ABSTRACT

Regional picture of Western Balkans traditionally represents mosaic of “troublemakers” – an unfinished European project in terms of transition and integration. Ever since the conflicts in early nineties of XX century, countries in this region have been limited by numerous constraints (their own and regional), producing very modest positive effects in terms of growth, building good mutual relations and thus fulfilment of European partners’ expectations. EU has been actively involved primarily in stabilisation process and then in reconstruction process since 1995. Cornerstone of this process lies on basic principles of the European strategy for Western Balkans, clearly defined in 1999 and incorporated in Stabilisation and Association Process. Basic principles of the process are: perspective of membership which is the most important driving force for European Integration Process and the region’s development, countries of the region should improve their relations while bilateral relations of each country with the EU must account for specific social, economic, political and institutional conditions of each country. Today, countries in the region accept these principles differently. The first principle is broadly accepted and European integration is a part of every governmental development program or policy in the region. The application of other two principles i.e. of more intensive regional European integration has shifting dynamics and the process is developing much slower than expected.

Keywords: Democratization, Enlargement, EU Membership, Stabilisation, Western Balkans

INTRODUCTION

World system has been dramatically changed in last few decades, mostly due to the intensive changes in world environment (Luhmann, 2004). The world environments have rapidly changed from the end of the Cold War to series of several regional conflict that have effected overall political, social and economic system.

At the end of the Cold War, one fundamental premise of the European security architecture changed, but with the subsequent political,
social and economic liberalization in the former communist bloc, the risk of conflicts between states was greatly diminished as most of countries had aspired to EU membership since the early 1990s (Braniff, 2011). From the viewpoint of policy makers in Brussels, actual and potential conflicts are likely conflicts outside its boundaries than within them (Wolf, 2011).

In the early 1990s the state of Yugoslavia began to disintegrate, a process which is still not fully resolved and has resulted in a series of civil wars in the Western Balkans. After destructive events occurred in the 1990s, the Western Balkan countries started their political and economic rehabilitation and reconciliation. Balkan reconstruction became a pressing issue for the international community after the wars of the 1990s (Montanari, 2005). The EU played the key role in the region’s rebuilding efforts, influence and shape the nature of state, society and foreign relations, as it utilized the promise of membership as a vital tool to exert its influence (Brafin, 2009, 2011). As the EU started to pursue an integrative strategy, and now, the region has gradually been transformed from its “Balkanized” form into a “Europeanized” (Yava, 2011).

In the last decade, the EU’s Balkans policy has moved from an agenda dominated by security issues related to the war and its legacies to an agenda focused on the perspective of the Western Balkan states’ accession to the European Union, to which there has been a formal political commitment on the part of all EU Member States since the Thessaloniki Summit in June 2003 (Abramowitz et al. 2011). In that regard the European Union created the main instrument for so-called Western Balkans countries, the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), launched in 2000. Stabilisation and Association Process is the name for comprehensive, strategic approach of the EU to the countries of the Western Balkans, fostering regional cooperation, political dialogue and economic development among regional countries. Western Balkans – term used in the EU and encompasses Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Serbia and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244).

SAP has made a framework for support comprehensive changes of Western Balkans societies and economies in European integration process. The economic recovery started after 2000, where economic growth was represented with average growth rates in most countries in the region between 4-5%, mostly based on post depression recovery, decrease of political risk and improved opportunities for trade and investment (Delevic, 2007).

SAP was an important tool for development of democratic politics institution in the Western Balkan region and prospects of European integration contribute in substantial manner to implementation of democracy values and pluralism. There are number of authors arguing that in many historical cases there has been a link between war and democracy, as Charles Tilly emphasizes, “Surges of democratization often follow violent interstate wars” (Tilly, 2004).

Building of strong and democracy institution is one of the preconditions for success in this process, so the construction of precondition for their implementation and success application is development of good institutions, able to implement and develop European values as democracy, rule of low, respect to minorities. However, countries in the Western Balkan region have shown different terms of institutional and administrative capacity to enforce political decisions and to get society-wide compliance with formal rules and laws (Tilly, 2007).

Socio-economic changes of the Western Balkans, as set of a young states and democracies, have been fostered with the process of European integration as the most important drivers towards overall changes in the region. That is what this article is focusing on the process of European integration as the most important process towards the peace in the region and its successful transformation to democratic and prosperous states. In this process, Stabilization

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