

THE EU CONDITIONALITY AND EUROPEANIZATION OF POLICY CO-ORDINATION MECHANISMS IN THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES

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Almost two decades after start of the Stabilization and Association Process, the Western Balkan candidate and potential candidate countries are still making slow progress in meeting the obligations of EU membership. The main argument of the article is that stronger systems of policy co-ordination functionality in the governments of the Western Balkan countries can foster good governance and the EU accession progress. The article identifies implications of EU conditionality on the national level executives, progress of Europeanization in the Western Balkan countries and the role of policy co-ordination framework and provides comparative success experience from the EU Central and Eastern European member states. The author concludes that the Western Balkans faces combination of higher adjustment costs with lower confidence in EU conditionality and much more far-reaching and uncertain prospects for EU membership comparing to the EU CEE countries, whereas stronger systems of policy co-ordination functionality in the government should facilitate national reform process and the EU accession.

Key words: Europeanization; conditionality; national reforms; policy co-ordination; the Western Balkans.

1 INTRODUCTION

The experience of the Western Balkans, with the exception of Croatia, shows that a realistic prospect of EU membership in the face of political challenges has not been a sufficient reason for successful Europeanisation. The reform process in

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these countries has been slower and much more difficult than expected, and the impact of EU *conditionality* has been direct in only a few areas. In 1998, when the European Union (EU) Central and Eastern European (CEE) candidate countries were preparing to start EU accession negotiations, OECD SIGMA raised a number of development issues (OECD SIGMA 1998), which 20 years later remain relevant also to the Western Balkan countries. In particular, the main focus of the EU accession negotiations in the candidate countries should not be primarily on the country's desire to join the EU, but on its ability to meet the essential obligations of EU membership and implement needed reforms. Once the EU accession process is complete, the candidate countries become EU members. This is the beginning of a new phase of Europeanization and an important moment in the further development of the country. The EU membership can even be considered much more difficult and demanding compared to the EU accession process. The new EU Member State needs to develop a well-thought-out national EU policy on how to develop the necessary capacity to function successfully in its new status and, at the same time, to address the temporary challenges of a full transition to it. Absolute prioritization of EU membership risks underestimating the challenges ahead, thus weakening rather than strengthening the country's long-term operational capacity. Therefore, the experience gained in coordinating implementation of national EU policy during the EU accession should also be used as a preparatory attempt in the context of future EU membership, moving from a bilateral negotiating model with the EU to a multilateral model with the EU Member States.

The paper is focusing on national *executives* as they are in the most privileged position *vis-à-vis* the legislator, both in terms of absence of direct role in EU decision-making and available financial and human resources to follow all EU-related issues at an equivalent professional level as the government, and the judiciary, despite national courts at all levels have acquired new functions and become subject to the EU legal system. According to the theory of institutionalism (Cowles, Caporaso and Risse 2001), the work of public administration or its structures and their interaction are essential for the successful Europeanization. The executive is negotiating the reform of the treaty at the Intergovernmental Conference, setting out the EU's medium-term tasks during the EU Council meeting, which makes it possible to explain the greater involvement of the Heads of State and Government. In turn, the EU accession negotiations and the tasks set by the EU require the fulfilment of the conditions of EU membership and the implementation of the national EU policy directly from the executive branch. The EU also demands for managerial competence and central co-ordination trend towards a 'core executive' that has to co-ordinate the work programmes for other line ministries to fulfil the annual 'national programme for the adoption of the *acquis*' (Grabbe 2001).

The main argument of the paper is that stronger systems of policy co-ordination functionality in the governments of the EU candidate and potential countries in the Western Balkan will facilitate fostering good governance and the EU accession progress. First, the article identifies implications of EU *conditionality* on the national level executives in the Western Balkan countries and provides comparative experience from the EU CEE member states. Further on, the article settles progress of Europeanization and main impact on the process of national reforms in the Western Balkan countries. Finally, the role of policy co-ordination framework, quality of co-ordination instruments, institutional and functional capacity of various policy co-ordination models in Europeanization of the executives is argued.

2 THE IMPACT OF EU CONDITIONALITY ON THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVES

There are several main explanations for the candidate countries' adaptation to EU norms, namely the "*logic of consequences*" based on "*rational institutionalism*" and the "*logic of suitability*" based on "*constructive institutionalism*" (March and Olsen 2008). First, rational institutionalism involves cost-benefit calculations by both the EU institutions and the national elite. It addresses specific issues, such as the clarity of EU requirements, which is particularly problematic in the area of the rule of law, and the credibility of EU conditions in general. The process participants choose behaviours that increase their benefits and appropriateness in particular circumstances. The "*logic of consequences*" shows that the EU can successfully manipulate the candidate country's cost-benefit calculations through external incentives. The dominant mechanism for the Europeanisation of candidate countries here is *conditionality*, which is based on a reward strategy for the completed work (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004).

Credibility of conditions has played an important role in the process of Europeanisation, as it has successfully put pressure on EU candidate countries, at least in the case of the EU CEE member states. At the same time, the success of the *conditionality* generally depended on the direct and indirect costs of taking over the commitments in the countries concerned. Alternative tools to promote the adoption of EU norms, such as socializing and persuading national elites, have been less effective than *conditionality* of political accession to the EU (Sedelmeier 2006), although described as a unique EU strategy. At the same time, some researchers (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005) have been sceptical about the future prospects of Europeanization after the countries have joined the EU. EU rules were often adopted very formally in the EU accession process, and when *conditionality* eased after accession, their actual implementation could be suspended or even changed. Alternatively, even if Europeanisation was not slowed down after accession, social and other development processes could have contributed to its sustainability. Following the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, the EU also demonstrated "*enlargement fatigue*" and launched a debate on the impossibility of immediate further EU enlargement, thus undermining the credibility of its EU accession promise to the Western Balkan candidate countries (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2018). On the other hand, the new candidate countries also had to reckon with higher adjustment costs compared to the CEE countries due to their complex historical heritage, such as recent history of ethnic conflict, weaker statehood, democratic traditions, and so on.

Following the 2004 enlargement of the EU, either *conditionality* has become inapplicable or the conditions for its effective application have significantly deteriorated (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2018). Although *conditionality* is still the dominant mechanism of Europeanisation in the Western Balkans, its effectiveness has become less credible compared to the 2004 EU enlargement. For the candidate countries of the Western Balkans, the prospect of joining the EU has become a less credible strategy compared to the EU CEE member states' accession due to global economic crisis in 2008, revealing the deep interconnectedness of European banking and financial structure, economic contraction and social hardship, the EC's president's Juncker's enlargement moratorium in 2014 (Juncker 2014) and related EU's priority shift that fundamentally challenged also enlargement ambitions in the Western Balkan region and the EU member states' bilateral vetoes. As result, the EC has produced

several enlargement strategy upgrades: in 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2020. Each of these strategies incorporated aspects of the lessons learnt through previous enlargements and ongoing negotiations, but the approach developed in 2015 represented a fundamentally changed method of assessing the candidates' progress. One of main reason for this was the diminished credibility of the EU's conditionality linked to declining public support for enlargement in existing member states (Dimitrova 2016). Domestic societal acceptance decreased in the EU member states on the EU enlargement from 53% in August 2004 to 35% support in May 2012 and the highest levels of scepticism registered by Eurobarometer (2019) in Austria, the Netherlands, Finland, France and Germany. The EU's ever stronger *conditionality* created also a situation in which benefits for the Western Balkan national elites were likely to only be realized in the intangible future, if at all, given citizen opposition to further enlargement. The national elites, therefore, did not have the incentive to deal with fundamental economic and political problems that would result in reforms and undermine elite potential benefits (Dimitrova 2016). Finally, the EC communication reset the Commission's concrete proposals for strengthening the whole EU accession process again in February 2020 (European Commission 2020a).

There appeared different views among EU Member States on whether enlargement should continue and which countries should be admitted. Enlargement has become a matter of politicization at national level, and referendums on accession treaties with the new Member States can be held in existing EU Member States. These factors undermine the credibility of the EU's enlargement pledge (Woźniakowski, Schimmelfennig and Matlak 2018). Meanwhile, the expenses of national adjustment related to EU accession have increased. The Western Balkan countries have a worse initial situation, further and more expensive fulfilment of the conditions for EU accession. The EU has also become less attractive and able to generously support capacity building in candidate countries. This particularly relates to political and reform costs of Europeanization and national adjustment to the EU. The EU CEE member states were given historical "window of opportunity" – externally stimulated accession process with priority commitment on the EU side at high intensity within short period of time and nation-wide political consensus by national elite. Contrary to the EU CEE member states, the Western Balkan countries faced unsettled state building issues, fragmented different generation of elites for whom the EU may not be the only choice in terms of alliances or models (Dimitrova 2016), territorial disputes, neighbourhood relations alongside a weak regional co-operation, ethnic issues and less strong external pressure – EU enlargement 'fatigue' hampered, global economic crisis in 2008, the EU's priority shift to handle the financial crisis, recession, the "digestion" problems after the 2004, 2007 and 2013 enlargement rounds, the surge of Eurosceptics in the European Parliament, the crisis in Ukraine and the "new Cold War" with Russia, the refugee crisis and Brexit (Minić et al. 2016), leading also to lowering support of citizens for EU accession in EU countries. There has also been a larger role of international actors such as Russia or Turkey, neither of which played a part in the EU enlargement to CEE (Rupnik 2010). Despite Thessaloniki Agenda (2003), this has resulted into a lengthier and stagnating national reform process in the Western Balkan countries, introduction of a more demanding EU accession progress monitoring mechanism, interim benchmarks as a response to the lessons from the 2004-2007 enlargement related to setbacks on a substantive approach to fundamental reforms. The EU accession process in the Western Balkan countries has "simultaneously been endangered due to low levels of economic growth and increasing poverty and institutional ineffectiveness in the implementation of

European standards and values, accompanied by dwindling support for EU accession and accession-related reforms” (Minić et al. 2016).

Admittedly, *conditionality* is also losing its effectiveness as candidate countries move from accession to EU membership, shifting the focus of Europeanisation from institutional and regulatory to political and economic issues. The dominant Europeanisation mechanism of the 2004 EU enlargement countries has changed from *conditionality* to *hierarchical policy* implementation. It is based on legally binding EU directives and regulations, as well as the legal enforcement mechanisms of the EU Commission and the European Court of Justice. However, some policy areas are outside the scope of *hierarchical implementation*. Firstly, issues remain subordinate to the conditions for accession to the EU, such as the prospects for the accession of Member States to the euro and the Schengen areas. Secondly, there are areas of the so-called '*enlargement acquis*', such as democracy, the rule of law, minority rights and administrative capacity, which were part of the *conditionality* of EU accession but not or only to a limited extent covered by the EU *acquis* and cannot be legally implemented in EU Member States. In all these areas, where *conditionality* could still be applied, their effectiveness has also deteriorated (Woźniakowski, Schimmelfennig and Matlak 2018). This is mainly because the 2004 enlargement Member States have already received the most important EU reward in the form of membership, whereas the threat of excluding them from membership or the benefits it brings is not a plausible scenario. At that point, the EU neither had experienced “EU-exit” situation, nor the new EU member countries were undermining Article 7 of the Treaty on EU which are “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.” EU *conditionality* lost its effectiveness once candidate countries shifted from accession to the EU membership model and the focus of Europeanisation shifted from institutional and regulatory to political and economic issues. In policy areas, such as democracy, the rule of law, minority rights and administrative capacity, which were part of the EU accession *conditionality* but with weak EU competences, could have been offset by other international organizations (Ibid.). Nevertheless, enforcement efficiency deteriorated in these areas. Corruption, organized crime and rule of law were sensitive areas for some CEE member states, who consequently resisted too much emphasis on them. The very lack of *acquis* in the field of rule of law still makes enforcing basic democratic principles both difficult and sensitive, as current tensions between the EU and Hungary and Poland illustrate (Dimitrova 2016). As to date, according to Freedom House democracy index, Poland has regressed from consolidated democracy to semi-consolidated democracy but Hungary to transitional/hybrid regime (Freedom House 2020). Both countries have further escalated the deadlock in 2020 by holding back the EU's €1.81 trillion seven-year budget and the recovery fund if the rule of law conditionality is tied to the EU budget (Brzozowski and Radosavljevic 2020). Dimitrova and Toshkov (2009) analysing the administrative capacity of EU CEE member states, concluded on existence of a strong link between coordination mechanisms and the success of change. At the same time, however, it should be noted that even effective coordination mechanisms are not a sufficient precondition for taking over new EU commitments, especially in cases where there are significant political specificities and significant domestic political opposition.

Nevertheless, the candidate countries are trying to emulate the EU by recognizing EU rules and policies as an appropriate development solution. The weak credibility of *conditionality* in the current Europeanisation of the Western

Balkans has a corresponding effect on the reform process, progress and results of these countries (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2018). Weakly credible EU accession promises to the Western Balkans and the threat of sanctions against those who obstruct democracy explain the lack of progress in Europeanisation and the failure to prevent de-Europeanisation. Less attention is also paid to Europeanisation of *horizontal policy coordination mechanism* that is essential for national reforms' process.

Unlike the EU CEE Member States, the EU is paying more attention to the need for the Western Balkan countries to set benchmarks for the content of reforms to assess progress or failure in the implementation of democratic principles and the rule of law. The countries are required to demonstrate credible progress in a functioning judiciary, an effective fight against corruption, the protection of fundamental rights and the fulfilment of benchmarks in other key areas. In turn, the "*new approach*" announced by the EU in 2011 on setting priorities for justice reform in the candidate countries was perceived also as an effort to draw lessons of preceding enlargements and to escape initiating a verification mechanism after the countries join the EU. The "*new approach*" is based on the principle that issues relating to the judiciary and fundamental rights, as well as justice, freedom and security, "*should be addressed at the beginning of the accession process and the relevant negotiating chapters opened accordingly, based on action plans requiring a convincing accounting of outcomes*" (European Commission 2011, 5). In addition, the "*new approach*" provides for a benchmarking system to assess a country's readiness to open and close a chapter of EU accession negotiations and to introduce safeguards, in particular a general equilibrium clause, to suspend negotiations on other negotiations chapters if progress in sections 23 and 24 is starting to fall behind.

The EU has also stated that it will not see the countries of the Western Balkans as one potential "*round of enlargement*", but will assess each candidate on its own merits. This approach strengthened the credibility of EU *conditionality*, as less suitable candidates do not have the opportunity to hope to "*hide*" behind the strongest candidate countries (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2018). As a result, the *conditionality* enacted by the EU on the countries of the Western Balkans has become even more demanding and (partly) decisive. The EU has extended the "*enlargement acquis*" beyond the formal framework of the EU *acquis* and included requirements for fundamental state-building, rule of law, economic and administrative reforms. In some of these areas, the description of the conditions set has been improved, as well as the monitoring, feedback and sanction mechanisms of the candidate countries. On the one hand, stricter *conditionality* should improve the chances of successful Europeanisation, on the other hand, more demanding conditions could stimulate the implementation of the requirements for achieving the status of a member state of the EU, thus also strengthening the effectiveness of *conditionality*.

The costs of political and administrative adjustment for current EU candidates are higher than it was for EU CEE Member States. The countries of the Western Balkans have launched Europeanisation from a lower point of development and compliance with the EU level. Some countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, continued to struggle with statehood and state transformation issues. In terms of both democracy and governance capacity, the gap between the EU CEE and the EU has been significantly smaller than the gap between the countries in the Western Balkans and the EU (Börzel and Schimmelfennig 2017). Accordingly, the costs of adjustment at national level for the countries of the

Western Balkans created a much less favourable framework for Europeanisation than in the case of the EU CEE countries. First, the governments of the Western Balkans must relinquish the power and opportunities for greater benefits and adopt more restrictions in order to meet the EU's conditions, especially in the area of the rule of law, where the EU has strengthened its *conditionality*. Secondly, the countries of the Western Balkans have to meet the 'Copenhagen plus' conditions, which address past ethnic conflicts, sensitive issues of identity and thus involve potentially high political costs for governments. The implementation of this type of cost also requires significant and guaranteed compensation (Schimmelfennig, Engert and Knoble 2006; Schimmelfennig 2008). Third, the accession process is dominated by political conditions, which generally require higher adjustment costs. By comparison, while breaches of the political criteria were observed in only a few EU CEE Member States and largely ended before the start of EU accession negotiations, they affect practically all the Western Balkan countries and continue to affect the EU accession negotiations and the enlargement process as a whole. Accordingly, governments that perceive a high degree of uncertainty about joining the EU are unlikely to incur significant political and administrative costs in order to be fully compliant with EU membership and to facilitate Europeanisation. Finally, the *conditionality* of EU accession has not been able to stimulate sufficient and sustainable progress in the political development of the candidate countries in the Western Balkans (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2018). The fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo remain at the bottom of the Western Balkan candidate countries in terms of democracy and governance confirms the strength of statehood as a key precondition for Europeanisation (Börzel and Sprungk 2007) and the failure of EU *conditionality* in nation-building (Bieber 2011).

3 IMPLICATIONS OF EUROPEANIZATION ON THE NATIONAL REFORMS PROGRESS

The EU's relations with the Western Balkans have developed within the framework of the Stabilisation and Association process (SAP) started in 1999. They are based on bilateral Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA). At the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, the European Council stated: "*The future of the Balkans lies in the European Union*" (Council of the European Union 2003). This political commitment by the Heads of State and Government of the EU member states was seen as a strong impetus and promise that the region's future in the EU will be stable and prosperous. The EU membership is a long-term goal that can only be achieved through the hard, responsible and sustained work of all branches of state power. The government is fully responsible for determining the strategic path and the speed of the chosen path of progress. However, with the exception of Croatia, which joined the EU in 2013, seventeen years after the Thessaloniki Summit, the Western Balkan countries still remain far from full EU membership.

Although the SAA between the EU and the Western Balkans has entered into force in all countries in the region, only Montenegro and Serbia, and now Northern Macedonia and Albania, have finally reached the stage of accession negotiations with the EU. Bosnia and Herzegovina prepared its application for EU membership, but it then took almost two more years to answer the European Commission's (EC) EU accession questions. The EU and Kosovo held their first meeting of the SAA Council in November 2016, but Europeanisation has made minimal progress due to a long period of internal political stalemate.

The EU's interest in the EU perspective of the Western Balkans was confirmed at the European Council summit in March 2017, followed by new positive signals following the elections in Northern Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo and Albania, as well as by European Commissioner J. Hahn's and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy F. Mogherini statements, which became the basis for greater optimism about the region's future in Europe, including Kosovo. Nevertheless, EU accession talks involving the two leaders in the region, Montenegro and Serbia, have stalled, with the last chapters opening in December 2018. At October 2019 summit, EU leaders could not agree to start accession talks with Albania and Northern Macedonia. In Northern Macedonia, this concerned renaming of the country, which was largely done in such a way as to enable EU accession negotiations to begin. At the same time, national governments had a clear roadmap for action, such as the effective fight against crime and corruption in Albania and reduction of illegal immigration, which would pave the way for the opening of EU accession negotiations. In March 2020, the green light for EU accession negotiations with Northern Macedonia and Albania was finally given.

Stalling of EU accession talks with the Western Balkans due to number of reasons should turn inwards also to EU. First, the EU needed time after 2004 to properly internalize results of expansion which had substantial impact to EU institutions and resources. Furthermore, after the 2007 accessions of Bulgaria and Romania, debate expanded that neither country has done much to change the fundamental problems of governance and state capacity. Second, within the 'old' Member States, there were increasing calls to bound further enlargement and 'protect' the national interest by right to call future referendums on accession to the EU and politicizing enlargement issue in the domestic arena. Third, bilateral demands of separate EU member states such as Greece's dispute over name "Macedonia" and Bulgaria's vetoed decision to open EU accession negotiations with North Macedonia. Finally, complex internal responsibilities between the EU institutions: although the Commission plays a central bureaucratic role in the accession negotiations, this should be balanced with the Council and the European Parliament (O'Brennan 2014).

The speed with which the new elite wins parliamentary elections has been instrumental in the Europeanisation process. It determined the type and duration of political reforms, as well as the differences in the choice of institutions in each country, similar to the duration and scope of economic reforms. By comparison, the EU's most successful CEE candidate state was initially Slovenia, which was able to make the most progress in reforming its economy and whose political culture was very close to the norms and values of the EU's Western European member states. In the case of other EU CEE countries, reforms were complex, but there was an awareness of the need to achieve EU Member States' status as equal partners.

Contrary to initial expectations that the region's rapprochement with the EU will gradually introduce a liberal democratic form of government based on the rule of law, the Western Balkans have experienced a serious deleveraging of democracy and the rule of law over the last decade. According to Freedom House (2020), years of increasing state capture, abuse of power, and strongman tactics employed, for instance, by Aleksandar Vučić in Serbia and Milo Djukanović in Montenegro have rolled those countries over the edge—for the first time since 2003, they are no longer categorized as democracies in Nations in Transit. Democratic consensus average index in the Western Balkans countries has

reduced from 4.2 to 3.65 during 2004 – 2020 period (Kmezić and Bieber 2017; Freedom House 2020) and resulted into change from semi-consolidated democracy to transitional/hybrid regime. The process of EU approximation has become unrelated to progress in democratization. Despite the particular emphasis on democracy and human rights in the Western Balkans the methodology and tools of the EU have not brought the anticipated progress (Kmezić and Bieber 2017; European Commission 2020b). This change came at a time when the EU's accession process was delayed in disagreements between EU member states with Germany consistently supporting the expansion of the EU, while France traditionally been more sceptical (Demsey 2019) and geostrategic shift in the region with increased presence of authoritarian powers like Russia, Turkey and China.

A number of the Western Balkan countries are led by more authoritarian leaders with a moderate attitude toward political change. Although the liberal democratic governments of the Western Balkans seek to identify with the EU, they often contrast with the formal and informal elite power that continues to control the country in an effort to preserve its private economic and political interests. In addition, despite rapid growth at the beginning of the 21st century, effective economic reforms have often been hampered by the failure of regional economies to cope with competitive pressure from the EU's single market. In most of the Western Balkans, the economy is still underdeveloped, dependent on foreign aid, loans and remittances, and characterized by a high level of government intervention. Given current average growth rates, these countries will need at least several decades to reach the average EU GDP per capita (Sanfey and Milatovic 2018).

The countries of the Western Balkans are witnessing an expanded EU approach to the Europeanisation process. It focuses on state-building, security, the legislative process in areas other than the SAP, such as strengthening the rule of law, counterterrorism, organized crime, cyber security, migration, support for socio-economic development, energy, communications, transport, digitization and trade. For the countries of the Western Balkans, the EU's primary pressure on the executive is paramount, mainly through the establishment of comprehensive and centralized functioning policy coordination mechanisms. On the other hand, the level of external functional pressure is lower than in the case of 2004 EU enlargement countries. This opens up greater influence of national structures and party policies, which can affect the role and quality of national EU policy. The EU candidate countries lack political commitment, leading to a shift in government reform priorities and a low-quality reform process, thus jeopardizing the SAA implementation process. On the other hand, the EU lacks competence and resources to manage the complex process of state-building and transformation in the Western Balkans.

In addition to modest progress in meeting the economic criteria, there are significant other differences between the countries of the Western Balkans. The EC's assessment of compliance with the economic criteria puts Serbia, Northern Macedonia and Montenegro at the forefront of economic preparedness vis-à-vis other countries in the region. Albania lags slightly behind, with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo being the least prepared. Northern Macedonia is the only country that has reached a good level of preparedness for the development of a market economy. Serbia, Montenegro and Albania remain moderately prepared. None of candidate countries is adequately prepared to cope with EU competitive pressures. While Serbia, Montenegro and Northern Macedonia are

only moderately prepared, Albania has reached a certain level of preparedness. Potential candidate countries - Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo - are at an early stage of compliance with both criteria. According to EC assessments, none of the candidate countries has achieved a high level of legal harmonization (European Commission 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2016e, 2016f, 2016g).

TABLE 1: LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS OF THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES TO TAKE OVER THE OBLIGATIONS OF AN EU MEMBER STATE

Criteria	Montenegro	Serbia	North Macedonia	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Kosovo
Capacity to transpose EU <i>acquis</i>	Moderate preparedness in most areas	Moderate preparedness in most areas	Moderate preparedness in most areas	Conditional readiness in most areas	Conditional preparedness in many areas	Initial preparation phase
Public administration reform	Moderate preparedness	Moderate preparedness	Moderate preparedness	Conditional readiness	Initial preparation phase	Conditional readiness

The regional leaders - Serbia, Montenegro and Northern Macedonia - have reached only a moderate level of readiness to commit to the EU *acquis* in most chapters of the EU accession negotiations. Albania is moderately prepared in an even smaller number of areas, while Bosnia and Kosovo are lagging behind and are at an early stage of preparation. These indicators are clearly linked to the capacity of administrative systems to transpose and implement EU law, as a similar situation is with public administration reform. None of the countries has a well-functioning public administration. Serbia, Montenegro and Northern Macedonia are moderately prepared for public administration reform, while the rest of region's countries are lagging behind. The existing mismatch between the transposition and implementation of EU rules, which has to face high implementation costs, weak institutions and human resources, should also be considered as a significant factor.

One of the most important features of the Europeanisation of the Western Balkans is its level of dynamics. At first sight, this may not appear to affect the institutional framework for EU accession, but it is essential to look more closely. The length of the EU accession process allows the participating countries to experiment and change according to national political preferences. On the other hand, the length of the process does not change its overall sense, which means structural reforms that require full political commitment, consensus and strong administrative capacity in the public administration (Lazarević et al. 2014). Thus, a stable and strong institutional environment is a prerequisite for the EU accession process. Almost two decades after the start of the SAP, the candidate countries of the Western Balkans are still making slow progress in meeting the obligations of EU membership.

In the enlargement strategy published in 2018, the EC has pointed to the current lack of progress in the EU candidate countries (European Commission 2018a, 2018b). Contrary to the EU progress reports, the EC explicitly states that *"the countries of the Western Balkans clearly demonstrate the elements of state kidnapping, including the link with organized crime and corruption at all levels of government and administration"* (Ibid.). The EC also notes that the countries of the Western Balkans cannot be considered a functioning market economy, just as they do not have the capacity to cope with EU competitive pressures. The reasons for the almost twenty years of EU enlargement and the failure of the region's Europeanisation to bring about more than superficial reforms lie in both the local elites of the Western Balkans and the EU political *"elites"* responsible for EU enlargement - the failure of EU Member States to take responsibility for promotion of the reform process and its progress.

All EU candidate countries have the same enlargement policy, similar institutional arrangements and are potentially motivated by the same impetus. The countries have experienced a deep-seated system of state capture over the last two decades. This has hampered the consolidation of a liberal democratic society based on the rule of law. The EU *acquis* is anticipated as a "moving goal" and the rule of law held as one main precondition for the EU accession process, which has led to the EU's significant adjustment of its approach to EU accession negotiations in the Western Balkans. This has a direct impact on the institutional environment, as the reform focuses both on key executive bodies and the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. In addition, under the EU's enlargement strategy, the implementation of the EU *acquis* is given as much, if not more, attention than the transposition of the EU *acquis*. This approach further focuses on the reforms at the national level, which require the EU accession countries mainly results in terms of implementation. On the other hand, countries that have not yet started accession negotiations with the EU will have to identify the most important stages of the negotiations and the goals to be achieved in the initial stage. It will also be important to decide on a common national policy on transition periods. The experience and results of the EU CEE Member States vary widely. It is absolutely necessary to follow a single approach in the EU accession negotiations and not to conduct negotiations on a chapter-by-chapter basis. A good agreement in one sector may not be the best outcome for the country as a whole if it is well below the optimal level in another sector. In addition, there is a need not only for the structure of the EU accession negotiations, but also for a parallel system that monitors the fulfilment of all commitments made during the EU accession negotiations and later in the EU membership phase. Such a monitoring system must continue to exist after the conclusion of the EU accession negotiations and before the actual accession to the EU, as the EC also regularly and in detail monitors all the commitments made by the "new Member State" in the EU accession negotiations (Lazarević et al. 2014).

4 THE ROLE OF THE POLICY COORDINATION FRAMEWORK

As the EU accession process imposes a complex reform process on the candidate country's executive, it also requires close coordination at the political and administrative level between line ministries and other public administrations (Ibid.). The development of new national policies in line with EU policies, the transposition of EU legislation into national legal systems, the maintenance of political dialogue with the EU, the planning and implementation of EU accession assistance, and the preparation and conduct of EU accession negotiations are separate processes that public administration should handle (Ibid.). They need mutual coordination between different government institutions, as well as consultations with various external players such as the EU and its Member States. In addition, a number of horizontal reforms are needed to stimulate the government's ability to guide the EU accession process and prepare the country for its obligations. Therefore, development of new institutions, structures and procedures in the EU accession process takes place under conditions of high intensity, as the process of (re)construction of public administration institutions at all levels must take place in parallel and co-ordinated. Institutional arrangements for EU accession are governed by the principle of institutional autonomy: each country can choose its own institutional settings depending on its political and administrative culture and political preferences. However, an effective policy coordination mechanism is needed and, as the practice of the

Western Balkans shows, the models used by these countries are based on the experience of EU CEE Member States (Ibid.).

For a candidate country with insufficient knowledge on EU level and weak form of policy coordination, it would be advisable relying on a single central-level institutional capacity that sectoral institutions perceive as authoritative body on EU issues. At the same time, officials from line ministries dealing with different policy areas, which are also covered by the chapters of the EU accession negotiations, should improve their knowledge and skills. From their qualitative participation in the EU negotiating teams, the outcome of the negotiations in specific chapters can to a large extent be determined. In other words, a clear understanding of EU law and the EU integration process increases possibilities to handle EU negotiations successfully. The development of a comprehensive and realistic National Program for Legal Approximation (NPLA) in accordance with the future requirements of the EU integration process facilitates public administration institutions to prepare well for the implementation of the tasks set by the EU accession negotiation process. The analytical and organizational skills acquired in preparing the NPLAs, as well as in monitoring their implementation, benefit to the smoother operation of the policy coordination mechanism (Engelman and Mrak 2013).

By developing policymaking and coordination mechanisms in the early EU accession process, candidate countries are preparing to act as proactive members of the EU Council from the very first days of membership, thus making the most of their rights and benefits as EU members. Therefore, in order candidate countries could be well prepared for both the challenges and the prospects of EU membership, the EU accession period, and in particular the accession negotiations, should be used as a preparatory time for establishment of effective policymaking and coordination mechanisms that could be operational also in the EU membership framework.

The effectiveness of coordination mechanisms is one of the most important challenges that countries also face in the process of public administration reform. The OECD SIGMA assessments and EU progress reports reaffirm the capacity of the Western Balkan governments to develop and coordinate policies in a sound and evidence-based manner. Namely, the strength of central institutions to develop strategic capabilities depends to a large extent on whether the resources at their disposal give them time to develop strategies and common development policies. The weakness of policy coordination mechanisms leads to many problematic issues and inter-ministerial conflicts, which require the intervention of central government bodies. This, in turn, limits the time resources that governments can devote to policy and strategy development. In such an environment, even with the most effective policy coordination mechanism, the end results will not be effective, as the policies proposed by the line ministries and coordinated by their departments will be of poor quality, thus not achieving the expected results. Evidence-based policies are important, especially in the EU accession negotiations. This is crucial for achieving, for example, transition periods and exceptions for the implementation of specific policies. In comparison, in the context of the 2004 EU enlargement, it was also observed that in some countries central policy coordination structures emerged as "*islands of excellence*" and positive coordination practices and experiences were not used to fully disseminate and implement them in the overall national policy coordination system. This constraint meant that even if the country was successful in the EU accession negotiations, thanks to the intensive efforts of the institutions

responsible for EU accession and coordination, the reorganization of these bodies after accession risked depriving sectoral policy coordination bodies of their ability to continue EU membership effectively (Ibid.).

Coordinating the content of government policy proposals is the most complex function, not only in the public administrations of many EU countries, but also in the Western Balkans. Therefore, in order to ensure qualitative coordination of national and national EU policy, it is necessary to have a specialized institution in the centre of government or in another executive institution, which is able to provide it qualitatively, regardless of the institutional status.

TABLE 2: INSTITUTIONAL ALLOCATION OF CENTRE OF GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS IN THE GOVERNMENT

Country	Centre of Government lead institution	Other institutions performing Centre of Government functions
Albania	Office of Prime Minister	Ministry of Finance (MoF), Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Ministry of European Integration and Foreign Affairs
Bosnia and Herzegovina	General Secretariat of Council of Ministers	Legislative Office, Directorate of Economic Planning, MoF, Directorate of European Integration
Kosovo	Office of Prime Minister	MoF, Ministry of European Integration
North Macedonia	General Secretariat of Government	Legislative Secretariat, MoF, European Affairs Secretariat , Ministry of Information Society and Administration
Montenegro	General Secretariat of Government	Legislative Secretariat, MoF, European Integration Bureau
Serbia	General Secretariat of Government	Public Policy Secretariat, Legislative Secretariat, MoF, Serbian Office for European Integration

Source: OECD SIGMA (2015).

Although all governments in the Western Balkan countries have set up institutions to provide a policy coordination function, they all face difficulties in analysing and managing policy content. This is due to a number of reasons: (1) an administrative culture in which officials do not address policy issues; (2) legal interpretations in which the responsibility of sectoral ministries for sectoral policies is considered to be decisive if the central government institutions have the right to intervene only on the basis of a specific legal reason and (3) limited staff capacity and unclear division of tasks between departments (Vági and Kasemets 2017, 14). The comparative analysis also shows that all government centres in the region have established coordination functions (although not in all cases operational) such as: (1) coordination and approval of the preparation of government strategic priorities and work program; (2) coordination of policy content proposals for government decision-making; (3) coordination of policy availability and public sector resource planning; (4) coordination of government communication activities to ensure a unified government message and (5) maintenance of government-parliamentary relations and national EU policy coordination.

The problem of effective coordination experienced in the EU CEE Member States in the initial phase of EU accession was rooted in national political and administrative elites. As a result of the influence of the political level, senior public administration officials were in a particularly precarious position. This includes a lack of management skills and competences in governing bodies, a lack of civil service ethics and values, a politicization of the civil service, as well as underdeveloped coordination structures and fragmented adoption of international experience. It was based on a lack of experienced, skilled and knowledgeable staff who can provide high-quality policy advice and support to

the government. Evidence of this is the fact that a Secretary of State or a senior official is often replaced by a change of government and head of government. In the Western Balkans, on the other hand, the successful adoption of EU rules at the "macro level" is severely limited by the low administrative capacity of the implementing authorities. There is no evidence of a significant impact of Europeanisation on the public administration arrangements and practices. In contrast, entrenched patterns of informal institutional behaviour, combined with deficient investment in infrastructure and human resources, intensify significant differences between the transposition and implementation of the EU *acquis*. At the "micro level", the EU *acquis* implementation in many cases faces informal practices based on enduring conventional political and administrative cultural patterns that are resilient to the process of adapting the "new" rules created by the EU. This leads to incomplete EU implementation in cases where the responsible authorities choose to apply the rules selectively.

For the coordination of national EU policy, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Macedonia have set up a separate independent or Centre of Government affiliated secretariat under the Head of Executive or Deputy Executive. Albania and Kosovo have established a separate ministry in the executive. Contrary to the experience of the EU CEE Member States, the Western Balkans are also driven by specialized ministries working towards the introduction of new, well-functioning policy coordination and governance practices.

TABLE 3: MODELS OF CENTRAL NATIONAL EU POLICY COORDINATION STRUCTURES

State/structure	Institutional model		
	Separate ministry	MoF	Central executive body
Albania	-	European and Foreign Affairs ministry	-
Bosnia and Hercegovina	-	-	Directorate of European integration
Kosovo	European Affairs ministry	-	-
North Macedonia	-	-	Secretariat of European Affairs
Montenegro	-	-	European Integration Bureau
Serbia	-	-	European Integration Bureau

Some countries in the region have opted for one policy coordination model, while others have changed over time. For example, Montenegro, when activating the EU accession process, shifted the policy coordination centre from the head of government to the MFA, then established a separate Ministry of European Affairs, but in February 2018, returned the policy coordination centre under the Head of Government. Albania included the Ministry of European Affairs in the MFA, but in Kosovo transformed the Office for European Integration under the Head of the Kosovo Government into a Ministry of European Affairs. The reasons for the institutional changes have been explained either by the formation of a new coalition of government, the optimization of the institutions, their functions and expenditures, or the influence of certain personnel at the political and leading administrative levels.

TABLE 4: ADVANTAGES AND RISKS OF POLICY COORDINATION MODELS

Model	Advantages	Risks
Central coordinating institution (Centre of Government)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong central position ▪ "Island of Excellence" ▪ Specialization in performing policy coordination functions ▪ Combined national EU policy coordination functions ▪ Opportunity to influence line ministries to improve policy-making capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dependence on the support of the leading political force ▪ Risk of duplication of policy coordination functions with the General Secretariat of the Government (GSC) ▪ Competition with the MFA ▪ Limited policy-making function
European Affairs Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Political leader (minister) working exclusively on EU issues ▪ Institutional and functional autonomy ▪ Building an "Island of Excellence" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EU affairs are not a classic portfolio of a line ministry ▪ Equal institutional status with other line ministries ▪ Dependence on the strength of the leading political force
MFA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Political leader (minister) with guaranteed political authority ▪ Ability to speak "in one voice" with external players ▪ Rationalization of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preference for "external" aspects of the Europeanisation process ▪ Challenge to take on the role of national reform coordinator ▪ Dependence on the central government level and the position of the head of government

Source: Lazarević et al. (2014)

The key requirements for an executive policy coordination function in the Western Balkans, regardless of the model chosen, are strong political ownership of EU accession and the related national reform process, effective national reform programming and monitoring mechanisms, and the government's ability to speak with one voice. An effective reform planning and monitoring mechanism involves both the political and the administrative level. Sound and professional administrative structures remain a key precondition for an effective EU accession process. While it is crucial that the administrative bodies responsible for accession to the EU receive political support, it is essential that they are free from undue political interference, as the Europeanisation process requires a high level of professionalism and specialization (Ibid.). At the same time, it is important for the institutions to develop a permanent model of cooperation, which is necessary not only for the specific needs of accession to the EU, but also for the day-to-day effective functioning of the executive power. This is particularly the case at a time when the EU's functional pressures have eased and policy coordination structures and their functions need to be reorganized.

5 QUALITY OF CO-ORDINATION INSTRUMENTS

Policy coordination in the Western Balkans in the coming years will be guided mainly by two closely related processes: the coordination mechanism for the EU accession negotiation process and the continued implementation of the NPLA, which is an important document in the EU accession period. Policy coordination will not be successful without full coherence between the two processes, as the public administrations of the candidate countries have a number of very important interlinked tasks to play. These include the *screening* process of national legislation and the detailed preparation of a common EU accession negotiating position, and the continuation of the policy impact assessment process; regular review, updating and implementation of the NPLA; planning of EU and other financial assistance; preparation, planning and implementation of EU accession funds; organization of institution building exchange programs; regular work in the Stabilization and Association Committee (SAC) (Mayhew 2005, 20).

The advantage of the NPLA is that it is a national document that is fully controlled by the government. The NPLA also plays a very important role in the EU accession process. Apart from the EU accession negotiation process, also from the EC's point of view, the NPLA is the most important tool that determines the approach to policy implementation activities and planning of financial support. The NPLA is also a direct link to the EU accession negotiations, as it helps to target aid to sectors with significant development challenges, such as agriculture and the environment. Ideally, the government's accession to the EU negotiating position should be fully reflected in the measures described in the NPLA. For example, if a government decides to meet all veterinary and phytosanitary standards before joining the EU, it would be expected that the NPLA would find a complete list of measures needed to achieve this goal, with details of their implementation and financial costs.

While it is clear that there must be full coherence between the EU's accession negotiating positions and the outcome of the negotiations, coherence with national budget planning is equally important. As a general rule, the costs of the position papers of the various chapters of the EU accession negotiations need to be financially assessed to get an idea of the total costs of implementing the EU *acquis*. A realistic assessment of the financial resources required is essential to ensure that the activities envisaged in the NPLA do not become a 'wish list' without real coverage. The NPLA is also a key instrument for implementing EU financial assistance, including pre-accession funds such as IPA.

The NPLA must also be integrated with the positions adopted in the context of the SAC. For example, decisions taken by the SAC must be reflected in the measures approved by the NPLA. The work of the SAC should not be underestimated during the EU accession negotiations either, as a number of important issues between the Western Balkans and the EU will continue to arise in the coming years, directly related to the interpretation of the SAA implementation.

6 INSTITUTIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL CAPACITY OF POLICY COORDINATION

The policy coordination functionality primarily concerns the development, implementation planning, management and monitoring of the national EU policy strategy. Policy coordination has a number of key tasks to ensure the country's effective membership of the EU: (1) to develop policies that reduce loopholes in law and are inherently coherent, cost-effective and do not create unnecessary additional regulation; (2) develop policies that are in line with overall government priorities; (3) develop policies that are financially sound and sustainable; (4) to ensure the coherent implementation of decisions; and (5) to support the principles of integrity in government work by promoting transparency in decision-making, interaction with the legislature and consultation with the non-governmental sector. The possibilities for candidate countries to influence the transition periods for the transposition of the EU *acquis* in the EU accession negotiations are limited (Mayhew 2007). In order to develop a strategy for accession negotiations, it is necessary to identify priority needs. It is therefore important that the candidate countries also give serious consideration to the economic and social impact of the EU *acquis* before the start of EU accession negotiations. For example, transposing the environmental and

social policy *acquis* into the EU *acquis* can be extremely costly for both the private and public sectors. At the same time, ensuring the effectiveness of policy coordination requires an integrated approach to policy planning, a precise division of competencies between institutions in planning and monitoring, compliance with planned deadlines in institutions, alignment of budgetary resources with priorities and implementation of OECD Sigma public administration principles developed in 2014 and updated in 2017 (OECD Sigma 2014; OECD Sigma 2017).

All the Western Balkan countries have introduced a policy coordination function, but the number of staff involved in the central coordinating body varies between 42 and 106 (Vági and Kasemets 2017, 16).

PICTURE 1: NUMBER OF STAFF INVOLVED IN THE CENTRAL POLICY COORDINATION BODY (DECEMBER 2015)



In general, the policy coordination function is well resourced compared to other public administration functions. There is no correlation between the country's Europeanisation progress and staff numbers in the central policy coordination bodies. For instance, countries already negotiating EU accession do not operate higher number of staff for policy coordination than countries that have not yet started the negotiation process. There is also no correlation between the increase in the number of policy coordination staff in cases where the state has established a separate Ministry of European affairs in comparison with another type of policy coordination organization. At the same time, foreign technical assistance target institutions have limited capacity to absorb foreign assistance over time and ensure the sustainability of its results. The target institutions do not have sufficient staff qualifications or resources to coordinate the implementation of the SAA, which is also associated with high staff turnover.

Separate structural units have been established in the line ministries, which serve as contact points in EU-related matters. They have added value to the coordination mechanism, serve as a coordinating working group on EU issues in the line ministry, liaise with the central coordinating body and sometimes play a special role in planning and monitoring the implementation of EU financial support. It is important for these departments (European integration units or departments) to ensure the right balance in cooperation with other line departments of the ministry. They should not take over the "regular" role of other bodies responsible for certain EU policies, as they are responsible for a specific

area of national policy in which the relevant EU policy should be included. In addition, there is an unavoidable risk that EU policy coordination functions overlap with those of national strategic planning and policy coordination units in line ministries, unless line ministries optimize the implementation of these policy coordination functions in a single body as in Slovenia. Often, accession to the EU is an incentive to set up various new administrative units and institutions, which also poses new risks to the effectiveness of policy coordination mechanisms if financial and administrative resources are restricted. The experience of the EU CEE member states in this situation suggests a rational approach to building new institutions and optimizing existing functions, which can be a more effective solution than adopting mechanical institutional success models of other countries.

7 CONCLUSION

The main difference between the EU CEE member states and the enlargement of the Western Balkans is the blend of lower confidence in EU *conditionality*, higher adjustment costs and more complex domestic political situation. EU's *conditionality* most essentially appears to be linked with its credibility. The Western Balkans countries began to Europeanize from a much lower point of compliance with EU standards, facing the additional preconditions of joining the EU, but in return with much more far-reaching and uncertain prospects for EU membership. This difference has decelerated Europeanisation throughout the region, particularly in countries that have experienced weak statehood and have been embroiled in bilateral disagreements. Nevertheless, experience of some countries in the Western Balkans also shows that compliance is possible even on highly politicized issues, as long as the *conditionality* offered by the EU is credible.

Europeanization is not possible without the prospect of real EU membership (Maniokas 2011, 1). Therefore, the further impact of Europeanisation on the countries of the Western Balkans and the process of their reform also depend to a large extent on the prospect of their accession to the EU and capacity to implement necessary national reforms and institutional change. As in the EU CEE Member States, the EU's influence on adaptation capacity-building is mainly in the form of formal institutional change, which is, however, insufficient to change informal institutions and behavioural practices. Experience of the EU CEE countries tells that stronger systems of policy co-ordination functionality in the government facilitate fostering good governance and the EU accession. Therefore, a number of recommendations based on Europeanization experience of CEE countries can serve for improvement of the policy coordination mechanisms to boost national reforms and institutional change in the Western Balkan countries:

1) *Stimulating the overall process of Europeanization*

(1) Continue to implement the necessary reforms, regardless of progress in the EU integration process and at a time when the EU is not prioritizing EU enlargement policy, focusing on Europeanization related national reforms; (2) economic development must be one of the main development priorities of the countries in the region, as the EU's enlargement policy is a framework for national and economic modernization and aims to prepare the country for competition in the EU common market; (3) public administration reform is a cornerstone of other national reforms and is one of the basic conditions for the EU accession process and can be more successful and lasting if implemented on the basis of defined operational principles governing the process; (4) to propose

and/or support a larger number of joint bilateral or multilateral projects with the Western Balkans countries aimed at drawing on the specific experience of the analysed CEE countries, which can provide direct experience of the EU accession process; (5) intensification of regional cooperation and the development of a common national position, which would also strengthen the position of the Western Balkan countries in their relations with the EU; (6) contribute to the EU enlargement through precise arrangements as a mutually beneficial process for the EU and the Western Balkans, such as resolution of the EU's energy security challenges and the fight against organized crime; (7) work systematically to persuade the EU Member States to embark on the next stages of their EU integration process, based on a decision on the tangible results achieved and image of the countries; (8) the EU Member States need to forge closer links with the state-building process in the Western Balkans, including the transfer of knowledge and experience, at both national and regional level, developing infrastructure, promoting further democratization, good governance, the rule of law, the fight against organized crime, corruption, the judiciary power and socio-economic development; (9) the "denationalisation" of EU enlargement policy, focusing on a new communication strategy to address the issue of "accession fatigue" in the Western Balkans and emphasizing the EU as an opportunity to stimulate effective and democratic nation-building in the region and (10) the way in which the EU progress reports are communicated needs to be adjusted, using it as a powerful tool for civil society and media to assess achievements and failures of each government, and to stimulate competition between candidate countries to implement the necessary reforms.

2) Improving policy coordination and reporting on the implementation of the SAA (including EU accession) and bilateral cooperation with the EU

In order to improve and Europeanize the policy coordination mechanism in the Western Balkans, it would be advisable to: (1) improve the effectiveness of government in coordinating, monitoring, reporting and evaluating SAA implementation and the EU accession process, ensuring its sustainability and linking to joint government and parliamentary work plans; (2) further strengthening the role of coordinating bodies for the European affairs to ensure that all relevant aspects of EU accession are properly scrutinized and reported to the government in all submitted documents; (3) improve the coverage of inter-institutional working groups to ensure that they are properly involved in EU decision-making; (4) strengthen the parliamentary oversight mechanism for the EU accession by improving Parliament's accountability on the SAA related issues, in particular the EU's integration, economic and trade priorities; (5) introduce effective and practical standards for consultation with civil society in sector policy areas and (6) establish a more structured dialogue with the various EC services and provide systematic feedback.

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POGOJNOST EU IN EVROPEIZACIJA MEHANIZMOV ZA USKLAJEVANJE POLITIK V DRŽAVAH ZAHODNEGA BALKANA

Skoraj dve desetletji po začetku stabilizacijskega in pridružitvenega procesa države zahodnega Balkana in potencialne države kandidatke še vedno zelo počasi napredujejo pri izpolnjevanju obveznosti članstva v EU. Avtor prispevka izhaja iz predpostavke, da lahko močnejši sistemi funkcionalnega usklajevanja politik v vladah držav Zahodnega Balkana spodbudijo dobro upravljanje in napredek pri pristopu k EU. Članek opredeljuje posledice pogojenosti z EU na najpomembnejših funkcijah na nacionalni ravni, napredek evropeizacije v državah Zahodnega Balkana in vlogo okvira za usklajevanje politik ter ponuja primerjavo uspešne izkušnje držav članic EU iz srednje in vzhodne Evrope. Avtor sklene, da se Zahodni Balkan sooča z višjimi prilagoditvenimi stroški, z nižjim zaupanjem v pogojenost z EU ter veliko bolj daljnosežnimi in negotovimi možnostmi za članstvo v EU v primerjavi z članicami EU iz srednje in vzhodne Evrope, medtem ko bi morali močnejši sistemi za usklajevanje politik v vladah državah Zahodnega Balkana olajšati postopek nacionalnih reform in vstop v EU.

Ključne besede: evropeizacija; pogojnost; nacionalne reforme; usklajevanje politik; Zahodni Balkan.