

Politicisation of enlargement: The future of the Balkans in Europe

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Abstract

When will we join the EU? and 'Why is it taking so long?' These are recurring questions in euroenthusiastic circles in the Balkans, while, 'Can we afford it?' and 'Will I lose my job to an immigrant?' are recurring questions in eurosceptic and anti-globalist circles in the old EU member states. The question of enlargement has become politicised, something you can be for or against. In 1999 Alston and Weiler described European enlargement as a moral imperative (Alston and Weiler 1999: 672) and the Treaty of the European Union still prescribes that membership is open to any European country that is committed to promoting the European values of human rights, minority protection, market economy and rule of law (TEU art 49 and 2). The term 'enlargement fatigue', however, emerged after the 2004 enlargement, and thus raised the question 'should we continue enlargement' rather than 'how can we facilitate enlargement'. While the TEU has not changed in this respect, discourse in the member states and towards the candidate states have changed. Similar to the concept of European integration (Føllesdal 2004: 4), European enlargement has become politicized.

This article will consist of a historic account of the EU enlargement policy from the first enlargement to the latest. Reviewing the reasoning for changing the enlargement policies from the post-accession harmonization process of the 1970s and 1980s to the pre-accession process in the 2000s, and European conditionality policies in the Balkans, asking how and why they changed and what it means for a Balkan future in Europe. Throughout the analysis I will utilize Schulz-Forbergs theory on how the power of conceptualisations, such as the concept of enlargement, change over time, as

well as theories on European normative power and legitimacy indicators as described by Andreas Føllesdal, Alston and Weiler, and others.

Keywords: Enlargement fatigue, politicisation, EU accession, legitimacy, normative power

Introduction

"The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail."

(Treaty of the European Union (TEU) art. 2)

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.[...]
(TEU art. 49)

The legal foundation for European Union(EU) enlargement lies in article 49 of the Treaty of the European Union(TEU), and it relies on two concepts, the geographic or historic notion of a 'European state' – which has not been clearly defined – and political adherence to the common European values as prescribed in article 2. The provision for enlargement has changed somewhat from the article 98 of the treaty establishing the Coal and Steel Community in 1952, which welcomed any European state that could achieve unanimous agreement on enlargement with the existing member states. The political reasoning behind the provision in 1952 emerged from the debate between the federalists and functionalists, famously summarised by French president Schuman in his 1950 declaration *"Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity."* (Schuman declaration may 9th 1950). Gradually increased European integration in depth and in breadth, and thereby gradual enlargement, was thus very much part of the post Second World War order and the plan for development of European cooperation.

Whether the initial motivation for European cooperation is categorised as a new human rights and rule of law paradigm in the super-narrative of avoiding another war like the Second World War (Schulz-Forberg 2011), or as a security objective for Western Europe during the cold war (Kelstrup, Martinsen & Wind 2012), or both, the situation changed in the 1990s. Communism fell, a large number of newly democratised states emerged on the European scene, and of course, a devastating war took place in the former Yugoslavia, with crimes against humanity in category with those committed during the Second World War. These developments simultaneously challenged the union's legitimacy based in the war-prevention discourse, and provided the union with dozens of new potential member states and thereby increased geopolitical power. As a response, during the following two decades, the union has changed its enlargement procedures and continually debates its integration policies. For reasons of scope, this article will deal only with the enlargement process.

This article will consist of two background chapters, where the first part 'A Brief History of Enlargement' accounts for the changes in EU enlargement procedures from the first enlargement in 1973 to the latest in 2013 and the potential futures for candidate- and potential candidate countries. This is an internal perspective on EU enlargement and how it is influenced by intra-EU developments, economic and political. The second, 'Bulwark or Bridge State', reviews the influence of candidate states' national narratives on accession speed and process to the EU. This second chapter starts the theoretical part of the article, utilising Benedict Anderson's theory on national narratives and Joseph Nye's concept of soft power. This is an external perspective on enlargement, analysing how an imagined community's national narratives affects both the internal cohesion and its foreign policy space.

Two analytical chapters will follow this, the first accounting in brief for the theoretical synthesis, of Bourdieuan doxa and liberal international institutionalism and soft power, explaining the EU stance towards new member states. The second accounts for the theory on politicisation through theories on legitimacy and normative power, and insights from conceptual history.

Finally, this leads into the conclusion, which will reiterate the theoretical results and attempt to make some predictions about the specific challenges and timelines for the candidate- and potential candidate states in the Balkans to accede to the EU.

A brief history of enlargement⁹⁸

After the creation of the Coal and Steel union in 1952, the UK attempted twice to join the union, but in both cases demanding special agreements for import of commonwealth goods, and was in both cases rejected. The first successful enlargement was in 1973, when Ireland, UK, and Denmark joined the European Economic Community (EEC). At this time, harmonisation to the *acquis* took place in a five-year adjustment period following accession rather than before accession (Leonard 2005). In the following years, European cooperation changed with the Schengen Agreement in 1985, the Single European Act in 1986, and the Maastricht and Edinburgh treaties in 1992-1993 that established the pillar structure and gathered a lot of European cooperation into one organisation, the EU. The Amsterdam and Nice treaties addressed issues of democratic deficit within the EU by increasing the power of the European Parliament, making the union more supra-national and less intergovernmental in the process. The Amsterdam and Nice treaties from late 1990s and early 2000s also prepared the EU for an influx of new members (Schütze 2012). The second and third enlargements, including Greece, Spain, and Portugal, were similar to the first enlargement but with a longer transition period for the former dictatorships and more restrictions on workers' freedom of movement from Spain and Portugal (Leonard 2005).

The fall of the iron curtain in 1989-1990 resulted in an emergence of several new potential candidate states. In this period, Turkey also approached the EU in order to join a full customs union after having had its application for membership shelved in 1987. These prospects of many new potential member states including one very large, raised the issue of the EU's absorption capacity. The concept of EU absorption capacity was based in a worry that integrating new member states could damage not only their economies because they were not ready for full market competition, but also the economies of existing member states and the momentum of integration, political goals, and public opinion in the EU (Accession Process EUR-Lex - I14536). This led the harmonisation process to move. Instead of a transition period *after* accession, harmonisation now had to be concluded *before* accession.

⁹⁸ Elements of this chapter is based on chapter one in my master's thesis. Not previously published.

The 1990s also prompted internal challenges to the EU. First, the Maastricht treaty, which was to be ratified in 1992, was rejected in Denmark, which had per tradition put the matter to a referendum. Some analysts (Kelstrup, Martinsen & Wind 2012) mark this event as the beginning of an EU legitimacy crisis. Andreas Føllesdal has noted that the referendum results and court cases in Denmark and Germany concerning the constitutionality of sovereignty transfer challenged the permissive consensus legitimacy that the EU had relied on until then. The implicit consensus of the populations could no longer be assumed and thus the integration process – at least in depth – was politicised (Føllesdal 2004). This politicisation was also underway in the enlargement process – integration in breadth – but was addressed by the EU institutions with the changes to the accession process.

New accession process and enlargement fatigue

The 1993 summit in Copenhagen, where the European Council formulated the Copenhagen Criteria⁹⁹ for new member states, was the beginning of a new accession process. New candidate states now had to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria and harmonise with the *acquis* before accession and got assistance from the EU institutions to do so (European Council Press Release Copenhagen 1993 and Annex II). In order to ease negotiations on the harmonisation of national legislation with EU law, the *acquis* was divided into 31 chapters for the fifth enlargement in 2004.

In 2004, the UK among a few other EU member states opened its borders immediately to workers from the new EU member states as part of the already existing British managed migration agenda. The influx of workers was greater than expected and the government failed to prevent the popular discourse of the job-stealing Polish plumber, despite the migrants actually benefitting the UK economy and job market (Springford 2014). By 2007, the UK along with other EU members had introduced restrictions to workers from the newest EU member states Bulgaria and Romania

⁹⁹ Stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; 2) A functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces in the EU; 3) The ability to take on and implement effectively the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union (Conditions for membership, europa.eu).

(Szołucha 2010: 4). These restrictions now apply to Croatian workers as well. The restrictions on the movement of workers from new member states is not directly tied to increased conditionality for candidate states, but it is an indicator of a growing reluctance in existing member states to have more candidate states accede; a tendency also known as enlargement fatigue.

The term 'enlargement fatigue' is assumed by some scholars to be the result of a combination of insufficiently tight conditionality applied in 2004 and 2007, and the crisis of confidence following the 2005 failure of the constitutional treaty, the result of which included a lack of institutional capacity to admit new member states (Szołucha 2010). It is worth noting, though, that the Lisbon treaty in 2009 solved the institutional capacity problem, and addressed the constitutional crisis, but in member state discourse, enlargement fatigue remains in force. Likewise, the financial crisis, which hit the South and Southeast European countries particularly hard, has contributed to the discourse of absorption capacity and enlargement fatigue, but the European institutions' solutions were neither lesser integration or a slowdown of the enlargement programme. Therefore, enlargement fatigue is an internal EU issue in public discourse and domestic political programmes. It influences enlargement processes in subtle ways when central political figures gain popular support by stating that there is a pause in the enlargement strategies. However, these are often cheap comments, such as in 2014 when Juncker promised no more enlargements within the next five years (Juncker 2014). The real issue with enlargement fatigue is not that it delays enlargement, since there is no real indicator that this is happening. Current member states' demand for restrictions on new member states, however, is. Restrictions to workers' movement in Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, halted the economic benefits of membership for both citizens in these countries and potential receiving countries with high demand for workers.

For the latest enlargement, and this will apply to future enlargements in the post-Yugoslav states as well, conditionality has been strengthened. The number of acquis chapters are adjusted to fit each candidate state, generally in a manner that increases the number of chapters. Moreover, for the Balkan states, the Stabilisation and Association Process and Agreements (SAP and SAA) facilitate a longer road to membership with more financial and institutional support along the way. The Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) is a conditionality programme specifically for the Western Balkans. The EU provides financial and institutional assistance for economic and democratic reforms in return for cooperation with the ICTY, regional

cooperation, and harmonisation with the *acquis* (European Commission: Understanding Enlargement 2007), and the objectives in the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA) must be fulfilled before the country can apply for membership.

In short, the road to EU membership is longer for the Balkan states than it ever was for the states that joined in earlier enlargements, especially in first through third. This could be construed as unfair for candidate and potential candidate states, and within the discourses of enlargement fatigue or absorption capacity, it absolutely is, since the Balkan states simply have the bad luck of being late to the party.

There are, however, weighty arguments for why the EU has chosen to lengthen the road. Internal arguments include that the EU is a larger and more complex organisation than when it started, and it cannot afford any more reluctant member states such as Denmark or the UK which have opt-out and opt-in agreements and large continents of eurosceptics, currently concluding in the Brexit. The many different kinds of sovereignty transfer, through varied kinds of constitutions in the older member states also create legal problems with the primacy of European law, as shown in for example the Danish supreme court case (Maastricht case 1998) which reiterated a dualistic understanding of European law in relation to Danish law. The member states from the 2007 enlargement also proved vulnerable to the financial crisis and have not benefitted as much from EU membership as predicted, and while both Bulgaria and Romania have come far in combatting corruption and protecting democratic institutions, frequent untimely elections and corruption scandals have negatively affected the central and northern European discourses surrounding these countries. Thus, having learned from poor experiences from both old and new member states, the EU has strengthened conditionality within the rule of law, including prior to membership acceptance of EU law primacy, and provisions on sovereignty transfer that are specific and democratic.

Moreover, the post-Yugoslav states are in a specific position because of the succession from Yugoslavia, both legally, where there are still cases of unsolved jurisdiction, such as the Ljubljanska Banka dispute or maritime demarcation, and within transitional justice. Given the European narrative of the EU as guarantor of peace and the Balkan conflict history, transitional justice had to be part of the accession process, as did regional cooperation. In addition, the EU is incorporating the idea of collective rights to combat structural inequalities and discrimination (COM 2005) especially to facilitate integration of Romas in European societies (COM 2011/173). Because of the

constitutional tradition in Yugoslavia and the both positive and negative experiences with collective minority rights and coexistence of several cultural, linguistic and ethnic groups, the post-Yugoslav countries represent potentially very strong allies in the achievement of the goal of non-discrimination, but only if accession and integration is a success. In the meantime the SAAs go some way to allow the states to integrate gradually, gaining the benefits of membership as they harmonise.

Bulwark or Bridge state?

Narratives matter. In Benedict Anderson's analysis of states as imagined communities, the national narratives are key in establishing the state as an entity for which individuals will work, fight and die (Anderson 1983). However, a nation's narrative not only affects its internal cohesion, but also its external soft power. As Joseph Nye has noted in relation to American foreign policy, the policies, words and images that are successful in communication with a domestic audience can have negative effects on foreign soft power (Nye 2004). In American policy, the case of the 'war on terrorism' is an example of this: It mobilised both American institutions and voters, but foreign powers found it hard to work with the notion of a war of infinite duration, and the incarceration of foreign prisoners without trial damaged the American position as a human rights and freedoms frontrunner. Within European policies, national narratives and soft power are of even greater importance as the power of the EU relies for the most part on a combination of economic and normative power, and European enlargement is a tool for facilitating the strengthening of these two kinds of power. For potential candidate states, this means that a national narrative that furthers European normative power, by being in line with promoted European values (TEU art 2), will improve the state's position in the accession process, compared to a state with a national narrative that is in conflict with the promoted values.

Nicole Lindstrom has illustrated the power of the national narrative in foreign policy towards the EU in a comparative study of the Croatian and Slovenian narratives and path to Europe. Both Slovenia and Croatia tried to sell themselves to Europe as 'not really Balkan', but rather bridge states between the Balkans and Europe. This makes sense given the negative Balkan discourses in western Europe, coined

'Balkanism' by Maria Todorova in the 1990s (Todorova 1994). Slovenian discourse as a bridge state was built on liberal principles, making the Slovenian war of independence out to be one between the Balkan tide of nationalism and the Slovenian struggle for democracy and human rights. At the same time, Croatia tried to establish itself as a bridge state in cultural terms, a civilised Catholic country that acted as a bulwark against the unruly Moslems and Orthodox Christians. The Slovenian narrative was easier for the EU to swallow than the Croatian narrative because the EU, already containing many different cultures and several religious directions, had no interest in adopting a Huntingtonian 'Clash of Civilisations' understanding of its enlargement programme (Lindstrom 2008).

In short, it is central to acknowledge that European enlargement, although assumed as a 'moral imperative' by central scholars, has a power-political component as well. The union does not expand mainly to benefit the new member states, and despite the inherent discourse in the conditionality programme, membership is not a prize for states doing well economically and in incorporating rule of law principles. The EU expands for its own benefit, to ensure its security and strengthen its hard, economic, and soft power. The inclusion of new states expands the economy, and increases relative hard power capabilities, successful transition, growth and reconciliation in SAP candidate states under the influence of European conditionality policies, increases normative power legitimacy and institutional soft power.

In the following chapter, the theoretical background for these conclusions will be explained in further detail along with a presentation of the process of politicisation and how it affects the future of the Balkans in Europe.

Soft power in high and low politics

Alston and Weiler called in 1999 for a charter of human rights to be added to the Treaty of the EU, because, as they noted, it is difficult to export values when you have not yet imported them in a predictable and institutionalised manner (Alston & Weiler 1999). For Europe, human rights were always a high policy matter, a foreign and security policy goal. It is a central claim for this article that European enlargement is likewise high politics, a foreign security policy goal – not just for the potential member states where this is obvious, but also for the union itself. The belonging of a concept

within the field of foreign or security policy does not mean that the union does not adhere to it itself or promote it internally as a double-standard Europe narrative may suggest (Molbæk-Steensig 2015), but it does mean that it has the status of 'high politics'.

While Keohane and Nye(1977) and later Barnett(1990), have argued, quite convincingly, that the realist strict division of politics in high and low politics is increasingly artificial because foreign policy goals and actions very much influence low politics in terms of funding, votes, and narrative, and because domestic policies influence foreign policy legitimacy and thereby soft power, I will argue, that a status hierarchy remains. In a Bourdieuan understanding, the fields of foreign and domestic policy may be overlapping, but there remains a barrier to entry between low and high politics, where foreign policy takes place in specific ministries and through specific rules for legislation and executive power in the parliaments. Moreover, we see repeatedly, in the 1990s and 2000 in Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Macedonia et cetera, that through changing governments, economic and political crisis, the foreign policy goal of EU membership remained. Similarly, during the Cold War, the Scandinavian states kept their foreign orientation towards the West even though they in several cases had leftist coalition governments with one or more parties advocating socialist policies. Thus I hypothesise that foreign policy or 'high politics' will absolutely be discussed domestically, but the rate of radical changes in its goals and methods will be slower and less party political than within low politics.

European enlargement is security policy because of the union's reliance on soft power and normative power in its foreign policy. In Cooper's application of Nye's theory on soft power, EU soft power relies on four elements, the recipe for success, the safety in numbers, the seat at the table, and the concept of united in diversity (Cooper 2004). The concept of 'united in diversity' is a powerful narrative to attract potential new member states, it allows for integration specifically without threatening the national narratives while the safety in numbers element is the closest thing Europe comes wielding hard power. Enlargement engages the recipe for success and the seat at the table. The prospect of membership for close neighbours of the EU allows the EU to wield conditionality policies and keeps neighbouring countries oriented towards Europe, whether their pending membership is close – such as in the Balkans or in the further future – such as Ukraine. The recipe for success is the idea that European economic success and long lasting peace depends upon specific institutional solutions, which can

be exported. These include free trade and the rule of law, but also the institution of the Ombudsperson, parliamentarism and supranational human rights protection. The continued power of the recipe for success relies on successful enlargement and integration. Democratic failures and constitutional crises such as those occurring in in Hungary and Poland damage the EU soft power relying on the recipe for success. The Brexit, depending on its outcome and the political conceptualisation of it may also damage this part of EU soft power.

Thus far, European enlargement has been a stable part of European normative power and thereby of its security policy. When Alston and Weiler describes it as a moral imperative it is not a nominal judgement based in moral philosophy, but rather an expression that enlargement is a key component in the supra-concept of what European cooperation is and why it takes place. In a Bourdieuan terminology, the concept of enlargement has been doxa. In a conceptual history view, enlargement has been a hegemonic concept which was not discussed politically (Schulz-Forberg 2014) the question was how to enlarge, not whether. This changes with a politicisation of the concept.

Politicisation

In Bourdieuan terminology, a politicisation can be understood both as a concept's movement from the status of doxa to a lesser universally accepted norm, and as a topic's movement from one field, for example the legal field, to the political field. In a conceptual history understanding, a politicisation is a way for a concept to move from one area or field through appropriation, often morphing and changing through this move. Hagen Schulz-Forberg exemplifies this with the Wilsonian concept of self-determination after World War I that lost its conditionality on institutional maturity when it was imported by the former colonies (Schulz-Forberg 2014). Similarly, human rights, which are conceptualised in the UN as universal, interdependent and indivisible (Kofi Annan 1997), but in their appropriation by national law scholars they in some cases lost their indivisibility (Christoffersen 2014), and in their appropriation by the political right, they lost their universality as well (Messerschmidt 2016). The appropriation is not always destructive, in the case of the African Union, the concept of human rights was developed to encompass collective rights as well as individual rights,

and rights of particular importance in Africa, such as the right to development (African Charter on Human and People's Rights 1981).

The concept of enlargement has done exactly this, moved from the status of *doxa*, a key element in the purpose and *raison d'être* for the EU, to a politicised object that can be discussed. Such a politicisation could mean movement from high politics to low politics. This is seemingly in opposition to the high-low politics discussion earlier, but in the politicisation, the concept of enlargement has *morphed* (Schulz-Forberg 2014). Enlargement is no longer a simple political decision following a unanimous agreement by the current member states, it is a lengthy process of harmonisation to the *acquis* - Europeanisation. Specifically of Europeanising constitutions to rely on a monist understanding of legal plurality accepting EU law primacy, of harmonising institutions into the European parliamentary tradition, tradition for judiciary independence and checks by the Ombudsperson. The 'recipe for success' narrative that is part of European soft power is more prevalent than before 1990, and the accession process is a transformation of a candidate state into an institutionally speaking Western European state. The narrative of 'united in diversity' is of course still in place, but is applied mostly to cultural and linguistic elements, along with a general principle of subsidiarity.

Balkan enlargement – a conclusion

In relation to the Balkans, and in a foreign security policy view, very little has changed. Both the EU and the Balkan states have an interest in enlargement. For the EU, however, this is only true, if the new member states are not going to be problem states, within political values such as Poland, Hungary or Great Britain, or through reluctance such as Denmark, Sweden or Great Britain – again, or through economic and institutional unreadyness, such as Greece. In order to assure this, new candidate states go through a more thorough harmonisation process ahead of accession.

The narratives of absorption capacity or enlargement fatigue, and the increasing number of political turns towards protectionism and nationalism in old and new member states influence intra-EU policies and the in depth integration as well as strategies in the accession process, but the goal of enlargement remains the same. Unlike in the 1960s where France vetoed British membership, there is all but no risk

that membership of the Balkan candidate and potential candidate states will be vetoed. As such, amidst Eurosceptic discourse, and protectionist and nationalist discourse in both old and new member states, enlargement into the Balkans, remains a foreign policy goal for the EU. Accession of Turkey is another matter as it has been politicised from the beginning with the shelving in 1987 and overwhelming popular opinion against Turkey joining (Eurobarometer 2006). This is despite the fact that Turkey has been a member of the Council of Europe since 1949 and a member of the Western European Union since 1992 and the customs union since 1995. We may see EU soft power based in the 'seat at the table' element suffer from the prolonged non-delivery on the promise of membership to Turkey. Especially following the 2017 Turkish amendments to its constitution that go directly against EU conditionality, and could therefore indicate a geopolitical turn of Turkey towards the south and east rather than towards Europe.

To reiterate, politicisation of European enlargement has resulted in a morphing of the concept from a traditional international relations' alliance where the only barrier to entry was permission by all member states, to a process of harmonisation. This means, that European enlargement into the Balkans remains an implicit imperative, a key proponent of the conceptualisation of the European Union. Since the summit in Copenhagen 1993 and the start of the SAP in 1999, all Balkan countries are included in this implicit imperative. The morphing of European enlargement through the constitutional crisis of 2005, financial crisis in 2008 and Lisbon treaty with increased supranational cooperation in 2009, has transformed the enlargement process into a lengthy harmonisation process with a higher demand for institutional Europeanisation. In another light, the European soft power both relies on and to a higher extent wields the 'recipe for success' part of its soft power, and to a lesser extent the 'seat at the table' element.

For the Balkan euroenthusiasts, this is both good and bad news. It means that unlike the UK in the 1960s and Turkey in the 1980s until today, the Balkan states will not be rejected on cultural or power political grounds – for both the UK and Turkey, opponents of their membership have argued that they were too big and would upset the power dynamic in the union. On the other hand, complex harmonisation prior to accession is a fact of contemporary accession to the union, and the process is longer and more demanding than it was before. While the SAAs give access to some EU funds, specific trade agreements and institutional support, full benefit of membership for

regular citizens will not be achieved without the freedom of movement for people, goods, and services that follows full membership.

In order to achieve the fastest and smoothest enlargements process, the Balkan states, institutions, politicians, civil society groups and anyone else interested in enlargement, should remember that EU enlargement is not something the EU does to be nice to the Balkan countries, it is a mutually beneficial activity within high politics. The union expands to ensure its security and soft power. This means that formally fulfilling EU requirements while also catering to Russian interests, as long as Russia maintains its illiberal internal and external policies, will likely not result in speedy EU membership. The EU is an alliance of security as well as an economic union and a community of values.

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