

## From ‘Balkanization’ to ‘Europeanization’ of the the Western Balkan countries

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### Abstract

*From '90s onwards the region had undergone through a number of important transformative processes, moving from a Balkanization paradigm towards an Europeanization one. The paper will try to focus on the major processes and trying to analytically distinguishing among them. Although it acknowledge that the transformations have been sometimes running in parallel and that there is no clear-cut of when a process ends and when the other starts, I will propose – for analytical reasons – three main distinguishable stages to look at the Western Balkans; that of nation- and state-building (the ‘last Balkanization’), the (delay) transition and the (pre-) Europeanization process, conceptualizing so the many and complex transformations in the region as ‘multiple stages’. What it is argued here is that “the Western Balkans can be Europeanized. The problems with the Europeanization of the Western Balkans do not rest only on the formal compliance to the EU requirements. Their greatest challenge will be to abandon practices of the past, so become ‘behaviourally Europeanized’. The success of the Balkans is tied to the integration of all states from the region into the EU and NATO structures. The disintegration in the past must be substituted with the integration into Europe based on values and interests in common.*

**Key words:** Europeanisation, western Balkans, integration, democracy, reforms

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Introduction: The Balkans today-Europeanization and the incompatibility of Balkanisation

The Balkan region constitutes today an inseparable part of the under formation ‘new’ European space. However, its incorporation into the New European Architecture has proved particularly problematic with negative consequences for the whole of the European space and the evolution of European integration. In fact, the Balkans, and more specifically what the EU calls ‘Western Balkans’, remains the least integrated and most unstable region of the continent. Throughout the Cold War period, the Balkan Peninsula constituted the area of division par excellence. With the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and within the broader unification euphoria that followed the Maastricht Treaty, the prospect of a common Balkan future in a democratic and prosperous Europe looked feasible.<sup>1</sup>

However, the anarchical situation that dominated the Albanian political scene and especially the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia indicated that transition and integration would be much more costly and demanding in the southern easternmost European corner. There is no doubt that the past two decade has been exceptionally difficult for the Balkan countries. Constant hostilities created deep-seated resentments and led to the emergence of a polarized patchwork of nationstates. In most of the countries, struggle, lack of reform consensus, limited democratic experience and weak institutions impeded politico-economic progress; delayed and unimplemented reform programmes derailed the countries from the path of fully functioning market economies leading to inferior economic performance, declining living standards, rising unemployment and increased poverty.

In this article, it is argued that the Balkans can be Europeanised. Europeanization is analysed as an EU-centred process, directly dependent upon specific mechanisms and intervening confining conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Demetropoulou Leeda, Nov. 2002, Europe and the Balkans: Membership Aspiration, EU Involvement and Europeanization Capacity in South Eastern Europe, Southeast European Politics, , Vol. III, no.2-3

Within the context of these countries, i.e., of aspiring candidates in transition, Europeanization can be understood as the conceptual framework that links integration and transition<sup>2</sup>. Thus, it acquires a more specific meaning as a process of systemic transformation and structural accommodation based on a set of special requirements for full EU membership. States that are not law-governed, market-oriented liberal democracies cannot be accorded full membership. Thus, the EU functions as a reference model for the modernisation of the political, economic and social systems of the aspiring candidates in transition, and Europeanization becomes a series of operations leading to systemic convergence through the processes of democratisation, marketization, stabilisation and institutional inclusion. Not ignoring the fact that a number of different variables influence the outcome of Europeanization, two of them stand out as particularly significant in the case of the Balkans: a) the mechanisms of Europeanization, and b) the confining conditions within the region and within each Balkan state.

a) Europeanization mechanisms: It is a basic assumption among Europeanization approaches that different mechanisms have a different impact on the various domains of the concerned state (policy-making procedures, identities, institutions, structures etc.) leading to varying adaptations (or non-adaptations). Referring to the post-communist aspiring candidates the following Europeanization mechanisms can be discerned borrowing from democratisation theories' terminology<sup>3</sup> and combining with Europeanization approaches' typologies<sup>4</sup>

Since the fall of communism in the '90s, the Western Balkans have been undergoing fundamental and multiple transformations that are complex in their nature and uneasy to be explained by a single paradigm or model. Such a complex transformation, where democratization and transition take place in conjunction with nation- and state-building and European integration, usually comes at the expense of a truncated picture of the region. The focus has shifted towards the Western Balkans' integration into the EU, employing so the enlargement literature.

## **2. The Last "Balkanization"**

After the fall of communism, all Eastern European countries had to undergo a dual transformation where the most notable challenges to be faced were the economic transformation and its political democratization. Apart from these transformations other concerns prioritized the situation of the Western Balkans. The region's main concern of that period was mainly related to 'state building' in the literal sense of the word albeit with the distinct profiles of the individual cases, ranging from state weakness without unfinished state building in Albania to inconclusive state and nation building in Yugoslavia<sup>5</sup>. In the agenda of the Western Balkans politicians less importance was given to democratic values and economic reforms since all focus was centered on the nation- and state-building process. Bringing back the question of nation-state will result in disorder for the entire region where the most acute problem to be faced was the disintegration of the Western Balkan states.

During the first decade, the dissolution of Yugoslavia was accompanied also with violent conflict causing many human victims, traumas and dislocation of civilians, not to mention here the enormous economic costs it brought to the region. The process of disintegration in ex-Yugoslavia does not only regard the immediate aftermath period of the collapse of communism.

It was an unfinished business, lately revealed through the independence of Montenegro and of Kosovo. Apart from the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Albanian state also underwent hard times of disorder. In the spring of 1997 the Albanian state collapsed, "representing a classic case of state failure where the structures that should have guaranteed the rule of law failed completely"<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Agh, Attila, 1998, *The Politics of Central Europe*. Sage.

<sup>3</sup> Schmitter, Philippe, 1996, "The influence of the international context upon the choice of national institutions and policies in neo-democracies" in *The International Dimensions of Democratization—Europe and the Americas*, ed. Whitehead Laurence. Oxford: Oxford University Press..

<sup>4</sup> Radaelli, Claudio, 10–13 April 2000, "Whither Europeanisation? Concept stretching and substantive change." *Political Studies Association Annual Conference*, London.

<sup>5</sup> Balkan Forum, 17-18 June, 2004, *Rethinking the Balkans: Incongruities of State and Nation Building, Regional Stabilisation and European Integration*, Discussion paper final version, , p. 3, .Bertelsmann Foundation and Center for Applied Policy Research, Berlin

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

Such developments of the region often have been referred to as the process of Balkanization intending to describe the situation of the Western Balkan states in the '90s undergoing their last disintegration process – state partition in Yugoslavia and state failure in Albania.

In very broad lines, the Yugoslav (violent) disintegration was explained as products of the undemocratic nature of the old political system, and specifically as parts of a clever strategy devised by former communist elites anxious to maintain their power.<sup>7</sup> The Albanian anarchy of 1997 and the quasi-destabilization in 1998 were also the result of the conflictual political culture demonstrated by the parties which proved to be as 'infected' as of their communists predecessors since political opponents were considered 'enemies'. Such arguments usually point out that these legacies placed several obstacles to comprehensive democratization and further developments.

### 3. The "Delay" Transition

Transition, in the general meaning of the term, denotes "the interval between the dissolution of the old regime and the installation of a new regime".<sup>8</sup> In postcommunist literature, it is frequently being conceptualized as the transformation towards a pluralist democracy and a market economy. Such transformations required firstly the creation of new institutions to guarantee the separation of the state from party control, and the introduction of a market economy, abandoning thus state economic planning. Furthermore, other fundamental reforms and new legal and administrative practices had to be introduced, in order to break up with the institutional legacies of communism.

In the Western Balkans, after the disintegration was (almost) over and the authoritarian rule was getting weaker and weaker the transition process (building a liberal democracy and becoming oriented toward a market economy) came up again, this time as the main issue of the day. Although some degree of democracy and some economic reforms started since the beginning of the '90s, it can be argued that the Western Balkans experienced transition later, at least in comparison to some of the CEEC countries.

#### 3.1. New challenges and the governance incapacity to handle them

The transition process, beside recovery from conflicts and disorder, brought new challenges for the region. In the political sphere, the main challenge was to establish a liberal democracy, since most of these countries were only 'partially' democracies.<sup>9</sup> A second important challenge was the creation of a positive identification with the state by the citizens. In the social field a weak organizational capacity of social actors and weak civil society was noticed. A key challenge to the Western Balkans economies already accomplishing a degree of stabilization was the creation of sound conditions for "self sustainable economic growth"<sup>10</sup>.

Along these basic challenges in the political, economical and social sphere, other problems arise, where the most challenging were corruption and organized crime. These new challenges and the incapability to handle them showed once more the structural weakness of the Western Balkan states, which lacked sufficient governance capacities to carry out the necessary reforms. They proved to be ineffective states, incapable of fulfilling the basic functions and of handling out the new problems arising. A lack of state institutions which could carry through the transition reforms and at the same time compile with the EU standards was noticed. This process of building institutions capable of overcoming the new challenges has been one of the key issues of the post-conflict Western Balkans.

<sup>7</sup> I. Krastev, 2002, "The Balkans: Democracy Without Choices", p. 43 *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (3).

<sup>8</sup> O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986, Reference from P. Kopecky & C. Mudde, "What has Eastern Europe... *op.cit.*, 2000, p. 519.

<sup>9</sup> For example referring to the Freedom House surveys 97, Serbia and Montenegro (then Yugoslavia) will be classified as being 'not a free' country till 1999 (with the exceptions during 90-91 and 92-92 as 'partially free'). After 1999 the country was seen as 'partially free' (till 2002) and from 2002 on it progressed to be ranked as 'free'. Bosnia and Herzegovina also was considered as 'not free' till 1996 and only after 1996 it was classified as 'partially free'. Croatia was considered as 'partially free' and only in 2000-2001, after the sequence of political change, was considered as 'free'. Macedonia and Albania were classified as "partially free" and still will remain at this status. Albania, for example, failed many times in holding free elections and that reflected also on the relations with EU, as free elections proved to be a decisive element in starting and signing SAA negotiations with Albania

<sup>10</sup> Gligorov, 1999, *et. al.*, *Balkan Reconstruction... op. cit.*, ., p. 18, See also: M. Uvalic, 2003, "Economic Transition in Southeast Europe", p. 63, in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 3 (1).

But the capacity for institution-building was restricted due to limits imposed by the previous tensions as well as due to lack of political will. Yet “even when there was political will, authorities frequently lack the financial and administrative capabilities to implement reforms and policies”<sup>11</sup> for improving political and economic conditions. Regarding the economic aspects of the region, the consequence of transition strategies has been a degree of de-industrialization,<sup>12</sup> where the marginal productivity of the new private sector proved to be insufficient to offset the decline of the state sector. The “socio-economic progress along market lines is only possible if there is an effective state capable of fulfilling its basic functions”.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4. The “pre-Europeanization”

Despite the turbulence of the previous decade and the new transition challenges the Western Balkans are facing, their positive steps must be recognized. “Today, most of the problems and factors underpinning the Balkan wars seem to be over... what’s more the Western Balkans countries have achieved positive reform developments in the last couple of years”.<sup>14</sup> Political changes in Croatia and later in Serbia changed the regional risks and turned the region towards EU integration.<sup>15</sup> Economic development in the Western Balkans has been encouraging and the prospects are positive.

The Western Balkans could thus leave behind the era of ‘Balkanization’ and catch up with transition. Highly important at this stage is that transition towards pluralist democracy and market economy is occurring in parallel to the evolving perspective of EU integration. In 2000, at the Feira European Council, the prospect of EU membership has been extended to Western Balkans countries, where the Heads of EU States and Governments confirmed the prospect of the Balkan countries as potential candidates for EU membership.<sup>16</sup> The target of membership status has accelerated the progress and given new impetus, especially after the accession of the ten countries from Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans being now literally the next waiting in the queue (including Turkey). In order to be admitted the aspiring countries had to strictly comply with the EU political, economical as well as legal requirements (known as the Copenhagen Criteria)<sup>17</sup>. Such a relation (EU conditionality – Western Balkans compliance) implies that EU has an impact on the Western Balkans. This overall process, where European integration has an impact on to-become-member countries has been called ‘Eastern style’ Europeanization.

For the Western Balkans, Europeanization means adjustment to advanced western models as well as security and prosperity for the future<sup>18</sup>. In the actual phase of the Western Balkans we can speak of a pre-Europeanization process, since the current transformations are effects of the preparation for accession. Europeanization in this context is first a member-state building process where Western Balkans states have to review much of their legislation, adapt existing institutions or build new ones conforming to the EU’s legislation, policies, and standards. As a result of this member-state building process, the Western Balkan states will experience major transformations (the most direct one is the revolutionizing of the structure of public administration; the social and economic convergence to EU standards; change in the substance and processes of democratic governance).

<sup>11</sup> D. Bechev & S. Andreev, 2005, *Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up... op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Gligorov, 1999, *et. al.*, *Balkan Reconstruction... op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank, 1997, *The State in a Changing World*, The World Development Report, Washington.

<sup>14</sup> S. Panebianco & R. Rossi, October 2004, *EU Attempts to Export Norms of Good Governance to the Mediterranean and Western Balkan Countries*, p. 15 & 20, Jean Monnet Working Papers in Comparative and International Politics (JMWP) n° 53, Jean Monnet Centre EuroMed – Department of Political Studies – University of Catania, Catania.

<sup>15</sup> WIIW-Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, March 2006, *The Western Balkans: Economic Development since Thessaloniki 2003*, p. 1., Vienna,

<sup>16</sup> The EU “objective remains the fullest possible integration of the countries of the region into the political and economic mainstream of Europe.... All the countries concerned are potential candidates for EU membership”. Council of the European Union, *Presidency Conclusions*, Santa Maria da Feira, 19 June, paragraph 67

<sup>17</sup> The Copenhagen Criteria require that the candidate country must have achieved “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union; the ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic & monetary union.” See: The Copenhagen Criteria, DG Enlargement – Retrieved from <  
[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement\\_process/accesion\\_process/criteria/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accesion_process/criteria/index_en.htm) >.

<sup>18</sup> O. Anastasakis, 2005, “The Europeanization of the Balkans”, p. 80, *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, XII (1).

#### 4.1. Can the Western Balkans be Europeanized?

Despite all this uncertainties and difficulties regarding future EU integration processes, what is probably most important here is that these processes are now irreversible even in a country like Serbia, where political changes are likely to influence only the speed and general course.<sup>19</sup> Recent research has shown that “ultimately, it is Europe (its norms and values) which stands as the common denominator around which a new collective identity of the Balkans has begun to crystallize”. This means that joining EU now stands as the only long-range vision for the Western Balkans. By now, the logic and momentum of European integration have made the inclusion of the Western Balkan states a foregone conclusion, a strategic inevitability.<sup>20</sup> Besides this very optimistic picture, where “elites and constituencies throughout the region increasingly share a European orientation”<sup>21</sup>, tangible measures need to be taken by the political elites since complying with EU standards and consequently the launch of the opening process rests on them. Ultimately, the political will and commitment of the regional leaders determines the success or failure of the European package “consisting of a bilateral (pre) association process, regional co-operation and proactive crisis management”

What it is argued here is that “the Western Balkans can be Europeanized”<sup>22</sup>, as Demetropoulou’s research concludes. This does not suggest that there is not much to be done. On the contrary, the problems with the Europeanization of the Western Balkans do not rest only on the formal compliance to the EU requirements. Their greatest challenge will be to abandon practices of the past, so become ‘behaviourally Europeanized’.

#### The mechanism of inducing Pre-Europeanization changes

The European orientation rhetoric alone does not count much unless it is turned into actions, that is, political and economic reforms. The EU, from her side, has used both ‘reward’ or ‘punitive’ incentives in order to make the applicant countries comply with the set of membership conditions. Such mechanisms, of positive or negative conditionality, have been EU’s most powerful tool to induce pre-Europeanization changes in the candidate countries. Until now, EU has exercised both a positive and a negative conditionality on the Western Balkan countries. Previous EU approaches had been marked by a number of negative conditionality. The exception is the signing with Macedonia of the SAA, as a reward for the end the conflict. Anastasakis and Bechev, in examining the conditionality of the EU’s approach to the Western Balkans, call for the need to move “towards a positive conditionality”<sup>23</sup>. Such a positive conditionality would not only require the offer of a general membership perspective for the entire region, but also a more detailed road map of when each country would join.

The Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAA) are a step further and reflect a move forward in approaching the EU approach, “at the same time the punitive aspects of conditionality continue to play an important role and are an integral part of each SAA”<sup>24</sup>. It may be suggested at this point that such a ‘carrot-and-stick’ approach, through both reward and punitive mechanism, will still continue to be the ‘inherent’ strategy for bringing the Western Balkans if not (in the near future) into the EU, at least next to closer to it.

A point to be argued is not much the conditionality *per se*, but which type and how to successfully use such incentives for Europeanizing the Western Balkan countries. Anastasakis and Bechev consider the application of conditionality in the region problematic.<sup>25</sup> EU is finding itself in a deadlock position, since on the one hand it is putting hard conditions to the Western Balkan countries, and on the other hand it cannot offer much to the region because the EU itself faces challenges of consolidation.

<sup>19</sup> M. Uvalic, 2003, “Economic Transition... *op. cit.*, , p. 79, less emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> Balkan Forum, July 2002, *Integrating the Balkans: Regional Ownership and European Responsibilities Discussion paper*, p. 6, Bertelsmann Foundation and Center for Applied Policy Research and Policy Planning Staff, German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Berlin.

<sup>21</sup> Balkan Forum, 2004, *Rethinking the Balkans... op. cit.*, , p. 5

<sup>22</sup> L. Demetropoulou, 2002, “Europe and the Balkans: Membership Aspiration, EU Involvement and Europeanization Capacity in South Eastern Europe”, p. 88, *Southeast European Politics*, III (2-3)

<sup>23</sup> O. Anastasakis & D. Bechev, 2003, “EU Conditionality in South-East Europe: Bringing Commitment to the Process”, p. 3–4, *European Balkan Observer* 1 (2),

<sup>24</sup> Pippan, 2004, “The Rocky Road to Europe: The EU’s Stabilisation and Association Process for the Western Balkans and the Principle of Conditionality p. 235, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 9 (2).

<sup>25</sup> O. Anastasakis & D. Bechev, 2003, “EU Conditionality... *op. cit.*, p. 3.

But as scholars have been stressing out, the EU conditionality can be effective only as long as the prospect of joining the EU is considered a realistic one.<sup>26</sup> This is the best incentive for the region. The role of the EU in Europeanizing the Western Balkans countries, and even more its membership “carrot” is crucial in accelerating the reforms, since “Europe (EU) has been as a magnet and source of inspiration for their efforts to built modern states and societies”.<sup>27</sup> ‘Reinforcement by reward’ seems the best model to get the Western Balkans Europeanized. On the contrary freezing or any postponement of EU enlargement “would discourage the Western Balkan countries which are using the prospect of membership as a motivation for painful reforms”.<sup>28</sup>

### **5. Conclusion: the need for parallel enlargement and Europeanization at a later stage**

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

Up to date, the EU has promoted an approach that aims to keep the Balkans (especially the Western Balkans) within Europe but outside the EU institutional core. Regional co-operation has been promoted as an alternative that could create the broader conditions for democracy and market economy, normalize relations, bring minimum stability and facilitate trade, thus opening the way to economic prosperity. However, the Kosovo crisis and the limited success of the Bosnian state demonstrated the shortcomings of this approach and made the EU, in co-operation with other European and international actors, start considering the prospect of Balkan accession and to move towards the institutionalization of relations. Within this context and following the current practice of transformation prior to accession that characterizes the eastern enlargement, the Europeanization of the region according to the EU normative model has automatically become a necessity.

With the EU-orientation and initial enthusiasm having given place to disappointment and frustration, the double offer of institutionalization and of eventual accession is made as a strong incentive that can keep the Western Balkan states in the EU orbit. However, a whole set of questions emerge concerning the Europeanization capacity of the Balkan states, the democratic character and the effectiveness of the promotion of the specific Europeanization model by the EU.

a) The Europeanization capacity of the Balkans: Concerning the Europeanization capacity of the region western Balkan countries have demonstrated that once aspiration of membership becomes substantial and the European orientation rhetoric is translated into action, systemic and structural accommodation can start. However, in view of the great number of confining conditions that exist in the area, convergence would require a long time, patience and persistence in the Balkans and constant and firm support by the EU. The Balkan countries will have not just abandon practices of the past but also to challenge overpowering vested interests in important economic sectors, as well as corruption and criminality.

Moreover, societies divided by hatred and war will have to learn to live together, respecting the law and the rights of the others. From the EU side, despite the small size of the Balkan economies, the amount of funds required will be considerable and the real problem will be for the EU to be able in the long run to provide the required resources.

b) Democratic character and effectiveness of imported models: In view of unsatisfied expectations and declining support, it would seem rather undemocratic for the EU to impose a specific economic and political model.

<sup>26</sup> J. Rupnik, 2000, “Eastern Europe... *op. cit.*, , p. 126.

<sup>27</sup> D. Bechev, 2006, *Constructing South East Europe... op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> H. Grabbe, June 2001, Profiting from EU enlargement, p. 60 Centre for European Reform (CER), London.

It would be more democratic to provide support to the concerned actors for eliminating confining conditions through broader processes that will create a more stable basis for convergence and accommodation. It is not possible to build on a rotten basis. The role of the EU should be to support and not to impose. Within the context of deteriorating conditions and continuing instability, the effectiveness of the incorporation of ready-made models is doubtful.

In any case, to increase effectiveness the EU should pay greater attention to the Europeanization mechanisms. With reference to contagion, the EU should increase the demonstration effects by safeguarding the prosperity of its population and its democratic character, which means that the EU should rapidly proceed with the necessary internal reforms. With reference to consent, the EU should generate more contacts with Balkan domestic groups, allow their participation in a variety of programmes, committees and meetings, and in short create the networks that will facilitate the required learning and adaptation. Concerning control, the EU should maintain a strong international presence and create the necessary appropriate monitoring mechanisms and tools (e.g. regular reports). Finally, concerning conditionality, the EU should set realistic conditions that can be fulfilled, link them to visible inclusion and allow countries to proceed without being blocked by the lateness of others.

c) Remote accession horizon and intermediate period: To move away from instability, integration is necessary. And if the Balkans cannot be integrated in accordance with the current practices, then these practices should change or new ones should be introduced to permit Europeanization at a post-accession stage. The need of a parallel enlargement is pressing. Meanwhile, regional co-operation should be promoted but on the basis of the local needs and not of external wishes and economic interests. Working on common projects that could, for example, facilitate the physical integration with Europe (e.g. roads, rail connections) could bring people together. However, regional co-operation should not have an anti-room character and this require substantial institutionalization and a visible accession prospect.

d) The Balkans in Europe. Vaclav Havel, at a speech given to the European Parliament said that: *“The idea that there could forever be two Europes – a democratic, stable and prosperous Europe engaged in integration, and a less democratic, less stable and less prosperous Europe –is, [...] totally mistaken. It resembles a belief that one half of a room could be heated and the other half kept unheated at the same time. There is only one Europe, despite its diversity, and any weightier occurrence anywhere in this area will have consequences and repercussions throughout the rest of the continent”*<sup>29</sup>. A quarter of a century after the Helsinki accords, the map of Europe has changed to an unimaginable extent. Within the new context, no one denies the European geographical identity of the Balkans. However, there is a fluid dynamic around borders and while their traditional functions retreat (territorial dimension), other functions (functional dimensions) emerge<sup>30</sup>.

It is fairly clear that the EU promoted idea and borders of Europe are very much related to specific politico-economic systems and that Europeanization is, more than anything else, a process of systemic transformation. Keeping the Balkans outside the functional borders of Europe is dangerous as the longer it takes a country to join the EU, the greater the risks for the whole project to fail. Without an increased EU commitment, the outlook is poor for the Balkans; the vicious circle will remain, as well as the European border north of the Balkan Peninsula.

The success of the Balkans is tied to the integration of all states from the region into the EU and NATO structures. The disintegration in the past must be substituted with the integration into Europe based on values and interests in common. For all the countries in the region, regardless their level of integration into EU and NATO, the interests in common must be full integration into the European structures. For all of them the main interest for development is achieving enduring peace and stability. This can be achieved lastingly only in the framework of European and euroatlantic integration. The countries from the region should stop to be the problematic European question, instead they should occupy themselves in resolving the European questions. For this to be possible there must be a political will and determination among all the countries to step on this path.

<sup>29</sup> Havel, Vaclav, 15th June 2000, “Overcoming the division of Europe” (speech given to the European Parliament on 15th June 2000) in *Enlargement and the Finality of European Integration*, Zielonka Jan, Harvard Jean Monnet Working Paper 7/00, Symposium: Responses to Joschka Fischer.

<sup>30</sup> Ioakimides, P.C., 2001, “The extent and the borders of the European Space-New realities and challenges” in *The New European Space-Enlargement and the Geography of European Development*, eds. Andrikopoulou E. and Kafkalas Gr. Athens: Themelio.

This process will not be fulfilled unless there is a strong and successful leadership. As president Harry Truman said “Men make history, and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better”

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