various applicants with member states, the EU, and other regional organizations. The overall diversity regarding policy areas and analysis on matters of integration and enlargement processes in both domestic and international settings are necessary to be mentioned and analyzed, at least to the extent it is feasible within the natural constraints of this research project. Whereas longitudinal studies prefer to deepen into the comparison and expand it further to the study of the applicant itself by looking into member state politics and how those have evolved over time. In this context, geopolitical and economic objectives are usually invested with democratic and pro-détente rhetoric and the attention of integration policies revolves around a declared objective that is more often than not a hardline policy pertaining to building no walls in Europe, essentially also pushing the Single Market Economy agenda. The narrative of “building a circle of friends” sharing the same principles and values can be seen in the analysis of different enlargement rounds, with their short-term and long-term impacts. Nevertheless, as proposed by Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, there are some important parameters to consider when analyzing this process of enlargement or institutionalization. In longitudinal studies, the aim is to compare the politics of the applicants and those of the member states, to examine different enlargement rounds, and to work on refining the data and information related to short-term and long-term impacts (Schimmelfennig F. S., 2002). Based on these, suggestions in the form of dependent variables within such comparative strategies have come to deal with the following parameters and dimensions:

1. Applicant enlargement politics. A most important matter to pose a question upon regarding this dimension is, why and under which conditions do non-members seek accession to a regional organization? As we have mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, horizontal institutionalization does not simply originate and then bloom from the actual formal membership when it comes to the regional organization; therefore the broader question is, under what conditions do outsiders seek to change their institutional relationship with a regional organization, and what kind of institutional relationship do outsiders prefer to pursue with that organization? Especially about the EFTA enlargement, there is already a

significant corpus of material refining the theoretical background and information networks regarding the more philosophically placed literature that goes beyond individual cases and uses cross-comparisons within the same expansion round.¹⁰

2. Member state enlargement politics. According to Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier¹¹, the main question is, what were the parameters whereby a regional organization's member state supports or rejects expansion in a certain applicant country? Single-member states are frequently the subject of theoretical research of this dimension. Even meta-studies comparing many member countries are significant, but they are very uncommon. They analyze the domestic factors, interests, and considerations that shape a member state's position on expansion. Additionally, there are limited studies, known as meta-studies, that compare and analyze the positions of multiple member countries. These studies are valuable as they provide a broader perspective by examining the commonalities and differences in the expansion preferences of various member states.

Overall, the study of member state enlargement politics involves analyzing the parameters that shape a member state's support or rejection of expansion and considering the vulnerabilities faced by individual states in the context of multistate communities.¹²

3. EU enlargement politics. In this third section, the central question we have to examine is as follows: what are the conditions imposed upon regional organizations to admit new members, or if not to progress into full admittance of a new member, then to at least substantially change their institutional relations with outside countries? This question has two separate analytical dimensions, involving the expanded macro dimension and the substantive dimension, respectively.

The macro dimension is concerned with the EU as a polity and relates to the question of candidate selection and patterns regarding the aspect of national membership within the

¹⁰ Some examples are:

- Staab, A. (2013). *The European Union explained: institutions, actors, global impact*. Indiana University Press.
- Börzel, T. A. (2022). *Why noncompliance: The politics of law in the European Union* (p. 282). Cornell University Press.

Europe from Below: Notions of Europe and the European among Participants in EU Cultural Initiatives.

¹¹ Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier are both political scientists who have made significant contributions to the field of European integration studies. While Frank Schimmelfennig focuses on EU enlargement and the Europeanization process, Ulrich Sedelmeier has primarily worked on EU external relations, foreign policy, and the role of ideas in European integration.

¹² Schimmelfennig, F. (2010). Europeanisation beyond the member states. *Zeitschrift für Staats-und Europawissenschaften (ZSE)/Journal for Comparative Government and European Policy*, 319-339.

organization, a matter that shall be further discussed in section 4.3. Nevertheless, at this introductory stage where we are still mostly concerned with the theoretical framework of organizations and unions and the conceptualization of the enlargement as a policy initiative, the main question posed is why the organization prefers to host one state over another. Or, why the organization would prefer to offer membership rather than some other form (or lack thereof) of an institutional relationship between the organization and an outside state. These are all very important matters which will be further developed as we move further into the analysis of the function of the enlargement policy and the ENP within the bloc. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that theoretical literature on this dimension continues to emerge, most of the emerging studies focus on single cases, mainly the very ambitious and risky (especially given recent developments) project of eastward expansion.¹³

There are some horizontal comparisons with other international organizations in the same round of expansion, mainly the eastward enlargement of the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The basic study question for such cross-sectional and longitudinal studies was fluctuations in the structure of organizational size and national affiliation (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2002). So, those researches looked into the reasons why some states were better and more integrated or, for instance, why a state would choose membership in one organization over another, which then of course breeds the question of why some organizations have more member states and others less (and the extent to which this is a conscious decision based on exclusionary politics or not). As such, Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier collected a list of parameters regarding cross-sectional comparisons on the issue of EU enlargement, such as:

1. **The substantive or policy dimension of EU politics.** One major concern is the defined (or even predefined) content of those organizational rules that are used to achieve horizontal institutionalization. Research along these lines aims to explain the specific outcomes of accession negotiations in various policy areas, as well as the nature of pre-accession conditions or association policy. In the case of post-communist countries, matters pertaining to the democratic nature and processes of their internal institutions and laws were brought up and the EU

¹³ Genschel, P., & Schimmelfennig, F. (2022). War, political development, and European integration: a debate on Kelemen and McNamara's 'State-building and the European Union'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 29(12), 1867-1870.

Ferrara, F. M., & Kriesi, H. (2022). Crisis pressures and European integration. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 29(9), 1351-1373.

enlargement of 2004/2007 invested heavily in exerting profound influence and impact upon the process of “Europeanisation” of those countries. The key question upon following such a perspective is what are the outcomes of these rejections of the preferences for certain actors and which is their extent. It’s best to keep in mind that the applicants, member states, societal interest groups or institutional actors all come into this table of negotiation regarding accession with their own set of goals and agendas. Unfortunately, the purely theoretical analyses of the macro dimension have often neglected this dimension and there are very few theoretically informed comparisons between policy areas.

2. **The impact of enlargement.** Both organization and the state to which those fundamental regulations are introduced are impacted by enlargement. Much of the fatigue the bloc has shown after its latest enlargement deals precisely with the impact of the process and how well prepared the Union really is. On the one hand, the organization is most often asked how enlargement will come to affect the distribution of power and interests within its preexisting structures. It’s pivotal to describe how the enlargement will influence the identity, norms, and goals of all the actors involved in the process. Finally, the impact of the enlargement and integration is measured by the effectiveness as well as the efficiency of the organization carrying it out, on which subject matter there are multiple opinions and analyses approaching very critically the multiple treaties upon the functionality of the EU balances and whether those treaties have been fulfilled satisfactorily, enabling for a better adiabatic¹⁴ expansion. This led to a better understanding of the impact a large membership makes regarding the possibility of new member states to migrate into the organization. For this reason, the effects of enlargement on new members and non-members are most relevant to the study of horizontal institutionalization.
3. One final parameter, according to Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, is centred on **club theory**, described as the “most pertinent rationalist approach to the optimal size of organizations”. In this view, the main point to keep in mind, and one contested by member states, as we can see in the statement made by Polish

¹⁴ In a formal context, “adiabatic” refers to a thermodynamic process or change that occurs without any heat exchange between a system and its surroundings. In other words, during an adiabatic process, there is no transfer of heat energy into or out of the system. Instead, any change in the system's temperature or internal energy is solely due to work being done on or by the system. Adiabatic processes are often characterized by changes in pressure, volume, or temperature without any heat transfer involved.

Commissioner Danuta Hübner, is “why, if the benefits outweigh the drawbacks, there is so much popular opposition to these processes”¹⁵ (Devrim & Schulz, 2009). Club theory states that since we can see that the organization expands its institutions and membership then, for both the member states and the applicant states, the marginal benefits of enlargement exceed the marginal costs. There have been studies in support of this overall view, positing that the importance of the bloc in the process did in fact aid particularly post-communist regimes to outperform their counterparts that haven’t joined (Levitz & Pop-Eleches, 2010), as well as studies who contest that even though the EU appears to have provided many favorable conditions, giving solely credit for the improvement in the democratization and overall positive developments is a stretch, as there have been cases where post-communist countries that have joined the bloc seemed to have backslid (like the case of Hungary) (Börzel, 2014). Nevertheless, this is an issue that we will be discussing in the coming sections to a greater length. In the club-theoretical perspective, enlargement is almost an unstoppable force that will continue until marginal costs equal marginal benefits (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2002). What is highlighted by the aforementioned equilibrium, of marginal costs = marginal benefits, indicates the optimal size of the organization. In short, it can grow as big as it can remain profitable, even marginally so. However, the outcomes of organizational enlargement politics also depend on two more aspects, namely:

a. amalgamations of bargaining power

Amalgamations of bargaining power refers to the process by which member states within an organization come together and pool their negotiating strength to achieve common objectives or influence decisions collectively.

When an organization considers enlargement, member states might have varying interests and preferences regarding the inclusion of new members. Some states may be more supportive of enlargement, seeing it as an opportunity for increased economic cooperation, expanded influence, or enhanced security. On the other hand, other member states might be cautious or reluctant to support enlargement due to concerns about potential costs, risks, or changes to the organization’s dynamics.

¹⁵ Hübner (2006b), Speech/06/534, p. 8.

In such situations, the outcomes of organizational enlargement politics can be influenced by the ability of member states to form amalgamations of bargaining power. Member states that share common interests or objectives related to enlargement may collaborate and negotiate as a united front, creating a stronger and more influential bloc within the organization. By aligning their interests and combining their bargaining power, these member states can better advocate for their preferred outcomes during enlargement discussions and decision-making processes.

On the contrary, if member states are unable to form cohesive amalgamations of bargaining power, the enlargement process may face challenges in reaching consensus or achieving desired outcomes. Disagreements or divisions among member states can lead to delays, stalemates, or compromises that may impact the final decision regarding enlargement.

Overall, the effectiveness of organizational enlargement politics depends not only on individual member states' positions but also on their ability to build amalgamations of bargaining power, which can significantly influence the organization's direction and decisions regarding the inclusion of new members.

- b. formal decision-making rules. The integration and enlargement policy does not have to be beneficial to every member.

“Formal decision-making rules” refer to the established procedures and processes that govern how decisions are made within the organization. These rules are often outlined in the organization's founding treaties, charters, or internal regulations.

When an organization considers its integration and enlargement policy, formal decision-making rules play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes. Decisions regarding enlargement can have far-reaching implications for both existing and potential new members. However, it is important to note that the integration and enlargement policy does not necessarily have to be beneficial to every member state individually.

The formal decision-making rules ensure that the enlargement process is conducted fairly, transparently, and in accordance with the organization's principles and values. These rules typically involve specific voting procedures, thresholds, and consensus-building mechanisms that help guide the decision-making process.

The integration and enlargement policy may not be uniformly advantageous for all member states due to several reasons:

Diverse Interests: Member states have diverse economic, political, and social interests. Enlargement might create winners and losers among the existing members, as different states may have varying degrees of economic benefits, geopolitical influence, or policy preferences.

Absorptive Capacity: Some member states might be concerned about the organization's capacity to effectively absorb new members and integrate them into existing structures. Rapid or extensive enlargement could strain resources and hinder the organization's ability to function effectively.

Risk and Uncertainty: Enlargement can bring risks and uncertainties, such as potential challenges in managing cultural differences, economic disparities, or political divergences among member states.

Bargaining Power: As mentioned earlier, the amalgamation of bargaining power among member states can influence the outcomes of the enlargement process. Some states might be better positioned to advocate for their interests, potentially leading to outcomes that are not universally beneficial.

Ultimately, the integration and enlargement policy requires a delicate balance between the organization's overall objectives, the interests of individual member states, and the capacity to accommodate new members while maintaining cohesion and effectiveness. The formal decision-making rules help navigate these complexities, ensuring that the enlargement process is conducted in a manner consistent with the organization's principles and with due consideration of the interests of all stakeholders involved.

Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier point to another factor to be added and considered in integration theory studies, and that is formal decision-making rules. In principle, enlargement requires the consensus of all member states. For the EU, the vote of unanimity is an institutional structure. However, in the case of the Union, three further extensions must be considered:

- 1 The first concerns accession and the need for national parliaments to ratify affiliation treaties. In industrialized countries, and even some member states, accession treaties require or may be subject to ballot.

- 2 The second expansion factor relates to the fact that, as part of the accession procedures, both affiliation and accession necessitate the consent of the European Parliament (EP).
- 3 Finally, when it comes to EU sectors that are affected by enlargement (such as agriculture, commerce, or regional policies), the third point to consider is that all of these industries are governed by a complex system of regulations, rules, and decision-making processes. Local administrations and stakeholders involved in decentralized governance benefit from these norms and regulations.

Correspondingly, and in contrast to rationalist institutionalism approaches analyzed in the previous section, one would expect a low degree of variation among preferences and conflict among the member state actors when it comes to supranationalist philosophies. Specifically, sociological institutionalism often assumes or even presumes that the role of strong institutional and cultural influences (“socialization” or “Europeanization”) at the system level can facilitate expanded preferences for member states to be largely homogenized. In theory, if we relax assumptions about the institutionalized view of supranationalist sociology, we would expect to see more shifts in preferences. The reasons for that, as explained by Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, are that first, if a society’s values and norms are in conflict, there will be no one unambiguous criterion that affects applicants’ expansion choices. In the EU, the argument over whether to prioritize deepening or expanding is a good example. Second, not just between foreign states, but also between community participants, that is, everyone wishing to gain from the process of expansion and integration, the designation and assimilation of community rules and morals may diverge. This means that some countries may try to integrate to the EU and ally with its norms, and despite their effort and the assistance provided by the Union, they will not succeed, for various reasons (as, for example, due to the disagreement of the citizens). Furthermore, there may be states that try to take advantage of the assistance provided by the EU, but in reality they don’t want to integrate at all. Organizational actors, such as the European Commission, can be expected to have preferences that are heavily impacted by organizational norms. Even if member state governments are vulnerable to competing effects from national and international identities, as well as sociocultural settings, the essential goal is to create a place where such forces can be limited or tamed from a much broader viewpoint.

While member state governments may face competing influences from their national and international identities and sociocultural settings, the primary objective is to create a

framework where these forces can be controlled or moderated from a broader perspective. In other words, the aim is to establish an organizational environment that mitigates potential conflicts arising from diverse identities and cultural backgrounds among member states.

The European Commission and other organizational actors are expected to be influenced by and uphold the norms set by the organization to achieve its goals effectively. By adhering to these norms, the organization seeks to foster cooperation and mutual understanding among its members, thereby creating a space where competing forces can be managed and harmonized within a broader context.

The overarching goal is to strike a balance between the interests and identities of individual member states and the common objectives and values of the organization. By doing so, the organization can work towards its mission in a more cohesive and collaborative manner, while still respecting and accommodating the diversity and unique attributes of its member states. Finally, the resonance of organizational and institutional norms, as well as their breadth and depth of effect, may differ among policymakers. This, too, is largely determined by their functional and organizational roles. When looking at the policy dimension of enlargement policy and integration procedures, such potential tensions are particularly essential. While more general organizational norms and fundamental principles may have a greater impact on global macro politics, specific substantive policies may be determined to a greater extent by norms at the micro level of politics.

Eventually, the outcome of organizational politics will come to depend on the degree of community and cultural or normative match. More developed countries are easier to integrate to organizations like the EU, than less developed or struggling (from an economic or political perspective), as the majority of their members have been stabilized to a specific level. In fact, as will be discussed further down, the argument of predominantly conservative circles within the EU, and especially the older member states, have more than once brought forth such matters of “alignment” and normative/cultural match for the enlargement of the EU with the candidacy of various countries contested on the premise of the historical and cultural nature that the EU has, as for example that it is a Christian and based upon the Greco-Roman legal and normative principle. Nevertheless, when the organization expands its institutions to outside states but only to the extent that these states share its collective identity, values, and norms, then a paradox is formed. The higher the degree of community and the better the cultural or normative match, the faster and the deeper the process of horizontal

institutionalization is. However, since the EU is using the enlargement process as a foreign policy tool to absorb various states, expand its borders, acquire access to territories (meaning having a geopolitical agenda), to what extent are homogeneity and enlargement identical? Enlargement as a process will continue until the (cultural) borders of the international community and the (formal, institutional) borders of the international organization match. Integration, on the other hand, remains another equally complex aspect. More generally, the differentiation across patterns of institutional relationships between the organization and the states in their environments will be congruent with their differentiated degree of cultural and normative agreement¹⁶ (Schimmelfennig F. S., 2002).

More generally, the differentiation across patterns of institutional relationships between the organization and the member states in their respective environments corresponds to the varying levels of cultural and normative agreement among them.

In simpler terms, the way the organization interacts and cooperates with its member states depends on how much they share common cultural values, beliefs, and norms. If there is a high degree of agreement on these fundamental principles, the institutional relationships tend to be more harmonized and cooperative. On the other hand, when there is a lower level of agreement, the institutional relationships may be more diverse and varied, reflecting different levels of cooperation and integration among member states.

The level of cultural and normative agreement influences how the organization and its member states collaborate, make decisions, and work towards common objectives. When there is a strong alignment in values and norms, it fosters a sense of shared purpose and enhances the likelihood of mutual cooperation and joint action. Conversely, when there is less alignment, the organization and its member states may encounter challenges in finding common ground and reaching consensus on various matters.

All of the above essentially contribute to the kind of integration that is the objective; the integration effects will always depend on the degree of the actual integration. The more integrated an organization is, the more cohesively it can respond (however, the easier for the impact to reverberate throughout a union with greater ease). Let's take, for example, the OEF World Macroeconomic Model (see OEF, 2000), considered a traditional Mundell-Fleming

¹⁶ The patterns of institutional relationships between an organization and its member states depend on the level of cultural and normative agreement among them. Higher agreement tends to result in closer and more harmonized relationships, while lower agreement can lead to more differentiated and varied institutional arrangements.

type in macro model theory with the standard demand and supply equations¹⁷. Most of the equations within the Mundell-Fleming type refer to a series of estimated parameters. What this means in simpler terms is that when examining theories and models of integration, in the Mundell-Fleming type the functional form for equations is left unchanged when applied across countries, yet the estimated parameters differ. For example, let's consider the case of a typical Oxford country model. It will consist of equations for four blocs: (1) the demand side, which will refer to the properties of the goods market, meaning: consumption, investment, imports, and exports, the properties of the money market, where we have concepts such as money balances, or long bond rates, and exchange rates; (2) the supply side, pertaining to the following list: capital accumulation: capital stock, non-residential investment, real interest rates, labor market: labor supply, participation rate, the natural rate of unemployment, natural employment level, potential output, output gap, employment, average earnings, prices: GDP deflator, import prices, consumer prices; (3) government policy, this refers to monetary policy (in the EU this task is carried out by the ECB), we are referring to the Taylor rule; fiscal policy (taking into account the Stability and Growth Pact – SGP – solvability constraints); and (4) the rest of the world, here two broad categories are important: world trade and world prices. The Oxford model also includes special parts of financial markets and special features of emerging market economies (risk premia). In the long run, each of the economies behaves like the one-sector Cobb-Douglas economy described in the textbook in equilibrium. In the case of EU enlargement, the new members will enter the highest stage of economic integration into the EU (customs union, single market and, finally, the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)).

The process of enlargement can be a lengthy and complicated affair. Rational institutionalists prefer to see a world in which the acting parties are motivated by the maximization of profits, or so to speak, they are motivated by economic and security preferences. Previous enlargements of the Union have lasted large periods of time; in fact, sometimes they took many years – for example, if we see the case of the UK, it did take more than a decade. Membership application is a momentous decision for the applicant country, and triggers on the Union's side the process defined in Article 0 of the Treaty:

¹⁷ The Mundell-Fleming model is a macroeconomic model for small open economies. It looks at how fiscal and monetary policies, exchange rates, and capital flows affect key economic variables like output, interest rates, and exchange rates. It helps economists understand the impact of policies and external factors on an economy's performance.

Any European State may apply to become a member of the Union. It shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the assent of the European Parliament, which shall act by an absolute majority of its component members. The conditions of admission and adjustments to the Treaties of which the Union is founded which such admission entails shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the applicant State. This agreement shall be submitted for ratification by all the contracting States by their respective constitutional requirements.

It can be argued that enlargement has always been part of the agenda. Often the press has presented the integration process as the EU's most successful policy, one built on values, rules, and geopolitical interests. In fact, according to the EU treaties, membership of the European Union is open to "any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them" (TEU Article 49¹⁸) (Consolidated version of the Treaty of the European Union | Title VI: Final Provisions, 1992). The Treaties of the EU are the international treaties binding the member states and the Union. They act as the driving force and are set to function on a constitutional basis. While the tension between "widening" and "deepening" the bloc has always been present, the treaties' aim was to act in a stabilizing manner to establish the European institutions along with their procedural processes and objectives. The result of the aforementioned is that the EU can function, but only within the limits, parameters, and competencies afforded via those treaties¹⁹. Let's consider, for example, Article 2, which states the following values: "respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities." This is based on the "Copenhagen Criteria" agreed in 1993, as it is clear that many ex-Eastern bloc countries will apply for membership; membership requires candidate countries to achieve institutional stability, guarantee democracy, rule of law, human rights, respect and protection of minorities, and the existence of functioning institutions, a market economy and the ability to respond to domestic competitive pressures and market forces. The actual status of membership presupposes the ability of the candidate state to assume the subsequent membership obligations, including compliance with political, economic, and monetary union objectives.

¹⁸ Article 49 and ex-TEU Article 49 state: "Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall be notified of this application. The applicant State shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the consent of the European Parliament, which shall act by a majority of its component members. The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be taken into account.

¹⁹ This is also why any amendment to the treaties is a convoluted process as it does require the agreement and then ratification of all and every signatory.

Nevertheless, the fifth enlargement hid within it the prevailing neoliberal attitudes, something that eventually caused a public outcry and is widely considered to have brought upon the Union something of an “enlargement fatigue”. The fifth EU enlargement, which occurred in 2004 and included ten new member states mainly from Central and Eastern Europe, was indeed influenced by prevailing neoliberal attitudes. Neoliberalism is an economic and political ideology that advocates for free market principles, deregulation, privatization, and reduced government intervention in the economy. It emphasizes the importance of open markets and trade liberalization.

During the fifth enlargement, the EU embraced these neoliberal principles and promoted market-oriented economic reforms as a condition for accession to the Union. The candidate countries were required to adopt these reforms and align their economic policies with the EU’s *acquis communautaire* (the body of EU laws and regulations) to become members.

While the enlargement was seen as a positive step towards integrating the newly democratic and economically transitioning countries into the EU, it also brought challenges and concerns. The rapid adoption of neoliberal policies and market-oriented reforms led to socio-economic consequences for both the existing and new member states.

Critics argued that the emphasis on neoliberal policies favored the interests of multinational corporations and powerful economic actors, leading to increased economic inequality and social disparities. The public outcry emerged as some citizens of existing member states felt threatened by the potential impact of cheap labor and increased competition from the new member states.

The term “enlargement fatigue” emerged as a description of the growing skepticism and weariness among some citizens and policymakers in the EU towards further enlargement. This fatigue was a response to the perceived challenges and difficulties posed by the previous enlargement, and it raised questions about the ability of the EU to effectively manage the integration of diverse economies and societies.

In summary, the fifth EU enlargement brought about the incorporation of new member states with prevailing neoliberal attitudes, which contributed to both positive economic growth and public concerns. It sparked debates on the potential drawbacks of rapid

economic integration and led to a sense of enlargement fatigue within the EU, prompting more cautious approaches to future enlargements.

Essentially, what has happened is that during the last decade, the integration policy has degenerated and has reached today what can be described as a standstill. Back in December 1995, the Madrid European Council proceeded with certain revisions regarding the membership criteria and that was to include conditions for member country integration through a series of appropriate adjustments regarding their administrative structures. The principle underlying this was that, since European Community law should be reflected in national law, it is only logical that the revised national law should be effectively applied through appropriate administrative and judicial structures. Finally, technically outside the scope of the Copenhagen Criteria, there is a basic requirement for how all potential members should legislate. In particular, this means that potential member states must bring their laws into line with the body of European law that has been established throughout the history of the Union, known as the *acquis communautaire*.

4.1 THE STEPS OF THE EU ENLARGEMENT PROCESS

The process of EU enlargement involves several steps and stages that candidate countries must go through to become full-fledged EU members. While the specific details and timelines can vary for each candidate, the general steps of the EU enlargement process include:

1. **Application:** The first step is for a country to formally apply for EU membership. The candidate country submits an application to the European Commission expressing its desire to join the EU.
2. **Screening:** After receiving the application, the European Commission assesses the candidate country's readiness to meet the EU's political, economic, and legal criteria for membership. This screening process helps identify areas where the country may need to make reforms and adjustments to align with EU standards.
3. **Candidate Status:** If the European Commission determines that the candidate country meets the initial criteria, it recommends granting the country official candidate status. This is a significant milestone that indicates the country is eligible to proceed with the accession process.
4. **Negotiations:** Once a candidate country is granted official candidate status, it enters into accession negotiations with the EU. These negotiations cover various aspects, including the adoption of EU laws and regulations, economic and trade issues, and political reforms. The negotiations are conducted in different chapters or policy areas, with each chapter representing a specific policy field.
5. **Chapter Opening and Closure:** The accession negotiations are organized into chapters, each addressing a specific policy area (e.g., agriculture, competition, environment). Negotiations for each chapter are opened and closed separately as the candidate country makes progress in adopting EU standards and legislation in that area.
6. **Fulfillment of Criteria:** Throughout the negotiation process, the candidate country must demonstrate its ability to fulfill the EU's political, economic, and legal criteria for membership. These criteria include stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, a functioning market economy, and the capacity to adopt and implement EU laws.

7. Accession Treaty: Once the negotiations for all chapters are successfully concluded, and the candidate country fulfills the membership criteria, an accession treaty is drafted and signed between the EU and the candidate country. The accession treaty outlines the terms and conditions of the country's membership.
8. Ratification: The accession treaty is subject to ratification by the existing EU member states and the candidate country's national parliament. Ratification requires the approval of each member state and the candidate country.
9. Membership: After the accession treaty is ratified by all parties, the candidate country officially becomes a full member of the European Union, with all the rights and obligations of EU membership.

Every state willing to join the EU is able to officially apply. The application of the state initiates the integration process.

The first step triggered by the candidate's application is the screening process. The EU screening process is a rigorous and comprehensive assessment designed to ensure that candidate countries meet the EU's political, economic, and legal criteria for membership. It serves as an important foundation for the subsequent negotiations and reforms necessary for a successful and seamless integration into the EU.

The EU screening process is a crucial step in the enlargement process that takes place after a candidate country expresses its formal interest in joining the EU. The screening process is conducted by the European Commission and serves as an initial evaluation of the candidate country's readiness to meet the EU's political, economic, and legal criteria for membership. Its steps are as follows:

- 1) Assessment of Legal and Institutional Framework: The European Commission evaluates the candidate country's legal and institutional framework to determine if it aligns with EU norms and standards. This assessment includes an examination of the country's constitution, legal system, political institutions, and administrative capacity.
- 2) Identification of Gaps and Challenges: During the screening process, the European Commission identifies areas where the candidate country's legal and institutional framework may not fully comply with EU requirements. These areas are often referred to as "chapters" and represent specific policy areas that need further alignment.
- 3) Preparation of Screening Reports: The European Commission prepares detailed screening reports for each chapter, highlighting the gaps and challenges identified in the candidate country's legal and institutional framework. These reports provide a roadmap for the candidate country to address the necessary reforms.

- 4) **Technical Assistance and Support:** As part of the screening process, the EU may provide technical assistance and support to the candidate country to help address the identified gaps and challenges. This assistance may include expert advice, capacity building, and training to strengthen the country's institutions and capabilities.
- 5) **Communication with the Candidate Country:** Throughout the screening process, the European Commission engages in regular communication with the candidate country to discuss the findings of the screening reports and the necessary reforms. This dialogue allows for a mutual understanding of the steps required for further progress.
- 6) **Progress Monitoring:** The screening process is an ongoing and iterative exercise, with the candidate country making progress in addressing the identified gaps and challenges. The European Commission monitors the country's progress and provides feedback to ensure that the necessary reforms are effectively implemented.
- 7) **Conclusion of the Screening Process:** Once the European Commission is satisfied that the candidate country has made sufficient progress in addressing the identified issues, the screening process for that particular chapter is concluded. The candidate country can then move on to the next stage of the accession process, which involves the formal opening of accession negotiations for each chapter.

This step is much time-consuming as the majority of the states have a long way until they meet all the necessary points. Also, it has to be noted that, in case the Council of the EU rejects the Commission recommendation to give the candidate status, the process is initiated from step one.

When everything seems aligned and the Commission makes recommendation to the Council in order to offer the candidate status to the state applied, the Council votes, and if the result is a unanimous agreement, the state moves to the position of EU candidate.

EU candidate status refers to the formal recognition granted by the EU to a country that has expressed its desire to join the EU and has made significant progress in meeting the initial criteria for membership. It is an important milestone in the EU enlargement process and signals that the candidate country is eligible to proceed with accession negotiations.

It's essential to note that obtaining EU candidate status is not the final step in the accession process. Instead, it marks the beginning of more in-depth negotiations and reforms required for full EU membership. The process of accession negotiations can be complex and time-consuming, as it involves aligning the candidate country's legal, economic, and political systems with the EU's *acquis communautaire*. The country must also demonstrate its commitment to EU values, principles, and cooperation with existing EU member states.

EU candidate status is a significant recognition of a country's progress towards EU membership and an important step towards deeper integration into the EU. It means that the state is in a position to start the negotiations for its membership.

These negotiations aim to address various policy areas, known as “chapters”, and are conducted to ensure that the candidate country is willing and able to adopt and implement the EU’s legal and policy framework. The negotiations are conducted between the candidate country and the EU’s institutions, primarily the European Commission, which represents the EU.

The negotiations are organized into separate chapters, each covering specific policy areas or sectors. These chapters address various aspects of EU legislation and standards, including areas such as agriculture, environment, competition, judiciary, human rights, and economic policies, among others. The negotiations are conducted in a chapter-by-chapter approach. Each chapter represents a different policy area, such as economic and monetary policy, environment, competition, justice and fundamental rights, and others. The candidate country and the EU discuss and negotiate the alignment of the country’s legislation with EU laws in each chapter.

Furthermore, the negotiations involve technical discussions between the candidate country and EU experts, where the country’s legal and regulatory framework is compared to the EU *acquis* in each chapter. Discrepancies are identified, and the candidate country may be required to make legislative and institutional changes to achieve alignment. The progress of the accession negotiations is monitored through accession conferences held between the EU and the candidate country. During these conferences, the parties review the candidate’s progress in implementing the necessary reforms and achieving alignment in the different policy areas.

As the candidate country progresses in aligning its legislation with EU standards and fulfilling the requirements in each chapter, the negotiations for individual chapters are closed. Closing a chapter indicates that the candidate country has met the EU’s criteria in that specific policy area. After the negotiations for all chapters are provisionally closed, the candidate country may be required to maintain and demonstrate its alignment and commitment to EU values and principles during a waiting period.

Once all chapters are provisionally closed, as described in steps 5 and 6, the accession treaty (step 7) is finalized, detailing the terms and conditions of the candidate country’s EU membership. The accession treaty is then subject to ratification by both the candidate country’s national parliament and the parliaments of existing EU member states. After the accession treaty is ratified by all parties, the candidate country officially becomes a full member of the EU, with all the rights and obligations of EU membership.

The Accession Treaty step is a significant milestone in the EU enlargement process. It occurs after the candidate country has successfully concluded the accession negotiations with the EU, aligning its laws and practices with the EU’s *acquis communautaire*, and fulfilling the membership criteria. The Accession Treaty formalizes the terms and conditions of the candidate country’s EU membership.

The Treaty addresses various aspects of the candidate country’s membership, including its rights and obligations as an EU member, the timing of its accession, the

transitional arrangements, and any specific conditions or measures related to the integration process. Before the treaty is finalized, the candidate country's government must give its consent to the terms and conditions outlined in the treaty. This is a formal expression of the country's agreement to the treaty's provisions. Once the treaty is finalized and the candidate country gives its consent, it is submitted to the EU member states for approval. Each EU member state government must approve the treaty and sign it, indicating their agreement with the country's accession.

After the treaty is approved and signed by all EU member states, it goes through the ratification process. The candidate country's national parliament ratifies the treaty, formally endorsing its accession to the EU.

Once the treaty is ratified by all parties, it is deposited with the Italian government, as the Depository of the EU treaties. The Accession Treaty enters into force on a specified date agreed upon by the candidate country and the EU member states.

Finally, on the agreed-upon date, the candidate country officially becomes a full member of the EU. It gains access to all the rights and privileges of EU membership and is expected to adhere to the EU's rules and regulations.

The Accession Treaty step represents the culmination of the candidate country's journey towards EU membership. It formalizes the country's integration into the EU and represents a commitment to uphold the EU values, principles, and standards as a fully-fledged member of the EU.

4.2 EVOLUTION OF EU ENLARGEMENT PROCESS SINCE 2004

The European Union went through a phase of almost uninterrupted expansion in its history of approximately half a century. As we have mentioned, from the original six member states (Benelux, Germany, France, and Italy) back in 1957²⁰, the EU reached a total of 27 member states after five rounds of enlargement and integration²¹. The final round of enlargement introduced about 30 million new citizens to the “European family” and boosted its total population to roughly about 490 million. In the case of the EU, this number of people carries a very broad sense of a supranational identity, where being European does not equal being an American or Russian or Chinese. All these just go to show how such enlargements do not function in a neatly integrated framework, even if the application process takes long. Integration is something that starts with the application process but usually doesn’t end there; in fact, it might not end even after the acceptance of the membership. There are many cases where the Union decided to make a state full member, even though it was not aligned with the framework and wasn’t ready in terms of legislation and economy, in order to achieve other political goals. Some examples were Croatia and Bulgaria. The EU decided to make both countries member states on 2004, even though more reforms were needed for various reasons²²:

1. Strengthening Stability and Security: The EU saw the accession of Croatia and Bulgaria as an opportunity to promote stability and security in the Balkans region. Both countries had experienced political and social challenges in the past, and EU membership was expected to contribute to their political and economic stability.

²⁰ Referring to The Treaties of Rome (1957): The Treaties of Rome established two new European communities: the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). The EEC aimed to create a common market among its members, allowing for the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. These treaties marked significant steps towards European economic and political integration.

²¹ It would be perhaps useful in this stage to clarify those rounds a bit more. The first one was in 1973 incorporating Denmark, the United Kingdom and Ireland. The second one came in 1981 with Greece, followed by the third just five years later, which brought in the remaining Mediterranean countries (Spain and Portugal). The fourth round of enlargement took place in 1995 (Austria, Finland, Sweden), followed by the fifth round, which as we have seen took place and was completed in two parts. The first part was in 2004 with Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The second part officially concluded the fifth round of enlargement by bringing in Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, while Croatia was the last country to become an EU member state in 2013.

²² Milcher, S., & Slay, B. (2008). The economics of the ‘European Neighbourhood Policy’: An initial assessment. CASE Network Studies and Analyses, 291.

2. **Expanding the Single Market:** The inclusion of Croatia and Bulgaria in the EU expanded the EU's single market, providing new opportunities for trade, investment, and economic growth. Access to the EU's vast single market offered significant benefits to the economies of both countries.
3. **Promoting Democratic Values:** The EU's enlargement policy is based on the condition that candidate countries must demonstrate a commitment to democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. By welcoming Croatia and Bulgaria, the EU aimed to promote and reinforce these democratic values in these countries.
4. **Enhancing Regional Cooperation:** The inclusion of Croatia and Bulgaria in the EU contributed to fostering regional cooperation in the Balkans. EU membership served as an incentive for neighboring countries to pursue political and economic reforms, align with EU standards, and eventually seek membership themselves.
5. **Addressing Historical Tensions:** Croatia and Bulgaria had faced historical tensions and challenges, particularly in their relations with neighboring countries. EU membership offered a framework for resolving such issues through dialogue and cooperation within the EU community.
6. **Contributing to the EU's Objectives:** Both Croatia and Bulgaria expressed a commitment to supporting the EU's objectives, such as promoting peace, prosperity, and solidarity among member states. Their inclusion strengthened the EU's capacity to address common challenges and work together on various policy areas.
7. **Political and Economic Reforms:** The EU's enlargement process requires candidate countries to undergo significant political, legal, and economic reforms to align with EU standards. Croatia and Bulgaria undertook substantial efforts to meet the EU's criteria, contributing to their own development and modernization.

In May 2004, the Union went through its largest enlargement and welcomed 10 new member states. This was the time when EU enlargement and integration were perceived as indeed the best policy. Back then, the mellow transformative power of Europeanisation was

perhaps rather fashionable. The view was that the EU would only proceed towards the Balkans, Turkey, even former USSR states. This euphoric environment is no longer anywhere to be found. Today, when we are discussing the accession process, the general notion revolves around the formal steps, starting from the pre-accession agreement until the final ratification of the accession treaty. These steps are primarily presided over by the European Commission (Enlargement Commissioner and DG Enlargement), but the actual negotiations are technically conducted between the Union's member states and the new candidate country. In the current context of the multiple existential crises hitting the Union consecutively, critical views are multiplying. Before a country applies for membership it is required to sign an association agreement to help prepare the country for its candidacy, and perhaps eventually membership. Nevertheless, the public opinion is currently rather numb and can hardly be considered to add a positive outlook on the enlargement issue. Some member states are deeply negative vis-a-vis any further accessions. It is not uncommon for the half-finished (as is currently perceived) integration to be considered a culprit for the many mishaps that have befallen the Union. Most countries do not meet the criteria to even begin negotiations, and that is well before they even apply. As such, they enter a lengthy process of many years necessary to prepare them for the process. The accession process of the Western Balkans and Turkey has been halted and no immediate progress on the matter seems very likely. President Jean-Claude Juncker had openly stated that there would be no further enlargements during his mandate.

Initially, the European Union was meant to be a rather inclusive project: ever since the creation of the EEC in the 1950s, accession of member states has always been part of the agenda. After the application, the Council was to take the procedural decision and receive the further consultation of the Commission, who was expected to provide the Council with its opinion. This is an in-depth analysis of the situation of the applicant country, and an evaluation of its capacity to fulfill the conditions of membership, taking account of the evolution of the Union's acquis. Enlargement processes have been enshrined in the Charter's clauses, namely the integration clause (also known as the "acquis communautaire", or simply "the acquis,") is a fundamental principle in EU law. It refers to the body of EU laws, regulations, directives, judgments, and treaties that have been established and accumulated over time. The accession was something of a quasi-right available to all democratic states of Europe. Even the association agreement helped prepare for this first step. However, the dynamic on this matter is somewhat tricky: a state can apply, but the Union is not required to

accept it since there is no legal right to accession. For example, in the case of the Western Balkans, a special process, i.e. the Stabilization and Association Process, exists to deal with the special circumstances prevailing there.

In the spirit of its founding principles, the enlargement and integration process were supposedly based on a somewhat shared conviction regarding the common historical and civilizational roots. The opening of negotiations with the applicant country would come to denote yet another stage in the process of enlargement. As all European peoples were thought and expected to fit in this Union, the accession negotiation was not supposed to be a typical external negotiation, during which the Commission is the official spokesman on matters of Community competence. Since there was considered to be a common value system regarding freedom and democracy, reflected throughout the institutions present across the states, the idea was to build something of an intergovernmental conference between the member states and the applicant country. The Union's "common positions", decided by the Council by unanimity, are normally presented to the applicant country by the Presidency of the Council. The Commission, however, has an important *de facto* role in proposing common positions to the Council, and it may be mandated by the Council to seek solutions with the applicant country. All these are supposed to happen within the greater spirit that the Union is for everybody, the Ancient Greek heritage was an argument brought forth to support the overall consolidation of democracy in the European South. Or the role of the term "return to Europe", which was the invitation card extended to all those countries cut off during the Cold War era. When a country then decided to formally apply for membership, the Council was tasked to pose the question to the Commission to prepare an opinion regarding the country's readiness to begin negotiations. At this point, it is important to remember that the process of enlargement and the integration policy do not fall under the remit of foreign policy. Obviously, the Council can either accept or reject the Commission's opinion, but this is related to the actual architecture of the Community since initially, the idea was to bring new countries into the Union. If the Council were to consent to open the negotiations, eventually the screening process would commence. The Commission and the candidate country would examine its laws and those of the EU and determine what differences exist.

However, and after mentioning all the above, the enlargement was not included in the Lisbon Treaty under the heading of the European External Action Service; nevertheless, it is a procedure that is largely concerned with foreign policy. This is why the Council recommends beginning the negotiations on "chapters" of law where sufficient common

ground exists to be able to support constructive negotiations. Negotiations after that point become a matter of the candidate country to successfully convince the EU that its laws or administrative capacity are sufficient to execute EU law. Nevertheless, as geopolitics always featured predominantly, the process of integration became a “soft power” tool that can be implemented as seen fit by the member states. Often this will involve timelines before the *acquis communautaire* (European regulations, directives and standards) has the time to be fully and properly implemented. The accession of the UK was meant to strengthen NATO’s economic base back in the context of the Cold War, and this is also why the UK had USA’s strong support. Later, when the Union sought to expand South and East, the democratic stability of the periphery during and after the Cold War played an important role. The further integration of states like Sweden or Finland was to give a significant push towards the degree of integration of those states, including Austria, who had opted for a neutral stance during the Cold War. Integration of countries like Greece or Portugal followed the collapse of far-right dictatorships and was meant to act as a buffer and a stop against anti-west sentiments. Thus, they also strengthened the EU’s influence in the Balkans.

Finally, the Eastern enlargement (2004-2007) was yet another step to minimizing Moscow’s influence and to solidifying even more the West’s victory. In fact, that enlargement worked in tandem with NATO’s enlargement. The strong geopolitical motivations of the main protagonists have always featured strongly in the enlargement processes. Germany, for example, had very good reasons to strive for dominance in its eastern neighborhood after the fall of the Berlin Wall. On the other hand, countries like the UK found the right ground to implement their anti-Soviet/anti-Russian and Atlanticist policy. These foreign matters featured across multiple applications and the support or resistance they would meet. The Northern countries have their own interests in the Baltic region. Austria perceives the space of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire in a different manner, Greece has an interest in Cyprus, the Danubian region has its specific significance for Italy, etc.

All of the above come into play during the application process and eventually, a chapter is considered to be closed when both sides can reach an agreement that can be sufficiently implemented. However, it can still be re-opened if the Commission feels that the candidate has fallen out of compliance. Those who champion a strong and politically autonomous EU tend to perceive the enlargement policy with some skepticism. In that context, assessing all the progress achieved by countries preparing for accession to the EU, the European Commission tends to submit and resubmit regular reports (on a yearly basis) to the European

Council. These come to serve as a basis for the Council in its decision-making process regarding negotiations, and they are extended to other candidates as well. Since the Union demands unanimity as part of its institutional setup, the heterogeneity, which is a direct result of enlargement, makes the process more challenging for the Union, as each member has its own agenda and benefits from different situations and decisions than the rest. This heterogeneity undermines the concept of a strong and autonomous EU. This is why the negotiations take long to be completed because after the Treaty of Accession is signed, it must then be ratified by all the member states of the Union, including the institutions of the Union, and the candidate country itself. With this completed, the candidate state will join the Union on the date specified in the treaty. The entire process is long so as to help ease tensions after the new state joins the Union. New member states' lower level of economic development can in fact create tensions. Applying for membership to the EU can typically take about a decade. Notable exceptions are some countries like Sweden, Finland, and Austria. The duration of such negotiations is very difficult to predict. In the case of Austria, Sweden, and Finland, they were completed in thirteen months. In their cases, matters moved along much faster, taking only a few months, whereas with Spain and Portugal they lasted for nearly seven years. The process from the application for an association agreement through to accession has taken far longer, as much as several decades (Turkey, for example, first applied for association in the 1950s and has yet to conclude accession negotiations). The entire process of membership is supposed to not threaten economic and social cohesion, especially in cases of countries whose geopolitical location is considered "sensitive" and can render it even more difficult to implement a common foreign and defense policy, such as the example of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Another example is France's veto of any negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia on October 18, 2019, highlighting issues with the existing enlargement process. Disagreements in foreign and defense policy (or, in a broader context, "philosophy") have sparked controversy. During November of that same year, France introduced a seven-stage membership process. The entrance of several former communist countries altered the bloc's orientation and internal political equilibrium toward a liberal agenda, while simultaneously attempting to expand the bloc's presence and ties with Atlanticism. Involvement in many initiatives, including Erasmus, Banking Union, Capital Markets Union, Customs Union, and others, is proposed in the modified admittance strategy. This is to ensure that all states are on the same page. Initially, the European Commission was seen as being hesitant on questions of

membership and policy modifications, but this perception was quickly dispelled. Nevertheless, whilst the Commission follows the European Council's injunction to treat each applicant equally, it has been made very clear that, "if some countries have made sufficient progress in preparing for membership, they should not be delayed because others have not reached the same level". The reason behind such a shift can be found in the overall shift towards (neo)liberal agendas and practices, and perhaps more broadly to the Anglo-Saxon philosophical model. Nevertheless, as is evident, the length of the negotiations with each of the candidates from Central and East Europe will depend on the complexity of the issues to be resolved. Some of the least enthusiastic members with further enlargement remain those states within the Union who see it more as a federation (like Belgium or Luxemburg) or those who seek strategic autonomy from the US (like France). Yet, the fact remains that no matter the initial conception of the enlargement process, the policy strengthened both considerably and also unexpectedly its own institutional role within the Union.

Various conservative circles within the EU, notably most prominent and influential in the founding states but not exclusively there, raised objections pertaining to the religious, cultural, civilizational dimensions enshrined in the enlargement process. The original emphasis was, and largely still remains, the Greco-Roman ideal. The Greco-Roman influence is evident even in otherwise unperceivable matters. Let's consider, for instance, the Roman distinction of violence between *violentia* and *potestas*, a distinction that still survives in the way various countries perceive the phenomenon. The French "pouvoir" denotes a nation's will to manifest its state, etc. On top of that, the same circles also emphasized the Christian foundations of Europe, perhaps with a focus on western Christianity even excluding orthodox countries like Greece, though the symbolism of the cradle of civilization prevails. Such objections were raised regarding the issue of granting entry to non-Christian states (specifically Turkey). Before the 2004 enlargement, the EU had twelve treaty languages: Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Irish, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish. Such culturally-based tensions regarding religion, language, historical heritage, etc. have always been a part of the bloc. The issue of widening and deepening the integration always came with significant questions and objections regarding who fits or not. Back in the better days, the tensions and objections would usually find a means to resolve via the advance of the processes and negotiations. As such, multiple accessions and successive enlargements were indeed accomplished. Those steps would take place in tandem, and simultaneous advancement across multiple areas was possible. This is why the first enlargement practically

coincided with the establishment of a common commercial policy. The developments regarding cohesion politics took place simultaneously with the integrative actions in southern Europe. The CFSP followed the accession of the former neutral states, like Austria. The developments regarding the Single Market economy were unfolding along with the Eastern enlargement.

Nevertheless, the fifth enlargement was a turning point. Multiple EU officials considered the 2004/2007 enlargement a remarkable achievement for the history of the Union, and the enlargement policy has been openly declared as one of the most successful instruments of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This drew the 10 former communist countries, as well as Malta and Cyprus, into the Union. As a consequence, nine new official languages were added as an outcome of the 2004 enlargement: Polish, Czech, Slovak, Slovene, Hungarian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Maltese. A 2021 study in the *Journal of Political Economy* found that the 2004 enlargement had beneficial economic effects on all groups in the old and new member states²³. Romano Prodi predicted in 2002 that this round of enlargement would be “one of the most successful and impressive political transformations of the 20th century”²⁴ (Devrim & Schulz, 2009). The largest winners were the new member states, in particular unskilled labor in the new member states. Indeed, it can be successfully argued that the fifth enlargement was a success, at least in its early stages. The fifth enlargement led to remarkable progress in the democratization of overall reforms of the new member states. In addition, Russia didn’t even seem to react in any substantial way to a series of changes that promoted a major shift at its expense. Obviously, in such an environment, the affiliated nations’ eagerness to accelerate the admission process and join the Union is comprehensible. They really need to be completely integrated into the structures that have supported West European democracy and wealth for so long following decades of struggle beneath communism. Yet, it is roughly at this point that we begin to detect the change in the public’s opinion. Criticisms against enlargement began to erupt and people became considerably less supportive. Initially, this abrupt change was interpreted as fatigue, a quite normal by-product of the “big-bang” enlargement. The shortcomings around Romania’s and Bulgaria’s accession were also considered to play a role in the overall negativity that befell what was once considered the EU’s best policy. Needless to say that such

23 Hagemeyer, J., Michalek, J. J., & Svatko, P. (2021). Economic impact of the EU Eastern enlargement on New Member States revisited: The role of economic institutions. *Central European Economic Journal*, 8(55), 126-143.

24 Prodi, Romano (2002), ‘A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability, Peace, Security and Stability – International Dialogue and the Role of the EU’, Sixth ECSA-World Conference, Jean Monnet Project, Brussels, 5-6 December, Speech/02/619.

interpretations hold some verity. Another issue that came to change the perspective most likely had to do with the fact that the countries next in line were Turkey and states from the Western Balkans, a somewhat terra incognita for the European temperament. All these made the integration of new member states appear as an unwanted chore perhaps, a job not so very popular. Nevertheless, its actual causes stretch further back and should be distinguished earlier.

For all who are dealing with the long-term costs of economic change, the prospect of admission is extremely essential. However, on the issue of an enlargement timeline, the official EU position is that agreed upon at the European Council in Madrid, which stated “following the IGC, and in the light of the opinions and reports from the Commission, the Council will at the earliest opportunity take the necessary decisions for launching the accession negotiations” with the CEECs²⁵. We should not forget that in the 1990s Europe went through a climate of optimistic reunification following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, and with it the even more painful memories which brought about such realities. The reunification of Germany came with many technical flaws, which were – perhaps not too wisely – overlooked as the much stronger feelings generated by the unfolding of events created a strong sentiment of solidarity with the German people. In that context, the process of a state’s accession was nothing short of a rapid rapprochement. Furthermore, it was a process witnessed by multiple former communist states. This peculiar climate, a product of its times, did indeed breed with it multiple issues which remained hidden or concealed under the original rampant positive emotions, particularly in the incumbent member states.

During that same period, we also witness two other exceptionally dominant trends: globalization and neo-liberalism. As such, the enlargement of the bloc was shaped to aid the reform of the Union in accordance with global trends, to align it with such philosophies. All these, ironically, lead to a mellow adaptation to globalization and the gradual abandonment of the actual European model²⁶, the one that we referred to in the previous section. The new enlargement narrative focused on some important areas, such as high growth rates, or modernization during the early stages that states from Central Europe joined, but left out some other less illustrious and triumphant aspects, for example, issues of inequality, job

²⁵ In addition, MEC states that it “hopes the preliminary stage of negotiations will coincide with the start of negotiations with Cyprus and Malta”, which “will commence six months after the conclusion of the IGC and will take its results into account”.

²⁶ The enlargement process aimed to reform the EU and bring it in line with global trends and ideologies, but it also raised concerns about the impact on the traditional European model and its ability to assert its unique identity and values in the face of global pressures.

insecurity and the overall weakening of social protection in terms of important social systems like health. It can even be argued that for every calculated and quasi-propagandizing triumphant speech of the period, there is at least one equivalent lacking in nefariousness but earning in what can be perhaps explained as willing blindness. The negative or potentially negative consequences of the eastern enlargement were underestimated, resulting in very little to no accompanying measures to be taken (and even more so taken in time) to diminish massively negative effects. In fact, in a quite cynical manner, textbook capitalism and the extreme neoliberal views among elites of the candidate countries facilitated the social developments which were appraised as supportive or necessary for the Europeanisation of those states.²⁷

It would be unfair not to acknowledge that some measures were taken in view of the accession of multiple countries with a significantly different background and considerably less developed economies, democratic institutions and processes as well as legal processes. For these cases, the 1993 Copenhagen criteria were considered as a way to smoothen the transition. The criteria codified, or in a way created a taxonomy of, the various prerequisites that had to be fulfilled by any candidate country. This was considered as a safety net measure to ensure that neither the bloc nor the candidate country would end up destabilizing heavily and essentially spin out of control, even more so in the environment of the EU. The opening of enlargement negotiations thus depends on the successful outcome of the Intergovernmental Conference IGC²⁸, as well as the progress of the applicant countries in continuing the political and economic reforms necessary to prepare for membership. The Intergovernmental Conference is consists of:

- EU member states: Representatives from all EU member states participate in the IGC. They negotiate and make decisions on behalf of their respective countries.
- European Commission: The European Commission is the EU's executive branch. It plays an important role in IGCs by proposing and drafting treaty changes, as well as facilitating negotiations. The Commission represents the EU as a whole in IGCs.

²⁷ Beck, U., & Grande, E. (2007). *Cosmopolitan europe. Polity.*

²⁸ When the accession negotiations are near completion, an Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) may be convened to finalize the terms of accession and amend the EU treaties if necessary.

- **European Parliament:** The European Parliament is the directly elected legislative body of the EU. While the European Parliament does not participate directly in IGC negotiations, it has a role in the treaty amendment process. The Parliament must give its consent to certain treaty changes, especially if they affect areas within the EU's competence.
- **EU Council:** The EU Council represents the member states' governments. Different configurations of the Council may be involved in IGCs, depending on the specific treaty changes being discussed. For example, if the treaty changes relate to foreign policy, the Foreign Affairs Council may be involved.
- **Presidency of the Council:** The Council's presidency rotates among member states every six months. The country holding the presidency at the time of the IGC plays a leading role in chairing the conference and facilitating negotiations.
- **Legal Experts:** Legal experts and officials from each participating member state provide technical and legal expertise during the negotiations.

The Copenhagen Criteria also solidified another important notion, which was that a European Union of more than 25 member states would require a different model of governance than the one which was conceived and put in place for six. The following Treaties of Amsterdam and Nice didn't really fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria and the only thing coming between those and an open declaration of failure was the long-established bureaucratic practice of shifting the narrative by stating that the preconditions were met. The Treaty of Lisbon is a somewhat different story as it did incorporate measures of some substantial nature, some of which are the double majority decision-making mechanism or the setting of a ceiling for the number of MEPs.

These were in fact measures that facilitated enlargement. On 1 May 2004, the EU experienced its largest expansion in terms of area, nations, and populations. Slovenia was a non-aligned country prior to independence, and it was one of the former Yugoslav republics (collectively known as the "A8"²⁹). The final two were Mediterranean islands and

²⁹ The A8 countries, also referred to as the EU8, are 8 of the 10 countries that joined the European Union during its 2004 enlargement. They are grouped separately from the other two states that joined the Union in 2004, i.e., Cyprus and Malta, because of their relatively similar ex-Eastern block background, per capita income level, Human Development Index level, and most of all the geographical location in mainland Europe, whereas two other states from the aforementioned 2004 batch are Mediterranean isles.

Commonwealth of Nations members³⁰. The entrance of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, which were unable to join in 2004, but are now considered part of the fifth enlargement, was part of the same wave of enlargement. Another significant measure, the capping of Commissioners, was repealed as a result of the negative Irish referendum of 2008. Despite the fact that the Treaty of Lisbon included major reforms, the unanimity criterion was maintained, which meant that enlargement remained incompatible with the EU's functionality.

The mostly economic and social consequences of countries with a different background and less developed economic infrastructure brought forth a series of changes, like the relocation of industries in low-cost member states, or migration towards older member states, all of which inevitably put pressure on wages, employment, social dumping, etc. Publicly such matters were for the most part denied and privately they were branded as some peculiarities or mere differences which would contribute to improving European competitiveness. In retrospect, one could argue that the enlargement processes, starting from the Eastern enlargement, should have been accompanied by much stronger and even stricter EU policies in the crucial areas of cohesion (both for the applicant state and for the regions and sectors of the older member state which were to suffer a greater shock after the accession of the new countries). Cohesion policy was indeed initially sustained at higher levels but changed drastically in terms of its philosophy, perhaps to account for the shrinking Community budget. As such from acting as a counterbalance to smooth out tensions resulting from the market forces and integration processes, the cohesion policy changed into a transitional policy. As for the rest, it was presumed that market forces (like the "invisible hand" of the market) would take care of it all and somehow contribute to the growth agenda (though the growth agenda remained more in papers or declaratory via programs like the Lisbon programme). Therefore, when trying to understand the evolution of the enlargement process after 2004, one has to understand that the aforementioned perspective and philosophical approach to the integration and enlargement policy had already become and only further developed part of the way the broader challenge of globalization was addressed. So, even though on the one hand the new era appeared enchanting and the EU leaders seemed to be enchanted indeed, at the same time they became accomplices to the creation of societies

³⁰ The simultaneous accessions concerned the following countries (sometimes referred to as the "A10" countries): Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Seven of these were part of the former Eastern Bloc (of which three were from the former Soviet Union and four were and still are members of the Central European alliance Visegrád Group).

with glaring inequalities, unemployment issues, and overall insecurity around the welfare system of each country. It is not surprising then that the enlargement process came to be seen as an expression synonymous to globalization.

Notably then, the reason behind the negative associations with the enlargement process post-2004 deals with the enlargement and integration on multiple matters, such as the one mentioned above, and least of all democracy as a whole. Even though, prior to the fifth enlargement, even traditionally skeptical member states, such as France, saw the historical need for the reunification of Europe, afterwards the narrative of the enlargement as a success story was heavily disputed, if not downright rejected. The impact of the EU in the states that joined with the fifth round – 2004 and Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 – is in many ways unprecedented. The accession sets certain prerequisites and conditions essentially tying membership to compliance. The alignment with EU legislation and economic practices are of paramount importance as it supposedly preserves cohesion. However, as we have mentioned, cohesion policies have been twisted into something less than actual functional mechanisms to smooth out the discrepancies between new and older member states. Among the post-communist countries, some of the frontrunners spearheading the democratization of their own countries do so without any real influence on the EU, which has been shifting its agenda towards a different set of narratives and goals differing from those of the original bloc back in its conception. The EU's impact on countries that joined after 2004 relied a lot on favorable domestic conditions. Article 7 allows liberties to the EU to proceed with sanctions against member states in violation of the liberal democratic principles (both seriously and repeatedly).

Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) is a provision that deals with the possibility of the EU taking action against a member state that is found to be in serious and persistent breach of the values on which the EU is founded. This article is often referred to as the “Article 7 procedure.”

There are two main mechanisms under Article 7 TEU:

- Preventive Mechanism (Article 7(1)): The preventive mechanism aims to address potential breaches of EU values before they escalate into serious violations. If there are clear indications of a member state's actions that could lead to a breach of EU values, the European Council (which consists of the heads of state or government of EU member states and the President of the

European Commission) can issue a formal warning to the concerned member state. The member state is then given an opportunity to respond and address the issues raised.

- Sanctions Mechanism (Article 7(2)): If there is a clear risk of a serious breach of EU values by a member state, the European Council, with the consent of the European Parliament, can decide to suspend certain rights of that member state, including its voting rights in the Council. This mechanism is more severe and is used when a member state's actions have already resulted in serious and persistent breaches of EU values.

The values referred to in Article 7 TEU are outlined in Article 2 TEU and include respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities.

However, that alone is not enough as the requirements to use Article 7 are, to say the least, demanding. Nevertheless, it should be noted that a study undertaken just a few years after the eastern enlargement found no real indications of such backsliding in post-communist countries, or at least, no systematic evidence (Levitz & Pop-Eleches, 2010). The findings suggest that there is no reversal in terms of political forms and reforms, but it did show a general political instability. Yet, it should be noted here and in light of everything discussed so far (including the shortcomings or “failures” in EU policy to secure important socioeconomic sectors) that the post-communist countries which joined the bloc do outperform the ones that didn't. It might be a surprising finding, but it's best to keep in mind that the greater opportunities for work and travel create and place greater expectations upon governments. So, the post-2004 enlargement has some positive aspects. Whether those positive aspects are as deep and profound as they should be will be further discussed below. In fact, the Polish Commissioner for Regional Policy, Danuta Hübner did openly admit in a speech that the EU “does not communicate enough the advantages of being open, and we do not argue with sufficient rigor against the myths and misperceptions about enlargement”, and added “why, if the benefits outweigh the drawbacks, there is so much popular opposition to these processes”³¹ (Devrim & Schulz, 2009).

³¹ Hübner (2006b), Speech/06/534, p. 8.

The Eurobarometer of 2006 did in fact vindicate Hübner as it turned the rather worrisome result of almost two-thirds of the citizens of the Union declaring a vague sense of uncertainty regarding the level of credible information at their disposal regarding the matter of enlargement and integration³². Unfortunately, it can be noted that the overall sentiment expressed by the people participating in the Eurobarometer was not that different from clients who feel unsure of what they bought via telemarketing. The resulting hesitancy which came as a rather direct result of the aforementioned situation, as well as the unexpected consequences of the enlargement, can be interpreted as one aspect of the enlargement fatigue. In other words, one aspect of the fatigue remains upon and within the citizens of the European nations whose fear of uncertainty, cultivated by the overall political shift in the nature of the European enlargement to encompass politics related to globalization and neoliberalism, in conjunction with the anxieties shared regarding the absence of concrete developments in EU policies, produced the gradual lack of joy and euphoria around the success story the enlargement and integration project was initially hailed as. At this point, we should mention that the European Commission did in fact attempt to break this wave of overall unpleasantness around the bloc's enlargement by formulating and implementing in 2005 an Enlargement Strategy (European Commission, 2005). The strategy itself introduced three leading elements:

- 1 When it comes to the candidate states, guidelines were formulated and presented to aid them in their accession way.
- 2 The benefits of enlargement were fleshed out, in an effort to counter the voices who insisted almost exclusively on the negative aspects.
- 3 Finally, the need to explain and properly articulate the objectives throughout the communication with the peoples was emphasized.

Nevertheless, after the fifth round, and despite all the efforts made and the focus on the benefits of the enlargement, the general sentiment didn't shift. The developments pertaining to the economic crisis of 2008/2009 only strengthened the dissolution of the resolve that used to back the European enlargement policy. This can be plainly seen both in the declared agenda of enlargement pertaining to the Western Balkan countries and Turkey, but also in the more concealed agenda of eastwards expansion. The consensus is lacking and in the 2005 Strategy paper, the European Commission did admit that a renewed consensus was necessary

³² Eurobarometer (2006), Special Eurobarometer 255 (2006), p. 74, as seen in (Devrim & Schulz, 2009).

to proceed with the enlargement policy. According to the paper, the Union reached its absorption capacity and time was necessary for the member states (old and new) to process the impact.

The referendums which followed the fifth round of enlargement in France and the Netherlands (on the matter of the European Constitutional Treaty)³³ delivered yet another blow to the broader European political project and its common foreign policy agenda. The Constitutional Treaty, which was signed in 2004, sought to establish a Constitution for Europe, something that was deemed a necessity as the Union's legal basis is basically overlapping treaties used to codify basic human rights across the EU member states and streamline decision-making procedures. Even though, at first, all 27 members agreed to it, everyone introduced a series of their own ratifications (meaning that at least everyone partially rejected the Treaty), until eventually, the referendums held in France and the Netherlands solidified their rejection of the Constitutional Treaty entirely. The reactions that followed these events, including from the political echelon, only further demonstrate the actual fatigue that the member states were experiencing. Various views were expressed in a quite desperate effort to explain the results of the referendums, which were really honestly just the culmination of overall negativity as can be seen by the fact that all 27 members introduced their own ratifications on the text of the original Constitutional Treaty, something that showed how everyone was indeed dissatisfied and prone to at least partially reject the Treaty (at least not unless corrections were made). The referendums in France and the Netherlands cannot be seen as but the tip of the iceberg. Some politicians did blame the policy of the Enlargement but left out some important parts regarding how the Enlargement had gradually changed through the decades and became a space and a tool for domestic neoliberal policies and in terms of foreign policy came under globalization trends as well as overall compliance with Euro-Atlanticism.

After those events, Europe entered a period that can be described as a stage of reflection. The European Commission, seeing the aftermath of the fifth round of enlargement and the reactions to the Constitutional Treaty, delivered Plan-D³⁴, D standing for Democracy, Dialogue, Debate (European Commission, 2006). Margot Wallström, vice-president of the European Commission and largely responsible for the institutional reforms in regards to the Union's communication strategy, declared that the Commission was ready and in the position

³³ In June 2005.

³⁴ European Commission (2005), COM(2004) 494.

of “meeting the communication challenge”³⁵ (European Commission, 2006). In that sense, the newly formulated plan was to allow some space, perhaps a resting period, for the Commission and at the same time to regain the trust of the citizens. In 2006, the European Council, following the action plan set in motion by the European Commission, defined anew the (renewed) consensus and based the new Enlargement Strategy upon three characteristic principles: better communication with the public, fair conditionality, and consolidation of commitments. All of these actions were combined with the capacity of the bloc to perform as a Union and increase its substantial ability to perform and undergo enlargement processes. In 2007, Ohli Rehn, then Enlargement Commissioner, stressed how the Enlargement Strategy was putting into action all these declarations: “We are taking steps to improve the quality of the Enlargement process: extensive use of benchmarking, impact studies on issues related to integration capacity, better linkage of political and economic reforms and negotiations, more transparency in accession negotiations”³⁶ (Rehn O., The Commission’s 2007 Enlargement Reports’ presentation at European Parliament, AFET Committee, 21, 2007). Rehn essentially expressed how the consolidation of all the parameters was supposed to secure the enlargement agenda. However, it also introduced another dimension to the institutionalization procedures necessary to maintain the integration agenda, and this had to do with a sense of responsibility the EU expressed and acknowledged towards the states with European prospects. Upkeeping those commitments was an essential act of reaffirming its status as a liberal and democratic union, otherwise, the credibility of the bloc would be questioned, and the enlargement agenda would dissolve into an imperialistic crusade.

Commissioner Ohli Rehn delivered a number of different speeches on the matter and stressed that the candidate countries had to abide by the criteria (“to the letter”) and that it was only the extent of each candidate state’s achievements in regards to the goals they had in front of them that would determine the speed of the accession process³⁷ (Rehn O., 2006). So, the whole idea of communication and investing in better relations with the public by essentially making the process more transparent to deliver better quality information became a paving stone for the European Commission as without it there would be no public support to fuel the enlargement, and the biggest issue out of something like this would be the obvious breach in the Union’s democratic and liberal principles. By offering all these measures and

³⁵ Structured dialogue with the Culture Committee of the European Parliament, Brussels, 28 August 2006.

³⁶ Rehn (2007), Speech.

³⁷ Rehn (2006), Speech.

by developing a more sophisticated communication strategy, the Commission wanted to achieve its basic goal, which was to fight the fatigue that followed the fifth round of enlargement and perhaps, even if just superficially in certain cases, amend the past mistakes of “swallowing up” countries little with next to no regard to the negative consequences of the integration and institutionalization processes. The broader acceptance of enlargement as a viable and necessary policy entrenched in the Union’s core had to be delivered through a new narrative focusing on social matters and the diffusion of economic tensions as the impact of 2004/2007 and the economic crisis of 2008/2009 unraveled across the member states of the EU.

Eventually, this brings us to the current perspective around enlargement and how it can no longer be a blind tool to pursue geopolitical agendas, push a nonlinearization³⁸ of economies to manifest the Single Market Economy³⁹, and enforce a common foreign policy. The enlargement has to be seen within the context of institutionalization, rather than the notion that we have mentioned in the first section of this chapter and refers to Club theory, which states that the organization will continue to expand its institutions and membership for both the member states and the applicant states as long as the marginal benefits of enlargement exceed the marginal costs (Schimmelfennig F. S., 2002). This means that the new narrative theory and philosophy around enlargement that followed the fatigue brought about by the many malpractices of previous enlargements, but that reached its peak with the challenges of the fifth round, had to focus on a series of good practices that the applicant states were held responsible over to ensure and support the accession process.

³⁸ Nonlinear processes refer to situations where the relationship between inputs and outputs is not proportional or predictable in a linear manner. Nonlinear dynamics can lead to complex and unpredictable outcomes.

³⁹ The Single Market, also known as the Internal Market, is one of the EU’s core pillars. It aims to create a unified and borderless market within the EU where goods, services, capital, and people can move freely without obstacles. The Single Market is intended to promote economic growth, efficiency, and competition among member states.

4.2 THE EU ENLARGEMENT PROCESS AND TODAY

After the Second World War ended in May 1945, Europe was divided into a capitalist Western Bloc and a communist Eastern Bloc. The European Economic Community (EEC) was founded in 1957 by six Western Bloc countries and eventually expanded to include twelve countries from throughout Europe. COMECON was a looser economic association between European communist countries and the USSR. To the south, there was Yugoslavia, a non-aligned communist federated republic. The Cold War between the two superpowers was drawing to an end between 1989 and 1991, with the USSR's influence over communist Europe eroding. The subject of enlargement into the EU arose as the former communist republics began their transition to free-market democracies and aligned themselves with Euro-Atlantic integration (Pays d'Europe Centrale et Orientale (PECO)) to the European Economic Community. The Regional Quality Assurance Program (Programme Régional d'Assurance Qualité (PRAQ)) was established in 1993 to assist the PECO States in implementing the New Approach in respective economies. The *acquis communautaire* required the transposition of 3,000 directives and 100,000 pages from the Official Journal of the European Union. It necessitated a great deal of administrative work and significant economic upheaval, as well as posing significant cultural issues – e.g., new legal concepts and language consistency problems. The EU's enlargement is a critical political process for both the organization and Europe's international relations in general. While expansion has always been a significant, if intermittent, event in the EU's history, its importance has grown considerably after the end of the Cold War. The enlargement of the EU in 1995 to three former members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the recognition of the candidate status of thirteen more countries, up to ten of which could join in 2004, and the extension of the membership perspective to the Western Balkans have all made enlargement a permanent and continuous item on the EU's agenda.

Furthermore, the actual differences which pre-exist and are somewhat entrenched in the several countries only complicate matters more. As has been discussed in previous sections, the EU's evolution from a purely western European organization to the nucleus of pan-European institution-building has made it the region's dominant center of domestic policy-making and transnational interactions. The EU's future boundaries will take the place of the Cold War's traditional East-West dividing line as the key split in the European system. The intensity of institutional relations with the Community and the adoption of its organizational norms and rules have come to define 'Europe' in terms of the EU; individual countries'

‘Europeanization’ or ‘Europeanness’ has come to be measured by the intensity of institutional relations with the Community and the adoption of its organizational norms and rules (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2002).

Considering its political relevance, it is striking that EU enlargement has been a largely neglected issue in the theory of regional integration. A recent review regarding the state of democracies of new member states and candidate countries and building upon prior findings and discussions in the available bibliography paints a somewhat gloomy picture (Börzel, 2014). Börzel states that the quality gap between the older Western European member states, comprising the core of the EU, and the post-communist ones is still evident across a range of indicators. Her conclusion does not counter the one mentioned by Levitz & Pop-Eleches (Levitz & Pop-Eleches, 2010), at least not in the sense that indeed in the post-communist countries which became members the quality and level of democracy is significantly better than the ones that didn’t. However, Börzel is not as certain that the improvements should be so easily credited to the European influence, and probably not exclusively. The reasoning behind this is counterfactual. If we are to consider previous studies, the argument is actually based on a simple yet rather powerful observation. The counterfactual argument is the basis of Börzel’s counterfactual reasoning. The counterfactual argument is a thought experiment where one considers what would have happened if a particular event or intervention had not occurred. In this case, Börzel is suggesting that if we consider previous studies and analyze the democratization progress in post-communist countries that did not become EU members, it is possible that they might have experienced similar improvements in democracy even without EU accession.

Specifically, upon a better examination of the EU enlargement and the way it is progressing, a significant deterioration of democratic processes has been observed in four out of a total of ten post-communist states, namely Hungary, Latvia, Romania, and Bulgaria⁴⁰. The drops in democratic quality observed in Hungary since 2010, or in Romania since 2012, are attributed to internal governmental behaviors. These events created tensions, as was expected since the EU had to invest multiple resources to take control of the situation and deal with the multiple breaches of the liberal and democratic values permeating the bloc’s philosophy. If one is to rely upon the classical approaches to the study of integration, like neo-functionalism, ignoring other transactional aspects, as for example, accession terms,

⁴⁰ Sedelmeier, U. (2014). Europe after the eastern enlargement of the European Union: 2004–2014. *Heinrich Böll Stiftung*, 10.

compliance and conditionality accession agreements, financial support and aid, it doesn't make sense for the EU, and specifically for the older member states, to invest so much effort in such processes. However, it's not an actual surprise or irrelevant to analyze the establishment and its stabilization of regional organizations as both of those areas do in fact and logically precede the course of studying their territorial expansion. That only goes to say that to understand the fatigue experienced after the EU enlargements, it is important to look into the past of the integration process and try to understand from the inside the ways the EU changed and tried to cope with that change. Going back to the member states whose political behaviors changed, in Hungary the Alliance of Young Democrats won 52% in the 2010 parliamentary election; this gave to Prime Minister Victor Orban a supermajority and enabled him to pass a new constitution along with a series of changes and amendments, which entrenched the government's power in such a manner that even though there is no clear infraction against the EU's principles of liberal democracy, he is still "informally" violating the rule of law.

All of the above, and since the EU has completed its biggest and most significant enlargement round, has allowed for multiple voices to ask for a halt. For now, there is no actual consensus where the EU borders actually lie or if an EU with 35 members could function sufficiently and efficiently enough to accomplish, for instance, its economic goals. Romano Prodi did point out that "a debate in Europe" is necessary in order to "decide where the limits of Europe lie"⁴¹ (Devrim & Schulz, 2009). For example, Turkey's accession candidacy is pending since the middle of the previous century and still remains controversial. The imperatives of the West to maintain balance and the new status quo that emerged after the Cold War form the current geopolitical agenda, which dictates a lot of the decisions backed by the EU. Nevertheless, the enlargement process is characterized by fatigue, and countries which pose a significant challenge, like Turkey, also make it difficult to open the negotiations as their acceptance will create strenuous tensions given the many misalignments with the EU. Furthermore, from a cultural perspective, a democratic, economically dynamic, and Muslim-majority country close to regions of importance for the EU and NATO is thought to be able to stand as a stabilizing pole benefiting peace. Similarly, Eastern Europe is yet another unexploited field for the West. The fifth enlargement capitalized on the victory over Russia in the Cold War. The further decline of the former superpower under Yeltsin acted as a catalyst to the expectations of shrinking Moscow's influence. This was and still remains

⁴¹ Prodi (2002), Speech/02/619, p. 3.

true for those who saw enlargement as a foreign policy instrument (UK, US) and the 2004/2007 enlargement paved the way towards that direction of eastwards expansion, especially keeping Ukraine in mind. The immediate inclusion of those states was and is out of the question since the bloc recognizes the challenges in the “fatigue” that followed its fifth enlargement and has its roots further back into the history of the European integration. Nevertheless, a solution was proposed, known as the “neighborhood policy”, aiming to detach multiple countries from the Russian influence by building ties via economic association. The current strategy to push “Russia back to the steppes” inevitably provoked its reaction. As such, following the big bang, European enlargement policy had to remain alive to achieve both its declared objectives (Western Balkans and Turkey), but also the concealed one, the continuation of “drang nach Osten” (spread to the east).

Nevertheless, the fatigue which followed the fifth round of enlargement set a new context necessary for the Union to proceed down the path of integration and enlargement. Besides the pre-existing Copenhagen Criteria of 1993, the inclusion of new member states had to be placed within the ability of the bloc to integrate them. As we have mentioned before, ever since 2006 and 2007, the EU has linked its institutions to any further enlargement maintaining three major parameters when it comes to the accession of states: good communication, the obligation of the candidate state to fulfill a set of criteria, and the existing member states to feel secure in maintaining the momentum. This was why eventually the Treaty of Nice was labeled an inappropriate basis for the EU enlargement agenda. However, in the aftermath of the many challenges that the European states had to overcome, it became apparent that the Union had to undergo far-reaching reformations to preserve and enlarge its capacity to integrate new states and to continue to function properly in the face of enlargement processes.

4.3 THE POSITION OF THE EU MEMBERS ON THE ENLARGEMENT PROCESS AND ITS EVOLUTION

EU enlargement is not only a project with a world political dimension (peace in Europe, unification of East and West, EU transforming into a world power); it also has far-reaching economic implications. After 2005 and the First Enlargement Strategy, which did not yet directly link the capacity of the Union to proceed in institutionalizations of new states, the new conditions which came as a response to the varying degrees of negative reactions galvanizing multiple member states demonstrated that at least from the part of the EU Commission, the issue of democratic legitimacy was pivotal. Urging certain member states, or even political groups, to pursue a series of partnerships shows that there is a search of opportunities on the matter of political cooperation. There are already some studies in the literature, which either analyze the potential welfare effects of enlargement for the EU and the CEEC on a global scale (Brown et al., 1997 or Baldwin et al., 1997 and Lejour et al., 2002 with world CGE models; Neck et al., 1999 with a world macro model; Breuss, 2000b with a calibrated EU-CEEC growth model; EU, 2001d with growth scenarios for CEEC and their macroeconomic impact on EU-15, simulated with the QUEST-II macro model) or for individual countries (for Austria with a macro model, see Breuss and Schebeck, 1999; Keuschnigg and Kohler, 1999 with a CGE model; for Germany, see Keuschnigg et al., 1999 with a CGE model; for a survey of model simulations, see Breuss, 1999) (Breuss, 2002). However, the common point across all these studies Breuss cites whilst exploring the notion of political cooperation regarding the enlargement policy is basically that in the past and on multiple occasions, multiple candidates for accession came from the “neighborhood”. As we mentioned before, despite the presence of particularly conservative circles within strong member states, most of them comprising the very core of the Union, if not its founding members, the whole idea of relying on enlargement and integration as a foreign policy tool and a mechanism was involved in many occasions to promote the candidacy of certain countries in which existing member states had invested interest (for example, northern countries and the Baltic region, Greece and Cyprus, etc.). Therefore, sharing borders and good relations with a country that was already a member had the potential to help a state’s candidacy and eventually even its accession.

The five rounds of enlargements redrew Europe’s political map and elevated its status after the trials and tribulations of both WWII and the Cold War. The post-war era divisions were not simply put behind; they came to be seen as a line separating the past from the now

and the future. The Union openly declared that any course of action bringing it closer to “the building of new walls and dividing lines within Europe” (Wallden, 2017) was more or less an unacceptable course of action⁴². Instead, the emphasis which had been placed upon legitimizing the process of enlargement by making it more palatable to the general public aimed to control the impact of the integration processes in the internal dimension of the bloc. In fact, any of the shortcomings detected in the work of Breuss, as well as in the works of many of the scientists and authors he covers in his own article, pertains to calculations that are somewhat negligent of all possible integration effects that one can expect in the case of EU enlargement. Since the fifth enlargement, the Union has acquired new neighbors and new geopolitical outlooks, e.g. access to the Black Sea, yet this specific kind of regional integration of rich EU regions with poor CEEC regions has also procured external implications. On the other hand, Breuss and many others in the bibliography mentioned by him mostly analyzed the consequences only for the blocks EU and CEEC, but not for all countries involved in this enlargement process (Breuss, 2002). The further enlargement of the EU has sometimes presented in negative terms the cost of taking in poorer members, the difficulty of reforming union policies, institutional problems, etc. The Commission went through considerable efforts to communicate the potential benefits of the enlargement. Some of the most regularly mentioned and well-known such benefits are:

- ❖ Economic and financial benefits and incentives, such as that by enlarging the EU’s internal market to include more than 100 million additional consumers with rising incomes the market economy will grow.
- ❖ The overall benefits of supporting the newly liberalized market economies by further opening up markets in goods and services between East and West, North and South, stimulating economic growth in Europe, and offering new trading opportunities for all.
- ❖ In addition to the above, the economic transactions are also considered as a prelude to political ties securing regional stability, by binding the countries of Central and Eastern Europe into western European political and economic structures, and thus enhancing security and stability.

⁴² Even so, it should be kept in mind, especially given the focal point of discussion of this thesis and in line with the general feeling of anti-enlargement and anti-globalisation, that since the 1990s, 1000 km of walls have been built around EU as a measure of protection, referring to the parallel crises which have also hit the member states, namely security policies and migratory politics (Patteri, 2022).

- ❖ The creation of one united internal dimension will further help to increase effective cooperation across various fields, like those of Justice and Home Affairs, helping to fight crime and the menace of drugs and human trafficking, the effects of which are felt throughout our continent.
- ❖ Finally, another important clause to be considered in the list of positives has to do with the European Green Deal promising to bring higher environmental standards to Central and Eastern Europe, benefiting all of Europe by reducing cross-border and global pollution, while allowing the EU to spearhead the developments into a green economy (a financial area in which the current most important market is, in fact, the European one).

These contradicting forces and the duet of positive vs. negative effects of the enlargement process gradually led to the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), an action which in fact dates back to 2003 with a paper by the Commission entitled “Wider Europe – Neighborhood: A new framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbors” (European Commission, 2003). The concept of the ENP came to even further counter the general negativity along the public regarding the enlargement process, its deep impact on the member states as well as the new geopolitical agenda that was drawing upon in relation to the US and NATO. The ENP was designed as an instrument meant to provide across all member states a common approach to all its (new) neighbors without losing its flexibility and thus, allowing for adjustments per situation. Ever since its introduction, the ENP has turned into a new type of actual integration on its own since it is based on two areas of interest: foreign policy and the enlargement agenda. Both of these areas are, as we have discussed, heavily institutionalized within the bloc. Therefore, the policy of the ENP traces along the institutions backing the EU as a whole. Many of the developments pertaining to the ENP have been changed and adjusted over the years to accommodate for the changes in European borders. Initially there was deep uncertainty around the issue of including Russia (Southern Caucasus was formally excluded in 2004); eventually, the ENP came to incorporate 16 countries⁴³.

Furthermore, the ENP is complemented by two initiatives: UfM (Union for the Mediterranean) and the Black Sea Synergy (EPRS Admin, 2016). Such initiatives like the ENP, the UfM, the Black Sea Synergy, the Eastern Partnership, and the Southern

⁴³ Those are further divided between an Eastern Partnership and a Southern Neighborhood. The countries which are incorporated in total are: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Republic of Moldova, Morocco, the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine (EPRS Admin, 2016).

Neighbourhood were meant to provide a framework of reference within which nations and the public would see the opportunity for close and even privileged economic relations occurring within a greater degree of cooperation and cohesion than as opposed to third parties, since the level of integration would allow for such freedom. Nevertheless, the member states' perspectives and motivations came to vary considerably on either issue of enlargement as a direct accession process to acquire EU membership or the many initiatives that were basically accession alternatives. Those reactions are not always particularly cohesive. For example, France's initial motivation for the Union regarding the Mediterranean was to keep Turkey out of the EU and offer the country potential alternatives to membership. However, Poland had an entirely different motivation. The Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski offered the following comment in regard to the Eastern Partnership, pointing that Poland "had no official tie-in to enlargement policy"⁴⁴. Yet, Sikorski did express that future accession could become more natural once the effects of the fatigue wear away (Devrim & Schulz, 2009). Examining prior enlargements, which were frequently coupled with a depth of the Community, is very instructive. Following the first expansion, which included the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark, the Community agreed on shared policies in new areas (such as regional, environmental, and technological issues), as well as stronger foreign policy cooperation (EPC). With the advent of the European Council and direct elections to the European Parliament, institutional procedures were also enhanced. Following the accession of Greece, Spain, and Portugal, the Community expanded the Structural Funds as a means for transferring resources to member states' underdeveloped regions. The Single European Act, expanded engagement of the European Parliament, and a new financial framework were all part of the second expansion wave.

The Single European Act greatly expanded the use of the majority vote, which would have made the Internal Market impossible to complete without it. The most recent enlargement, which included Austria, Sweden, and Finland, was preceded by the Treaty of European Union, which included significant deepening, such as the commitment to the Economic and Monetary Union, the creation of a Common Foreign and Security Policy, and yet more powers for the European Parliament. These instances demonstrate how enlargement might hasten the Union's integration, cohesion, and convergence processes. Given the number of candidates and the greater diversity that their membership would bring to the EU, a strengthening of the integration process is even more important for the next enlargement.

⁴⁴ Unian, 'Poland's "Eastern Partnership" set for summit approval', 17 June 2008.

According to a relevant EP resolution (European Parliament resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Green Deal (2019/2956(RSP)), additional substantial policies are needed to bridge the gap between ENP and EU enlargement policy. Enlargement is, of course, a component of a larger European agenda that includes both internal and international elements. Internally, the Union will need to: modernize the Union's institutions, which were built for six member states, to meet the needs of a much larger Union (part of the IGC agenda); implement the single currency (the Euro) adopted in 1999, in accordance with the Maastricht Treaty's conditions. The EU's expansion plan must be rethought and reorganized. There is little doubt that this step will have a significant impact on the Union's development; to settle on new fiscal parameters for the Union once the current budget agreement expires; to agree on the future of the Structural Funds; to continue reforming the Common Agricultural Policy. These procedures are critical in preventing the enlargement and integration process from becoming automated. The EU has a number of significant priorities on the international stage, including: following the Barcelona Conference and the Cannes agreement on a new and substantial package for the Mediterranean, building a new Euro-Med Partnership is a priority; establishing a strategic cooperation with Russia and Ukraine, as well as strengthening ties with other CIS members; strengthening ties with Turkey; following the Bangkok conference in March 1996, establishing a new connection with Asia and preparing for a new round of international trade negotiations. These internal and external concerns, when considered combined, provide a difficult "Agenda of Europe" for the coming years.

The EU's growing global significance is reflected in this list of foreign priorities. However, if the EU is to wield its full weight in the world, consensus on steps to reinforce the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is required. As Commissioner Hans van den Broek has argued, "Our citizens, and indeed our partners in the world, are keen for Europe to speak and act with one voice in dealing with major issues such as the crisis in Bosnia. So far, the CFSP has been rather a disappointment. There is now an opportunity to achieve reforms in the IGC reforms which will become increasingly urgent with enlargement." It's worth noting that one of the key concerns that led the CEECs to seek Union membership was the necessity for increased security. This concise summary of the pre-accession policy demonstrates the Union's strong commitment to future enlargement preparations. However, the preparations being made by the related countries are equally crucial. The consolidation of political and economic reforms is a top goal in preparing for Union membership. This will allow the Commission to confirm that the Copenhagen principles are properly upheld when it

issues opinions on membership applications. The consolidation of democracy requires the respect for human rights, the protection of minorities, the free flow of information, and the independence of the media and the courts. Although the overall track record is positive, there are some concerning developments in particular countries. In preparing for membership, good relations with neighbors and the often-related issue of minority rights respect are also vital. Here, too, significant progress has been accomplished, thanks in large part to the efforts of the countries concerned, and in part through the Stability Pact. However, a number of critical problems remain unresolved. The pursuit of effective macroeconomic policy and economic reform is just as crucial as the consolidation of democracy and stability. In general, most applicant countries have laid the groundwork for a market economy and created conditions for long-term economic growth. However, the situation varies greatly from country to country, with some candidates experiencing real growth rates of above 5%.

There are still some underlying economic issues. Foreign investment is increasing, but it is still slow and unevenly dispersed among the candidates. Before supplying complex new goods and services, potential investors would want to ensure that host governments provide adequate protection for intellectual and industrial property rights. Adequate implementation and enforcement methods are just as crucial as the legal framework itself in this case. In other circumstances, the privatization process is opaque, and necessary restructuring is not always implemented. The banking and financial sectors are still in need of reform, and competition rules similar to those used in the EU are just getting started. To promote equitable trade and investment conditions, it is critical that competition policy and state aid rules are brought into line with the Union. This will be beneficial to both the Union and the linked countries because there would be a guarantee of fair competition comparable to that within the Union once competition legislation and state aids regulation, as well as other White Paper provisions, had been implemented satisfactorily. While the associated countries continue their reforms, the Union must also enhance its own institutions and decision-making mechanisms in order to prepare for enlargement. This will be one of the Intergovernmental Conference's (IGC) key tasks: The changes will be accommodated within the existing negotiating frameworks with Montenegro and Serbia. The essential question is how to create a European Union based on democracy, transparency, and efficiency with maybe 35 or more members.

The importance of the IGC making decisions to guarantee that a larger Union continues to function effectively was stressed in the Commission's report to the Reflection Group⁴⁵. In its Final Report, the Reflection Group⁴⁶ emphasized the need for institutional reform, but there has been no sign that the IGC negotiators are prepared to address these challenges. The nature and scope of such reforms continue to be a source of contention among member states. The IGC already has a full agenda, but the subject of enlargement ensures that two sorts of concerns must be addressed: constitutional and institutional. In terms of the Union's constitution, each new member adds to the workload and the variety of concerns to be dealt with. This means that the IGC will have to pay more attention to how the subsidiarity principle is used. Furthermore, attention must be paid to how to improve the preparation, taking, and implementation of decisions in a wider Union, which will necessarily include more complicated and diverse concerns. The issue of voting system modifications in the Council is perhaps one of the most sensitive and institutional issues. The larger states will almost definitely push for more attention to population size. The breadth of decisions to be made by qualified majority voting will be another difficult subject. This should not be reason for concern, as history demonstrates that the Union is based on solidarity and has always showed understanding when a member state is having problems with a big issue, regardless of the formal position. Other problematic concerns include the structure and composition of the six-monthly rotating Presidency/Troika system, how the Council conducts business (a tour de table with 35 member states, each speaking for five minutes, would take nearly two hours!), and how the Commission President is chosen. In terms of the Parliament, there appears to be a growing consensus to reduce its membership to 700 members and to simplify its extremely intricate procedures. Despite the fact that it has gained significant new powers as a result of the Maastricht Treaty, it is still dissatisfied with its position in relation to the other institutions, and it may seek to use its power to block future enlargements unless it is granted additional powers, particularly in co-decision. Another crucial goal will be to reach an agreement on arrangements to improve the EU's CFSP so that the EU can start punching its full weight in the world. Basic choices about the Union's relations with the Western European Union and NATO are also required. With enlargement, this will become much more necessary. After all, one of the factors driving Central and Eastern European countries to seek Union membership is the need for more security.

⁴⁵ 2019 Reflection Group Report, 16 December 2019, Joint Research Centre.

⁴⁶ REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL REFLECTION GROUP OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE, October 2022.

All of the above create a complex and complicated political and economic agenda for the EU. In fact, the entire system is so time-consuming and convoluted that it is only natural that fatigue after the fifth round of enlargement followed. In that context it also does make sense to invest in a backup plan, that of the ENP, to be able to pursue at least some of the most important goals in the Union's agenda, particularly matters pertaining to its financial growth, fiscal stabilization, and geopolitical growth. With a Union stretching from North to South and from East to West, practically covering the entire geographical continent of Europe, it's normal to pursue initiatives with a more regional focus. Besides, it is practically impossible to either exclude geography from the equation so as to expect Finland to work most closely with Portugal, or – even worse – to exclude history and culture. In that sense, most southern member states like France, Spain, or Greece promote their interests as those are constructed through the needs and necessities forged through their own boundaries, which include a lot of countries in Africa or Asia. On the other hand, the member states of Central Europe lobby for their own agenda that is not really concerned with African or Asian neighbors, rather the Eastern European countries and more often than not Russia. The unfortunate result really does resemble another version of Puchala's analogy between the EU and the tale of the three blind men and shows a lack of cohesion and uncoordinated foreign policy. Back in 1972, Donald Puchala (1972) offered a remarkable analogy between the scientific study of the process of European integration and the classic Indian tale of the three blind men: each described to the other two what an elephant looked like after having touched three completely different parts of the animal (the trunk, an ear and a foot). Despite the time that has elapsed, in this article we argue that the analogy is still valid to describe the problems faced by the academic community when attempting to tackle the enlargement processes.⁴⁷

As such, even the general public lost its appetite for territorial growth, as more territory does not automatically and without planning result in multiple benefits. Di Mauro and Fraile found, in research they conducted in 2012 for EUDO (European Union Democracy Observatory), that the general inclination was, in fact, negative. Specifically, they mentioned that by the end of 2008, those who were not in favor of any further additions of new member states was around 36%; within one year, this percentage climbed to 40%, and within 2010, it peaked twice to 45%, until it reached an actual 50% in 2011 (Di Mauro & Fraile, 2012). The authors note how the economic crisis and its effects, along with EU's neoliberal politics, the

⁴⁷ Piedrafita, S., & I. Torreblanca, J. (2005). The three logics of EU enlargement: interests identities and arguments. *Politique européenne*, (1), 29-59.

fact that as we have mentioned each region has its own agenda and expectations, needs, and demands eventually created a distinctly negative attitude among the population, which was then expressed by the politicians elected by each member state. Between 2008 and 2011, the percentage of people who were in favor of further enlargement dropped from 53% to 39%. This trend was especially prominent in member states like the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Cyprus, and Ireland. More often than not the overall position of the Union's member states on enlargement reflects the attitudes on the candidate state. In fact, Di Mauro and Fraile noted that no clear geographical pattern could be detected after examining the results from before and during the crisis, meaning that even though the economic crisis had an overall negative effect, it did not bear any difference on specific regions affecting the views either negatively or positively on the issue of enlargement and whether or not the EU should re-examine its criteria and processes for accession.

The exact question that was asked on the matter of bringing in more states was: “*For each of the following countries and territories would you be in favor or against it becoming part of the European Union in the future?*”. This question was followed by a list of these states: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, Turkey, Norway, Switzerland, Ukraine, North Macedonia, and Iceland (Di Mauro & Fraile, 2012). The results showed that attitudes varied a lot according to the candidate country. States like Switzerland or Norway were very popular (Di Mauro and Fraile reveal that 80% of the responders were positive to the bloc offering membership). In other cases, the percentage of support is only around 30%. Even less popular states like Turkey, Albania, or Kosovo are too “alien” for the core of many European peoples. In-between 80% and 30% or even lower lie countries like the former Yugoslavian countries and Ukraine. Finally, the research by Di Mauro and Fraile produced rather consistent results for the period from 2008 to 2010.

As such, the positions of the member states on the enlargement policy and its procedures reflect the population's acceptance of the candidate states. When Di Mauro and Fraile compared two indicators, one targeting specifically the pro-enlargement countries and another showing people's opinion towards each candidate, three interesting findings were made:

- 1 Indeed, pro-enlargement countries are generally more supportive than non-enlargement countries.

- 2 The differences in preferences can be described even as vast, except for the cases of Turkey, Albania, and Kosovo⁴⁸, in which case(s) attitudes between pro- and anti-enlargement camps opinions did not vary by much.
- 3 The final point is that by taking into account those extra indicators regarding the overall attitude of the people asked (pro or against further integration), there are indeed differences between 2008 and 2010. However, the changes are not particularly positive as even among the pro-enlargement camp, the percentages of people not supporting specific candidacies or any candidacies at all actually rose.

In short, the trend of decline regarding support towards enlargement is general and reflects the majority of opinions. As we have mentioned before, the impact of the fifth round of enlargement in 2004/2007, along with the effects of the economic crisis in 2008/2009, had a profound effect on the general populace. In addition, the overall negativity towards enlargement and its persistence can be seen by the declaration of Angela Merkel in 2021 that the EU should abstain from setting a date regarding the Western Balkans: "I don't really believe in setting dates, I believe in making good on our promises: Once the conditions are met the accession can take place" (Siebold & Carrel, 2021). Furthermore, she stressed how a definite deadline was a bad idea and for the most part would just add to the stress the EU was already under. To conclude, Merkel pointed out that this perspective had little to do with whether or not the countries of the Western Balkans fulfilled the conditions set out by the Union or not, meaning it had to do with the official line Germany was pursuing on the subject of enlargement as a policy this given moment. However, as we have shown, this line on enlargement was pretty much the same even in 2008 or 2010. Nevertheless, Germany's stance, as Judy Dempsey, a non-resident Senior Fellow at Carnegie Europe, has shown, had more to do with putting the country's economic agenda first (Dempsey, 2019). Whereas France's overall antipathy to opening up the negotiations to areas like the Western Balkans (where a lot of the candidate states are located, as shown by Di Mauro's and Fraile's research) had more to do with the issue of what direction the Union should take and what kind of Europe the member states want (Dempsey, 2019). This again falls in line with the attitudes to which we have referred to and refers to the cultural attitudes and sentiments attached to the conceptualization of the EU within a specific historical and cultural sphere.

⁴⁸ At this point it's best to keep in mind that in the anti-enlargement camp there are no more and less favorite options. There are only three accepted options (Norway, Switzerland, and Iceland) and for everyone else, it's pretty much a hard pass.

Even Di Mauro and Fraile were unable to provide an answer regarding the tendencies their research revealed in terms of diversity.⁴⁹ Even though they were able to link the general decline when it comes to acceptance and openness of the enlargement policy with the dire effects and subsequent negative economic impact of the economic crisis which hit Europe in 2008/2009, they were not able to exclude the gravity cultural affinities appear to have in the protectionist sentiments and attitudes appearing in people. For example, in the case of Western Balkan countries (and even though Greece shares its own fair share of antipathies), in more cases than one the government has supported the opening of negotiations in order to avoid a stability vacuum in the area, something that could potentially breed far greater threats (Kathimerini Newsroom, 2021). Then Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias specifically warned that anti-enlargement sentiments could “easily be filled by other non-European forces supporting extremism and revisionism or aspiring to revive empires that belong to the past” (Kathimerini Newsroom, 2021). Nevertheless, if there is any meaningful way to interpret all of the above information is that indeed regionalism plays an important role when it comes to supporting (or not) the EU membership of various countries. The effects of the economic crisis did influence everyone in a negative way, but even so, regional political and geopolitical agendas are a strong gravity pole affecting equally the way people feel over enlargement and the ways their governments proceed in regards to the European agenda on integration, by either pressuring for or against the policy.

After all, it's best not to forget Finland's case when evaluating the extent to which the repercussions of the crisis have affected general pro-European or anti-European sentiments. Even though 38% of the Finnish people reject the participation of their country to the economic crisis recovery package, still half the country supports its future in the bloc, with only 24% thinking they should go UK's way and aim for their own way out of the bloc (Vantinen, 2020). Therefore, the general attitudes are not exactly against enlargement (even though, as we have mentioned, there was a general decline, mostly due to the effects of the crisis and the subsequent protectionism it triggered across Europe), nor are they against the procedure (albeit a long one). The main issues holding back enlargement are the differences of opinion between the member states. Those differences boil down to the ways each country sees itself and its neighbors within the Union and the national agendas running parallel to the one run by the Union and the Commission. Adding to the general confusion is the fact that not only there is no common foreign policy, but it also seems exceedingly difficult to forge

⁴⁹ European Union Democracy Observatory annual report 2011.

one since again each member state, influenced by its own history, culture, and needs, already has a national foreign policy agenda that they are pushing and expect to see fulfilled, at least to an extent. All of the above brings us back to the ENP and its related initiatives such as UfM (Union for the Mediterranean) and the Black Sea Synergy (EPRS Admin, 2016), the Eastern Partnership and Southern Neighbourhood, suggesting that such regional cooperation movements (rather than the enlargement which, given the circumstances, can appear a lot like a monolith) were looked into and examined as alternatives. Undoubtedly, those initiatives do not meet the standards and expectations of all member states, a statement that on its own demonstrates how member states do indeed feel about the enlargement and whether they would rather have the criteria around it relaxed; however, neighboring countries do tend to have at least some common goals, and if not in every situation, then at least in some.

As such, accepting a more diverse neighborhood without the pressure of the actual integration and its impacts is a solution welcomed by most member states. However, it is a little risky calling these new formations outright Unions. Even the EU did not start as a union, primarily since the term in itself signifies a deep and meaningful integration. This is also why protests, such as those expressed by Macron, generally fall in line with the antithetic views France holds on enlargement have a logical basis. Indeed, to unify denotes to become part of one common formation. In that case, questions of inclusivity and exclusivity are not mere social media posts running behind visibility counts. To what extent can a union be stretched in order to allow for diversity before it is torn apart? History does show that too much diversity is not an exceptionally good thing and massive political formations, such as empires, were always faced with the challenge that demanded a viable answer. After all, no kingdom or empire can stay locked in a perpetual war against the others. Systems like the hellenistic syncretism (which later influenced Rome's politics in integrating different cultures) focus in creating one common supra-identity, under which everyone unifies without eliminating their own individual characteristics. Either way, these loose kinds of cooperation, such as the ENP, can be somewhat frustrating or even misleading. Let's consider the very recent statement by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who asked the EU to show Turkey the same kind of sensitivity extended to Ukraine pertaining to Turkey's long-pending request (since 1963, while the country was officially considered a candidate in 1999): "I tell the EU member states: Please show your sensitivity toward Ukraine, for Turkey as well. Or will you put Turkey on the agenda when someone declares war and attacks Turkey? They are not sincere." (Hürriyet Daily News, 2022). Even when Turkey and the Union entered into an

official negotiation regarding the former's candidacy in 2005, Brussels decided to suspend all further talks after the Commission declared that Turkey did not fulfill necessary criteria; criteria that technically are not met by Ukraine either, but are asked to be overlooked due to the current war with Russia. In that context, Turkey's dissatisfaction with the course of events regarding the long waiting list, the overall negativity, and even then, EU's preference to lump the country together in mutated formations instead of proceeding with the negotiations regarding Turkey's accession is somewhat understandable. It's not an exaggeration for many countries, especially the ones which are shown to be less than welcome to express directly or indirectly the view that concealed strategy behind initiatives like the ENP, or UfM, or the Black Sea Synergy is a dissolution of the enlargement policy rather than a motion of feeling in the gap.

To this matter, and the negativity now expressed over a period of at least a full decade by the neighboring states, who may or may not be considered candidates, and no guidelines are provided regarding what takes one country from the category of the "neighbor" to the category of the "candidate", other than the general sentiment and attitude of another group of people (that may or may not be influenced by economic, historical, geopolitical reasons), the European Parliament put forth the following claim and did so very early on, almost as in a preemptive strike against any future complaints (like the recent one by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan). The announcement of the EP stated that: "(the) Enlargement Strategy should be flanked by a more diversified range of external contractual frameworks and that these frameworks could be structured as mutually permeable concentric circles" (Devrim & Schulz, 2009). This means that the enlargement strategy should consider the pre-existing relations established via initiatives such as the ENP as a blueprint for any future negotiations and candidacy requests. Nevertheless, this takes us back to our previous remark about how neo-colonial the entire system is in its remarkable convoluted grandeur. The establishment of regional cooperatives, promoting the EU agenda in a new territory, will eventually build the necessary framework which will then be the basis for the "permeable concentric circles" leading to the accession of a new member state. Furthermore, what is perhaps even more important here is that the aforementioned remark did not come from the European Commission, the usual suspect as we have seen so far; rather, it came from the European Parliament. This means that the EP has progressed into a gradually more and more critical stance regarding the enlargement policy after the European Commission had established that due to the fatigue experienced within the Union, other routes were explored. So, essentially

the EP did not so much respond to the negativity within the Union as to the negativity around the Union concerning the bloc's criteria and process regarding accession. Upon a closer examination, we do in fact observe that the evolution of the process has become an even greater struggle, which might be the reason behind Enlargement Commissioner Rehn's remark that "for the Western Balkans and Turkey that have a clear membership perspective, the EU must not impose new intermediate stages before candidacy or accession. This would create doubts about the EU's commitment, thus weakening the necessary incentive for reform"⁵⁰ (Rehn O. , 2008).

It is striking, therefore, that countries like Turkey, Croatia, and North Macedonia negotiating for accession and membership in the bloc are lumped together with various other countries whose importance lies strictly within the economic and regional initiatives promoting the EU's foreign policy agenda. Technically, the idea of negotiating for candidacy to join the Union should at the very least signify a much more stable and profound bond and not a materialistic reality revolving around simply doing business. This attitude is expressed by both the member states (even if they express negativity to "alien" countries like Turkey or Kosovo), but also by countries like Turkey, who very rightfully ask their candidacy to be treated with the same zeal as those of other countries without having to experience the tragic consequences of war. The positions held by member states (and even non-member states) regarding the criteria are formulated according to their own agendas, yet it is the responsibility of the Union's institutions, that are confronted with this reality, to formulate a strategy to meet those institutional challenges pertaining to the enlargement policy and the integration criteria.

⁵⁰ Rehn (2008), Speech/08/383.

4.4 CRITICISM AND PROPOSALS REGARDING THE CURRENT INTEGRATION CRITERIA

The process of European integration refers to the industrial, economic, legal, sociopolitical, and even cultural integration of various nation-states geographically located entirely or partially within Europe, the process itself is an institutionalization concerned with precisely nothing other but the institutional organization of the EU. The process itself has a historical background and is currently revolving around various theories of integration. Ever since Antiquity, the vision of success embodied by the Roman Empire has in many ways haunted European thought, and multiple civilizations have attempted to achieve the level of cultural, economic, and sociopolitical integration that Rome achieved for the peoples of Europe. This can be plainly seen by the multiple claims pertaining to the rightful successor of the Roman Empire after the fall of the Second Rome, i.e. Constantinople, in 1453⁵¹. Following the horrors of World War I, philosophers and dreamers from a variety of political traditions revived the idea of a politically unified Europe. In the early 1920s, a number of international organizations were established (or re-established) to assist like-minded political parties in coordinating their efforts. The Comintern (1919), the Labour and Socialist International (1921), the Radical and Democratic Entente of centre-left progressive parties (1924), the Green International of farmers' parties (1923), and the International Secretariat of Democratic Parties Inspired by Christianity (1923) were among them (1925). While these internationals had a worldwide mandate, the prevalence of European political parties meant that they were able to encourage interaction amongst supporters of a certain ideology across European borders (Rosamond, 2000). The first Paneuropean Congress was held in Vienna in 1926, and by the time of the Wall Street Crash, the organization had grown to 8000 members. The goal was to create a Europe that was solely Christian, and thus Catholic. In 1933, Arthur Salter, a British civil servant and future Conservative minister, published a book promoting the United States of Europe. In 1923, Soviet commissar (minister) Leon Trotsky, on the other hand, coined the slogan "For a Soviet United States of Europe," pushing for a united Europe

⁵¹ The First "Rome" is Rome itself (Rome in historical context can be used to imply either the city of Rome, capital of the Roman Empire, but also to infer the notion of imperial capital). After the fall of Constantinople, the second capital of the Roman Empire, there was no rightful Third Rome. The title was claimed by multiple states (the Russians, the Ottomans by right of conquest, etc.) but nobody has achieved the rightful status. Both the League of Nations and the European Union in the 20th century built on the idea of supranationalism and the Imperial idea, the Golden Bull of 1356 and its final clause on multilingualism as a prerequisite of the Holy Roman Emperor have been seen by the historian Louis Eisenmann as expressions of the Imperial Idea originally expressed by the Hapsburg Monarchy, the Russian Empire, etc. As such, historically many perceive a new claim is expressed through the EU for the Third Rome.

based on communist ideas. The interwar movements were hampered by the Great Depression, the emergence of fascism and communism, and World War II: between 1933 and 1936, most of Europe's last democracies became dictatorships, including Ortega's Spain and Venizelos' Greece. Despite the fact that proponents of European unity, whether social-democratic, liberal, or Christian-democratic, were out of power in the 1930s and unable to put their ideas into practice, many would find themselves in power in the 1940s and 1950s, better positioned to put their earlier remedies for economic and political crisis into effect. At the end of World War II, the continental political atmosphere favored democratic European countries' unification, which many saw as a way out of the continent's devastation by extremist forms of nationalism.

For the initial theories, the question of how to avoid battles between nation-states was critical. Federalism and Functionalism recommended containing the nation-state, while Transactionalism attempted to theorize the circumstances for the nation-state system's stability. Neofunctionalism, developed by Ernst B. Haas (1958) and later researched by Leon Lindberg, is one of the most important theories of European integration (1963). This theory focuses on integration spillovers, which leads to even more integration. Liberal Intergovernmentalism, on the other hand, is a popular paradigm in Integration Studies that emphasizes on state preferences being realized through bargaining. Andrew Moravcsik created this hypothesis in the 1990s, based on Stanley Hoffman's and others' intergovernmentalist work. It continues to have a significant impact. The crucial argument between neofunctionalism and liberalism is that the incomplete nature of European integration contributed to the eruption of the eurozone crisis. The trigger may have come from abroad as the subprime lending crisis in the United States created trouble for European cross-border banks, but the failures were homegrown. European Central Bank (ECB) President Mario Draghi called this incompleteness Europe's "Achilles Heel" (Draghi, 2014). According to a 2016 study, European integration deepens through a "failing forward" process (Jones, Kelemen & Meunier, 2016), whereby:

"Intergovernmental bargaining leads to incompleteness because it forces states with diverse preferences to settle on lowest common denominator solutions. Incompleteness then unleashes forces that lead to crisis. Member states respond by again agreeing to lowest common denominator solutions, which address the crisis and lead to deeper integration. To date, this sequential cycle of piecemeal reform, followed by policy failure, followed by further reform, has managed to sustain both the European project and the common currency".

From the start, the EU goal of merging a single market with a common currency was flawed. The inadequacy of Europe's Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) governance architecture was both a cause of the euro crisis and a recurring pattern of policy responses to the crisis, according to this article. Using recent experience in the Eurozone as an example, the "failing forward" argument to explain the dynamics of European integration proceeds like this: Intergovernmental bargaining leads to incompleteness because it forces governments with various preferences to compromise on solutions that satisfy the lowest common denominator. The official EU discussion began in 2005, following the completion of the 2004 part of the fifth round of EU enlargement, as well as the referendums held in France and the United Kingdom. The new standards, as well as the European Commission's emphasis on recovering people's trust by addressing any concerns of openness and accountability, enhanced the prerequisites for a country's membership. Along with it emerged programs like the ENP, which tried to bring relatively different initiatives that would supplement the original role of the enlargement policy but avoiding direct influence on the bloc's already vulnerable environment. If anything, it could be claimed that the expansion process mutated in response to the pressures it faced. However, it should be noted that this mutation is not completely harmless, and it is far from a joke; it altered the unilateral character of the enlargement process. The new squabbles were significant. In particular, as discussed in previous sections, the accession process takes time; in fact, automating it would be contrary to the Commission's principles; therefore, and in that context, it makes sense for applicant states to spend some time adjusting to the demands of the organization they have asked to join. When you ask to join a club, you don't negotiate the terms, as the saying goes. This small provision is so deeply established in our realities and logic that most sensible people will either accept and wait for their membership to be approved or reject when asked to join a Facebook group and the administrators ask them to accept the full disclosure of their rules.

Undoubtedly, some have argued that a more diverse neighborhood is indeed a disadvantage of the enlargement. Compared to enlargement, the ENP is perceived as a more positive initiative. It is more acceptable to the EU's citizens and seems to provide a basis for a new success story in the EU, with the narrative shifting from the success story of enlargement to the success story of the ENP. The adoption of this "mutation", this new approach into enlargement, was more or less a necessary step to the negative criticisms of multiple member states (Germany, France, Finland, and many more). Many of the initiatives that we have already mentioned are complementary initiatives to existing policies within the

EU. They were favored because of a prevailing optimism regarding the effectiveness and efficiency when it came to the “transformative powers” of the enlargement process. However, it is not irrational to interpret such moves as either intermediate steps or alternatives to the initial enlargement policy. For example, the initial motivation for Nicolas Sarkozy in deciding to launch the Union for the Mediterranean was interpreted as a way to provide alternatives to giving full-time membership to Turkey. Even though the intention can be seen as a new proposal towards a new direction, the suggestion to invest in other Unions outside the EU speaks otherwise. The Union for the Mediterranean ended up with all 27 member states of the bloc, the additional ENP countries, and Turkey. For many years the attitude that the EU could have the cake and eat it was almost religiously cultivated. The rhetoric behind the enlargement policy would magically deliver the necessary and wanted results. Meanwhile, the accession perspective became even more blurred. The inclusion of all the different types of countries is in itself evidence of how misleading the concept of a clear distinction is between ENP and enlargement. Nevertheless, after the fatigue, many countries are unwilling to reconsider the process, leaving as such many applications pending.

The actual difference between neighbor and candidates is perhaps, and in an oversimplifying manner, the real challenge for the EU. It is also why quite possibly the enlargement policy and the ENP resemble something like an awkward divorced couple. There are no formal ties between the two policies, for example in the form of some binding treaty, and as such these can act separately (at least for the time being given the current developments). Nevertheless, both the ENP and the enlargement process are indeed and in fact linked one to the other since they both share a common background, they are based around many common principles, they promote the same agenda of political, economic, and geopolitical interests, and both fixate on a shared value system. It is impossible to avoid the link between the two as the EU’s interests in its surrounding countries, the “neighborhood”, cannot but almost automatically raise the issue of the ENP relationship with the greater enlargement process. However, the ENP was never conceptualized as an accession interest. At best, one could describe the ENP zones as broader geographical localities under European influence rather within the European influence. Whether and to what extent this will persist after the recent war in Ukraine has yet to be decided. However, the ENP was essentially a tool to help the Union deal with the fatigue and not necessarily to aid any countries with the accession process.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that no matter the unfolding of current events, one of the most important steps taken by EU institutions to combat this growing fatigue after the 2004/2007 round of integration of new member states was the preparation of two strategic approaches: the EU Enlargement Strategy and ENP. Both strategies were developed more or less simultaneously, yet not exactly in tandem one to the other, as the enlargement policy predates by a lot the great fifth enlargement of 2004/2007, whereas the ENP, for the most part, followed it, in fact, as it has been argued, the ENP and corresponding initiatives were developed to deal with the aftermath of the last round of enlargement and the structural weaknesses of the Union as it struggled to contain the impacts of both the enlargement and the economic crisis. The Enlargement Strategy was always meant to provide integration guidelines for candidate countries (a blueprint, so to speak), to highlight the common benefits of enlargement, and last but not least, to explain and communicate the enlargement process and its objectives to the public. As we have seen, this lack of communication between authorities and the public contributed gravely to the negative attitudes within the EU member states on this policy. The ENP, on the other hand, was mainly aimed at appeasing the quite likely unfeasible accession wishes of Eastern European states by offering complimentary proposals and alternatives. It was an initiative to create the so-called “ring of friends” around the EU, establishing an environment which would be friendly to the survival of the EU (Wallden, 2017), or as science fiction writers and authors would place it, it was something of a terraforming project, much like that of turning the conditions in a hostile planet friendly or friendlier to people from Earth. Thus, the ENP was to relieve significant pressure on the EU to enlarge beyond the already existing commitments and avoid the creation of empty space and power vacuums for countries that were not in some way part of the Enlargement Strategy. However, both policies, Enlargement and ENP, did try to secure public support for future integration and expansion projects, while at the same time sought to avoid adding extra weight to the issues of growing enlargement fatigue. As such, we can see why and how the need for additional time and space to consolidate the EU’s institutional reforms remained one of the top reasons for the establishment of parallel tactics to enlargement and another foreign policy field (the ENP) was developed. Yet, at this point, it’s best to mention that as far as any future development of the bloc and its policies is concerned, including the establishment of the new ‘Unions’, all of these largely – if not entirely – depend upon the adoption of the Lisbon Reform Treaty.

The extensive sequence of events unfolding around criticisms and proposals regarding the integration of new member states had as a result mutation policies, such as the ENP, which blurred the line regarding the integration criteria while helping Europe forge new strategic alliances. However, the ENP failed to deliver concrete results to the countries that were involved. Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen openly pointed out in a speech made in 2003 that the Union's neighborhood policy was distinct from its enlargement policy, and in fact this policy involved primarily countries for which accession was not on the agenda⁵² (Devrim & Schulz, 2009). Romano Prodi had also reaffirmed the established status quo regarding the enlargement agenda after the fifth round of 2004/2007, and reiterated that "participation in the Union with the exception of the institutions' should be established"⁵³ (Devrim & Schulz, 2009). More or less, by excluding formal institutions, Prodi confirmed that no process of institutionalization was to commence within the framework of the ENP, which was meant to act as an alternative to the European enlargement by balancing, on the one hand, the pressures of the integration agenda and on the other hand, by dealing with the criticism which followed the previous enlargements, particularly the exceptionally strenuous one of 2004/2007. Nevertheless, multiple EU officials (like Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen) pointed out that this fact, i.e. that the ENP was not synonymous as a process with the enlargement, should not discourage any prospective members from actually applying for membership. Therefore, in its conceptualisation, the ENP accomplishes two important tasks: it does eliminate the question of (automatic or eventual) EU membership, but not so much that it breaches Art. 49 TEU, leaving it open as such when it comes to countries from Eastern Europe. In some cases, since certain countries embody those principles and values central to the philosophical principle of the EU, there are real prospects for acquiring membership.

This way, the Union did quite successfully consolidate the many criticisms that erupted over the impacts of the enlargement and the integration process, whether some countries did or did not fulfill the criteria, and defined – through the back door nonetheless – which countries are wanted in the bloc and those that aren't, but due to geographical proximity, there are multiple benefits in engaging within a predefined and advantageous (definitely but not necessarily exclusively for the union members) environment. The ENP became the much-needed space for the necessary institutional reforms that cannot be ignored, like in past

⁵² Verheugen (2003), Speech.

⁵³ Prodi (2002), Speech/02/619, p. 5.

enlargements. As the public opinion would not only criticize EU policy but abandon it, the Commission made it clear that a general consensus was pivotal before attempting any other enlargement, while at the same time it allowed for the field of CFSP to continue expanding without requiring the enlargement process to pursue its own agenda (like for example, the eastwards expansion and the removal of Moscow's influence from many former communist states).

If we are to look for explanations regarding why the ENP and enlargement are not synonymous, barely overlap in certain predesignated areas (and more often than not even when that happens, there are multiple conditions), it is important to understand that they need to be conceptualized as different policies that were made for different purposes. The ENP rose to its current prominence through the observed reluctance of the European citizens. The results from the referenda of France and the Netherlands in 2005, or even the subsequent anti-immigration sentiment bound to issues of national safety and security, clash with the enlargement prospect. The euphoric times where integration of new states was seen almost entirely under a positive light, even at the risk and expense of ignoring negative effects, is long gone and with it the relevant freedom the Union had in opening up to new members. Ever since the fifth round of integration, the reactions across various countries diminished the support to enlargement policy procedures and inadvertently introduced another parameter when considering new membership, which was the extent to which the whole process along with its impact was to be considered palatable by the people. The overall quasi-accusations regarding the overall poor communication regarding the procedures of the accession dealt an even greater blow to a Union advertising that it is based upon democratic and liberal principles. The Commission diverted a significant part of its force and reallocated it to examine and work upon building a new narrative and formulating a new communication strategy to improve its social contract with the people of the EU member states. It was of paramount importance to counter the effects of this enlargement fatigue as within the enlargement multiple other issues are at stake, both economic as well as geopolitical. It was, in this sense, impossible to fully abandon the integration and enlargement policy.

However, the EU's institutions realized it was perhaps overly ambitious, or at least well outside the scope of the bloc's current ability, to strain public support for short or medium-term enlargement projects. Instead, it was much preferable to invest in initiatives like the ENP, the UfM, the Black Sea Synergy, the Eastern Partnership, and the Southern Neighbourhood to secure public support for future enlargement projects, when their time will

eventually arrive, while growing European influence and making the Union visible. The conceptualization of all these alternatives was meant to demonstrate to the general public that no country was desperately and loudly knocking on the EU's door. It provided the sense of stability that the vast majority of citizens were asking for in the aftermath of the economic crisis and the economic impact of the previous enlargements (again, with the fifth one, as it was the largest, playing its own important role). The Eurobarometer of 2006 clearly demonstrates how this proposal, of alternatives like the ENP, was a success: almost 68% of the participants stated they held a positive view on the issue and thought of it as moving in the right direction. They did believe that the ENP will fulfill its basic economic function and contribute to the prosperity of the Union alleviating the heavy consequences of the crisis and of past integrations, with 61% thinking that the benefits will be mutual for all sides involved (Devrim & Schulz, 2009). The ENP proposal became the narrative upon which a new success story started to be written and Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner characterized it as a win-win case. One year later, in 2008, she did, in fact, declare that the EU's "neighborhood policy is a success story"⁵⁴ (Ferrero-Waldner, 2008). She specifically mentioned regarding the vision and goals behind this new success story that the ENP was turning out to be: *"We work closely with our partners to help them advance their structural reforms and bring them closer to our Union. Progress on the ground over the last year has been remarkable in many countries and our relations with our neighbours to the South and to the East are becoming more intense and fruitful by the day."* And she added: *"This is a tailor-made partnership for reform, to the benefit of our partners and citizens alike. Each country shapes its relationship with us individually. In this vein, we are now considering to specifically deepen our ties with four countries that have shown particular progress and ambition"* (Ferrero-Waldner, 2008).

Upon a closer look at the pre-existing concepts upon which both the ENP and the enlargement have been based, the geopolitical perspective of the ENP is arbitrary. First of all, the Mediterranean Sea does act as a natural boundary. On the other hand, the enlargement process has always been visualized and conceptualized differently. Its political scope and agenda rely upon a set of criteria regarding the extent and depth at which member states and potential member states respect and abide by the Union's basic principles⁵⁵ and, last but not least, the rule of law. Therefore, not just every country can join the EU. In simpler words, one can ask, but the answer could still very well be no. The country has to be European; this of

⁵⁴ Ferrero-Waldner (2008), Brussels, 3 April 2008, IP/08/509.

⁵⁵ With exceptional emphasis on democracy, human rights, basic freedoms as those have been developed within the scope of the broadly defined European civilization, whether that means Greco-Roman influences, the Enlightenment, as well as the humanism of the Renaissance, or the multilingualism of the Holy Roman Empire.

course creates certain questions regarding cases like that of Moldova or Ukraine (especially the latter, given current political events). The treaties within the Union, as we have discussed, are the means through which the materialization of the institutionalization process can be carried out and across borders. If the institutions and institutional processes can be aligned, then the actual process of enlargement can be characterized as viable.

The EU prior to the 2004/2007 enlargement had invested heavily in a narrative of overcoming the division that befell the continent after WWII and persisted throughout the Cold War. Initially, the enlargement policy was depicted as the only way forward to producing positive contributions when it came to reducing the differences between East-West and North-South. The general expectation was that the gaps in institutional dimensions could be overcome and the gaps bridged. However, the impact of such processes was either ignored or downplayed by politicians and economic elites as they too promoted parallel to the enlargement agenda a neoliberal one, as well as following the globalization trends. All these issues were rightly perceived by the populations of the member states (new and old alike) as not exactly endogenous. However, the general population ascribed these problems to the enlargement instead of recognizing and accepting the additional policies working in tandem with the integration procedures. Furthermore, the overall reluctance of the EU officials and the Commission to procure and follow concrete strategies which would protect important sectors of the economy (industry, agriculture, etc.) as states of different backgrounds were attempting to merge within one common establishment were underwhelming, to say the least. In addition, since the EU is demanding for the institutions of a country to be democratic and liberal and for there to exist the rule of law, the existence of post-communist countries posed a whole different set of challenges greater than those of states which went through dictatorial periods as the political infrastructure was designed to move in a way that is considered very un-European. Nevertheless, almost two decades after countries from the ex-Soviet bloc were incorporated in the EU no major backsliding has been noted. The major issues when it comes to the negative criticism regarding the criteria of integration really do boil down to the actual differences which exist between countries and their negative effects upon societies. The existing member states (old or new) realized that as the EU was running behind its enlargement agenda and that the rights of the people were left a bit to the side, making it practically impossible to avoid serious repercussions in the aftermath of enlargements.

This prompted the Commission to seek out a series of reforms and process proposals that would keep the EU on track while allowing for some space for the enlargement fatigue to

pass. It was within this context that initiatives like the ENP were fleshed out and came to function as a solution to multiple issues. The ENP and all its relevant initiatives were never meant to act as a substitute for the enlargement process, even though it arguably caused a mutation in the process. The ENP, UfM, Black Sea Synergy, etc. delivered a necessary space for the Union to proceed to a series of much needed structural reforms in addressing the difficulties which arose especially after the fifth enlargement, so as to contain and redirect the overall sentiment of cultural threat that caused rampant anxiety in the public as well as to deal with the effects of a major economic crisis and anti-immigration sentiments. At the same time, these initiatives were perceived positively by the general public, who did agree with the official characterization of a win-win policy. The new European success story began to unfold, allowing the Union to proceed with its foreign policy agenda promoting economic relations with countries and regions of interest without committing to an official candidacy or denying it outright. Finally, the enlargement of the European market zone without the actual enlargement of the EU allowed for more space to pursue financially beneficially activities without the hassle of the accession process and the irritation which it provoked to multiple circles across different countries, and across different groups of people, regarding the Europeaness of another state. However, it should be stated that the ENP has come to be perceived as a somewhat neo-colonial structure since it can lock a country in a potentially indefinite status of “pending membership acceptance” whilst demanding structural changes to abide by European principles and values.

5. THE CASE OF NORTH MACEDONIA

North Macedonia (as the country is officially called currently) – along with other Western Balkans partners – was identified as a potential candidate for EU membership during the Thessaloniki European Summit in 2003. Its Stabilisation and Association Agreement, the first in the region, is in force since 2004. It applied for EU membership in March 2004 and the Council decided in December 2005 to grant the country candidate status.

Since October 2009, the Commission has continuously recommended to open accession negotiations with then former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). In 2015 and 2016, the recommendation was made conditional on the continued implementation of the Pržino agreement and substantial progress in the implementation of the ‘Urgent Reform Priorities’. In light of the progress achieved, the Commission repeated its unconditional recommendation to open accession negotiations in April 2018. In light of the significant progress achieved and the conditions set unanimously by the Council in June 2018 having been met, the Commission recommended in May 2019 to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia.

In March 2020, the General Affairs Council decided to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and endorsed the Commission Communication on a revised methodology “Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans” of February 2020. The decision was endorsed by the European Council.

In July 2020 the draft negotiating framework was presented to the Member States.

5.1 NORTH MACEDONIA'S INTEGRATION PROCESS FROM 1993 TO 2019

On 25 September 1991 the Republic of Macedonia made its Declaration of Independence and immediately applied to enter NATO, the UN and the EU. The use of the country name "Macedonia" was the object of a dispute with neighboring Greece, as the name Macedonia refers to the ancient Greek kingdom of Macedonia. Therefore Greece was afraid of potential claims over its history and territorial claims and vetoed all these applications.

The first step of North Macedonia towards joining the EU was made in 1999, when it started negotiations to participate in the EU's Stabilization and Association process and it became the first non-EU country in the Balkans to sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) on 9 April 2001. The agreement was ratified by the Macedonian Parliament on 12 April 2001 and came into force on 1 April 2004 (ec.europa.eu, European Commission website). Before that, there had been some minor agreements between North Macedonia and the EU, but they didn't have much impact.

The SAA with the EU, signed in 2001, set the framework for the relations between the EU and FYROM, including a political, economic and technical dialogue. More specifically, the aims of this Association are, first of all, to provide an appropriate framework for political dialogue, allowing the development of close political relations between the Parties to support the efforts of the FYROM to develop its economic and international cooperation. Moreover, through the approximation of its legislation to that of the Community, it aims to promote harmonious economic relations and to gradually develop a free trade area between the EU and FYROM and to foster regional cooperation in all the fields covered by the Agreement (Stabilization and association agreement between the European Communities and their member states, of the one part, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on the other part).

The next significant step FYROM took towards a membership in the EU was made on 22 March 2004, when it submitted its application for EU membership. On 6 September 2004, the FYROM government adopted a National Strategy for European Integration, supported by the country's parliament through its Commission for European Issues. The government subsequently began the procedure of answering the questionnaire of the European Commission regarding its performance in preparation for membership, in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria, a process that was finished by 31 January 2005. The European Council officially granted the country candidate

status on 17 December 2005, after a review and a positive recommendation of the candidacy by the European Commission. It must be mentioned that the EU was recognizing it only as the “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” because of Greece’s veto.

Gradually through the years, North Macedonia is trying to implement the requirements of the EU membership. This certainly is the most crucial issue in its political agenda, and almost all the decisions have that as an axis.

Some of the treaties already signed with the EU are:

- November 1997: The Transport Agreement enters into force
- 1 January 1998: The Cooperation Agreement enters into force
- 11 March 1998: The Trade and Textile Agreement is signed (it remains in force until 1998 and is later replaced with a new agreement on 1 January 2000)
- 16 February 2001: The Interim Agreement on SAA Trade Provisions is signed
- 9 April 2001: The SAA and Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade Issues is signed and enters into force on 1 June 2001
- January 2002: The Supplementary Protocol on Wine and Spirits, and Textile Products Trade Agreement is signed
- 17 December 2005: The European Council in Brussels approves the candidate status.
- 14 October 2009: The European Commission recommended the start of the accession negotiations for full-fledged membership of the Republic of FYROM.

After all these actions and many more institutional changes made, FYROM was in a positive course (The Republic of F.Y.R.O.M, 2016 EU Report), but also, it had many problems with the rest of its neighboring countries, except Greece. FYROM has even until now (to a minor degree), disputes mainly with Bulgaria and Serbia, with Bulgaria on the issue of the language, and with Serbia because of the two different orthodox churches.

In more detail, the bilateral relations with Bulgaria are generally good, but also complicated, because of their historic background. Bulgaria was the first to recognize the independence of the then-Republic of Macedonia, but refused to recognize the existence of a separate ethnic Macedonian nation and a separate Macedonian language. It argues that the ethnic Macedonians are a subgroup of the Bulgarian nation and that the Macedonian language is a dialect of Bulgarian, and all these lead to complications when the two countries sign treaties.

Nevertheless, North Macedonia has generally good relations with Bulgaria in the political, economic, and military spheres. Bulgaria supported their neighbor’s bid to enter the EU and NATO and has also donated tanks, artillery, and other military technology to the

Army of North Macedonia. Bulgaria and F.Y.R.O.M signed the Joint Declaration of February 22, 1999 to establish the rules governing good neighborly relations among them. They reaffirmed this commitment by a joint memorandum signed on January 22, 2008 in Sofia.

There had been a reaction from Bulgaria concerning a controversial encyclopedia by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (MANU) in 2009, because, as they said, “it is unacceptable for a country aspirant for NATO and EU membership to resort to terminology typical of the ideology of the Cold War era,” and that the controversial encyclopedia “gives no contribution to strengthening of the neighborly relations and curbing down of the ‘hate speech’.”

Bulgaria has proposed to sign a treaty (based on the 1999 Joint Declaration) guaranteeing the good neighborly relations between the two countries, in order to enable Bulgarian support for the accession of Macedonia to the EU. The governments of Bulgaria and FYROM signed a friendship treaty to bolster the relations between the two Balkan states in August 2017. The treaty was ratified by the parliament of the Republic of FYROM on the 15th and of Bulgaria on the 18th of January 2018.

As already mentioned, Bulgaria didn't recognize the existence of a separate ethnic Macedonian nation and a separate Macedonian language. All the bilateral issues arise from the fact that a “newborn” state needed an ethnicity to be united and language is a crucial point of an ethnicity. So F.Y.R.O.M needed a separate language from Bulgaria. Prof. James F. Clarke has said “For Macedonians to deny their Bulgarian heritage is like Peter denying Christ.” According to the Macedonian view, now prevalent and official in the books in Republic of FYROM, Macedonian was the first official language of the Slavs, thanks to the St. Cyril and St. Methodius's introduction of Slavic literacy language through the Glagolitic script that was based on the Southern Macedonian dialect from the neighborhood of Thessaloniki, the home of the two saints. Later on, Macedonia fell under the rule of Bulgarians, and the Byzantines regarded all Slavic Macedonians as Bulgarians. According to a minority view, supported in the Republic of FYROM, Tsar Samuil's realm in the early Middle Ages was allegedly the first Macedonian Slavic state. However, Krste Misirkov, who allegedly set the principles of the Macedonian literary language in the late 19th century, stated: “We speak a Bulgarian language and we believed that Bulgaria is our strong power.”

In 1946, elections for a constituent assembly in October gave the Communists a majority. The new authorities officially recognized the Macedonian language, but this

lasted only until the Tito-Stalin split in 1948. However, from 1948 to 1963 some Bulgarian linguists still continued to recognize Macedonian as a separate Slavic language. The first big “language scandal” between Bulgaria and Macedonia happened in November 1966 when the president of the Bulgarian Association of Writers Georgi Dzagarov refused to sign an agreement for friendship and cooperation that was prepared in both Bulgarian and Macedonian language. In 1993 the Bulgarian government refused to sign the first bilateral agreement with the Republic of Macedonia because the Macedonian language was mentioned in the agreement in the last clause: “This agreement is written and signed in Bulgarian and Macedonian language”. That started a dispute that was resolved in February 1999 when the governments of Bulgaria and Macedonia signed a Joint Declaration where in the last paragraph both governments signed the declaration in: “Bulgarian language according to the constitution of Bulgaria and in Macedonian language according to the constitution of Macedonia.”

The denial to recognize the Macedonian language persisted though in Bulgarian society, so in August 2017, both governments signed another Agreement for Friendship, with a clause that mentions the Macedonian language again. In the Bulgarian society, there still exists a perception that Bulgaria did not and does not recognize the Macedonian language. In the rest of the world linguists subscribe either to a pro-Macedonian or a pro-Bulgarian view until this day. Illustrating the pro-Macedonian view is Horace Lunt, a Harvard professor, who wrote the first English language grammar of the Macedonian language in the early 1950s. Illustrating the pro-Bulgarian view, Italian linguist Vittore Pisani stated that “the Macedonian language is actually an artifact produced for primarily political reasons”.

During the last few years, thousands of citizens of North Macedonia have applied for Bulgarian citizenship (amongst them North Macedonia’s former PM Ljubco Georgievski), with 42,372 having already received Bulgarian passports. In order to obtain the Bulgarian passport, the citizens of North Macedonia who apply for Bulgarian citizenship must prove that they have a Bulgarian origin and a Bulgarian national consciousness. Between January 1 and November 18, 2011, the Bulgarian Council for Citizenship considered 22,241 applications for citizenship, of which 13,607 were approved.

Regarding now the bilateral relations between North Macedonia and Serbia, the situation was not that complicated, but was also not ideal. Until 1991, both countries were constituent republics within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Republic of FYROM declared its independence in September 1991. The army of rump Yugoslavia

peacefully left the Republic of Macedonia; therefore, FYROM was the only former Yugoslav republic that gained independence without conflict or war.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Macedonia on 8 April 1996. The establishment of bilateral relations was conducted under the country's then constitutional name (Republic of Macedonia). Serbia, therefore, is one of 131 countries in the world that recognized FYROM under its constitutional name. Following the Republic of Macedonia's recognition of Kosovo's independence in October 2008, the ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia was expelled from Serbia. The break in the bilateral relations lasted a few months. However, Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia agreed to reestablish bilateral relations. The new ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia took office in Serbia in May 2009.

The Serbian Orthodox Church does not recognize the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which declared autocephaly from the Serbian church in 1967. In a visit to the Republic of Macedonia in May 2009, the President of Serbia, Boris Tadić, pointed out that his country wishes a settlement to that issue. In 2009, the Serbian Orthodox Church surprisingly allowed a visit by a Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia delegation.

In general, the bilateral relations of the two countries are good. In the economic field, they have an important cooperation. According to the Republic of Serbia Statistical Office data, in the first 10 months of 2017 the volume of bilateral trade amounted to EUR 622.9 million. Today there are about 38 signed bilateral agreements between FYROM and Serbia, in various fields.

However, in December 2017, it became known that the Prime Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia, Zoran Zaev, intended to support Kosovo's accession to UNESCO. The Serbian government responded that they would no longer recognize the country by the name "Republic of Macedonia" if they continued such efforts. Serbian foreign minister Ivica Dačić stated that it was an example of hypocrisy from Zoran Zaev's government.

Since October 2009, the Commission has continuously recommended to open accession negotiations with FYROM. In 2015 and 2016, the recommendation was made conditional on the continued implementation of the Pržino agreement and substantial progress in the implementation of the 'Urgent Reform Priorities'. In light of the progress achieved, the Commission repeated its unconditional recommendation to open accession negotiations in April 2018. In light of the significant progress achieved and

of the fact that the conditions unanimously set by the Council in June 2018 have been met, the Commission recommended in May 2019 to open accession negotiations with FYROM (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations/ F.Y.R.O.M, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/north-macedonia_en).

Before the European Council in Brussels approved the candidate status for FYROM (17 December 2005) and before the European Commission recommended the start of accession negotiations for full-fledged membership (14 October 2009), two significant agreements were signed between FYROM and the EU. The first, as already mentioned, was the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) (23 February 2004). This agreement must be signed and be respected from all the EU member states and the candidate states. The SAA comprises 10 headings. First of all, there are the General principles, according to which, FYROM agrees to respect democratic principles and human rights, international law and instruments as well as the principles of market economy; to fight against terrorism and fulfill international obligations in this area; to promote international and regional peace and stability and foster cooperation and good neighborly relations in the region, including developing projects of common interest, and an appropriate level of mutual concessions concerning the movement of persons, goods, capital and services.

Secondly, political dialogue between the two parties must be further developed. It will promote, in particular, an increasing convergence of positions of the parties on international issues, regional cooperation and the development of good neighborly relations and finally, common views on security and stability in Europe, including in the areas covered by common foreign and security policy of the EU.

The third heading of the agreement concerns regional cooperation. FYROM is required to actively promote regional cooperation, negotiate with the countries which have already signed an SAA with the EU with a view to concluding bilateral agreements on regional cooperation; to pursue regional cooperation with countries involved in the stabilisation and association process (SAP) in some or all the fields of cooperation covered by this agreement and to conclude, if possible, cooperation agreements with any EU candidate country.

The fourth and one of the most important headings is on the “Free movement of goods”, one of the main purposes of the EU Single Market. The 2 parties are committed to gradually establishing a bilateral free trade area. The SAA sets out a process for reducing and removing customs tariffs and quotas on goods from both the EU and FYROM. The fifth heading is on the movement of workers, the establishment, the supply of services, and the

movement of capital. According to this, nationals of FYROM legally working in an EU country shall be free of any form of discrimination compared to nationals of the country concerned. Also, there shall be established rules to coordinate the social security system for FYROM nationals legally employed in the territory of an EU country and for the members of their families legally resident there. Companies (as well as subsidiaries and branches) based in one party will be allowed to set up operations on the territory of the other party under the same conditions as companies based in that territory. Both parties must take steps, which progressively allow their companies or nationals to supply services in the territory of the other party. Any payments and transfers on the current account of balance of payments between the EU and FYROM must be permitted in a freely convertible currency.

The sixth heading states that the laws of the country should be aligned to those of the EU. That is, FYROM agrees to ensure that its existing laws and future legislation will gradually be made compatible with the EU *acquis* and that such laws will be properly implemented and enforced. Both sides are bound by competition rules, based on EU law, relating to actions that may affect trade between the two parties.

In the seventh heading “Justice and Home Affairs”, the SAA emphasizes the importance of the rule of law and reinforcing institutions at all levels. Cooperation focuses on a number of specific areas, including independence of the judiciary, the improvement of its effectiveness and training in the legal professions; visas, border control, asylum and migration; preventing and controlling illegal migration, readmission and finally, preventing and combating crime, corruption, terrorism and other illegal activities.

About the last three headings, and first of all, the cooperation policies, the EU and FYROM should establish close cooperation on a wide range of policy areas to help the development and growth potential of the country. Secondly, about the financial cooperation, to help achieve the objectives of this agreement, FYROM may receive financial assistance from the EU in the form of grants and loans, including loans from the European Investment Bank. And lastly, regarding supervision, the SAA establishes a stabilisation and association council to supervise the application and implementation of the SAA.

All these regulations are only the basics for a state to implement before it is able to apply as a candidate state to become an EU member. After the SAA agreement, FYROM officially made an application for EU membership on 22 March 2004. Thus,

the next set of official procedures had started. On 17 May 2005, the Council asked the Commission to give an opinion on FYROM's application. After the replies to the EU questionnaire (14/02/2005), the Commission gave a favorable opinion on the application of the (then) former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for membership in the EU on 9 April of the same year (ec.europa.eu).

On 9 November 2005, the next crucial step for FYROM had been made. The country granted the candidate status from the European Council. According to the European Council Brussels 15 & 16 December 2005 Presidency Conclusions:

“The European Council welcomes the Commission's Opinion on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's application for EU membership. It welcomes the significant progress made by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia towards meeting the political criteria set by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993 and the Stabilisation and Association Process requirements established by the Council in 1997.

In the light of the Commission's analysis, the European Council decided to grant candidate country status to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, taking into account, in particular, the substantial progress made in completing the legislative framework related to the Ohrid Framework Agreement, as well as its track record in implementing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (including its trade-related provisions) since 2001.”

The European Council also made clear that further steps will have to be considered in the light of the debate on the enlargement strategy, as provided for by the Council conclusions of 12 December 2005; of compliance by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with the Copenhagen political criteria; of the requirements of the Stabilisation and Association Process and the effective implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement; and of the need for further significant progress to respond to the other issues and criteria for membership included in the Commission's Opinion and implementation of the priorities in the European Partnership, on the basis of specific benchmarks. The absorption capacity of the Union also has to be taken into account. Finally, the European Council invited the Commission to report on developments in future progress reports.

Concluding so far, the most crucial point was achieved for FYROM by becoming a candidate member country. The country was able to gain all the benefits of this status, and first of all, the already mentioned SAA. After that, on 30 January 2006, the Council adopted the European Partnership, which means that many public and private investments were going to be placed in the country, and that would have a significant impact on the economy (2006/57/EC). This adaptation was later updated to an Accession Partnership in 2008. In the

agreement, it is specifically mentioned: “The European Council endorsed the introduction of the partnerships as a means to realize the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries. The proposed Accession Partnership updates the European Partnership of January 2006, on the basis of the findings of the 2007 Commission Progress Report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It identifies new and remaining priorities for action. The new priorities are adapted to the country’s specific needs and stage of preparation and will be updated as necessary. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is expected to develop a plan including a timetable and specific measures intended to address the Accession Partnership priorities. The partnership also provides guidance for financial assistance to the country.” (2008/212/EC). The short-term key priorities of the agreement as stated are the following:

- Ensure proper implementation of all commitments undertaken in the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.
- Promote a constructive and inclusive dialogue, in particular in areas which require consensus between all political parties, in the framework of the democratic institutions.
- Ensure effective implementation of the law on police.
- Establish a sustained track record on implementation of judiciary reforms and strengthen the independence and overall capacity of the judicial system. Implement the reform of the prosecution and finalize the appointment of the Judicial Council.
- Establish a sustained track record on implementation of anti-corruption legislation.
- Reduce impediments to employment creation and address in particular youth and long-term unemployment.
- Enhance the general business environment by further improving the rule of law, strengthening the independence of regulatory and supervisory agencies, speeding up legal procedures and continuing registration of property rights.
- Ensure that recruitment and career advancement of civil servants is not subject to political interference, further develop a merit-based career system and implement fully the law on civil servants.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ (COUNCIL DECISION of 18 February 2008 on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and repealing Decision 2006/57/EC).

In the same year (2008), two other major key-points were established for the overall process. Initially, the Commission adopted a Communication on the Western Balkans, identifying benchmarks for the next stage in the accession process. That means that from now on, the Commission is able to monitor and report more frequently and more efficiently on the progress being made, or not. The second remarkable event was that visa facilitation and readmission agreements were made with the most Western Balkan States⁵⁷ (except Albania). Since the Western Balkan states were placed on the EU's negative visa list in 2001, they were hoping for a quick visa liberalization scheme. However, the EU recognized a visa-free regime as a long-term objective only. The 2003 Thessaloniki Agenda first introduced the prospect of a liberalized visa regime once certain conditions have been met:

“The EU is aware of the importance the peoples and governments in the Western Balkans attach to the perspective of liberalization of the visa regime. Meanwhile, progress is dependent on these countries implementing major reforms in areas such as the strengthening of the rule of law, combating organized crime, corruption and illegal migration, and strengthening their administrative capacity in border control and security in documents (Council of the European Union, 2003b).”

Based on the Thessaloniki Agenda, the Commission conducted exploratory talks with each one of the Western Balkan countries. The relaxation of the visa regime was not only linked to the signing of an EC readmission agreement, but more broadly to “substantial efforts by the countries in question” (Commission of the European Communities, 2006c, p. 9). Due to the political salience of the issue in the Western Balkans, the promise of visa liberalization has provided the EU with particularly strong leverage. The Commission defined that through a ‘case by case approach’, each Western Balkan state may achieve visa liberalization on its own merit. In addition, the countries’ status as candidates or potential candidates should be taken into account (Ibid).

The very concrete go-ahead for the Commission to launch negotiations on EC visa facilitation and readmission agreements was granted on the Council meeting held on 13-14 November 2006. The Commission initiated the negotiations with the countries in November 2006, except for Albania whose readmission agreement with the EC entered into force on 1 May 2006. In that case, the negotiations on a visa facilitation agreement started on 13

⁵⁷ “Western Balkans” is a term used in the European Union to refer to six countries in Southern and Eastern Europe that are covered by EU enlargement policy: Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of Kosovo, Republic of North Macedonia, and Republic of Serbia.

December 2006. All agreements were officially signed in September 2007 and entered into force on 1 January 2008.

At that year, the most difficult obstacle for the integration of FYROM as an EU member state appeared, making any other progress up to then irrelevant. That obstacle was the name dispute between Greece and FYROM and the obstacle was posed by Greece, who made use of its veto power⁵⁸, blocking thus the integration of FYROM in the EU and preventing it from joining in any way. The problem with the name of the neighboring countries started even before the independence of the second, in the aftermath of World War II, when Marshal Tito separated the region that until then was called Vardar Banovina (i.e., the current Republic of North Macedonia) from Serbia, granted it the status of federal component of the then new Federal Yugoslavia, and renamed it initially “the People’s Republic of Macedonia” and later “the Socialist Republic of Macedonia”. At the same time, he began to cultivate the idea of a separate and distinct “Macedonian nation”, as a tool of the ethnicism being built at the time.

But the actual problem started in 1991, when the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia seceded from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and proclaimed its independence under the name “Republic of Macedonia”. Historically, the term “Macedonia” which, it should be noted, is a Greek word, refers to the Kingdom and the culture of the Ancient Macedonians, who were part of the Greek nation. But geographically, this term refers to a larger area spanning the present territory of a number of Balkan countries. Most of it is located in Greece, while other smaller parts of it are in today’s FYROM, Bulgaria and Albania. That is why FYROM made claims upon the name. FYROM was then passing through its stage of nationalism. Because it was inhabited by a variety of nationalities, it needed to create a national keystone to maintain its unity. So, they claimed the Macedonian heritage as theirs. The Greek government reacted because, apart from other things, it was afraid of a possibility for territorial claims from the neighboring country. In 1992 the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia all adopted the appellation “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” to refer to the Republic in their discussions and dealings with it. The same terminology was proposed

⁵⁸ The power of veto that every EU member state has comes from the unanimity requirement. According to the Treaties of the EU, all EU Member States in the Council have to agree unanimously on a number of policy areas that the Member States consider to be sensitive (taxation, social security or social protection, the accession of new EU member states, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), including Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), and operational police cooperation between Member States.)

in January 1993 by France, Spain and the United Kingdom, the three EC members of the United Nations Security Council, to enable the Republic to join the United Nations. Both countries denied that compromised solution for different reasons.

On 7 April 1993, the UN Security Council recommended to the United Nations General Assembly “that the State whose application is contained in document S/25147 be admitted to membership in the United Nations, this State being provisionally referred to for all purposes within the United Nations as ‘the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ pending settlement of the difference that has arisen over the name of the State.” And by these means, the Republic of Macedonia joined NATO, becoming the 181th member state.

The four key principles of the compromise solution were:

1. The appellation “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” is a provisional term to be used only until the dispute was resolved. The term was a reference, not a name; as a neutral party in the dispute, the United Nations had not sought to determine the name of the state. The President of the Security Council subsequently issued a statement declaring on behalf of the Council that the term “merely reflected the historic fact that it had been in the past a republic of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia”.

2. The purpose of the term was also emphasized by the fact that the expression begins with the uncapitalized words “the former Yugoslav”, acting as a descriptive term, rather than “the Former Yugoslav”, which would act as a proper noun. By also being a reference rather than a name, it met Greek concerns that the term “Macedonia” should not be used in the republic’s internationally recognized name.

3. The use of the term was purely “for all purposes within the United Nations”; it was not being mandated for any other party.

4. The term did not imply that the Republic of Macedonia had any connection with the existing Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as opposed to the historical and now-defunct Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

In the meantime, until 1994, many states recognized today’s North Macedonia with its constitutional name. The beginning was made by the People’s Republic of China (13 October 1993) and six other countries followed: Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (16 December 1993). Because of this, in February 1994, Greece imposed a trade embargo on its neighbor country for 18 months. FYROM’s damages are estimated at around US \$2 billion.

The bilateral relations of the two countries were formalized with an interim accord signed in New York on 13 September 1995. The main part of that interim accord was that

Greece agreed that it would not object to any application by the Republic so long as it used only the appellation set out in “paragraph 2 of the United Nations Security Council resolution 817” (i.e. “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”), which opened the door for the Republic to join a variety of international organizations and initiatives, including the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Partnership for Peace. The accord was not a conventional perpetual treaty, as it can be superseded or revoked, but its provisions are legally binding in terms of international law.

In 1995, the two countries agreed to the Interim Agreement, which imposed a binding “Code of Conduct”. Under the auspices of the Secretary General of the United Nations, the two parties began negotiations in order to reach an agreement on the name, as stipulated in Article 5 of the Interim Agreement.

The main points of 2008 proposal:

- The name “Republic of Macedonia” will stay the official name inside the country (in the native language).

- The name for the country in all official purposes (i.e., United Nations, EU, NATO) will be “Republic of North Macedonia” (Macedonian: Република Северна Македонија).

- The UN Security Council will suggest to third countries to use the name “Republic of North Macedonia” in official bilateral relations.

- The name “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” will no longer be an acceptable name for the country.

- “Macedonia” alone cannot be used by any of the two parties as an official name for the country or the region.

- Both parties can use “Macedonia” and “Macedonian” in unofficial settings, with the precondition that they will not claim exclusive rights of any kind.

- The front page of the Macedonian passports will contain the following name for the country: Republic of North Macedonia (in English).

- Greece will support the integration of its neighboring country into the EU and NATO.

- Both countries will confirm that they have no territorial claims towards each other.

There were serious reactions from the side of Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria also.

In November 2008 Skopje instituted proceedings against Athens in front of the UN's International Court of Justice for what it described as "a flagrant violation of Greece's obligations under Article 11 of the Interim Accord signed by the Parties on 13 September 1995". The alleged violation was referring to the blockade by Athens to North Macedonia's bid for NATO membership.

The Republic of Macedonia requested that:

- Greek objections to the jurisdiction of the Court should be rejected. The Court should adjudge and declare that Greece has violated the obligations under the provisions of the Interim Accord, Article 11, paragraph 1, and

- The Court to order Greece to immediately take all necessary steps to comply with the obligations under the above provisions, and to refrain from objecting in any way, directly or indirectly, to the membership of the Republic of Macedonia in NATO and/or any other "international, multilateral and regional organizations and institutions" if the Republic of Macedonia applies for such membership under the name "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

The Hellenic Republic requested that the Court:

- Should find that the case does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Court and to reject it as inadmissible;

- In the event that the Court finds that it has jurisdiction over the case submitted by the Applicant, then to find those claims as unfounded.

The Court delivered its judgement on 5 December 2011. In its judgment, which is final, without possibility for appeal, and binding on the parties, the ICJ found that:

- It has jurisdiction to process this case;
- The Hellenic Republic, by objecting to the admission of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to NATO, has breached its obligation under Article 11, paragraph 1, of the Interim Accord of 13 September 1995;

- And rejected all other submissions made by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

After that, the negotiation continued from 2011 until the final agreement, the Prespa Agreement.

While all actions regarding the Name dispute were taking place, FYROM continued its integration agenda in other fields. The first step for FYROM, regarding the visa liberalization for travel visa to the Schengen area, was made with the Commission's proposal to the

Council in the 15th July 2009, which was granted for the citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, together with Montenegro and Serbia in December of the same year.

Starting in January 2009, Commission was consistently proposing to the Council to open negotiation talks for accession with FYROM until 2015. In that year, a sequence of events led to a major political destabilization. In February, the then Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski was accused by his opposition leader Zoran Zaev, that together with the secret police chief Sasho Mijalkov (Gruevski's cousin), they authorized the wiretapping of some 20,000 people, including social activists, religious leaders, judges, political opponents, police, foreign ambassadors, and more than 100 journalists (rferl.org). That event triggered an escalating tension, with student protests and more aquations. The peak of this instabilization took place in the 17th of May, when 60,000 people gathered, surrounding the government building in Skopje, accusing Gruevski of widespread corruption, undemocratic practices and large-scale illegal surveillance. Social democrat leader Zoran Zaev stood together with the protesters, also accusing Gruevski and his government of stealing public funds while posturing as great patriots, and calling the Prime Minister to resign and call elections (Macedonians Stage Mass Protest for PM's Resignation, BalkanInsight, 17 May 2015). On 12 May, the Interior Minister Gordana Jankuloska and Transportation Minister Mile Janakieski, along with the Director of the Administration for Security and Counterintelligence (UBK) Sašo Mijalkov, resigned after it was revealed that they were the main interlocutors in many of the incriminating tapes (Ministers quit as Macedonia's turmoil deepens, Balkan Insight, 13 May 2015).

In June 2015, in order to reestablish the political balance to the country after the political and institutional crisis it was going through, the Commission proceeded to publish a report called "Urgent reform priorities for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". In the report, the Commission highlights the necessary changes and reforms that FYROM is obligated to make in the fields of rule of law and fundamental rights, de-politicization of the public administration, freedom of expression and electoral reform. According to the report: "These reform priorities have been drawn up by the European Commission on the basis of previously-issued recommendations and previously-agreed reform priorities in these areas, which have been both confirmed and complemented by the findings of the Senior Experts' Group" (Urgent reform priorities for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, June 2015).

Furthermore, in a try to fully end the crisis, the Przino agreement or agreement from 2 June – 15 July 2015 was signed between the main political parties in FYROM with the mediation of the EU as a follow-up of the report. The agreement stated in detail the following:

1. Parties to agree on exact organization of the government preparing the elections.
2. Revision and modification of the State Election Commission's composition.
3. Opposition's return to the Parliament.
4. Discontinued further disclosure of any materials arising from interception of communications.
5. SDSM to hand over all materials from intercepted communications to the competent public prosecutor.
6. Enhanced competences and authorizations for SEC to ensure free and fair elections, with level playing field for all political parties.
7. Appointment of new special public prosecutor with full autonomy, to lead investigations surrounding and arising from intercepted communications.
8. Start of work and first report of parliamentary committee (chaired by representative of SDSM) overseeing work of the Directorate for Security and Counterintelligence (UBK) and interception of communications.
9. Facilitated negotiations among stakeholders, to ensure greater media freedoms.
10. Appointment of new Minister of Interior (upon nomination by SDSM).
11. Appointment of new Minister of Labour and Social Policy (upon nomination by SDSM).
12. Appointment of new Deputy Minister of Finance with veto rights (upon nomination by SDSM).
13. Appointment of new Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy with veto rights (upon nomination by SDSM).
14. Appointment of new Deputy Minister of Information Society and Administration with veto rights (upon nomination by SDSM).
15. Submission of formal resignation by the incumbent government to the Parliament.
16. Appointment of new Prime Minister nominated by VMRO-DPMNE.

17. Holding fair and democratic parliamentary elections (Przino Agreement, 2 June 2015)

The European Commission welcomed the agreement, with Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, calling it good news and an important step towards ending the political crisis. Correspondingly, in the country report adopted by the Commission in November, it is stated that: “the Commission is prepared to extend its recommendation to open accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This shall, however, be conditional on the continued implementation of the June/July political agreement and substantial progress in the implementation of the urgent reform priorities. This issue shall be addressed again after the elections.” (Key findings of the 2015 report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 10 November 2015, ec.europa.eu). In contrast the rest of the report highlights many challenges that have been underscored in the field of the political criteria needed to fulfill regarding the country’s membership, with the most impactful to be that the inter-ethnic situation remains fragile and that the name issue has still not been solved⁵⁹. Nevertheless, Commission is more optimistic and recognizes that progress has been made in terms of economic criteria and the steps that have been made towards meeting the EU legislation standards.

The following year started with the resignation of the Prime Minister in compliance with the Przino Agreement. Gruevski stepped down as Prime Minister on 15th January 2016. However, Gruevski remained boss of the VMRO DPMNE party and maintained de facto control of the government as his close ally, Emil Dimitriev, took the Prime Minister’s seat. The resignation was planned as a prelude for early elections that were due to follow in April. Yet the elections did not take place in April as previously agreed; reforms designed to guarantee the minimum conditions for a free and fair vote had not been put in place (Macedonia 2016: Elections Leave Crisis Unresolved, BalkanInsight, 3 January 2017). The EU and the US agreed to this decision, claiming that the country was not ready for fair elections in April as it was planned, so they mutually advised a postponement of the pre-term polls that are intended to end the country’s political crisis. In May, protests started among the country that turned violent pretty fast, until June, when they climaxed. This, in combination

⁵⁹ Referring to the name dispute with Greece.

with the international pressure, led to the formation of a provisional government tasked to carry out the early elections which were reestablished. In late August a new early election date was set for December 11. The election on December passed off peacefully but ended in uncertainty and failed to resolve the political rift. In a near-tie result, the ruling party won 51 of the 120 seats in parliament and the SDSM 49 (Macedonia 2016: Elections Leave Crisis Unresolved, BalkanInsight, 3 January 2017). VMRO first tried to form government by collaborating with a smaller party but failed. Then Social Democrat leader Zoran Zaev formed a coalition with the Albanian party, after agreeing to support a bill making Albanian the country's second official language, but the president of the provisional government Gjorge Ivanov tried to block the coalition, claiming that it was dangerous for the stability of the country (Macedonia's president blocks new coalition government, BBC News, 1 March 2017). Nevertheless, Zoran Zaev with his coalition partners representing North Macedonia's ethnic-Albanian minority managed to form a government in May 2017, ending a lengthy political deadlock and became the fifth democratically-elected president of FYROM.

After almost a year of Zaev's governance, a more balanced situation prevailed to the country. The Commission repeated its unconditional recommendation to the Council to open accession negotiations between EU and FYROM. Shortly thereafter, in May 2018, the Commission also published its annual country report for FYROM, where it stated that the country is in a good place regarding its obligations towards the EU integration process. More specifically, in the report it is stated that the country has achieved some level of preparation in the fields of judicial system, the fight against corruption, the fight against organized crime, protection of fundamental rights, freedom of expression, regional cooperation. Furthermore, the report affirms that "the country is moderately prepared with the reform of its public administration. Good progress has been made with the adoption of the public administration reform strategy and the public financial management reform programme" and regarding the economic criteria that "As regards its ability to assume the obligations of membership, the country is moderately prepared in most areas, including in the areas of competition, transport and energy. The country shows a good level of preparation in areas such as company law, customs union, trans-European networks and science and research. Further efforts are needed across the board, in particular in those few areas where the country is at an early stage of preparation, such as freedom of movement of workers. More focus is also needed on administrative capacity and effective implementation. The country has continued to improve its alignment with the EU declarations and Council decisions on Common Foreign and Security Policy". (SWD (2018) 154 final).

The only thing that was left at that point for FYROM in order to officially open accession negotiations with the Council was the pending veto set from Greece in 2008 over the name dispute. The negotiations started in 2011 and a conclusion was forthcoming, with the support of a more resilient government in FYROM and some bigger pressure from the EU and the international community to Greece. All these eventually led to the ratification of the Prespa agreement in 17 June 2018, which gave an end to the dispute and lifted Greece's veto.

5.2 THE PRESPA AGREEMENT

The Prespa agreement was a mutual solution, regarding the name dispute between the (until then) FYROM and the Greek Republic, as mentioned and explained in the previous chapters. This agreement was the outcome of negotiations between the neighboring countries that lasted almost eight years and settled this conflict, letting North Macedonia to continue its process into becoming an EU member state. This agreement practically replaces the Interim Accord of 1995 that was signed by the two countries.

The agreement signed between the North Macedonian and Greek foreign ministers, Nikola Dimitrov and Nikos Kotzias respectively, in the presence of their respective prime ministers, Zoran Zaev and Alexis Tsipras, in the village of Psarades in the Greek-controlled area near the lake Prespa, where it was also named from. Prespa was a symbolic place for the agreement to be signed, since the lake is shared between North Macedonia, Greece and Albania.

Unfortunately, the decision for the agreement did not find a consensus by the majority of the population and the other political parties of both countries. The Greek and North Macedonian governments faced strong oppositions, disagreements and dissatisfaction in their parliaments and from the public as well. Three days later, on 20 June 2018, the deal was approved in the North Macedonian Assembly, but without the opposition parliamentarians, who boycotted the session. The North Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov stated that he would not support the deal, even after a threat of impeachment. The following days were marked by protests against the agreement involving hundreds of North Macedonians in the capital city, Skopje ('Macedonia's Parliament Ratifies Historic Deal with Greece', BalkanInsight, 21 December 2018). On the other part, the Greek government headed by prime minister Tsipras found a storm of opposition in the Parliament: New Democracy, the leading party of the opposition, talked about a sad day for Greece and a day of shame for Tsipras and Kammenos (leader of ANEL, the party co-governing with SYRIZA and Defense Minister), whom he accused of "giving the citizens of FYROM the opportunity to call themselves 'Macedonians' and to claim that they speak the Macedonian language". "There are no illusions here. Mr. Tsipras baptized them." This was the way in which the president of PASOK and leader of the Movement for Change, Fofi Gennimata, chose to comment on the signing of the agreement on the country's official name in Prespes (Χρονολόγιο: Το ντόμινο που πυροδότησε η Συμφωνία των Πρεσπών, Ethnos, 12 January 2019). "Mr. Tsipras and his government have succeeded in giving the neighboring country a letter of recommendation for

NATO and EU membership. The agreement, which is the product of the overt intervention of these forces, aims to advance the Euro-Atlantic integration in the Western Balkans”, said in an interview with the newspaper “Ethnos tis Kyriakis” the Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Greek Communist Party, Dimitris Koutsoumbas. The practical result was the motion of censure against the government submitted by Nea Dimokratia.

A majority of Greek citizens also opposed the agreement. In parallel with the debate on the motion of censure against the government submitted by New Democracy that did not pass⁶⁰, outside the Parliament in Syntagma Square, relatively small demonstrations were organized daily, which were directed against the Agreement. The main streets of the Greek capital remained closed until late at night, while at the rally organized on July 1 there were three arrests. The demonstrations were organized by the “National Defense Movement” for Macedonia “Alexander the Great” and the Scientific Committee on National Affairs. A group of about 30 people threw stones and flares at the police force, creating tension that lasted for about half an hour (Χρονολόγιο: Το ντόμινο που πυροδότησε η Συμφωνία των Πρεσπών, Ethnos, 12 January 2019).

Only the Western powers have unanimously hailed the treaty as a historic and positive step towards achieving peace and stability in the Balkans, with feelings of satisfaction high among EU and NATO member states, who see it as a means of securing the pro-Western orientation of the government in Skopje and minimizing Russian influence in North Macedonia (Antonis Klapsis, The Prespes agreement: A critical (re)evaluation’, Kathimerini English Edition, 21 December 2018). Reuters and AFP telegrams refer to a “historic agreement” ending a 27-year-old political dispute between Greece and Macedonia. AFP cites statements by Prime Ministers Tsipras and Zaev and considers Zaev’s election as prime minister in 2017 to be crucial for current developments. Sputnik wrote “Athens and Skopje sign historic agreement” and FAZ “Historic agreement in Prespes”.

Nevertheless, on 25 January 2019, Greece’s Parliament also barely approved the Prespa agreement with 153 votes in favor and 146 votes against, and by that the agreement entered into force.

⁶⁰ In the roll-call vote that followed the debate (39 hours in total) of the motion of censure, 153 MPs of the governing majority voted “against” and 127 “for” out of 280 MPs present (Απορρίφθηκε η πρόταση μομφής της Νέας Δημοκρατίας κατά της κυβέρνησης, vouliwatch, 16 January 2018).

The key points of the Agreement are the following (Prespa Agreement, Gre-NMK, 17th June 2018, Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs):

- The agreement provides for changing the constitutional name “Republic of Macedonia” and removing the provisional name of the “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” into a “Republic of North Macedonia”, or simply “North Macedonia” for all uses (*erga omnes*).

- Citizenship of the country is defined as “Macedonian / Citizen of the Republic of North Macedonia, without recognizing a Macedonian ethnicity.

- The agreement includes the recognition of the “Macedonian language”, noting that it belongs to the family of southern Slavic languages. North Macedonia is obliged to change its constitution and to inform all states and international organizations that recognize it as “Macedonia” or “FYROM” to proceed with its definitive renaming under the new name. North Macedonia is also obliged to change any documents and names of institutions referring to “Republic of Macedonia” and “Macedonia” within 5 years of the entry into force of the Agreement.

- The ISO abbreviation of North Macedonia will remain MK and MKD, while a change will be made to the car plates, with the abbreviation NM or NMK replacing the current MK.

- The agreement recognizes the greekness of Ancient Macedonia. In particular, Article 7 states that the two countries recognize that the concepts of “Macedonia” and “Macedonian” refer to different historical contexts and cultural heritages. When referring to Greece, these terms mean the region and the population in the area of Northern Greece, as well as the Greek culture and history of that area from the Antiquity to the present day. When referring to North Macedonia, these terms refer to the territory, language and people, with their own distinct history and culture.

- North Macedonia is obliged within six months to eliminate any inaccuracies in the monuments in its territory, stating in their inscription their Greek historicity and the purpose of erecting them as a sign of friendship between the two peoples.

- In addition, North Macedonia has to abolish the symbol of the Vergina Sun, recognizing its exclusive right to be used by Greece.

- A committee will also be set up to evaluate textbooks and maps in both countries to remove overlapping content and bring them in line with UNESCO and Council of Europe standards.

- Greece must accept North Macedonia's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and not obstruct North Macedonia's accession negotiations with the EU because of the name.

- Greece, however, retains the right of appeal and veto on North Macedonia's EU accession in case it violates the Prespa Agreement and / or does not proceed satisfactorily with changing its internal name into institutions and documents.

- The agreement also states that the common border of the two countries is a permanent and inviolable international border.

- The two countries pledge not to make unequivocal statements and to correct any errors in the registration and reporting of North Macedonia.

- Any disputes will be resolved through bilateral consultation, UN mediation or the International Court of Justice.

Five days after the final ratification from Greece's part, North Macedonia started the implementation agreed on its behalf by proceeding to the following necessary actions and changes:

- On 6 February 2019, at the NATO headquarters in Brussels, in the presence of Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov, was signed the Protocol on the Accession of the Republic of North Macedonia to the Alliance and had to be ratified by the 29 parliaments of NATO member states (Relations with the Republic of North Macedonia (Archived), NATO, 17 September 2020)⁶¹.

- On 12 February 2019, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia enacted the constitutional changes in order to be renamed North Macedonia and began renaming its official websites (Σε ισχύ η Συμφωνία των Πρεσπών: Και επίσημα Βόρεια Μακεδονία, CNN Greece, 12 February 2019).

- On 13 February 2019, North Macedonia began replacing the signs at the country's border crossings, writing the new name as agreed. Simultaneously, Greece and North Macedonia sent a joint letter to the UN Secretary General to change the name and resolve the name issue (UN Notified Of North Macedonia's Name Change, rferl, 13 February 2019)

⁶¹ The process was completed more than a year after, on 27 March 2020, granting North Macedonia NATO full membership, with Spain being the last country to ratify the accession protocol due to its political crisis (Macedonia se convierte en el 30 miembro de la OTAN agradeciendo al Senado la ratificación pese al coronavirus, europapress, 17 March 2020).

- On 14 February 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia informed the United Nations and its member states, as well as the international organizations, that the agreement had entered into force and requested that it be recognized by the new name by the countries that previously recognized it as “Macedonia” or “FYROM” (Συμφωνία των Πρεσπών: Η Βόρεια Μακεδονία ενημέρωσε ΟΗΕ και διεθνείς οργανισμούς ότι γύρισε σελίδα, CNN Greece, 14 February 2019).

- On 16 February 2019, the flag of North Macedonia at the UN headquarters was moved between Nigeria and Norway to reflect the new name in alphabetical order in the letter N (North Macedonia in English) (Συζητήσεις για διαγωνισμό προσλήψεων ΕΥΠ, Kathimerini, 16 February 2019).

- During the official visit of the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to Skopje on 2 April 2019, he and his North Macedonian counterpart Zoran Zaev decided to set up a joint committee regarding the products named “Macedonian” (Μακεδονικά προϊόντα: Μέσα Μαΐου η επιτροπή για τα εμπορικά σήματα, Star.gr, 3 April 2019).

Greece also reacted immediately in order to fulfill its parts of the agreement, starting by being the first of all 29 NATO countries to ratify the NATO Accession Protocol on 8 February 2019, although the voting in the Greek Parliament barely managed to pass, with just 153 positive votes from the 300 in total (Ευθεία σύγκρουση των πρώην εταίρων στη Βουλή – 153 «να» στην ένταξη της ΠΓΔΜ στο ΝΑΤΟ, Kathimerini, 8 February 2019). Some other action on the behalf of Greece was, among other bilateral agreements signed, the signing by Greek Defense Ministers Evangelos Apostolakis and Northern Macedonia Radmila Sekerinska of an agreement on the supervision and protection of North Macedonia air space by the Greek Air Force (Το ραντάρ της Θεσσαλονίκης θα ελέγχει τον εναέριο χώρο της Βόρειας Μακεδονίας, iefimerida, 1 April 2019). And lastly, regarding the mutual air defense part of the agreement, on 21 May 2019, the first flight of a Greek fighter plane, an F16 from the 347th Squadron of the 110th Larissa Battle Wing, took place over North Macedonia (Πρώτη πτήση ελληνικού μαχητικού πάνω από τη Βόρεια Μακεδονία, Kathimerini, 21 May 2019).

A final, but very crucial part of the agreement, i.e. that both countries mutually acted upon was the Joint Interdisciplinary Committee of Experts of Greece-North Macedonia (expert committee) that was established according to Article 8 (5) of the Prespa Agreement, in order to discuss and monitor historical, archaeological and educational issues (Σύσταση της Μεικτής Διεπιστημονικής Επιτροπής Εμπειρογνομώνων (ΜΔΕΕ) Ελλάδος-πΓΔΜ, Greek

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 September 2018). The members of the expert committee initially were as follows:

Greek department:

1. Marcos Bolaris, Deputy Foreign Minister, as President of the Hellenic Section of the Commission.

2. Spyridon Sfetas, Professor, Department of History and Archeology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

3. Nikolaos Zaikos, Associate Professor, Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia.

4. Alexandra Ioannidou, Associate Professor, Department of Russian Language and Literature and Slavic Studies, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

5. Iakovos Michailidis, Associate Professor, Department of History and Archeology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

6. Efthymios Charlaftis, Counselor of the Embassy of AD, A3 Directorate of Southeast European Countries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

7. Athanasios Loupa, PhD Candidate, Department of History and Archeology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

North Macedonian department:

1. Ambassador Victor Gaber, Head

2. Professor Dalibor Jovanovski, PhD, Member

3. Professor Nikos Chausidis, PhD, Member

4. Professor Ljudmil Spasov, PhD, Member

5. Assistant Professor Ana Chupeska-Stanishkovska, PhD, Member

6. Professor Fahri Ramadani, PhD Member

7. Professor Kica Kolbe, PhD, Member.

The main issues that were going to be analyzed were the ethnic mentions and the mentions of the name “Macedonia” in the school books in North Macedonia, the statues and archeological places in North Macedonia mentioning or claiming Macedonian ethnicity and/or origin, and all other mentions regarding historical, archaeological and educational issues in general, that must be changed in order to comply with the Agreement and be acceptable by both parts. The first meeting of the expert committee took place in Athens on the 22 and 23 of March 2019 (Αθήνα-Σκόπια συναντιούνται για τα σχολικά βιβλία – Στην Οχρίδα ο Μπόλαρης, *tonima*, 17 May 2019).

Sadly, almost every effort suddenly froze from both parts, when on the meeting of the European Council on 17 and 18 October 2019 the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, formally vetoed opening negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Zoran Zaev, reacting to the negative response from the Council and the immediate internal instability in his country, stated through an interview of his to Euronews that he is “freezing” temporarily the Prespa Agreement. As he said: “There is no possibility of implementation of the Prespa Agreement, part of it will be frozen because its implementation is not possible. We will try to implement some provisions, but the two (implementation and European course) are interconnected.” (Ζάεφ στο Euronews: Το «όχι» στις ενταξιακές διαπραγματεύσεις επηρεάζει τη Συμφωνία των Πρεσπών, Euronews, 1 November 2019).

5.3 MACRON'S VETO

After the Prespa Agreement was signed and ratified by both Greece and North Macedonia, European countries were very positive regarding the opening of the accession talks with the reformed country of Western Balkans. Welcoming the agreement that solved an over 20-year-old dispute and stabilized the transnational relations in the region, the Council and the Commission were both promising that all these will lead to a positive vote and the continuance of the process towards the integration of North Macedonia as an EU member state. In the meeting of the General Affairs Council that followed, on 18 June 2019, the agenda included as a topic the opening of accession negotiations with both North Macedonia and Albania. The Council welcomed officially the agreement, as well as the general progress that had been done by North Macedonia, according to the Commission's reports, but nevertheless, due to the limited time given, readdressed the matter for their following meeting in the October 2019. The official conclusion of the Council regarding North Macedonia was the following: "Reaffirming its conclusions of 26 June 2018, the Council strongly welcomes the historic and unprecedented Prespa Agreement, and the Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations with Bulgaria, and takes good note of the Commission's recommendation to open accession negotiations with the Republic of North Macedonia based on its positive evaluation of the progress made and of the fulfillment of the conditions identified by the Council. In light of the limited time available and the importance of the matter, the Council will revert to the issue with a view to reaching a clear and substantive decision as soon as possible and no later than October 2019." (Council conclusions on enlargement and stabilisation and association process, Council of the EU, Press release, 18 June 2019).

This meeting, however, was the last under the Jean-Claude Juncker Commission. In July 2019, the European Council nominated Ursula von der Leyen to succeed him, and she was elected the 13th President of the European Commission by the European Parliament on 16 July 2019 (Von der Leyen elected EU Commission head after MEPs vote, BBC News, 16 July 2019).

Until the next Council meeting, everything seemed to be in line for the opening of negotiations for the two Balkan states. The comment that was highlighted by the conclusions of June's meeting, for example, was the one by George Ciamba, Romanian Minister Delegate for European Affairs, who stated "The solution agreed by consensus at the level of all member states represents the result of intensive work during a complex process of negotiation and sends a positive message, preserving a clear European perspective and timeline for the

partners who deliver on their commitments. The outcome of today's Council reconfirms that promoting the enlargement policy, based on EU internal cohesion, enhances the coherence and the relevance of the EU's global action, which starts in our immediate neighborhood", right after the meeting (Council conclusions on enlargement and stabilisation and association process, Council of the EU, Press release, 18 June 2019).

The following European Council meeting took place on 17 and 18 October of the same year. The main issues to be addressed on that meeting, according to the agenda, were the urgent matter of Brexit, the long-term EU budget, the EU's strategic agenda and the next institutional cycle, climate change, Turkey and its illegal drilling for oil, the downing of MH17, and finally the EU enlargement issue, regarding the opening of accession talks with Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia.

As already mentioned earlier in this thesis, in order for any decision to be taken by the European Council regarding matters of EU enlargement, there has to be a unanimous decision. Therefore, every single EU member state must agree with the respective decision. In the case we are examining, this did not happen. French President Emmanuel Macron disagreed with the opening of negotiations with the Republic of North Macedonia and Albania, vetoing the whole process, over concerns that the process for becoming an EU member was in need of fundamental reform. According to Macron, the EU enlargement process needs substantial restructuring before negotiations can be opened. The official result of the meeting, according to the press release, was "Leaders discussed the opening of accession talks with Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia. They agreed to revert to the issue before the EU-Western Balkans summit in Zagreb in May 2020" (European Council, Main results, 17-18 October 2019). The Polish President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, expressed his disagreement with this conclusion forthwith, on his report and concluding remarks to the European Parliament, stating "The leaders held a difficult debate on enlargement. Following the clear recommendation by the Commission, an overwhelming majority of member states wanted to open accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania. Despite this, the required unanimity was not possible last week. In my opinion, this was a mistake, which I have said to the leaders (and I was a bit more direct then). Now I can only hope that the leaders draw the right conclusions, when they discuss the accession process before the Zagreb summit in May 2020." (Report and concluding remarks by President Donald Tusk to the European Parliament on European Council meetings of 17 and 18 October 2019). To support this decision, French European Affairs Minister Amélie de Montchalin stated that "more reforms are needed in both countries, but also made clear that

bigger issues had to be addressed, including a deep reform of the way the Commission conducts the negotiations and addressing the issue of brain drain in the respective countries”. She also added “this was about ‘credibility’: criteria had been set in 2018⁶² and these should be respected”, she insisted. In the case of North Macedonia, she specified the reform of the special prosecutor office, which, in her words, “has not been completed.” (France halts EU enlargement, euractiv.com, 16 October 2019).

This decision of France, seen with large criticism from the most EU member states and even from the outgoing head of the European Council, Donald Tusk, addressed “our Macedonian and Albanian friends” on Twitter, assuring them, “You did your share and we didn’t.” Also, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Johannes Hahn, accused EU leaders of breaking commitments to the two countries. He said member states “now need to clarify how serious their commitment is to the Western Balkans’ EU integration”. Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, said it was a “major historic mistake”, adding: “If we want to be respected, we have to keep our promises.” The characterization “mistake” was also adopted by many political leaders.

The French denial, which was qualified by the majority of the political leaders of the Union and other states as a “historical mistake”, will have many drawbacks in the stability of the two “rejected” countries, as well to the other Eastern European countries, and it will also have serious consequences on the image of EU and its credibility to third parties, as the Union neglected its promise given to Western Balkans.

George Ciamba, Romania’s EU Foreign Minister, said: “It’s very important to give a political signal that enlargement is not dead”. Syriza’s MEP Stelios Kouloglou, speaking to North Macedonian Television, accused the French President that his action will open the door to external influence in the Western Balkans region. He also added that “When Macron decided to exercise his veto, he took into consideration neither the political stability of the Western Balkans, the importance of external influence, nor the people of North Macedonia. He just played his game with Germany” (KULOGLU FOR TV 24, 19 October 2019). Regarding the stance of the US, Washington’s envoy to the Western Balkans criticized on 4 November 2019 the EU for delaying the start of membership talks with North Macedonia and Albania, saying it sent a “bad message” to a region where all countries hope to join the bloc (US envoy knocks EU’s ‘bad message’ to the Balkans, euractiv.com, 4 November 2019).

⁶² Referring to the criteria set on 26 June 2018, by the Council, to North Macedonia and Albania in order to open accession negotiations with the EU (Brussels, 26 June 2018 (OR. en)).

Roland Freudenstein, policy director of Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, pointed out that “There is the problem of the Union’s credibility in the Western Balkans as accession talks were promised at a political level, as well as the danger that these countries are being pushed into the open arms of Russia, China and Turkey if the EU doesn’t show that it is serious about enlargement,” he said, adding that Paris “also damages the EU’s regional interests”.

On 9 November 2019, an open letter⁶³ signed from ten former foreign ministers resumed the common belief of the majority of the countries on Macron’s “mistake”, as well as their fears for the future. Therefore it is beneficial to cite this letter in whole:

“Stability, democracy and prosperity in Southeast Europe are directly linked to the consolidation of the European project and the completion of the reunification of our continent with the accession of Western Balkan countries, a process that started 30 years ago.

The obstinate opposition to opening EU accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia, despite the recommendation of the European Commission and the will of the vast majority of the member states and European Parliament, has put in jeopardy the EU’s remaining influence on its own doorstep and its ability to shape strategic developments and stability in Southeast Europe.

This is a strategic mistake that helps consolidating the status quo in Western Balkans and EU inertia in an increasingly messy geopolitical map. The European Union’s duty is to contribute to the stability and security of South East Europe. Therefore, it should consider Western Balkans’ accession to EU as a responsible policy rather than a burden.

Moreover, the opposition to start the accession negotiations with the abovementioned countries undermines the EU’s authority and credibility. For a region like the Western Balkans, which is struggling to strengthen rule of law and improve social and economic standards, membership process into EU remains indispensable.

⁶³ Signed in 9 November 2019 by:

- Igor Luksic, Former PM and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Montenegro.
- Sigmar Gabriel, Former Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Germany.
- Vesna Pusic, Former Deputy PM and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Croatia.
- Nikola Poposki, Former Deputy PM and Minister of Foreign Affairs, North Macedonia.
- Nikolaos Kotzias, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Greece.
- Karin Kneissl, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Austria.
- Ioannis Kasoulides, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cyprus.
- Ditmir Bushati, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Albania.
- Kristian Vigenin, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bulgaria.
- Goran Svilanovic, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

However, it is the psychological impact of such talks and the transformative effects that are important for these countries' feeling of being anchored to the EU. And above all, it is the issue of trust: Back in 2003, in the Thessaloniki Summit, EU leaders promised these countries membership.

Under the current circumstances, guarantees given by the EU to the countries of the region will no longer matter. Therefore, it will become increasingly difficult to reach compromises, overcome bilateral disputes and unleash positive energy.

This is a precursor to domestic troubles in North Macedonia and Albania, which have too long relied on the EU to support them. It undermines the negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo and strengthens the centrifugal forces in Bosnia & Herzegovina.

EU accession process in the Western Balkans is also a state-building process and by the same token a stabilizing process for the whole region. It is the key strategy for exercising EU's global political influence.

The EU should assume its responsibilities by acting in a strategic manner. It is high time for the EU to overview with creativity and to put in perspective its role within the new international environment, so as to act independently in this environment and to enhance its foreign policy and defense capabilities.

We call upon EU to overcome divisions on this point. The accession process will go on for many years during which there will be enough time to reconcile the need for the EU's further integration with the need for keeping the European perspective for Western Balkan countries alive.

Therefore, the opening of accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania, on the basis of their commitments, is imperative and should be agreed upon at the next EU Summit. At the same time, we call upon the EU to present new instruments in the upcoming Zagreb Summit that will consolidate the EU accession path of Western Balkan countries."

In a speech on Friday 8 November 2019, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the newly elected president of the Commission von der Leyen stated that the EU had "asked a lot of North Macedonia and Albania, and they've fulfilled it all. Now we must be true to our word and start accession talks."

Denmark, Spain and the Netherlands also blocked the decision, although they were open to considering the two countries separately. Both opposed opening talks with Albania, but suggested North Macedonia could get a green light by passing a law to safeguard the future of an independent public prosecutor. Their proposal was also rejected by President Macron.

There's also concern that the Balkans could go the way of Turkey, which has largely given up on democracy since it saw its EU accession hopes repeatedly frustrated.

Some weeks after the Council's meeting, Emmanuel Macron shared a memo, suggesting changes in the EU legislation regarding the membership process. The memo begins by asserting that France sees the Western Balkans⁶⁴ as part of Europe culturally and historically and would ultimately like to see them join the Union. Macron then proposes seven stages on the progression toward membership. He would also like the EU to reverse or suspend the process "if the European Union's fundamental values were challenged."

France's new approach to the EU accession process is largely based on the so-called "horizontal method": Candidates would make reforms in various areas, gaining access to select EU programs and gatherings along the way, before attaining full membership. The idea, which was articulated shortly before the publication of the non-paper by Milica Delevic and Tena Prelec⁶⁵, is to integrate the Western Balkans sector by sector, while keeping the current legal framework intact. For instance, there has already been progress in connectivity, in the form of energy and transport networks. With some effort and imagination, the parties could extend this concept to many other areas. The EU would support the adoption and implementation of the *acquis communautaire* in a particular sector with targeted financial assistance and would – once the candidate country meets certain criteria – allow it to participate, perhaps with observer or associate status, in the work of the bloc's relevant forums. The creation of a community occurs via exchanges in EU meetings, in which compulsory friendship relativizes bilateral problems (Non-Paper, Reforming the European Union accession process, November 2019).

This non-paper refers to two fundamental principles that have to be changed. It proposes a renewed approach based on four principles: gradual association, stringent conditions, tangible benefits and reversibility, and stronger political governance. The first part includes the following titles:

- Negotiations organized around policy blocks, in which candidate countries would gradually be included.

⁶⁴ Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

⁶⁵ Milica Delevic is a former director of the Office for European Integration of the Serbian Government (2008-2012) and an ECFR council member. Tena Prelec is a research fellow at the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford.

- Stringent conditions, in order to effectively converge towards European norms and standards over the long term, in the field of the rule of law, but also economic and social convergence.

- Concrete benefits during the process (which are currently lacking and prevent migratory movements from being stemmed, posing problems for both parties), particularly through increased financial support.

- A reversible process to ensure its credibility and incentive nature.

Subsequently, regarding the second part, the paper exactly writes: Specific governance would be established to support this new process. The Commission would assess and regularly monitor the progress made by candidate countries, including their compliance with the *acquis* of the stages already validated. The Member States would review these evaluations. The Council's role would be strengthened as candidate countries are increasingly involved in sectoral policies. Finally, along with the launch of reflection on a better articulation between the Berlin Process summits and the EU-Balkan summits, an annual meeting of the European Council could be held with Heads of State and Government of the Western Balkan countries, in order to address issues of common interest (joint response to major challenges, relations with non-European partners, cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs, economic and regional cooperation).

In the two final paragraphs of the memo, the Commission is being called to formulate corresponding proposals defining the new method (organization, decision-making procedures, monitoring mechanisms, the role of the different European institutions and member states), and to present them to the Council before the next Enlargement Package is published, by January 2020, in order for this new method to be implemented by the Council in the negotiation frameworks, when opening accession negotiations with candidate countries, and to act upon them.

Finally, the report includes a table with a proposal on how to organize the new stages of the accession process and which "old" stages will be replaced. The seven new stages that have been proposed are the following:

- Stage 1 (cross-cutting): Rule of law, fundamental rights, justice and security;
- Stage 2: Education, research and space, youth, culture, sports, environment, transport, telecommunications and energy;
- Stage 3: Employment, social policy, health and consumer protection; competitiveness;

- Stage 4: Economic and financial affairs;
- Stage 5: Internal market, agriculture and fisheries;
- Stage 6: Foreign affairs;
- Stage 7: Other matters.

We will revisit this proposal in more detail in the last part of the thesis.

5.4 26 MARCH 2020 FROM “NO” TO “YES”

As the debate on the veto by France, its correctness and its results, continued in the EU and internationally, the postponement of a final decision by the EU Council regarding the opening of enlargement negotiation talks with the two Balkan Countries, the Republic of Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia, triggered a new wave of instability in both countries, but it was more harmful for North Macedonia.

The public was frustrated as they saw a rejection from the EU, after their country was trying to fulfill the criteria and was making “sacrifices”, as the majority saw the Prespa Agreement, with which they believed that they gave up their claims over their name and their national identity. Protests started all over the country, blaming the current government of the state, as they considered Europe’s “no” its responsibility. In the edge of a new political crisis, President Zoran Zaev gathered the leaders of the major political parties in North Macedonia on 20 October 2019 and after a discussion, they announced early parliamentary elections. The date that they choose was on 12 April 2020 (North Macedonian leaders agree to hold snap election on April 12, Reuters, 20 October 2019). When the President announced the early elections as a follow-up of the decision of the Council, he stated that “I am disappointed and angry and I know that the entire population feels this way” (Snap elections in North Macedonia after EU rejection, euobserver.com, 21 October, 2019). The date in question was not chosen randomly. The leading political party selected this date, in particular, since it was expected North Macedonia would be a full member of NATO by then. Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia Nikola Dimitrov stated that on 25 September 2019, saying that his country’s process of becoming a fully-fledged NATO member should be over by April 2020 and that NATO cannot intervene in the Protocol’s process (North Macedonia to enter NATO by April 2020, Ministers announce, EuropeanWesternBalkans.com, 25 September 2019). Consequently, it is obvious that the government wanted to have this achievement of theirs as “an extra arrow in their quiver” before the elections.

A second mutual conclusion from the meeting of the North Macedonia party leaders that all seven of them shared was that “their country must continue to knock on the EU’s door – although for now it remains closed due to a single member state, France” (Early Elections Test North Macedonia’s Unity over EU Drive, BalkanInsight, 21 October 2019).

The peak of political instability in North Macedonia came on the 3rd of January 2020, when President Zoran Zaev and his government announced their resignation, not waiting for the parliamentary elections set in April. With the acceptance of the government’s resignation,

the Parliament of North Macedonia formed a new caretaker government under prime minister Oliver Spasovski, who served as interior minister in the previous government, and gave him a vote of confidence. The new temporary government was formed with the mandate to carry out the elections in the following April and to govern the country until then. Spasovski said in a parliamentary speech following the vote that the country is in a very difficult period and all institutions are expected to work unimpeded. He also stated that “It is the time when fair and democratic elections should be held. It is time to follow up on its decisions to start accession negotiations with the EU” (North Macedonia forms caretaker government, aa.com, 3 January 2020).

Apart from the events on North Macedonia and Albania, the EU had also to act after the French veto. The next critical event regarding the integration process and the call for changes that came from the French President, took place on March 2020 and it was the Council’s adoption of the latest Commission’s Communication⁶⁶ on 24 March 2020.

Witnessing even more member states agreeing and espousing the approach of France, other “louder” and others more silently, the Commission, in an attempt to find solutions, tried to optimize the integration process of the EU. With this in mind, and on the basis set by the non paper, the Commission published on 5 February 2020 a Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of The Regions, titled “Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans”.

It is strongly mentioned in the Communication that the proposed changes are only aiming at the negotiation process. As EU spokeswoman Ana Pisonero stated in an interview the day before the presentation, “What we are going to propose tomorrow is to make the negotiating process more credible. We are not going to propose changing the conditions to join the EU. These conditions are very clear, they’re set out in the treaties”. It is obvious that the Commission believes that the criteria are functional and efficient the way they are, and clearly states in the Communication that it is in the interest of everyone (both of the EU and of the candidate states) not to make any changes to the integration criteria, at least not when many states are in the middle of the process and have already made radical changes and big steps towards meeting the current criteria. An action like this, according to the Commission, may be devastating for these states.

⁶⁶ The European Commission issues a wide variety of communications. Communications may include policy evaluations, commentary or explanations of action programmes or brief outlines on future policies or arrangements concerning details of current policy. Policy proposals will never be put forward by means of a communication (eumonitor.eu).

The main keystones of the changes proposed by the Commission, as they are described in the Communication (Brussels, 5.2.2020 COM (2020) 57 final), are the following:

a. More credibility

This means that for the accession process to regain credibility on both sides and to deliver its full potential, it needs to rest on solid trust, mutual confidence and clear commitments on both sides. In order for that to be achieved, there must be an even stronger focus on the fundamental reforms. To do that, negotiations on the fundamentals will be opened first and closed last and progress on these will determine the overall pace of negotiations. Negotiations on the fundamentals will be guided by:

- A roadmap for the rule of law chapters, equivalent to the previous action plans, will constitute the opening benchmark. Interim benchmarks will continue to be set. No other chapter will be provisionally closed before these benchmarks are met.

- A roadmap on the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration reforms.

- A stronger link with the economic reform programme process to help the countries meet the economic criteria.

b. A stronger political steer

This includes the creation of new opportunities for high-level political and policy dialogue with the countries through regular EU-Western Balkans summits and intensified ministerial contacts, especially in areas where alignment is progressing well and key criteria are being met. Such increased engagement could lead to the countries participating as observers in key EU meetings on matters of substantial importance to them.

To achieve this:

- Member States will be invited to contribute more systematically to the accession process

- The Commission will continue to take stock of overall progress in negotiations. It will propose in its annual enlargement package the way ahead for the following year in greater reform detail, for approval by member states, including proposals for corrective measures.

- Country-specific IGCs should take place after publication of the Commission's annual package of reports on each country and provide the fora for political dialogue on reforms.

- The Stabilisation and Association Councils will also provide an important and complimentary moment for political dialogue on reforms.

c. A more dynamic process

In order to inject further dynamism into the negotiating process and to foster cross-fertilization of efforts beyond individual chapters, the negotiating chapters will be organized in thematic clusters. These clusters will follow broad themes such as good governance, internal market, economic competitiveness, and connectivity. Negotiations on each cluster will be opened as a whole, after fulfilling the opening benchmarks, rather than on an individual chapter basis. Finally, the clusters will be aligned with SAA sub-committees, so that progress in the cluster can be monitored and specific measures of accelerated alignment taken under the SAA structures.

d. Predictability, positive and negative conditionality

By providing clear and tangible incentives of direct interest to citizens, the EU can encourage real political will and reward results arising from demanding reforms and the process of political, economic and societal change. If countries move on reform priorities agreed in the negotiations sufficiently, this should lead to:

- Closer integration of the country with the EU, work for accelerated integration and “phasing-in” to individual EU policies, the EU market and EU programmes, while ensuring a level playing field.

- Increased funding and investments – including through a performance-based and reform-oriented Instrument for Pre-accession Support and closer cooperation with IFIs to leverage support.

Closing the Communication, the Commission mentions the importance of the transparency in every action and every decision, and states that “The Commission will also continue its communication and information activities, including in EU Member States, where it is primarily for Member States to inform their citizens and provide them with the facts about the strategic opportunities and challenges of the process”.

This Communication did not include radical changes. It was something like a soft update and “touched” only the negotiation process, leaving the criteria and the obligations of the states seeking integration as they are. If that was enough to satisfy the French President

and its supporters, it was left to be seen in the upcoming meeting of the Ministers for European Affairs in March.

On 24 March 2020, the Council agreed and adopted the changes that were proposed by the Commission regarding the negotiation process. As it is stated in the conclusions of the Council's meeting (ELARG 20 COWEB 35), "The Council endorses the Commission Communication on "Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans" of 5 February 2020, aiming to reinvigorate the accession process by making it more predictable, more credible, more dynamic and subject to stronger political steering, based on objective criteria and rigorous positive and negative conditionality, and reversibility. The fundamental democratic rule of law and economic reforms represent the core objective of the accession process. The Council looks forward to the Commission's proposals integrating the enhanced approach in future negotiating frameworks and building on applicable established practice under the renewed consensus on enlargement. The proposed changes can be accommodated within the existing negotiating frameworks with Montenegro and Serbia with the agreement of the respective countries."

Finally, after the adoption of the new methodology, a decision regarding the start of negotiations between the EU and North Macedonia was made in March 2020 (Conclusions of the Council of the EU, 25 Mar 2020). The decision stated that the negotiations would start at the first Intergovernmental Conference between the parties, without specifying a date.

That meant that, at the time, every member of the Council accepted that the criteria have been met by both Western Balkan countries (Republic of Albania and Republic of North Macedonia) and that they all agreed to open accession negotiations with them, showing that the changes brought by the Commission Communication satisfied everyone, "closing the gap" between EU and the candidate states.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The EU, throughout its history, has made many changes in its legislation and in a variety of its processes in order to be more efficient and to respond to the needs of every situation in order to achieve the most optimal result for the interests of its members. That is the case with the enlargement process as well. Many changes and reconsiderations have occurred, throughout the course of the Union, as we have already chronicled in the previous chapters of this thesis.

The dissimilarity of the case we are examining, i.e. the case of the integration of the Western Balkan countries, is due, first of all, to the fragility and the general situation of these countries. In contrast with the already integrated countries, Western Balkan countries are not stable or self-sustained. All of these countries have been challenged by many adversities, have made mistakes, and have had a harmful background, like the ethnic diversity, the disputes regarding the name of Macedonia with Greece and the one regarding the Macedonian language with Bulgaria, the political instability and the internal disputes, as we saw in the case of North Macedonia. The countries that integrated in previous enlargements of the EU were, in their majority, mature states, self-sustainable and stable, so they were not going to harm by any means the EU; they only extended the power and the strength of the Union.

Additionally, the EU, at the time of the last enlargement phases, was also sturdy in terms of economy, concord and international policy, with few other difficulties to face. Thus, the EU was in a position that permitted the support, mainly economical, and also in general terms, of newly entered countries, which struggled to find their steps in an international environment. A representative example is Greece, which was not totally in line with the terms of the EU and did not completely meet the criteria when it became a member state of the European Communities, but with the support and the assistance received by the Union, it managed to evolve and become an acceptable member state that meets all the criteria and is equal to the other members.

Today's EU, though, is not exactly in the same condition as it was back then. The Union has been weakened due to many facts that have occurred since then, like Brexit, the potentially upcoming international health crisis, the inflation, the international economic crises, the migration crises and the general contradictions among the members. All the above make the EU unable to equally support new country entries.

North Macedonia has a complicated history that haunts them until this day. They never had an actual identity because of the occupations of other nations. Almost through their entire history they were under the rule of the others and they weren't able to create their own tradition and history. That is why, until these days, they haven't united as a nation and an ethnicity.

For the same reason mentioned above, they stayed behind regarding the global international relations. All other states passed their century of nationalism in the 19th and 20th century, moving on in prosperity and rising in other fields, such as international relations. Combining, also, the name dispute with Greece and the huge problems caused by the attempts to take historic figures and events that belong to other nations, creating hate and hurtful nationalism, North Macedonia was not able to participate in international organizations (NATO, EU etc.), in order to build better relations with the rest of the world. Until recent years, after the Prespa agreement, when North Macedonia made important progress on all these issues.

North Macedonia became member state of NATO and they established positive views from EU states, after significant changes in their political ideologies and strategies. But even after all this progress, North Macedonia still has domestic and administrative problems. Like other Balkan states, North Macedonia is almost a century behind regarding public administration and politics.

Furthermore, North Macedonia did not solve all its disputes with its neighbors. Bulgaria still claims that the Macedonian language is a form of Bulgarian language. They may have signed a mutual declaration⁶⁷, but Bulgarian government continues to deny Macedonian as a separate language. Also, many people are starting to state that the Prespa Agreement is partially not being applied on behalf of North Macedonia and that the government intentionally delays to apply many changes, like the street signs, the signs on the statues or the official use of the term "Macedonia" instead of "North Macedonia", and fails to monitor and/or impose other parts.

⁶⁷ A Joint Declaration that signed by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria Ivan Kostov and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia Ljubčo Georgievski, were Bulgaria recognize the second state as Republic of Macedonia. The agreement signed on 22 February 1999 in Sofia and reaffirmed on 22 January 2008, also in Sofia (Joint Declaration of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia, BULGARIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY).

Also, the resignation of Zoran Zaev's government and the rising favor of its opposing political party VMRO, in combination with the public dissatisfaction and its reactions, suggest a general political instability. Another example of the government's failure is the brain drain of the younger citizens, according to latest researches (INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION, Remittances, and the Brain Drain, editors Çağlar Özden and Maurice Schiff, A copublication of the World Bank and Palgrave Macmillan).

The EU has made some steps towards finding a solution and a more optimal strategy in order to overcome the difficulties resulting from the differences of the Western Balkan countries with the countries that have already become member states of the EU. As we witnessed, many attempts have been made from the Commission and the Council, like the SAA and several policies that have been applied exclusively for the Western Balkan states.

Yet, the problem still occurs. As we have already explained, North Macedonia, the subject of our key study, is still unprepared and is not ready to move to the next stage of the EU integration process, the opening of negotiations, but the Council has agreed for the country to move on and continue the process. This event, on its own, implies that the process needs to be reevaluated further and radically change, as the partial changes and the soft optimization have no meaningful impact.

It is necessary to mention the dangers entailed in changing the criteria or the process, at a time when five countries, Albania, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey, are currently candidates. Being a candidate to become EU member for a country means that it has to make radical changes, to focus its policies and decisions towards specific goals, and to use its funds for other purposes than it would in other cases. So when these countries are moving towards that direction, it is not safe for the EU to tell them to go to a new one. Furthermore, as many politicians mentioned after Macron's veto to the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania, the credibility of the EU is at stake, when the obligations that the Union undertook by herself are not fulfilled. That means, to popularize, that the EU is not able to say to the states, 'I know I asked you to do this, but now you are half way there, I want you to do that'.

In a case like the one described above, as many politicians and political experts emphasized, it is possible for candidate countries to face internal instability, as it happened in a low scale in North Macedonia on October 2019. The situation in the most candidate countries, due to many factors, is fragile, and it is easy to get worse to the point that will not

be manageable by the state and the authorities. Also, another unpleasant development that may occur in that case is the risk that these countries, led by frustration and disappointment, may come closer to other international powers, like Russia and/or China, migrating external influence at the heart of Europe.

A simplified solution could be to preserve the situation as it is, not making any changes, and just holding to the few monitoring changes brought up by the Commission. This would be logical, as the Council agreed with them and promised to proceed with the opening of negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Sadly, the situation is way more complicated than that. As already explained, the EU is not able to support new members that are not self-sustained and that need economical support and assistance in their internal politics due to the challenges that are being faced at the moment. It is important that the countries be in a good position politically and economically before entering the EU as member states. Otherwise, the total of the Union is facing the risk of collapse. Due to the regulations and the legislation that the EU has established regarding the support and the unity of its members, it is dangerous to include countries, which are going to need a significant amount of funds and support in general, in order to reach a level where they will be able to offer to the Union as well.

A last but not least important factor, which also affects deeply the choices of the EU on the matter, is the current size of the Union. The member states of the EU now are twenty-seven. This means that the Union has to consider the interest of twenty-seven separate and unique countries. Also, due to the principal of unanimity, in order to take and implement a single decision, all members must be in favor of it. It could be stated that one or two more member states will not make any significant impact. Initially this is probably not that obvious, but if we take into consideration the level of difficulty that it is faced by the EU as it is to make a decision that will be acceptable by every member state, we can conclude that any extra vote will worsen the situation.

As it is concluded from the above facts, the criteria established by the EU in 1993, known as the Copenhagen Criteria, are not able to ensure the stability of the EU and the monitoring mechanics are not enough in order for the Council to have a clear and objective point of view regarding the situation of the candidate countries. Thus, it is not allowable for the EU to follow the current legislation for enlargement regarding the integration of the Western Balkan states. It is obligatory for the EU to carry out radical changes in the process

before any further expansion. In a different case, it would put in danger the stability of the Union as a whole.

7 PROPOSALS

The main proposal, as it naturally comes from the whole of this thesis, is that the EU should reevaluate the Copenhagen criteria. These criteria, established twenty years ago, reflect the needs, the dangers and the situations of that era. Our era is mainly affected by the fast tempo of the changes in every domain, the rapid evolution of everything. With this in mind, it is not optimal for an organization with international impact and a critical role on the policies all over the world to apply outdated processes, which do not respond anymore to the current needs.

The main changes recommended regarding the accession criteria is that they have to be more specific in order to be clearer and able to be evaluated more sufficiently. It is not necessary to change the criteria completely, but rather to optimize the already existing ones by clarifying their core and separating it into smaller and clearer sections.

Regarding another flaw of the process, the one that President Macron referred to, namely reversibility, effective mechanisms for resolving disputes, a credible reform track and gradual integration would be a good start for a better and more stable enlargement process. As long as enlargement is a matter of EU member states (and is not going to remain as it is), it will stay an inescapably political process. But, at the same time, a more effective and merit-based process, capable of delivering results promptly and robustly, might just restore trust in the process and re-inspire the bonds between the EU and the Western Balkan.

A merit-based process has been proposed from many experts. Its philosophy is that, after the integration progress will be separated into stages, as e.g. the French non paper has proposed, the EU will evaluate its steps independently and based on the merit of the candidate country in the achievements made regarding each current stage. The merit could take the form of offering more funds to the country in order to meet further success in the next integration stages, or some other economic deals with the EU member states, with the idea that this will help the state's development. Furthermore, a merit could have the form of some allowance in the Union's processes, like the participation as an observer in specific Council meetings including topics of the state's interests.

Another idea is the recent suggestion of Gerald Knaus of the European Stability Initiative⁶⁸. He suggested the creation of a South East European Economic Area (SEEEA) as

⁶⁸ Knaus, G., & Cox, M. (2005). The "Helsinki Moment" in Southeastern Europe. *J. Democracy*, 16, 39.

an additional stage in the process. According to Knaus, “The SEEAA would open up the benefits of the internal market to Western Balkans countries, while postponing the question of actual membership”. Similarly, the former European Commission director for the Western Balkans, Pierre Mirel, has suggested a waiting period in which countries build up a track record in implementing the *acquis* before full accession takes place (Flatter and faster: New Western Balkans pathways to the EU, European Council of Foreign Relations, 24 October 2019). These ideas, according to the former Commission director, “aim to restore support for enlargement in the EU, especially in France, while keeping Western Balkans countries engaged. However, it is doubtful whether they will meet the latter goal”, because as he added, “unilaterally imposing additional stages in the process 16 years on from Thessaloniki could further discourage reform efforts and undermine the region’s confidence in the EU”.

The complicated nature of the problem occurs from the fact already mentioned that the candidate states have already been in the course of changes towards the already existing process and they will be greatly disappointed if the EU changes the bases that they are stepping on. So, in order to make a smooth transition to any change at all, there should be a mechanism to prevent a potential drawback.

For this reason, the most optimal solution is, firstly, to separate the states between them. Each candidate state has to proceed and to be evaluated alone. The approach of mutual integration of many countries, like the Republic of Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia, has already been proven problematic. Opening of integration negotiations with Albania have been rejected due to factors exclusively related to North Macedonia, for example, because their cases were examined *en bloc* by the Council. The next step should be the creation of special commissions, unique for each candidate country, which will consist of specialists and experts from various necessary fields, like experts on politics, regional specialists, economists, and whatever else could be deemed essential. The purpose of these commissions will be to observe and report the already fulfilled steps by the governments and to evaluate their progress in every essential sector. This could also be done in cooperation with local experts and officials. After the evaluation of the current situation for each state, the commissions will readjust the progress already done by the country to the new criteria. Also, these commissions will be able to continue monitoring the evolution of the country they are accountable for and to report any change, drawback or step forward to the European Commission, in order, for example, to award the country any merit in accordance with the already mentioned proposal.

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