



Advocacy Strategy for the EU Integration of the Western Balkans *Guidelines*



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Integration of the Western Balkans**

Guidelines

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Foreword

The Western Balkan countries do not have an advocacy strategy aimed at promoting and speeding up their EU accession. Although there is growing awareness of the need for such a strategy, it has transpired that the WB government institutions have only communication strategies targeting specific groups within their national borders: decision makers and initiators/multipliers of public awareness of the EU accession process, youth, or opponents of integration. However, these strategies have not been oriented towards the relevant target groups in the EU. *The Advocacy Strategy for the EU Integration of the Western Balkans - Guidelines (ASWB)*, developed by eight Western Balkan and Visegrad Group think tanks¹, is the first initiative of the kind.

This document aims at supporting and facilitating EU enlargement to the Western Balkans. It offers practical guidelines for national administrations, parliaments and civil society organisations (CSOs) in order to encourage their advocacy efforts to accelerate accession to the EU and contribute to the development of positive perceptions of the region in the Brussels institutions, EU Member States, as well as the Western Balkans. The future regional and national advocacy strategies stemming from these guidelines are expected to synergise with other regional mechanisms/leverages for the faster European integration.

With a view to fostering the EU integration of the Western Balkan countries, the Guidelines argue that the key impediments are to be confronted through joint advocacy endeavours. They propose that a civil society coalition (the WB6 Advocacy Group) leads on the development of the regional strategy and coordinates its implementation. The authors offer guidelines on the preparation of the regional strategy and its elements: goal-setting, delineation of the desired outcomes and required courses of action, identification of the key target groups and the messages tailoring the courses of action to the groups' particularities, and case-building. They outline typical advocacy products regarding the particular goals and recommendations on their delivery through selected communication channels. The Guidelines propose activities and suggest ways to map and evaluate the stakeholders, which is prerequisite for establishing and maintaining productive relations with them. Mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the realisation of the outcomes are proposed to ensure the flexibility of the strategy and facilitate its fine-tuning during implementation. The recommendations are addressed to the future planners and coordinators of the strategy.

The ASWB is expected to increase the amount of attention paid to the advocacy/communication dimension of the WB countries' EU integration strategies, as well as improve their communication with Brussels and the EU Member States. Moreover, it can facilitate the concerted advocacy of the specific achievements and interests of numerous regional organisations and initiatives in the Western Balkans.

Most of the 180 interlocutors interviewed during the development of the ASWB emphasised the need for a common advocacy approach to the EU integration of the WB. In their opinion, such an approach will be effective only if the WB policy makers address the EU institutions and Member States with "one voice".

Limited WB administrative capacities for EU affairs and official advocacy channels require the involvement of and partnering with other actors in the region as well, notably the think tanks, academia, business community, media, etc., in advocating a faster and more successful EU integration process. Numerous regional initiatives and organisations, at both the political and expert levels, can contribute by mobilising their resources and

¹ Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS), Foreign Policy Initiative (VPI) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, European Movement in Montenegro (EMiM), European Movement in Serbia (EMinS) in the Western Balkans; and, the Center for European Neighborhood Studies of the Central European University (CEU CENS) in Hungary, the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) in Poland, the Research Centre Slovak Foreign Policy Association (RC SFP) and the Czech Institute for European Policy EUROPEUM in the Visegrad Group (V4)

channels of influence. These mostly underused unofficial channels of advocacy can prove to be a valuable resource in the endeavour to accomplish the goal all WB countries are striving towards – EU accession. The ASWB provides a good framework for a comprehensive strategic approach interlinking official and unofficial actors.

The Visegrad Group's experiences during EU accession and in defining their joint positions in influencing decision-making in the EU after they joined, as well as the communication/lobbying strategies of regional organisations and networks (i.e. RCC, SEETO, RESPA, NALAS, REC, BCSDN, CDRSEE)², were of particular relevance during the preparation of the ASWB. The ASWB is informed by abundant literature on EU enlargement, public attitudes and accession experiences collected and analysed during the desk research stage.

The ASWB has been made available to the interested public on a web portal and at promotional events and debates with key policy makers in the Western Balkan countries, the V4 capitals and Brussels.

Jelica Minić
Editor

² See the List of Acronyms

Advocacy Strategy for the EU Integration of the Western Balkans - *Guidelines*³

1. Introduction

1.1. *The Case for a Regional Advocacy⁴ Strategy*

Compared with the previous rounds of enlargement, the circumstances under which the European Union (EU) is supposed to enlarge, have never been worse. The EU is facing multiple internal crises. The requirements imposed on aspirant countries have become more complex – more chapters, interim benchmarks, the equilibrium clause and additional emphasis on the economic criteria. The process has been further encumbered by the five-year enlargement moratorium and marginalisation of the issue on the European Union agenda, reduced focus on the Western Balkans (WB)⁵ at the EU institutional level and the nationalisation of the enlargement policy following the Lisbon Treaty, coupled with declining support for further enlargement and rising Euroscepticism in the Member States.

On the other hand, the EU accession process in the WB 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.

In order to fuel the European integration process and manage the anti-accession influences in such circumstances, the aspiring Western Balkan countries will inevitably have to clearly strategise and intensify their advocacy activities to give impetus to the enlargement process in Brussels and the EU Member States, on the one hand, and facilitate the EU accession process and speed up the related reforms at home, on the other.

Diverse activities geared at influencing policies and practices of decision-makers and generating public support – such as lobbying, communication campaigns, promotion of policy alternatives, work with the media and other similar activities – have been designed and implemented by Western Balkan governments since the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, with a view to fostering their European Union integration, as will be presented in the following chapters. These individual countries' advocacy endeavours are in compliance with the "regatta" principle, and, as the comparative experiences of the Visegrad Group (V4) countries' accession processes demonstrate, remain indispensable for fulfilling a number of EU accession prerequisites (i.e. gaining support of the domestic publics, resolution of country-specific issues, etc.). The national approach to advocacy activities, as opposed to a joint, regional approach, is better suited to achieve certain country-specific goals in the three accession stages, which the countries in the region have been completing at different paces. These three stages cover the periods before, during and after the negotiations, whereby the typical goals include e.g. increase in public support for specific accession-related reforms or countering country-specific opposition to formal accession to the Union, etc. As will be shown, the regional approach focuses on overcoming the region's common rather than the country-specific obstacles to EU integration.

³ Compiled by *Ana Marjanović Rudan*, Organization and Program Development Consultant, Praxis Development Consulting Office, Belgrade

⁴ The term *advocacy* in this text refers to various activities of state and non-state actors, aimed at influencing policies and practices of the decision-makers and raising awareness and instigating support of the broader publics.

⁵ The term *Western Balkans* in this text refers to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo* (This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro and Serbia.

However, there are two key reasons why relying solely on national advocacy efforts will not suffice for the Western Balkan countries' further progress towards European integration and why they should adopt a joint, regional approach to address the obstacles they share:

- Firstly, the nationalisation of the European enlargement process resulting from the Treaty of Lisbon prompted the need for the aspiring EU members to address enlargement and accession-related concerns of decision- and opinion-makers in both the EU and the individual EU Member States, and to work on winning their unyielding support. In practice, this translates into the need to mobilise additional human and financial resources, often beyond the reach of individual Western Balkan countries going it alone. Fortunately, the phenomenon of “cluster perception” of the Western Balkans among the decision- and opinion-makers in the EU and EU Member States, who tend to view it as a single region with shared problems and do not distinguish between the individual countries, facilitates a joint, regional, “cluster response”. The “cluster response” to a “cluster perception” is a cost-effective way to achieve those advocacy goals related to the shared, regional impediments to EU enlargement (which are, as will be demonstrated, largely linked to the marginalisation of enlargement on the EU agenda, growing dissemination of the disintegration narrative and the unfavourable image of the region). The resolution of other problems hindering the region's EU integration, such as open bilateral issues with the EU Member States, can also be facilitated by an intensified regional approach and greater involvement of the regional structures.
- Secondly, regional cooperation among Western Balkan countries is the *sine qua non* of their European perspective largely because of their recent conflicts and lingering bilateral issues. More importantly, and aside from being an accession requirement, regional cooperation is the trump card in the hands of the Western Balkan countries, as it is becoming “a key element for the stability of the region and of the whole of Europe”⁶, especially in light of the unprecedented security challenges posed by large-scale terrorist threats, continued migration along the Western Balkans route and increased meddling of Russia and other non-EU actors in Balkan affairs, but also in light of the emergence and spreading of the EU disintegration narrative, additionally fuelled by the outcome of the United Kingdom referendum.

While cost-effectiveness is the practical reason for a joint approach to advocacy, the second reason – the added value of regional cooperation in the grim global circumstances – reflects the essence of the European idea. Moreover, for the first time in recent history, the Western Balkan multi-ethnic region has found itself in a situation where its countries are not confronted, but on the same side, focusing on the same goal – EU integration. This historical precedent provides a favourable climate for rallying national energies, resources and knowledge to overcome the hurdles faced by the entire Western Balkans and maximise the region's strengths and opportunities in the accession process.

In view of all these considerations, a synergetic, regional approach to advocacy is proposed in order to efficiently address the obstacles to EU integration shared by the six Western Balkan countries and facilitate their individual accession. The below guidelines have been developed to initiate the development of a full-fledged regional advocacy strategy for the integration of the Western Balkans in the European Union and its implementation.

⁶ According to *Final Declaration by the Chair of the Paris Western Balkans Summit*, 4 July 2016.

1.2. Development, Coordination and Implementation of the ASWB and the Relationship between the Regional and the National Advocacy Strategies

Much like the guidelines, a full-fledged advocacy strategy for the European integration of the Western Balkans should be co-authored by the think tanks from the six countries of the region (rallied in the WB6 Advocacy Group), while peer reviews and advice can be sought from think tanks in the V4 countries, boasting valuable pre- and post-accession advocacy experiences that can prove extremely practicable. The full-fledged strategy should be prepared in consultation with the entities in the six countries that are to participate in its implementation: line ministries and other government institutions, civil society organisations and think tanks involved in EU integration, the national and regional media, as well as business associations. In addition to the national actors, the authors of the strategy should also consult with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and other key regional initiatives that already have elaborate regional strategies⁷ and developed links with the European Union and can provide both mentorship during the strategy preparation stage and direct support during the implementation stage. Since the development and the implementation of the strategy will require donor support, advice should also be solicited from donors highly involved in the region. Support for this initiative by the Western Balkan governments and the key regional initiatives – indispensable for the effectiveness of the envisaged advocacy efforts – should be sought and secured within the framework of a high-level platform, such as the South East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) or the Berlin Process.

While the implementation of the strategy will entail involvement of actors from regional initiatives and state, civil and business sectors, the guidelines propose that the regional group of think tanks developing the strategy also be tasked with the coordination and operational management of its implementation. The guidelines propose that the group be established as a collaborative platform of the six think tanks (the WB6 Advocacy Group) and that the direct involvement of the regional governments and the key regional initiatives be formalised through the Group's Advisory Committee.

Apart from the regional advocacy strategy, which will address the EU integration obstacles shared by the Western Balkan countries, unrelated to the particular contexts of the individual countries, it is also recommended that the WB countries develop national strategies supporting EU accession, to tackle the country-specific goals in different stages of accession. The regional and national strategies should be complementary and their harmonisation should be secured by the think tanks participating in the WB6 Advocacy Group, in their respective countries⁸. Attaching priority to the regional approach is recommended in case of overlaps, for the listed two reasons – cost-effectiveness, and the leverage of regional cooperation in light of the new security challenges and the disintegration narrative.

⁷ Notably, the Southeast Europe 2020 Strategy developed by the RCC, together with the Secretariat of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) 2006, Energy Community Secretariat, Southeast Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO), Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) and others.

⁸ It is advisable that the six think tanks participating in the WB6 Advocacy Group also initiate the development of the national advocacy strategies.

2. Strategy Development Guidelines

2.1. Impact, Goals, Projected Outcomes and General Courses of Action

In the context mentioned in Section 1.1, the envisaged impact of the ASWB would be to foster the European integration of the Western Balkan countries through a joint, regional advocacy enterprise. In order to define the ways in which to achieve the desired impact, we intersected the causes of the current stalemate of European integration common to the six WB countries (derived from answers to the following question: What are the shared obstacles standing in the way of the WB countries' accession to the Union?) and assessments of the possible scope of impact of the advocacy efforts as such (derived from answers to the following question: What can be realistically achieved by advocacy activities?). This exercise helped single out three clusters of problems and their causes that can be meaningfully addressed by advocacy mechanisms:

- (1) Marginalisation of enlargement on the Union agenda, which can be attributed to the decision-makers' overwhelming focus on the emerging problems threatening the EU's stability and future – the protracted financial crisis and 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, Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partners (TTIP) negotiations, Brexit, etc.
- (2) Decreasing support for EU enlargement in the Member States, in the context of the post-Lisbon nationalisation of the enlargement policy, caused by the negative image of the region and emergence of the EU disintegration narrative⁹. The former stems from the predominance of negative perceptions of the Western Balkan region (war legacy, lack of the rule of law, poverty, widespread corruption, slow reforms) and from the sporadic and mostly negative news coming from the Western Balkan countries; doubts about the EU's future and integrative capacity can largely be ascribed to the same reasons that led to the marginalisation of the enlargement issue on the EU agenda¹⁰.
- (3) Lesser support to European integration in the WB countries resulting from the incoherent official discourse¹¹ about the EU and the decision-makers' modest enthusiasm for regional cooperation, as a tangible and immediate manifestation of commitment to EU integration. Notwithstanding formal commitments to EU accession, daily politics in the WB countries are characterised by ambivalence¹² underlying the official EU-related discourse, along with the reluctance to engage full-heartedly in regional cooperation. This state of affairs is reflected in the regional mainstream media, and perpetuated by their conservatism and inclination to follow the lead of the powers that be. The habitual failure of the mainstream media to provide functional information on the EU, their lack of interest in reporting on

⁹ The decrease in support is also caused by internal reasons (in-country political tensions, election cycles, emergence of Eurosceptic forces), and by bilateral issues between the Member and aspirant states; however, the internal reasons are beyond the immediate scope of an advocacy campaign, and the reasons stemming from bilateral, country-specific issues, should be addressed within the national strategies, and only indirectly within the proposed regional strategy, through the promotion of regional cooperation.

¹⁰ The dissemination of the disintegration narrative linked to the upsurge of Eurosceptic forces is beyond the scope of this advocacy strategy.

¹¹ The term *official discourse* in this text pertains to public addresses and statements by decision-makers, institutional agendas of the ministries and state institutions relevant to EU integration, everyday messages politicians communicate either by words of actions, etc.

¹² In terms of simultaneous efforts of WB decision-makers to strike a balance between their relations with the EU and with other, non-EU actors, and to appeal to both the supporters and opponents of EU accession at home.

accession-related successes and progress in regional cooperation¹³, in turn, shape public opinion and support for EU integration in the Western Balkan countries¹⁴.

We outlined the following three goals of the regional strategy with a view to applying advocacy tools to address the particular causes of these three clusters of problems:

- (1) To reinvigorate the issue of enlargement to the WB on the EU agenda;
- (2) To increase support for enlargement in EU Member States, in the context of the nationalisation of the EU enlargement policy;
- (3) To increase the pro-EU orientation of the official discourse and commitment to regional cooperation among Western Balkan countries.

In order to achieve these goals, we have defined the outcomes leading to their attainment, the required courses of action and the target groups. Given the nature of the outcomes – change in attitudes, perceptions and behaviours – we recommend that the ASWB be developed to cover a three-year period.

Table 1: Goals, Outcomes, Courses of Action, Target Groups

Goals	Projected outcomes – leading to the achievement of the goals	Courses of action	Target groups
(1) Reinvigorate the issue of enlargement to the WB on the EU agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-makers in the relevant EU institutions are willing to take specific actions necessary for moving the WB enlargement issue up on their agendas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-step approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Step 1. Indirect action: dissemination of the narrative of further enlargement as part of a solution to the Union’s inherent tensions and present-day challenges ○ Step 2. Direct calls to action: dissemination and promotion of specific proposals of alternative policies and practices 	(1) Decision-makers in the relevant EU institutions (2) Opinion-makers with influence in these institutions
(2) Increase support for enlargement in the Member States, in the context of the nationalisation of the EU enlargement policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased support of the EU Member States’ governments to enlargement to the Western Balkans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-step approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Step 1. Improvement of the WB countries’ image by countering negative perceptions and exploiting positive ones; dissemination of the further enlargement narrative as part of a solution to the Union’s inherent tensions and present-day challenges ○ Step 2. Direct calls to action: dissemination and promotion of specific proposals of alternative policies and practices 	(3) Decision-makers and (4) Opinion-makers in key Member States ¹⁵

¹³ More on the media in: Minić, Jelica, “April 2016 – Media Image of the Western Balkans”, in *Western Balkans between Geography and Geopolitics*, ed. Simurdić, Milan, *Foreign Policy Papers No.1, 2016*, European Movement in Serbia Forum for International Relations, Belgrade, 2016, pp. 17-27. Available at: http://www.emins.org/uploads/useruploads/forum-mo/Foreign-Policy-Paper_1.pdf

¹⁴ Other factors causing a drop in support to EU accession in the WB countries, such as *patience fatigue*, rise in Eurosceptic forces, increasing Russian influence and others, are to be addressed by the national advocacy strategies, as these factors require country-specific approaches due to the particularities of the local contexts.

Goals	Projected outcomes – leading to the achievement of the goals	Courses of action	Target groups
(3) Increase the pro-EU orientation of the official discourse and commitment to regional cooperation among Western Balkan countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final outcome: The official discourse in the WB countries clearly reflects their pro-EU orientation and the WB countries demonstrate increased commitment to regional cooperation Intermediate outcome: public (media-driven) discourse in the WB countries resonates the commitment of elites (decision- and opinion-makers) to European integration and regional cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In parallel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouragement of the Western Balkan decision-makers to prioritise EU accession and regional cooperation on their agendas and in their public addresses, and intensify their engagement in the existing regional cooperation initiatives, through direct calls to action – specific proposals of policies and practices Raising awareness of opinion-makers about the finer points of EU integration, their role in shaping public discourse and generating public support for accession and the related reforms, regional cooperation as a formal requirement for accession, existing regional initiatives, mechanisms and strategies – through the promotion of EU integration and regional cooperation 	(5) Decision-makers, and (6) Opinion-makers in Western Balkan countries ¹⁶

2.2. Target Groups, Messages and Case-Building

To proceed with planning activities needed to achieve the projected outcomes, it is necessary to begin by mapping and researching the defined target groups – decision-makers and opinion-makers in the European Union, EU Member States and the Western Balkan countries¹⁷. Obviously, as the scope of any strategy’s outreach to target groups is determined by the availability of resources, it is advisable to prioritise them during the planning stage. Prioritisation should not, however, result in excluding any target groups, as all are instrumental for achieving the goals; rather, prioritisation should be performed within the target groups, among their particular members (who will be known only upon the completion of detailed mapping and research). For instance, not all Brussels-based think tanks, but only the ones wielding the greatest influence, will be invited to a study trip to the Western Balkan countries; not all Member States, but only the ones opposing enlargement the most, will be targeted by the media campaign. The criteria on which to base such prioritisation will include the possible influence of a particular target group to

¹⁵ Counter-intuitively, a recent research of the European Public Centre found that “public opinion on Balkan enlargement does not seem to be a dominant factor for the official national positions of EU capitals on the dossier” (see: Balfour R., Stratulat C., *EU member states and enlargement towards the Balkans*, European Policy Centre, Issue Paper No. 79, July 2015, p. xii)

¹⁶ The ASWB should focus on decision- and opinion-makers as sources and key influencers of public discourse, while the national advocacy strategies should target broader audiences to secure popular support.

¹⁷ The impact of the advocacy strategy will be achieved by the direct engagement of the decision-makers. However, since their action is greatly influenced by various opinion-makers (not only the media, but influential think tanks, academics, eminent public figures, etc. as well), the opinion-makers are directly targeted through advocacy activities, as they hold the keys to changing the decision-makers’ policies and practices, which this strategy is seeking to effect. Due to this direct link, opinion-makers are addressed as the strategy “target groups”, not as “other stakeholders”, who can be engaged in the activities, but changing their perceptions and resulting behaviours is not among the goals of this strategy.

the attainment of the goals (high or low), but their pre-disposition towards the attainment of the goals (affirmative, ambivalent or opposing) should not be an eliminatory factor (only a corrective one). This is because nurturing the support of the proponents of enlargement is as important as reversing attitudes, perceptions and behaviours of its opponents and because addressing the concerns of a low-influence opponent should not be neglected.

The mapping of the target groups' members will entail the preparation of a database with names, positions and contacts of the individuals in the institutions we are aiming to affect, and such a database should be put in place at the very beginning of the strategy preparations and updated twice a year. The database should also contain key findings of the research of the target groups' members, conducted to shed light on the particular targets, such as their circumstances, concerns, priorities etc., which will enable the authors to tailor their advocacy products and select communication channels that will affect the particular counterparts most efficiently. Also, the research will indicate the best timing (based on organisational cycles and other circumstances) to approach particular targeted counterparts.

The following is a preliminary list indicating the typical institutions that belong to the particular target groups, within which individual contacts should be identified, researched, catalogued in the database and targeted by the activities. The list should be compiled in the early stage of strategy development.

The role of the advocacy strategy is to encourage and inspire the target groups to action. EU decision-makers should be inspired to refocus the EU agenda on enlargement, decision-makers in the Member States to support enlargement to the Western Balkans and decision-makers in WB countries to take actions to reaffirm their commitment to EU accession and intensify regional cooperation. This can be achieved by (a) change of narrative and (b) direct calls to action, with the support of the stakeholders (described in Section 2.3).

To define the content of the narratives and direct calls to action, the messages that will be communicated to the members of the particular target groups (aimed at changing the narratives and/or at instigating direct action) are to be clearly defined, reflecting the nature of the desired changes in the target groups' policies, behaviours and practices. The messages will be "packed" in advocacy "products" (letters, publications, etc.) and delivered via communication channels (i.e. one-on-one meetings, roundtables, media, et al).

Table 2: Preliminary List of Institutions Targeted by the Strategy

Target groups	Institutions – preliminary list
In the EU:	
(1) Decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European Commission (representatives of the Directorate for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, representatives of other Directorates dealing with international issues – security, trade, energy, connectivity, development etc.), European External Action Service, European Council (Foreign Affairs Council), European Parliament (MEPs, rapporteurs, committees), IFIs, Western Balkan Investment Framework, etc.
(2) Opinion-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think tanks: Friends of Europe, European Stability Initiative, Carnegie Europe, Centre for European Policy Studies, European Council on Foreign Relations, etc. Eminent international and Brussels media, such as the Economist, Financial Times, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, International Herald Tribune, Le Monde, New Europe, Balkan Insight, Politico, etc.
In Member States:	
(3) Decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliamentary committees, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, executive authorities specialising in EU issues

(4) Opinion-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think tanks focusing on EU policies and the WB region: the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, German Council on Foreign Relations, European Institute at the London School of Economics, French Institute of International Relations, the College of Europe, Humboldt University, Southeast Europe Association, etc. • Think tanks focusing on the Member States' domestic policies • Eminent media (traditional and online, including individual influencers on social networks) with national and regional coverage
In the WB countries:	
(5) Decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parliamentary committees, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, executive authorities whose remits include EU issues, pro-EU and ambivalent political parties
(6) Opinion-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional think tanks, such as The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group • Think tanks in the six Western Balkan countries (primarily those in the WB6 Advocacy Group) • Eminent media (traditional and online, including individual influencers on social networks) with national and regional coverage (Balkan Insight, Vicinities, Al Jazeera, N1, EurActiv, European Western Balkans, etc.)

The messages should not be vague or banal; nor should they mechanically reflect the desired outcomes. Instead, they should be logical statements, backed by evidence, which will provide the sophisticated counterparts (as is the case in this strategy) with good reasons to reconsider their attitudes and alter their behaviours. The wording of the messages should be simple and brief and tailored to the particular stakeholders to ensure that their actual concerns are properly addressed. The messages should be based on the analysis of the overall circumstances (political, social, economic, etc.) and identified pre-dispositions (perhaps most easily accomplished through SWOT analyses¹⁸), and formulated with the aim of contributing to the achievement of the projected outcomes.

During the implementation of the regional advocacy strategy, the exact way in which the messages within particular products will be phrased and adapted to the particular communication channels will be determined only once the circumstances of each individual stakeholder are reviewed. However, during the further development of the strategy, the umbrella messages should be defined on the basis of the desired outcomes and suit the broadly defined target groups. Umbrella messages are, therefore, raw, semi-products, and should be refined and backed by evidence before they are used in specific advocacy products. Below are the illustrations of the umbrella messages that will be additionally elaborated during the further development of the strategy.

Finally, before proceeding to “packaging” and “channelling” the messages (planning the activities), evidence must be built for the messages that will be communicated – each statement and each request has to be backed by solid arguments. The process of case-building involves gathering and analysing information, desk research and other methods requisite for corroborating the statements and promoting action.

¹⁸ National chapters of this edition contain preliminary SWOT analyses of WB EU integration by WB and V4 think tanks and should be consulted in the strategic planning process.

Table 3: Illustrative Umbrella Messages

Target groups	Courses of action	Illustrative umbrella messages ¹⁹
<p>(1) Decision-makers in the relevant EU institutions</p> <p>(2) Opinion-makers with influence in these institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step 1. Indirect action: dissemination of the further enlargement narrative as part of a solution to the Union's inherent tensions and present-day challenges • Step 2. Direct calls to action: dissemination and promotion of specific proposals of alternative policies and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the new narrative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Politically, the EU cannot allow a black hole in its South East flank in the long run, because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WB has an important geostrategic position (it is surrounded by the EU and NATO) – rendering it attractive to competing great powers - WB has high security relevance (migration, cross-border organised crime, terrorism) – rendering it relevant to the security of the EU countries - WB is a transit region, with an important position regarding European energy security and transport connectivity – rendering it important for full EEA integration
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Operationally, the integration of the Western Balkan countries can proceed effortlessly, since: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The costs of the region's integration will be low due to its small size - Numerous functional EU and regional mechanisms supporting the process are already in place • For direct calls to action: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Restore high-level EU-WB dialogue ○ Support the WB countries in managing the effects of the nationalisation of the enlargement policy ○ Increase cooperation with and extend greater support to WB regional intergovernmental structures and CSO networks ○ Support the faster functional integration of the WB through security structures, infrastructure development, development of small and medium-sized enterprises and policies conducive to the region's economic growth

¹⁹ The messages were formulated using the recommendations from the national chapters of this edition.

Target groups	Courses of action	Illustrative umbrella messages ¹⁹
<p>(3) Decision-makers and (4) Opinion-makers in the key Member States</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step 1. Improvement of the WB countries' image by countering negative perceptions and exploiting positive ones; dissemination of the further enlargement narrative as part of a solution to the Union's inherent tensions and present-day challenges • Step 2. Direct calls to action: Dissemination and promotion of specific proposals of alternative policies and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the new narrative (regarding the image of the WB region): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ WB countries are now all on the same side, aspiring towards EU accession ○ The migrant crisis and security issues have demonstrated the importance of the WB for the entire EU ○ Various messages promoting the elements of WB's "soft power" and bringing it closer to EU citizens (culture, art, history, food, music...) and countering biases and misconceptions • For the new narrative regarding further enlargement – as above • For direct calls to action: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To Germany, Italy and Austria – WB have proven themselves as solid and cooperative partners. Help WB go through the integration process with the fewest possible obstacles and keep investing in WB countries ○ To Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia – We have open bilateral issues, but we should deal with them separately from the EU integration process and in parallel with fostering our economic, cultural and other cooperation, which are in our mutual interest ○ To V4 countries – Help us with your experience in regional cooperation and EU integration, as well as with your influence in the EU institutions. We should expand our economic cooperation ○ To France, Benelux and the Nordic countries – We should increase our cooperation in trade and investments, as well as our cultural cooperation

Target groups	Courses of action	Illustrative umbrella messages ¹⁹
(5) Decision-makers and (6) Opinion-makers in Western Balkan countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement of decision-makers to prioritise EU accession and regional cooperation on their agendas and in public addresses and intensify their engagement in the existing regional cooperation initiatives • Raising awareness of opinion-makers about the finer points of EU integration, their role in shaping public discourse and public support to accession and the related reforms, regional cooperation as a formal requirement for accession, regional initiatives, mechanisms and strategies – through the promotion of EU integration and regional cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the new narrative (to inspire change): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Regional cooperation is tangible proof of commitment to EU accession ○ Regional cooperation is a safeguard against regional conflicts ○ Opportunities offered by the existing regional cooperation mechanisms are largely untapped ○ Only through collaboration can the region attract major investments and reindustrialise ○ The small WB countries can defend their interests only as an interest group, like the Nordic countries, Benelux and V4, before and after the region joins the EU ○ Many of the hitherto regional cooperation successes have gone unreported • Direct calls to action will contain proposals to change policies and behaviours and will encourage the decision-makers to take part in regional initiatives more intensively

2.3. Activities and Stakeholders

Target groups are addressed by products containing evidence-based messages (such as researches, publications, promotional material, etc.) and communicated via particular channels (such as traditional and online media, one-on-one meetings, roundtables, conferences, cocktail parties). Activities denote the placement of the products via the selected channels. The final choice of products and channels can only be made after careful research and mapping of the target groups and, when possible, after the identification of their representatives (due to the high profile of specific counterparts, research of their personal preferences for advocacy products and channels will be useful). Specific activities can be planned once the right mix of products and channels for a target group has been identified.

Typical advocacy products include policy analyses with recommendations, position papers, reports, researches, policy briefs, letters, newsletters, policy- and situation-related statements, press releases, interviews, appearances in TV shows, op-eds, articles, keynote speeches, presentations at conferences, etc.

The products are communicated via channels, such as: face-to-face meetings, dissemination of products via individual letters, mailing lists and social media, organisation of and participation in roundtables and conferences and at events such as cocktail parties, working breakfasts, formal dinners, organisation of study trips, guest lectures, road shows and exhibitions, traditional and online media campaigns, advertising campaigns, etc.

The activities should be tailored to the particular target groups, as demonstrated by the following example:

Table 4: Examples of Activities per Target Group

Target groups	Activities
(1) Decision-makers in the relevant EU institutions (2) Opinion-makers with influence in these institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings (group and individual) with influential representatives of the targeted EU institutions • Organisation of cocktail parties with official speeches • Addresses to the European Parliament and other EU fora which WB candidate countries can access (i.e. sectoral committees, joint committees, political parties' groups in the EP, Working Party on the Western Balkan region (COWEB), etc. • Keynote speeches in distinguished settings such as events on the margins of WB6 Summits, Friends of Europe, European Policy Centre, Centre for European Policy Studies, Davos, London School of Economics and Political Science, the College of Europe in Bruges, Humboldt University in Berlin, etc. • Campaigns in eminent international and Brussels-based media
(3) Decision-makers (4) Opinion-makers in the key Member States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings (group and individual) with influential representatives of the targeted institutions • Guest lectures at distinguished universities • Organisation of working breakfasts with journalists of eminent media • Organisation of joint WB business road shows promoting WB economies • Organisation of exhibitions of WB artists • Organisation of briefings for the diplomatic corps (from the Member States, appointed to the WB countries) • Placement of articles in eminent media outlets
(5) Decision-makers (6) Opinion-makers in Western Balkan countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings (group and individual) with influential representatives of the targeted institutions • Organisation of working breakfasts with journalists of eminent media • Organisation of roundtables with influential representatives of targeted institutions • Organisation of regional events or participation in advocacy activities at the conferences, meetings and workshops organised by regional cooperation organisations and initiatives (SEECP, RCC, CEFTA, ECS, SEETO, REC, NALAS, etc.) • Campaigns in regional media (Vicinities, Al Jazeera, N1) • Promotion of products via social media (boosted posts)

Furthermore, the kinds and levels of involvement of particular stakeholders, who are important because of their power to sponsor, facilitate, fund, enable, impede, distort or disable the outcomes of particular activities, will be clarified during activity planning (but not before that)²⁰. Due to their potential role, a segment of the strategy should be dedicated to planning relations with stakeholders, after they are carefully mapped and researched (like the target groups) and their strengths and possible bearing on the outcome of the activities are evaluated (based on their vested interests)²¹. Some of the stakeholders in the regional advocacy campaign activities will include, among others:

²⁰ While the target groups are defined *vis-à-vis* the direct impact we want to achieve, the stakeholders denote individuals and institutions capable of affecting the achievement of our goals, which can be broadly grouped as allies (including active proponents) and challengers (including direct opponents).

²¹ The stakeholders need to be evaluated in order to optimise the resources required for establishing and maintaining relations with them; such an exercise is unnecessary in case of the target groups, as they are automatically “evaluated” during the definition of the projected outcomes and the general courses of action.

- The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) as a hub of regional cooperation;
- The core group of regional initiatives in the Western Balkans and South East Europe: the Central European Free Trade Agreement 2006 (CEFTA), Energy Community Secretariat (ECS), South East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO), Electronic South Eastern Europe Initiative (e-SEE), Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe (SWG), South East Europe Investment Committee (SEEIC), Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), and other regional initiatives, such as the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE), South East European Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (SEECCEL), Centre of Public Employment Services of Southeast European Countries (CPESSEC), Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) and other regional initiatives;
- Donor organisations highly involved in the Western Balkans: the European Commission, EuropeAid, European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), Heinrich Boll Foundation (HBS), Embassies of the Netherlands and Norway across the region, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Open Society Foundation's offices in WB countries, European Fund for the Balkans, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and others;
- Civil society organisations and their networks in the Western Balkans and Europe: the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN), Regional Convention on European Integration of Western Balkans, SEE Change NET, Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South East Europe (CDRSEE), European Movement International, etc.
- V4 think tanks that participated in the preparation of this edition²².

The stakeholders on this illustrative list are the ones with potential positive influence (allies), and efforts should be made to ensure their participation or some other form of involvement in the ASWB activities. However, strategy planning will also have to include the drawing up of a list of stakeholders with potentially negative influence (challengers) across the region, in the EU Member States and Brussels - from among Eurosceptic political parties, extremists from right- and left-wing groups, to organisations and media promoting Russian presence in the Western Balkans - and the preparation of a plan on how to mitigate the risks they pose to the achievement of the outcomes of the strategy activities.

Relations with the stakeholders (dynamic and types of interaction) will be planned after they are mapped and evaluated. One way to plan the activities aimed at maintaining relations with the allies is to place them in the following quadrants²³:

²² The other V4 think tanks will be targeted as members of Target Group 4 (opinion-makers in EU Member States)

²³ Adapted from Jones, H (2011) *A guide to monitoring and evaluating policy influence*, Overseas Development Institute.

		INTEREST	
		Low	High
POWER	High	Keep satisfied	Engage closely and influence actively (maximum effort)
	Low	Monitor (minimum effort)	Keep informed

Once the list is prepared, the strategy authors should determine the courses of action with various stakeholders and activities addressing each and every one of them. The following Table lists examples of activities required for maintaining relations with stakeholders:

Table 5: Examples of Activities Directed at Stakeholders

Relationship goal	Activities
Engage closely and influence actively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular face-to-face meetings • Writing letters with updates on matters of interest • Invitations to events organised within the advocacy campaign • Inclusion in the newsletter mailing list • Inclusion in the lists of recipients of written products • Following the stakeholder's activities and readiness to react
Keep satisfied	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing letters with updates on matters of interest • Inclusion in the newsletter mailing list • Inclusion in the lists of recipients of written products • Following the stakeholder's activities and readiness to react
Keep informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion in the newsletter mailing list • Inclusion in the lists of recipients of written products • Following the stakeholder's activities and readiness to react
Monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion in the newsletter mailing list • Following the stakeholder's activities and readiness to react

2.4. Monitoring, Evaluation and Fine-Tuning

The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to closely and regularly follow the effects of the undertaken activities in order to fine-tune the approaches and increase their efficiency. The Table 6 below outlines the proposed monitoring and evaluation methods and timeframe:

Table 6: Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

Projected outcomes – leading to the achievement of the goals	Monitoring and evaluation measurement tools	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision-makers in the relevant EU institutions are willing to undertake specific actions necessary for moving the issue of Western Balkan enlargement up on their agendas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-depth interviews with the representatives of the decision-makers – to determine changes in attitudes to EU enlargement to the WB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline Annual interviews – with representatives of those institutions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups and in-depth interviews with opinion-makers – to determine the degree in which they adopted the promoted narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline Annual – with those focus groups
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media clipping and qualitative analyses – to determine whether the promoted new narrative is embraced by the media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline Periodic analyses of media clippings (respectable as well as popular media), and analyses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased support of EU Member States’ governments to enlargement to the Western Balkans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-depth interviews with representatives of the decision-makers – to determine changes in perceptions of the WB and in support to EU enlargement to the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline Biannual – with representatives of those institutions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups and in-depth interviews with opinion-makers – to determine changes in perceptions of the WB and the degree in which they adopted the promoted new narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline Biannual – with those focus groups
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media clipping and qualitative analyses – to determine whether the WB are receiving more positive coverage and whether the media are embracing the promoted new narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline Daily clippings, weekly analyses

Projected outcomes – leading to the achievement of the goals	Monitoring and evaluation measurement tools	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final outcome: The official discourse in the WB countries clearly reflects their pro-EU orientation and the WB countries are demonstrating increased commitment to regional cooperation Intermediate outcome: public (media-driven) discourse in the WB countries resonates the commitment of elites (decision- and opinion-makers) to European integration and regional cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-depth interviews with representatives of decision-makers – to determine changes in attitudes towards EU integration and regional cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline Biannual – with representatives of those institutions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content analysis of the decision-makers' activities to determine their actual dedication to EU integration and regional cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline Monthly
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups and in-depth interviews with opinion-makers – to determine changes in perceptions and awareness of regional cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline Biannual – with same focus groups
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media clipping and qualitative and quantitative analyses – to determine changes in the public discourse on EU integration and regional cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline Daily clippings, weekly analyses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public opinion surveys – to determine the effects of public discourse – changes in support levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline Annual

During the further development of the strategy, the baseline research will identify the initial values, to serve as starting points for planning the activities and their outcomes. Interim monitoring will demonstrate the level of success of the activities and enable fine-tuning.

3. Next Steps

As recommended in Section 1.2, the proposed team, comprised of think tanks from the six Western Balkan countries – the WB6 Advocacy Group should be responsible for the planning, coordination and operational management of strategy implementation. The think tanks can provide staff for the technical coordination, research, analysis and planning (in the planning stage) and staff for the coordination and performance of activities (in the implementation stage). The V4 think tank group will have a privileged consultative role in the further development of the WB6 Advocacy Group. Not only the Western Balkan countries, but the listed donors as well, will be approached to secure funding for both the further development and the implementation of the regional advocacy strategy. For practical purposes, a Secretariat should be established in one of the six countries, which will serve as a technical mechanism and be responsible for coordinating the Group members' work, fundraising and external communication activities, including the maintenance of the Group's website and its promotion on the social networks. The Secretariat can be a rotating one, and the think tanks forming the WB6 Advocacy Group can provide the technical and logistic assistance. The Group should consider establishing a Brussels-based contact point (supported by the RCC Liaison Office, or the Secretariat of the European Movement International) for the duration of strategy implementation. The involvement of the WB governments and the key regional initiatives should be formalised through the Group's Advisory Committee.

The next steps may be grouped in three stages:

- During the preparatory stage (Stage 1), the Group should hold a constituent meeting, attended by the representatives of the entities participating in the Advisory Committee, at which it will present the strategy development plan. With the support of the Advisory Committee members, the WB6 Advocacy Group should engage in mobilising the financial resources necessary for further strategy development and planning.
- The planning stage (Stage 2) should begin with a baseline research, to determine the exact state of affairs regarding the target groups' attitudes and perceptions, in order to best plan the activities (and to be able to fine-tune them in Stage 3, based on the interim evaluation of the achievement of the outcomes). After the research, the planning of the strategy should proceed as recommended in this paper, following the proposed order of activities – definition of goals, outcomes and courses of action, prior to the broad definition of the target groups; mapping and research of the target groups and formulation of messages to elicit their engagement; design of activities (products and channels), mapping, evaluation and planning of relations with stakeholders, and planning of monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of the outcomes. The final stage of strategy preparation includes cost-planning and prioritising. Once the strategy is developed, after a series of consultations and peer reviews by the V4 think tanks, the national governments and the donors will be solicited for funds for the implementation of the strategy. Support to the strategy, reflected in an official commitment of all the Western Balkan governments and key regional initiatives, should be sought at this stage, within the framework of the South East European Cooperation Process, the Berlin Process or another high-level forum.
- The implementation stage (Stage 3) will include intensive involvement of the Western Balkan governments and the RCC and other core regional initiatives, which will be facilitated by their participation in the Advisory Committee. It is likely that the implementation will begin with limited funds, to cover the priorities of the strategy, or only its partial implementation, which means that fundraising should be planned as another ongoing activity of the WB6 Advocacy Group's Secretariat.

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The Western Balkans - National Chapters

ALBANIA

Abstract

Accession to the European Union has for decades been, and will continue to be, Albania's key vision and challenge. Tremendous changes that have occurred during these years of democratic transition have often been a result of, or pushed by the EU integration agenda and with the support of EU institutions. All state and non-state actors are deeply engaged and involved in these processes and possess the means to evaluate the country's progress. In view of this, the design of a compact advocacy strategy to advance integration is both helpful and necessary. This section looks at Albania's relationship with the European Union by identifying strengths and weaknesses, making a case for positive aspects of EU membership of Albania and other countries in the region and ways to fight the widespread negative perceptions and frequent misconceptions, fuelled by prejudice and lack of information. It offers an analysis of key advocacy tools and how to use them in the context of the Western Balkans' integration in the European Union.

Key words: *Albania, Western Balkans, enlargement, communication, communication strategy, advocacy strategy, European Union.*

1. Albania in the EU Integration Process

Relations between Albania and the European Union date as far back as 1991, when the former was in the process of overthrowing the communist regime and taking embryonic steps towards becoming a transitional democracy. The establishment of diplomatic relations between Albania and the then European Economic Community in 1991²⁵ was followed by intensive communication with and assistance by the European Union. However, it was not until the 2000s that the prospects of joining the European Union were publicly articulated and made visible to Albania, as well as the other countries in the region. The Zagreb and Thessaloniki Summits (in 2000 and 2003 respectively) offered a clear European perspective and integration path for Western Balkan countries.

Albania signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) on 1 April, 2009 and applied for EU membership at the same time. The SAA process lasted more than three years, from its inception to the finalisation of the signature procedure in 2009. Before the 2000s, the European Union directly assisted the economic and political rebuilding of the country marred by 45 years of communist oppression. Albania's status has since changed to that of a country aspiring to become an equal member of the European Union. One of the most significant speeches directed at Albania was made by Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission in 2003, who stressed not only the importance of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement for the country's eventual membership, but also reminded Albanians that Albania's full participation in the EU integration project would be a major contribution to the consensual and peaceful unification of the European continent. In addition, Mr. Prodi said "when Albania becomes a full member of the Union, for me it will be a moment of intense emotion and great joy".²⁶

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²⁵ Ministria e Integritimit Europian. Historiku i marredhenieve BE-Shqiperi.
Available at: <http://www.integrimi.gov.al/al/programi/historiku-i-marredhenieve-be-shqiperi>

²⁶ Romano Prodi, Speech 03/43, Albania's European destiny. Available at: europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-03-43_en.pdf

In order not to lose sight and momentum of the EU enlargement perspective, a new initiative, the Berlin Process, was kicked off in 2014 as a tool to keep track of accession negotiations with the Western Balkan countries. The Berlin Process started with a High Level Conference held in Berlin in October 2014, followed by the Vienna Summit in 2015 and the Paris Summit in mid- 2016. In his 2014 speech, Albania's Minister of Foreign Affairs emphasised the geo-economic importance of the Western Balkans for the EU, especially in terms of the prospect of "enhanced cooperation and security amongst nations now at peace with each other".²⁷ The Final Declaration by the Chair of Berlin Conference highlighted the key direction in the following four years (2014-2018) as a roadmap for: increasing regional cooperation, promoting good governance and increasing prosperity through sustainable economic growth.²⁸

Albania's 2015-2020 National Development and Integration Strategy reinforces the notion that EU integration is an essential part of the country's development goals and a national interest that will bring benefits to all citizens. As laid down in the Strategy, the vision and priority of Albania's EU integration enjoys full political consensus and social support. It lists indicators of reaching the national EU integration goal, such as:

- Public administration reform, sustainable institutions and a modern, professional and depoliticised civil service;
- Strengthening the independence, efficiency and accountability of the judiciary;
- Intensifying the fight against corruption and organised crime; and
- Ensuring the protection of human rights.²⁹

2. National Position on the EU

The Albanians' affection towards the European Union and the European idea in general dates back to the beginning of the 1990s, when phrases like "we want Albania to be like the rest of Europe" were chanted as slogans during student protests aiming to overthrow the communist regime. For more than two decades now, EU integration has steadfastly remained the Albanian society's ultimate goal, articulated both by politicians and state institutions and the Albanian citizens themselves.

The 2013 program of the Socialist Party used during the June parliamentary elections is comprised of four pillars, one of which is "A Return to Europe", where Albania belongs. A set of promises and commitments are listed as a basis for ensuring the quick and swift implementation of policies aiming to bring the country closer to the European Union. Specifically, European Albania, under the governance of the Socialist party, aims to:

- First and foremost, achieve candidate status for Albania, a process filled with failures. (The country was, however, granted candidate status in June 2014.)
- Proper implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.
- A radical change of the EU integration process in Albania.
- Integration of internal reforms in the framework of the democratisation processes within the EU integration agenda.

²⁷ Shteti Web. 2016. The Berlin Process. Available at: <http://shtetiweb.org/berlin-process/>

²⁸ *Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans*, Berlin, 28 August 2014. Available at: http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/684762/publicationFile/195997/140828-Abschlusserkl_Konf_Westl_Balkan.pdf

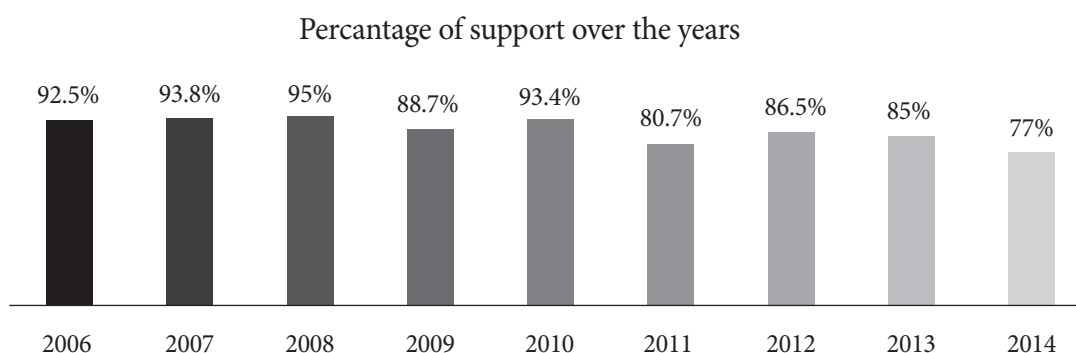
²⁹ *2015-2020 National Development and Integration Strategy*, Council of Ministers draft. Available at: https://ssl.kryeministria.al/SKZHI_draft%20per%20konsultim_25.3.2016.pdf

- Establishment of an intensive and sustainable dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, social partners, civil society, academics and interest groups on the EU accession path.
- Consolidation and institutionalisation of practices involving various actors at all stages of policymaking within the framework of EU integration.

Similarly, the stance of the Democratic Party is clearly and visibly pro-EU and holds EU integration as the most important item on Albania's foreign policy agenda, as well as its internal agenda in terms of the requisite democratic reforms. In general, when it comes to EU integration, there are no divisions between big and small parties. There is no significant anti-EU narrative in Albania and Euroscepticism has found little fertile ground to grow, despite the current events in the European Union and Albania's internal problems.

Albania's citizens have, on occasion, been the most enthusiastic about the country's European perspective. The Albanian Institute for International Studies has measured the pulse of Albanian citizens in terms of support for EU integration. Year after year, the surveys conducted at the national level have confirmed the perception that Albanians are one of the most supportive nations in the Western Balkans when it comes to EU integration.

Picture 1: Percentage of Support for European Membership – Albania



Source: AIIS

The above picture provides an overview of support for EU membership of Albania over the years (2006–2014). The first visible conclusion is that the Albanians' support for Albania's integration in the European Union is almost unanimous and complete, ranging between 92.5% in 2006 to 77% in the most recent poll of 2014. The slight drop in support since 2012 can be attributed to internal, as well as external factors. However, numbers and percentages alone will not shed light on the reasons why Albania has such a positive attitude towards the integration process. The 2014 analysis, entitled "European Perspective of Albania: Perceptions and Realities", reveals that several factors are in play:

1. *Political rhetoric.* As mentioned, all relevant political parties in Albania are pro-EU. Moreover, the EU integration agenda has been one of the highest priorities of all political parties that have ruled the country, notwithstanding their ideological differences. EU accession was the first item in the programme of the Alliance for European Albania, the coalition that won the 2013 parliamentary elections. As this coalition said in its programme, "the process of accession to the European Union is a national objective, in view of the democratisation and transformation of the Albanian society, in accordance with the values and principles of United Europe"³⁰

³⁰ Llubani, Megi (2014), "The European Perspective of Albania: Perceptions and Realities," Albanian Institute for International Studies.

2. *Media.* Media play a crucial role in creating and shaping perceptions and opinions in Albanian society. Perusal of the TV reports, newspaper articles and other sources of information shows that media outlets use EU integration and other related buzzwords in their headlines and top stories almost on a daily basis.
3. *Historical reasons.* The communist past is often considered a gap in time and the EU integration processes are often considered a return to origins, to the European family, where we rightly belong. This has also contributed to a sense of belonging in the EU due to historic reasons.
4. *Lack of Euroscepticism and critical debate.* The lack of Euro sceptics in the country, or at least of a critically-intoned debate regarding the EU, has contributed towards the Albanians' overwhelming positive feelings towards joining the EU. The topic is often approached in terms of the benefits the country will reap if it becomes a Member State in the future. There is little discussion about the actual obligations, not only prior to accession, but what it really means to be a Member State of the European Union and what challenges a Member State has to rise to. There are a few critical voices among academics in Albania, but no serious threats to the public discourse on the EU integration process.

Other studies have come to a similar conclusion. A survey conducted by Epoka University revealed that 68% of the respondents considered European Union a priority in terms of the country's foreign policy. As many as 92% responded positively and in support of integration, while 49% mentioned economic benefits as one of the main reasons for support.³¹

3. Diplomatic and Institutional Capacities

With the SAA, Albania entered a new phase in its relations with the EU, during which new requirements appeared, such as: the need to gather information from and communicate it to various stakeholders and target groups involved in the EU accession process. This includes internal and external communication activities of all government actors. Capacity building and institutional development are considered a key component for enabling the Ministry of EU integration to assume its new functions and responsibilities.

Only a month after Albania's membership application to the EU was approved, when it started responding to the European Commission's Questionnaire, the Albanian Government assured the EU that Albania had, over the previous 18 years, successfully developed and completed the institutional structure for the management of the EU integration process.

The following main actors are supporting this process:

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is responsible for the external representation of Albania's interests vis-à-vis the Member States, for instance in the Stabilisation and Association Council;
- The Ministry of European Integration (MEI), as the coordinator of the internal process, is responsible for communication with the European Commission, the Stabilisation and Association Committee (SAC) and sub-committees;
- At the level of the Deputy Prime Minister, the MFA continues providing the MEI with back-up, on request;

³¹ Cipuri, Ramadan & Koçibelli, Albi. *Albanian Attitudes towards European Integration*. Available at: http://esj.epoka.edu.al/ESJ_2_3.pdf

- The Inter-ministerial Committee for European Integration (ICEI) is responsible for overall coordination and approval of the EU integration policy and strategy;
- The Inter-institutional Coordinating Committee for European Integration (ICCEI) is responsible for the implementation of both the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and the ICEI's decisions. It leads the process of updating the National Plan for the Implementation of the SAA (NPISAA) and represents Albania in the Stabilisation and Association Committee, etc.;
- The Inter-institutional Working Groups (IWGs) continue overseeing the implementation of the SAA, the harmonisation of national legislation with the EU *acquis* and preparations for accession negotiations.

Albania has diplomatic missions in 18 EU Member States, plus a Permanent Representative in Brussels, charged with coordinating and facilitating cooperation between Albanian and EU institutions. They represent Albania's interests in these countries, but serve also as a window of information for EU audiences and advocate Albania's accession to the EU in various capitals of the Union.

4. Information Tools & Actors

Ministry of European Integration – as the key institution managing the EU integration process, the MEI is in charge, *inter alia*, of informing the public about the EU accession process. In addition to reports on EU integration-related issues, the Ministry periodically distributes a newsletter containing information on its activities, as well as on recent integration-related developments within and outside Albania. In general, the Ministry's official website contains extensive information on its activities and key EU integration documents.³²

EU Info Centre network – established within a project financed by the European Union, this network covers many cities in the country, providing information on the European Union, its relations with Albania and the latter's integration processes, as well as implications of Albania's their implications for Albania's accession. Most importantly, it aims at bringing information on the EU closer to Albanian citizens through a conglomerate of tools, such as training courses, information sessions, press conferences, round tables, outreach activities, seminars, public debates, summer schools and open days. It also serves as a hub for sharing information and knowledge through its extensive library, which citizens can access and use easily.³³

Civil Society Organisations – have been one of the most outspoken proponents of EU integration in Albania and promoters of discussions and public discourse on both the benefits and costs of EU integration. There is a large number of CSOs in Albania in the form of think tanks, NGOs and grass root organisations working actively in Tirana, as well as in other cities. Some NGOs, such as the European Movement in Albania (part of the European Movement International), are entirely dedicated to EU integration, The European Movement in Albania publishes a periodic newsletter (Eurospeak)³⁴ containing analyses, articles, opinions and information on internal and external developments regarding EU integration, policies and institutions. The Albanian Institute for International Studies has for over a decade now been publishing the results of annual surveys on public perceptions of the EU and of Albania's accession process, using it as a tool for advocacy and influencing decision makers to listen to the citizens' voices and expectations. A recent group created with the support of Open Society Foundations and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung has gathered young professionals in an attempt to create an additional mechanism for influencing policy making on the EU integration path through communicating Europe, campaigns aiming at raising awareness about the EU, etc.

³² Ministry of European Integration Newsletter. Available at: <http://www.integrimi.gov.al/newsroom/newsletter>

³³ Information available at the official website of EU Info Centre Tirana: <http://euin.al/content.php?id=59#.VyaDUiN96u4>

³⁴ Eurospeak has been published since 2007. European Movement in Albania. Available at: <http://em-al.org/en/eurospeak-in-years/>

Media – Albania is characterised by a vibrant media scene, which is perceived by the public as a very important factor in shaping politics and public opinion. Several surveys have concluded that TV and radio are the main sources of information for Albanians across the country.³⁵ Various talk shows on national public and private TV stations often serve as platforms for discussing EU integration, Albania's accession endeavours, topics related to Albania's challenges and priorities as defined in the EU requirements, as well as informative documentaries and discussions aimed at informing the public. EU also features extensively in the TV and radio news, newspapers and online media. Nevertheless, Albanian citizens do not seem to be well informed of these topics, as revealed by the annual AHS surveys³⁶ and various studies published in recent years.

Recommendations for the Information/Communication Strategy:

The Final Report on the National survey on perceptions of and expectations from Albania's potential EU membership³⁷ issued the following recommendations:

- Information campaigns targeting young Albanians should use online information channels like Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp focusing on access to these tools over mobile phones;
- Information campaigns targeting elderly Albanians should use traditional media tools like television;
- The EU Delegation to Albania should encourage the production of Albanian language TV & YouTube documentaries that explore the cases of Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia to explain the potential implications of Albania's EU accession;
- The EU Delegation to Albania should boost deliberation of EU affairs among more educated Albanian citizens by promoting public debates at Albanian universities;
- EU Info Centres in Albania should encourage online discussions by launching a blog and reinventing their YouTube channels;
- EU Info Centres in Albania should provide a real time Albanian-language information service on EU affairs, using WhatsApp & Viber;
- The EU Delegation to Albania should promote citizen-centric journalism by supporting web 2.0 media.

This expertise can be used for future communication campaigns, as public information is an ongoing endeavour to keep up with the current developments and give society the chance to participate. For that reason, efforts need to be invested in achieving additional government commitment to initiating the required institutional development by allocating the necessary human and financial resources.

5. Sources of Negative Perceptions

Interviewees for this report generally agree that negative perceptions about Albania and other countries in the region predominate among EU elites, media and societies at large. Understanding the reasons for these negative perceptions and often bad reputation is an important tool in tackling these perceptions and changing the image of the region. One of the interviewees contended that negative perceptions of Western Balkan countries among EU elites and the general public were one of the main impediments and roadblocks these countries faced in their bid for EU accession. The most common reasons relate to the perceived lack of the

³⁵ *Audit of Political Engagement*, Institute for Democracy and Mediation (2016)

³⁶ The annual survey, entitled *The European Perspective of Albania*, reveals that Albanian citizens do not think they are well informed of EU integration or that they properly understand the process and EU benchmarks.

³⁷ Available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/albania/documents/survey_full_report_0.pdf

rule of law and will to fight corruption and organised crime, and proper enforcement of the law. Specifically for Albania, one of our interlocutors mentioned the deep divisions in the Albanian political class and lack of political will for sweeping reforms, politicisation of the public administration and state capture.³⁸ Other interviewees looked deeper into the historical, cultural and current sources of negative perceptions, which have to be addressed not only by technocrats, but by people with deep knowledge and understanding of the region as well.³⁹

Another interviewee attributed negative perceptions about Albania to lack of information on Albania and the general political situation in Europe. In his view, “the issue of improving Albania’s image at the international level requires an intelligent strategic approach focusing more on the cultural and academic levels”.⁴⁰ Furthermore, cooperation with the neighbouring states is an important step in overcoming the negative perceptions the countries in the region often nurture against each other. Their slow pace of integration has led to the further marginalisation of their problems. Modest economic development and corruption plague all Western Balkan countries. In this framework, the political elites are mainly to blame for inciting such perceptions.⁴¹

Other interviewees focused on historic reasons, saying that the countries of the region have been, and still are, seen as explosive in terms of security challenges; these perceptions are exacerbated by the poor economic indicators of the Western Balkan countries, religious affiliation and weak government.⁴²

6. Strongest Arguments for Accession

The interviewed experts listed a variety of values Albania and the countries of the Western Balkans, in general, could bring to the EU upon accession.

Albania’s role in the region – Albania has taken on a constructive role in the region, which, according to the interviewees, is a value that needs to be promoted in a more substantial way.⁴³ Another interviewee went further, focusing on the role of the entire region in increasing regional and international security as well as serving as a mechanism for preventing further conflicts.⁴⁴

Religious tolerance – Despite its small size, Albania has often made headlines for its approach to religion and been hailed for its harmony and tolerance. In 2012, Huffington Post dedicated an article to the country’s religious mix and how it could serve as a model for the rest of the world. As it summed up: “Albanian interfaith harmony represents a unique example for the rest of the world. Speaking a language of Indo-European origin but directly related to no other, Albanians were compelled always to put their national identity ahead of religious affiliation”.⁴⁵ Most of the interviewed experts mentioned religious harmony as one of Albania’s core

³⁸ Interview with Ilir Kalemaj, Professor, University of New York, Tirana.

³⁹ Interview with Klodiana Beshku, Professor, University of Tirana, Faculty of Social Sciences.

⁴⁰ Interview with Gentian Elezi, Deputy Minister of European Integration.

⁴¹ Interview with Mimoza Kociu.

⁴² Interview with Vladimir Thanu, Young Federalists Albania.

⁴³ Interview with Gentian Elezi, Deputy Minister of European Integration.

⁴⁴ Interview with Frank Hantke, Country Director, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Office, Tirana.

⁴⁵ Schwartz, Stephen, “How Albania’s Religious Mix Offers an Example for the Rest of the World”, *Huffington Post*. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stephen-schwartz/how-albanias-religious-mix-offers-an-example-for-the-rest-of-the-world_b_2199921.html

values.⁴⁶ According to Besnik Mustafaj, “ethnic, religious and cultural diversity within a small geographical space constitutes an added value to the EU.”⁴⁷

Pro-EU integration feelings – Both our interviewees and surveys gauging general opinion reveal strong pro-EU and pro-accession attitudes. The absolute majority of Albanians are not only pro-EU; they also consider Albania’s accession to the EU a national interest and an important topic.

Multiculturalism – One of our interviewees, Arben Malaj, the former Minister of Finance, considers Western Balkans integration a tool to demystify “myths” related to the core of the EU project, as a group of privileged rich countries with a religious preference. Their accession would make the EU more multicultural in its entirety and a bigger union in face of geopolitical challenges.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Gledis Gjipali highlighted cultural affinities between the EU and the Western Balkans countries, arguing that the latter naturally belonged to the EU and were surrounded by the EU.⁴⁹

Large diaspora – Albania and other Western Balkan countries have large immigrant communities in most EU countries. Strong cultural, emotional and economic links with their kin states should also be viewed as an added value to the EU.⁵⁰

Vital population – Several interviewees mentioned the liveliness and relatively young age of Albanians as a value adding to the aging population of EU countries.⁵¹ In her opinion, Western Balkan countries have “energetic and tireless populations in search of their fate amid obstacles and the struggle for survival.”⁵²

In addition to several other features of Albanian culture and heritage, other values that come from this small country in the heart of the Balkans also include its hospitality and kindness, a typical Albanian trait also demonstrated by the Nobel Peace Prize winner: Mother Teresa. Another core value of the Albanian code of honour is *Besa*, a concept quite important to all Albanian people and laid down in *Kanun* (moral code). The famous Albanian modern novelist, Ismail Kadare, also a Nobel Literature award candidate and winner of many other international prizes, has written about this concept in some of his novels. Kadare’s work has been published in more than forty countries and at the same time translated into over thirty languages, rendering him one of the best ambassadors of Albanian literature worldwide. Albanian music, for its part, has gained global recognition thanks to many famous artists, including opera divas Inva Mula and Ermonela Jaho and the distinguished violinist Tedi Papavrami. The National Folk Festival held in Gjirokastra is a prime example of traditional folk music.

7. Areas of Achievements

Tourism – Albania’s natural beauties and historic legacy constitute one of the country’s major values and contributions to the European Union. The country’s tourism potentials have featured extensively in magazines, newspapers and websites around the world. For instance, Lonely Planet writes that:

⁴⁶ Interview with Ilir Kalemaj, Professor, University of New York Tirana.

⁴⁷ Interview with Besnik Mustafaj, a former diplomat and politician.

⁴⁸ Interview with Arben Malaj, Executive Director of Institute for Public Policy and Good Governance.

⁴⁹ Interview with Gledis Gjipali, Executive Director, European Movement Albania.

⁵⁰ Interview with Besnik Mustafaj, former diplomat and politician.

⁵¹ Interview with Arian Starova, Atlantic Council of Albania.

⁵² Interview with Entela Komnino.

“Albania has natural beauty in such abundance that you might wonder why it’s taken 20 years for the country to take off as a tourist destination since the end of a particularly brutal strain of communism in 1991... Albania offers a remarkable array of unique attractions, not least due to this very isolation: ancient mountain behavior codes, forgotten archaeological sites and villages where time seems to have stood still are all on the menu. With its stunning mountain scenery, a thriving capital in Tirana and beaches to rival any elsewhere in the Mediterranean, Albania has become the sleeper hit of the Balkans.”⁵³

It took almost two decades for Albania to be acknowledged as an international tourist destination, with articles in renowned media outlets overflowing with descriptions of the hidden gems in the Western Balkans. A 2013 article in the Huffington Post lists 10 reasons to visit Albania, including, notably, the affordability of Albanian tourism and the promise of adventure. “It has been said that Albania is Europe’s next adventure destination.”⁵⁴ Albania’s rich cultural and tourist resources have appeared recently in numerous articles. The National Geographic calls it the far edge of travel in a December 2014 article, which features a sentence summarising the rich and ancient tradition found everywhere across the country: “We rumble in a 4×4 on gravel roads through olive groves to Pilur, a village where, under a chestnut tree, elders burst into impromptu polyphony, a UNESCO-recognized blend of musical voices that dates back more than thousand years. Then we dine alfresco on local figs, plums, eggs, petulla (fried dough), tart goat cheese, and sausage, washed down with home-brewed rakija and wine out of soda bottles”⁵⁵ Similarly, another article in the Daily Mail qualified Albania as Europe’s last corner and a hidden bargain in Albania, exploring both the secluded areas as well as the developed and major cities trying to match the development of other cities around Europe.⁵⁶

Cultural heritage – UNESCO’s World Heritage List has acknowledged Albania’s cultural and historical heritage. More specifically, the cities of Berat and Gjirokastra are inscribed as rare examples of an architectural character typical of the Ottoman period. Situated in Southern Albania, these two cities bear witness to the wealth and diversity of the urban and architectural heritage of the Western Balkan region. Berat and Gjirokastra bear outstanding testimony to the diversity of urban societies in the Balkans, and to longstanding ways of life, which have today almost vanished.

The third site on the World Heritage List is Butrint, located in the south of Albania, approximately 20 km from the city of Saranda, with its special atmosphere created by a combination of archaeology, monuments and nature in the Mediterranean. With its hinterland, it constitutes an exceptional cultural landscape, which has developed organically over many centuries.

The three World Heritage sites are complemented by extremely valuable intangible cultural heritage, such as iso-polyphonic singing traditions, distinctive textile designs, and exemplary inter-faith cultural relations. Mosques, Muslim quarters, Christian churches and monasteries, Bektashi Teke, Byzantine walls, and antique vestiges all testify to the meeting of different peoples and civilisations, evolved over nearly three millennia.

Trade and economy – Albanian economy had gone through different phases during the period of transition from the communist regime to its present-day market economy system. The country is rich in minerals and

⁵³ Lonely Planet, Introduction to Albania. Available at: <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/albania#ixzz3xUs08YX8>

⁵⁴ Aylanak, Leyla, (2012) “10 Reasons 2013 Is the Time to Visit Albania”, *Huffington Post*. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/leyla-giray/albania-tourism-2013_b_2352931.html

⁵⁵ Bellows, Keith (2014) “The Far Edge of Travel: Albania”, *National Geographic*. Available at: <http://intelligenttravel.nationalgeographic.com/2014/12/22/the-far-edge-of-travel-albania/>

⁵⁶ Middleton, Christopher (2013) “Europe’s last corner: Beaches and beauty in Albania, the hidden bargain of the Balkans”, *Daily mail*. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-2320892/Albania-holidays-Beaches-bargains-Europes-hidden-secret.html>

natural resources, such as chromate, iron-nickel, nickel-silicate, copper, coal and so on, which are already recognised as a great potential for the country's further economic development.

Twenty-two years of transition are the bridge that built Albania's present-day market economy, upon the completion of the final transition cycle, involving the move from central planning to a free market economy. All these years have been largely successful, resulting in the creation of many new opportunities for restoring market economy in the context of initiating structural adjustments in order to improve the performance of the free market, by means of rigorous recommendations for the economy of the state, where, accordingly, the IMF and World Bank have emphasised the importance of privatisation, with simultaneous focus on economic growth. These are considered the most important indicators of success and a measure of further achievements of the government's economic policies and are thus the most important aspect illustrating the country's development. Albania has recently invested great efforts in addressing poverty and increasing sustainable social and economic development by taking new steps in implementing long-term programmes that aim at improving education, healthcare and infrastructure.

In fact, the Albanian economy focuses more on imports rather than on exports, which already registered a growth of more than 25% in the recent years, where the main countries of import are Italy (with over 33% of total imports), Greece (8.9% of the total imports), China (6.8%) and Turkey (6.4%). The main products coming from these suppliers include machinery and equipment, metals, vehicles and means of transport. Whereas when it comes to exports, as already noted, Albania has many mineral resources, and it exports, first of all, crude oil and mineral ores, chromium ores (28.2% of total exports), refined petroleum, petroleum gas, packaged medicaments and other products such as textile and shoes, leather footwear, metals, vegetables, fruit and tobacco. The primary destinations for these exports are Italy (55.9% of the exports), Greece (11.6%), China (7.2%), Turkey (7.4%), and Germany (5.6%).

The high potential for Albania's economic growth arises, firstly, from its geographic position in the South-East Europe and the Western Balkans, with its a 362km long Adriatic and Ionian Sea coastline and a relief that is a perfect combination of mountains, fields, hills, lakes and rivers, its biological diversity (flora and fauna) and Mediterranean climate in which many Mediterranean produce are grown. Consequently, Albania definitely has a wide range of opportunities to offer in many sectors, including tourism, agriculture, and trade. Its very favourable climate facilitates the growth of many exportable fruits and vegetables, which both increase the national economy and offer a variety of fresh produce to other European states. Bio food, such as cheese, milk, yoghurt, butter, buttermilk, jam, fresh meat, fish, are all Mediterranean produce in demand in the rest of continental Europe. Such important fresh produce cannot be grown in the EU's continental climate, wherefore Albania's accession should be seen as enrichment of what other Mediterranean countries, like Greece, offer the Union.

8. Recommendations for the Development of a Regional Advocacy Strategy

Interviewees approached the development of a common strategy for the countries in the region from various perspectives. Ilir Kalemaj suggests taking into account the characteristics of each country in the Western Balkans (i.e. their size, political culture, level of support for EU integration, political antagonisms and economic factors). While recommendations may vary from country to country, he urges focusing on Albania's image as soon as possible, which has been undermined by the criminalisation of a part of its political elite and deep political antagonisms.⁵⁷ Another interviewee suggested applying the top-down approach in analysing

⁵⁷ Interview with Ilir Kalemaj, Professor, University of New York, Tirana.

the topics covered by the common strategy.⁵⁸ Another suggestion was to focus primarily on knowledge. According to one of the interviewees, awareness of the advantages of EU integration for our country and citizens is essential for a strategy to inform the public properly.⁵⁹

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⁵⁸ Interview with Klodiana Beshku, Professor, University of Tirana, Faculty of Social Sciences.

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Annex

Albania – SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young and vibrant population • Potential efficient labour force • Strong pro-EU sentiments among the population as well as officials • Huge tourist potential stemming from natural beauties and historic and cultural heritage, increasingly turning the country into a tourist destination • Common borders with EU countries • Religious tolerance praised as a model for other countries to follow • Albania has played the role of stabiliser in the past decade and needs to pursue it • Large immigrant communities in EU countries • Increased regional cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak political and democratic institutions • High dependency on EU mediators to solve political crises (justice reform being the latest example) • Negative perceptions of Albania among the EU population and political elites, due also to organised crime • Rampant corruption (Albania ranks among the most corrupt countries in Europe) • Lack of the rule of law, hindering reform • Lack of proper information about Albania among the EU population • Small market (small population and labour force compared to other EU countries) • Lagging behind in IT and technological development • Existing animosities in the Balkan region • Continuing gap between civil society and government • Lack of experience, both in the government and civil society, in developing a proper advocacy strategy
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proven willingness to push for regional cooperation, as a positive aspect of integration • The Berlin Process serves to keep the enlargement agenda alive • The ASWB is a good opportunity to take advantage of the momentum and use it to promote our countries' EU integration • The refugee crisis is also an opportunity to reinforce the partnership and cooperation between the Western Balkans and the EU in order to show willingness of the former to contribute to peace, prosperity and protection of human rights • Cooperation of civil society organisations across the region is an opportunity that needs to be taken advantage of • Having V4 countries on board both through government initiatives and CSO assistance is also an opportunity to advance the WB's EU integration on the agenda of the EU institutions and EU Member States 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The halt in enlargement might negatively influence enthusiasm in Western Balkan countries and EU population • Current political and economic situation in the EU, which has fuelled far right parties, anti-immigrant movements and public apprehension • Brexit has created uncertainties regarding the future of the EU • If our countries' negative reputation continues, there is the threat that the EU will reject our integration and membership • Selling the Western Balkan EU accession bid will be rendered difficult if the unwillingness of the political elites to properly carry out reforms persists • Uncertain political situation and rising ethnic tensions in WB countries endanger integration • Enlargement is on the margins of the EU agenda at the moment, despite the Berlin process trying to keep the idea alive

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate BiH's potentials that can reinforce the key arguments and affirm new ones in advocating further EU enlargement. The key objectives include: raising the institutions' and citizens' awareness and knowledge of the benefits and responsibilities of further approximation to the EU; contribution to the increase of the advocacy capacity and motivation of all relevant institutions and agencies implementing EU accession related reforms, experts, think tanks, media and civil society; highlighting of arguments for faster accession to the EU; coping better with the EU "enlargement fatigue" phenomenon; and contribution to the development of positive perceptions of the region and WB countries in the Brussels institutions, EU Member States and general public in the eight countries involved in the project. This paper uses the qualitative data collected from 30 interviewees working in various national executive and legislative authorities, EU institutions, non-government organisations, state agencies, private companies, relevant think tanks, etc. Based on the secondary research (desk research) and primary research (interviews) conducted, the paper provides information on BiH's current status in the process of association/accession to the EU. In addition to interviews, the research involved thorough desk research, which included an analysis of documents such as progress reports, policy papers, state statistics, academic articles, think tank publications, etc. Furthermore, the research provided insight in diplomatic and other institutional capacities to communicate, promote and advocate EU integration and the level of coordination of policy measures in this area. The strongest arguments for accession and the values the country can bring to the EU were identified on the basis of the conducted interviews. The SWOT analysis was one of the tools used to analyse the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to Bosnia and Herzegovina (and other WB6 countries) on its path towards the European Union. The paper also identifies the risks that might jeopardise the development and implementation of the advocacy/communication strategy of the Western Balkans 6 and ends with a list of recommendations drawn up on the basis of the interviewees' suggestions and our overall analysis.

Key words: *Bosnia and Herzegovina, Western Balkans, enlargement, communication, communication strategy, advocacy strategy, European Union*

1. Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has been taking part in the European Union (EU) Stabilisation and Association Process since its initiation in 1999. BiH was also recognised as a potential candidate for full EU membership in the 2003 Thessaloniki European Council conclusions.

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between BiH and the EU came into force in June 2015, 18 years after the establishment of the EU/BiH Consultative Task Force (CTF) tasked with providing technical and expert assistance in the fields of administration, regulation and policy.

In 2000, the country was given a list of conditions laid out in the EU Roadmap, the fulfilment of which would enable the European Commission to even consider development of a Feasibility Study for SAA negotiations. The Feasibility Study was published in 2003. The EU-BiH negotiations on the SAA lasted from 2005 to 2006.

⁶⁰ Foreign Policy Initiative BH, Sarajevo

The Agreement was initialled at the end of 2007 and signed in Luxembourg on 16 June 2008. France was the last EU Member State to ratify the SAA with BiH, in March 2011. The SAA's entry into force was put on hold due to political challenges arising from the non-enforcement of the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights. The SAA finally came into force in June 2015. In the meantime, the Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade Related Issues was in force, as of 1 July 2008.

BiH applied for EU membership on 15 February 2015. The EU Member States have set conditions for forwarding Bosnia's application to the European Commission. Once the EU Member States conclude that these conditions have been met, the application will be sent to the European Commission and the BiH authorities will receive a questionnaire. The answers to this questionnaire will form the basis for the European Commission's opinion on BiH's readiness to be granted official candidate status. This requires a unanimous decision by all EU Member States. The question remains whether BiH will receive the questionnaire by the end of 2016 and be awarded candidate status as soon as possible. Once BiH is granted such status, it will be able to work on opening accession negotiations. Kosovo⁶¹ and Bosnia are the only Western Balkan countries not granted candidate status yet.

2015 was an extremely important year for BiH in terms of EU accession. The SAA came into force in June that year. The European Commission noted that BiH had returned to the road of reforms in its annual Progress Report, published in November 2015.

Taking into consideration all the internal political challenges BiH faces, the EU membership application is seen by many sceptics as an act indicating merely declarative readiness but unsubstantiated by essential reforms. Many observers believe that, given the current political constellation, BiH is not ready to face the challenges it will face on the road to the EU.

For moderate optimists, who attach importance to the very prospect of EU membership, as the driving force for positive democratic, political, economic and social changes in BiH, 2016 should provide answers to the question whether the application will be followed by BiH's fulfilment of all obligations assumed on the path to the EU. For the BiH membership application to be considered credible, the EU coordination mechanism, adopted on 9 February 2016, needs to become operational and enable BiH to speak with "one voice" with regard to the EU. Some political forces, however, contested the agreed mechanism from the start and it is yet to start working. One other priority – implementation of the socio-economic reform agenda – will be another test of the political will to reform the country.⁶²

2. BiH's Position on EU Accession

Under the BiH Constitution, the tripartite Head of State, the BiH Presidency, is in charge of foreign policy. The Presidency defined EU and NATO integration as the basic direction and goal of BiH's foreign policy in 2003. According to the 2003 Presidency decision, closer and institutionalised relations with the European Union, in accordance with the Stabilisation and Accession Process, are important for BiH.⁶³

⁶¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

⁶² Topčagić, O., 2016, Policy analysis: EU Membership Candidate Status: Between Challenges and Weaknesses, Foreign Policy Initiative BH, Sarajevo, p. 2.
Available at: <http://www.fes.ba/files/fes/pdf/publikationen/2016/EU%20Membership%20Candidate%20Status%20-%20Between%20Challenges%20and%20Weaknesses%20ENG.pdf>

⁶³ Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2003, *Basic Directions of BiH Foreign Policy: multilateral character*, Sarajevo.

In February 2015, this priority was reaffirmed by the BiH Presidency and the Parliamentary Assembly, as well as by the leaders of all BiH political parties, who adopted a Declaration on the institutions' commitment to implement reforms for BiH to make headway on its path to the EU.

In July 2015, the BiH (state and entity) governments adopted the BiH Reform Agenda for the 2015-2018 period, as well as the Action Plan for its implementation, which serve as guidance for the implementation of socio-economic reforms prerequisite for the submission of a credible membership application in accordance with the conclusions of the EU Foreign Affairs Council. In February 2016, BiH submitted its EU membership application and reaffirmed its goal to become a fully-fledged member of the EU. The BiH governments and Presidency aim at obtaining candidate status by the end of 2017. For BiH, candidate status will mean a clear membership perspective and provide a strong incentive for further reforms and democratisation of society. BiH will additionally consolidate democratic reforms on its road towards building a functional state and strengthen the mechanisms of the rule of law by meeting the political criteria; furthermore, by harmonising its law with the EU *acquis*, it will upgrade its own standards in the areas of economy and business. Once it is granted candidate status, BiH will make better use of the possibilities of drawing and using EU pre-accession funds that are to secure faster development and support reforms in the key areas.⁶⁴

3. Institutional Efforts/Capacities to Communicate, Promote and Advocate EU Integration

3.1. BiH Directorate for European Integration (DEI)

The Directorate for European Integration (DEI) is a permanent, independent expert body of the BiH Council of Ministers. The Directorate is responsible for coordinating the BiH authorities' activities and supervising the implementation of decisions passed by the relevant national institutions concerning EU accession-related requirements.

The Directorate has the role of chief coordinator of the EU integration process at the state level (horizontal coordination) and between the state institutions and entities (vertical coordination). The DEI inter alia coordinates EU financial assistance and its DEI Director is also the National Coordinator for IPA (the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance). The Directorate produces a variety of information, analyses, reports and strategic documents necessary for the integration process. The DEI has a significant role in promoting the accession process and informing the public about what it entails.

The Directorate has many different units, including the EU Promotion Unit. The Unit promotes the EU accession processes in BiH, as well as the activities aimed at developing and training staff with a view to raising their capacity to perform EU integration-related tasks in the Directorate and other institutions involved in the process. The Unit exercises its powers through the following internal organisational units:

3.1.1. Promotion Department

- Responsible for the development and implementation of the Communication Strategy through the Annual Action Plans for the implementation of promotional and informational activities;
- Responsible for the timely and meaningful promotion of the EU integration process in the country by organising events, preparing and publishing documents on EU integration and editing and updating the Directorate website.

⁶⁴ Topčagić O., *ibid*, pp. 4, 5, 7, 9.

3.1.2. Education Department

- Responsible for the development and implementation of a professional EU integration training curriculum for BiH's civil servants;
- Responsible for the professional development and training of its own staff, as well as staff charged with EU integration in the institutions at the state and entity levels;
- Responsible for equal coverage of the representatives of all levels of government by educational activities, as well as the timely distribution of information about education and specialisation in the field of EU integration to all potential beneficiaries.

The EU Promotion Unit uses various tools to communicate and inform the public about the EU integration process, the progress that BiH has made and the ensuing steps. The most popular and most frequently used tools are:

- News and events (media announcements, press clippings, access to information, public opinion polls, etc.);
- Infographics (e.g. used to explain the benefits of the entry into force of the SAA);
- E-learning (ABC of EU Integration; Project Cycle Management; EU Association/Accession and IPA components I, II, III, IV and V);
- Seminars;
- EU Financial Assistance.

Advocacy and communication are included in DEI's regular activities. The online courses are free of charge and can be accessed by anybody. Civil servants can apply through their institutions for a certificate once they complete a course and pass the mandatory exam. Infographics are a very creative tool DEI has been using to help the public at large understand the different aspects of BiH's road to the EU. Furthermore, DEI has regularly been organising seminars for civil servants on various EU-related topics; apart from their educational aspect, these seminars also aim at communicating and advocating EU integration.

4. SWOT Analysis

Developing SWOT analyses for Western Balkan countries and BiH, in particular, required both desktop research and primary research. The desk research involved analysing various documents such as: European Commission's annual Progress Reports, SIGMA reports, national institutional strategies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DEI, etc.), public policies and analyses published by various think tanks such as the Foreign Policy Initiative, etc. Furthermore, a series of interviews was conducted with representatives of various sectors: EU institutions (Delegation of the EU to BiH and EU Special Representative to BiH, European Commission), national policy makers and public opinion makers, think tanks, NGOs working on EU related projects and issues.

Herewith the main findings of the SWOT Analysis (see Annex 1) based on the conducted research:

4.1. Strengths

The core values, competitive advantages and main successes of Balkan countries, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular, were identified on the basis of the conducted interviews. The strengths were defined on the basis of the interviewees' replies in the following five areas: institutional reform; skilled and educated workforce; cultural, archaeological and architectural heritage; tourism and natural beauties; and, sports achievements. They will be analysed in greater detail below.



4.1.1. Reform Agenda

In July 2015, BiH adopted a Reform Agenda aimed at tackling the difficult socio-economic situation and advancing the judicial and public administration reforms. Its implementation has started. Meaningful progress in the implementation of the Reform Agenda is necessary for the EU to consider BiH's EU membership application. Despite these positive developments, Republika Srpska National Assembly decision of July 2015, to hold a referendum on the BiH state-level judiciary runs against the written commitment signed in February which is the basis for moving ahead on the EU path.⁶⁵

The preparation and adoption of the Reform Agenda was a major milestone in developing a roadmap towards EU accession. A number of events have already been organised within the advocacy part of the activities, including roundtables and workshops with civil society, NGOs, development agencies, the business community etc. The Strategic Communication Plan is an integral part of the Reform Agenda Action Plan and includes all relevant aspects of the communication and advocacy efforts, including time schedules, designation of authorities charged with implementing the activities and communication channels.

Redefinition of taxation, excise taxes, public sector downsizing, structural reforms of the labour law, strengthening of the fiscal system, public administration reform, public sector employment policy, improvement of the business climate and competitiveness, reform of social benefits, restructuring of public companies, reform of the health sector and rule of law are just some of the issues covered by the Reform Agenda, which Bosnia and Herzegovina should all address within the next three years if it expects to be granted any loans by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB) and the European Union, which is the promoter of the Agenda.

The EU integration process has speeded up the public administration reform process in many transition countries, and reference will be made to the Western Balkan countries that have set EU integration as one of their priorities. The Western Balkan countries are facing many challenges in their democratisation and implementation of action plans developed as part of the public administration reform strategy. The hitherto

⁶⁵ European Commission, 2015, Commission Staff Working Document, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015 Report, Brussels, p. 4.

progress and challenges lying ahead are analysed with reference to the European Commission's Progress Reports and SIGMA annual assessment reports, which clearly identify these countries' priorities in terms of public administration reform in the coming years.

4.1.2. *Skilled and Educated Workforce*

Our primary research has shown that most respondents believe that Western Balkan countries have a highly skilled and educated workforce, which can be very beneficial to the EU labour market. One interesting comment made by one interviewee was that "in Balkan countries, graduating from college has almost become a tradition". Furthermore, the tuition fees at public universities are reasonably cheaper than in EU countries; hence education is quite affordable and available. Secondary education acquired either in classical high schools or in schools providing vocational educational training (VET), is compulsory in most Western Balkan countries.

Furthermore, our primary research corroborates the general opinion that Western Balkan countries have high shares of skilled vocational workers, such as cobblers, tailors, plumbers and electricians, from whom the EU labour market can benefit greatly. However, one must bear in mind that some analyses, such as the one conducted by European Training Foundation in 2014, conclude that:

"With regard to practical training, it is evident that the number of hours spent in school practical lessons and in work placements in training companies differs widely across schools, within countries and between countries. At the same time, there is some evidence that preference in access to apprenticeships tends to be given to the more advantaged students. On the whole, the current state of practical training is insufficient to provide many students with a sound basis of vocational knowledge and experience."⁶⁶

Additional apprenticeships would increase these students' set of skills and prepare them well for the EU labour market. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (online data), BiH had the second highest number of enrolments in upper-secondary vocational and technical programmes in 2011, with a total of 112,050 enrolments; Serbia topped the list with a total of 214,131 enrolments.

4.1.3. *Tourism and Natural Beauties*

The primary and secondary research has shown that BiH has a lot of potential in tourism. As one of the Europe's fastest growing tourism markets, BiH is becoming increasingly attractive to EU tourists. EU citizens visiting BiH will help improve the country's image and increase its EU prospects, as they did Croatia's, Malta's and Cyprus' membership bids.

BiH found itself at the top of the list of countries when it comes to the rise in the number of tourists. In 2012, BiH registered over 740,000 tourists, an increase of 9% over 2011. That year, the country registered 1,600,000 overnight stays, i.e. 9.4% more than in 2011. Foreign tourists account for 58.6% of all tourists.⁶⁷

That same year, Sarajevo won the award as the best tourist destination in a competition with more than 100 cities around the world, organised by the foXnoMad, a world famous travel blog.⁶⁸ The travel guide Lonely Planet rated Sarajevo the 43rd best city to visit in the world.

⁶⁶ European Training Foundation, 2014, *South Eastern Europe, Israel and Turkey: strengths, perspectives and challenges in strengthening vocational education for social inclusion and social cohesion*, Luxembourg, p. 123.

⁶⁷ Statistical Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2013, *First Release: Tourism Statistics*, Sarajevo, March 2013.

⁶⁸ FoXnoMmad, 2012, *The Best City To Visit 2012 Travel Tournament Winner Is...Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina!*

The World Tourism Organization forecasted that BiH would be the third country with the highest growth rate in tourism in the world in the 1995-2020 period. The Huffington Post recently labelled BiH as the “9th Greatest Adventure in the World for 2013”, adding that the country boasted “the cleanest water and air in Europe; the greatest untouched forests; and the most wildlife. The best way to experience is the three rivers trip, which purls through the best the Balkans has to offer”.⁶⁹

The reliability of data provided by the state Statistical Agency and the entities’ Statistical Institutes needs to be borne in mind when analysing tourism in BiH. The data provided are correct considering the level of measurement these agencies are able to perform. The problem is that there is no efficient monitoring system or efficient tourism registration system. Many hosts do not register the guests they provide accommodation to, which results in large gaps between the registered and unregistered stays, and a high percentage of tourist mobility in the “grey economy”. If this problem were addressed, the statistics would show a far greater number of tourists in BiH, which would attract investors and lead to a higher level of development in that area, as well as in many others.

BiH also lacks a tourism development strategy at the state level. Republika Srpska (one of the two BiH administrative subunits) adopted its own strategy in 2012, and the other administrative subunit, the Federation, has not adopted a strategy yet. The country has a lot of potential for tourism development, but a strategy at the state level would help foster destination management, and “better sell” the country on the whole. It is important to know that tourists are not interested in political problems and do not recognise administrative borders.

4.1.4. Cultural, Architectural and Archaeological Heritage

Similarly to tourism, primary and secondary research has shown that cultural diversity, mix of architectural styles and discovered and undiscovered archaeological heritage may make BiH’s EU membership bid more attractive.

Dating from prehistoric times to the modern day, BiH has a plethora of cultural riches of various provenances: prehistoric, Greek, Illyrio-Roman, Gothic, early Slav, mediaeval, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Yugoslav. Properties of cultural interest include both movable cultural property (individual items or collections found in museums) and immovable cultural property (monuments or ensembles – residential, educational, religious, public, commercial, infrastructural, military, funerary, etc.). The most famous cities and locations are Sarajevo, Mostar, Stolac, Pocitelj, Trebinje, Medjugorje, Blagaj, Jajce, Ostrozac, etc., which have many monuments that intersect different cultures and religions, rendering Bosnia and Herzegovina the crossroads of Eastern and Western Europe.⁷⁰

BiH shares a common history with other Balkan countries and this is one of the areas in which cooperation can be established. Cooperation in a real sense requires, to some extent, “interdependence” between the interested parties, such as libraries, archives, and museums of the respective countries. The regional and international cooperative programmes carried out to preserve and manage the scientific and cultural information sources in the Balkan countries should be increased. As successful digitalisation, protection and management of information sources is closely related with the availability of networking facilities, the Internet infrastructures of the Balkan countries need to support “digital science” and “digital culture” should be studied to identify applications and services that can be streamlined through cooperative endeavours.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Sarajevo Times, 2015, *BiH as the “9th Greatest Adventure in the World for 2013”, Find out why!*

⁷⁰ Rob Pickard, 2008, *Analysis and Reform of Cultural Heritage Policies in South-East Europe*, Directorate of Culture and Natural Heritage, Regional Co-operation Division, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, pp. 25, 26.

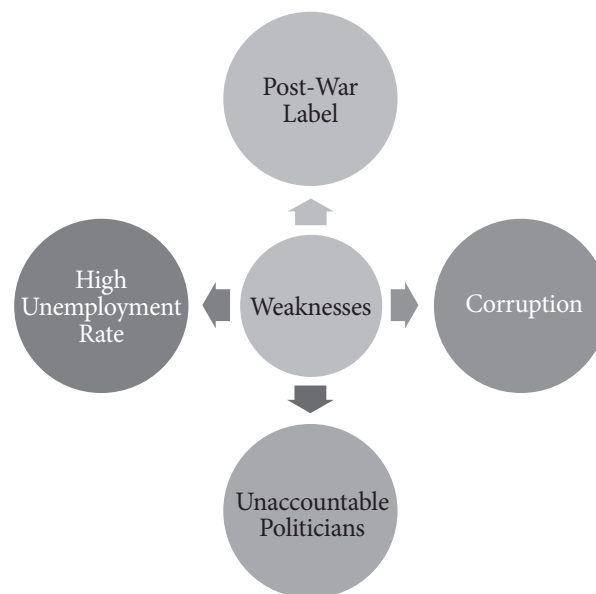
⁷¹ Yassar Tonta, 2009, *Preservation of scientific and cultural heritage in Balkan countries*, Department of Information Management, Hacettepe University, Ankara, p. 428.

4.1.5. Sports Achievements

BiH is also home to many great achievers in individual and team sports, notably in athletics, tennis, junior and cadet basketball, football, sitting volleyball, etc. BiH's star athletes can contribute to the improvement of the country's image and its promotion among EU citizens. BiH's qualification in the 2014 Football World Cup in Brazil attracted a significant amount of positive news coverage around the world and in the EU.

4.2. Weaknesses

The interviews have shown that the vast majority of respondents agree on the weaknesses of BiH and the region in general. They by and large mention the unaccountability of politicians; high levels of corruption; post-war label; high unemployment rate; lack of transparent governance, etc. These weaknesses are analysed in greater detail below.



4.2.1. Post-War Label

BiH is still considered a war-torn country, even though the war ended two decades ago. BiH's architectural heritage was damaged and some of it was even destroyed during the 1992-1995 war and there are still traces of war in many cities: bullet holes, destroyed buildings, grenade holes on the streets, etc. However, the war did not only leave scars on every city and village; it also left behind mine fields across BiH. The severe floods in May 2014 did not leave only material damage – the mine fields slid from the mapped locations, endangering security. One of the respondents referred to the context of tourism: “Whether we like it or not, we still have that “post-war country” label and the image of an unsafe zone. One of the reasons for that is the media. They are led by the number of “clicks” and survive on “sensationalist stories”, good or bad. They will always promote negative things and they play a very important role in this. If there were a good communication strategy and a good action plan for the implementation of this strategy – there would be a systematic approach to solving and dealing with this problem”.

Even today, there are many people who think that war is still raging in BiH. This is, however, not only the fault of the media, but of BiH and its governing bodies as well, because they are not working on building and communicating a positive image of BiH. Stories about BiH citizens' links with terrorism are also impinging

on the country's image. People want to go where it is safe. The tourism industry is the first to react to political instabilities as the examples of Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Syria clearly demonstrate.

4.2.2. Corruption

According to a United Nations Office on Crimes and Drugs report, corruption is often reported in the international community as an area of vulnerability for the countries of the Western Balkans and it appears that the people of BiH agree. Results presented in this report show that citizens of BiH rank corruption as the fourth most important problem facing their country, after unemployment, the performance of the government and poverty or low living standards.

More than a half of BiH's citizens (51%) believe that corruption is actually on the rise in their country, while only 6 per cent think it is decreasing. Perceptions, it should be underlined, are nothing more than opinions and are not to be confused with the actual experience of corruption that provides the main focus of this report. Nevertheless, such a perception can be interpreted as an expression of the citizens' awareness of one of the principal challenges facing BiH, both now and in the years to come.⁷²

Corruption is one of the main challenges faced by BiH. The country ranked 76th out of 168 countries on Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. With a score of 38 out of 100, BiH's performance is the third worst of the Balkan countries, ranking better only than Albania and Kosovo.⁷³

4.2.3. Unaccountable Politicians

Another identified weakness of BiH on its path to EU membership is lack of trust in and accountability of BiH politicians, as well as the lack of clear political will and commitment to the EU accession process.

There is a gap between declarative support to the EU integration process and deeds. In addition, the non-existence of actual inter-party consensus, or a mechanism that would ensure the continuity and tempo of EU integration means that there is always the danger of the EU agenda being derailed by the local political situation. It is necessary to enable a dialectical approach between politics and economy, where the two will synergise with a view to EU integration; this balance has not been created yet, or, rather, the political and economic actors have not yet fostered this dialogue.

The Democratization Policy Council issued a strongly worded statement about the situation, saying that "BiH politicians can continue to be irresponsible and mortgage their countries - and their citizens' - future for their own political survival - but not at Western taxpayers' expense. The failure of BiH's politicians to meet the first concrete requirement of the EU initiative demonstrates yet again their unwillingness to reform and sense of entitlement to Western taxpayers' hard-earned funds. While the EU and international financial institutions remain willing to assist BiH's people in a long-delayed transition to an economy that rewards initiative and hard work, they will no longer fund political irresponsibility and mal-governance. When salaries and pensions cease to be paid, BiH citizens should blame their politicians - not Germany, the EU, or the West."⁷⁴

⁷² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011. *Corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Bribery as experienced by the population*, Vienna, pp. 3-5.

⁷³ Transparency International, 2013. *Country profiles: Bosnia and Herzegovina*.

⁷⁴ Bassuener K, 2015. *What Chancellor Merkel Should Tell Bosnia's Politicians and People*, Democratization Policy Council

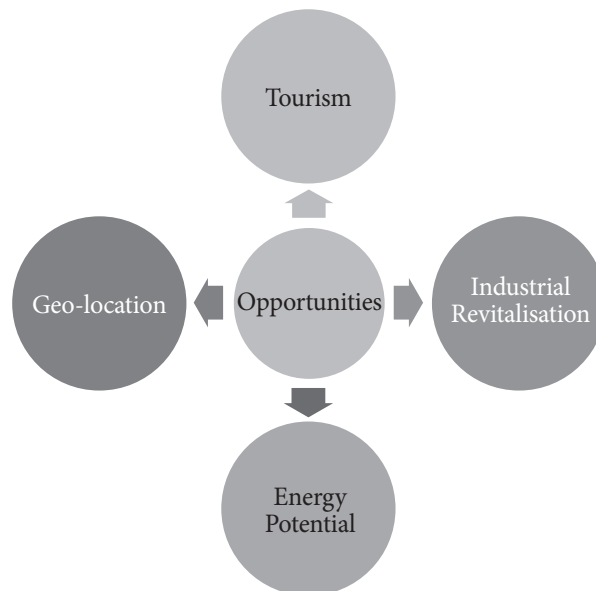
4.2.4. High Unemployment Rate

Statistics show that, in 2014, (FYR) Macedonia had the highest unemployment rate of all Western Balkan countries, standing at as many as 27.6 per cent. BiH took second place with only 0.1 per cent less, i.e. 27.5 per cent. The interviews have revealed that the majority of respondents share the opinion that the high unemployment rate, coupled with poor education and absence of a vision of the future, have rendered many young men (and women) susceptible to manipulation and radicalism, prompting them to go off and fight in Syria and other places.

Furthermore, the high unemployment rate has also forced many young people to emigrate in search of jobs. BiH, as well as other Western Balkan countries, are facing the problem of “brain drain”. Statistics show poor prospects for the region’s youth, with predictions of youth unemployment reaching as many as 38.8% in Montenegro and 47.5% in Serbia; the youth unemployment rate in Kosovo stood at 55.3% in 2012. In January 2015 alone, 10,000 Kosovars applied for asylum in Hungary. Not only the youths are leaving these countries; so are highly skilled professionals, such as doctors, engineers, academics, etc. Obviously, the EU is a stakeholder in this equation, considering the fact that most of these *emigres* are moving to Germany, Austria, and some other EU countries, in search of better opportunities.

4.3. Opportunities

Western Balkan countries have potential for development in many different areas: specific types of tourism such as eco-tourism, medical tourism, cultural tourism, etc.; industrial development and revitalisation, energy potentials of renewable and sustainable energy sources; organic agriculture, and in many other fields. However, the barrier to development of the listed potentials of these countries lies in lack of investments, since the weaknesses identified below are pushing away foreign investors and jeopardising additional loans from the IMF, World Bank and the EU.



4.3.1. *Tourism*

Western Balkan countries abound in natural beauties: include mountains, forests, the seaside, beautiful rivers and lakes, and many more. Eco tourism is becoming increasingly popular in the world and it involves travelling around natural sites, where the environment is conserved, meeting with locals and learning about nature and its preservation. This type of tourism has major potential in the Western Balkans because of the variety of different possibilities the region's countries offer to those who appreciate nature.

Western Balkan countries can also offer extreme sports tourism - mountain biking, rafting, rock climbing, cliff jumping, etc. Such events are already organised in BiH: e.g. Old Bridge jumps in Mostar, Red Bull Jump & Freeze competition at Mt Bjelasnica, et al.

Medical tourism has become increasingly popular in BiH over the last few years, with most visitors coming from countries such as Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, etc. Natural thermal springs are frequented by those in need of physical therapy, and there is a lot of space for development when it comes to medical tourism, which includes dental tourism, wellness tourism, physical rehabilitation tourism, etc.

Cultural tourism is yet another area in which Western Balkan countries have a lot to offer. There is a lot of scope for cooperation and creation of a joint platform offering organised tours of the Western Balkans, which would contribute to the creation of a more positive image of the region, not just one specific country.

4.3.2. *Industrial Revitalisation*

The further integration of the markets of the Western Balkan countries, prior to their full membership in the EU, would open space for more economic opportunities and greater economic development. This would help the countries in the region transform into fully functional market economies and increase their competitiveness once they gain full access to the EU market of 500 million consumers. EU countries would then become interested in benefitting more from full access to the Western Balkan countries and would therefore champion their integration in the EU.

Specific sectors, such as metal processing, the auto-motive industry and information and communication technologies, are already of interest to the EU. There are also some sectors, such as food production and processing, the wood and furniture industries and the textile, clothing and footwear industries, in which the Western Balkans and BIH have competitive advantages.

4.3.3. *Energy Potential*

There is great energy potential in the six Western Balkan countries. And a great part of that potential, for example, the region's hydro potential, is still underused. There are also substantial reserves of coal in Kosovo, BiH and Serbia, while studies on the construction of thermal power plants in the region have given priority to those using cheap coal or lignite. Electricity consumption in the region is on the rise, but investments are needed in order to support energy efficiency. Furthermore there is significant potential in renewable energy such as wind, solar and biomass energy. BiH, Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania are emerging markets when it comes to oil product consumption.⁷⁵

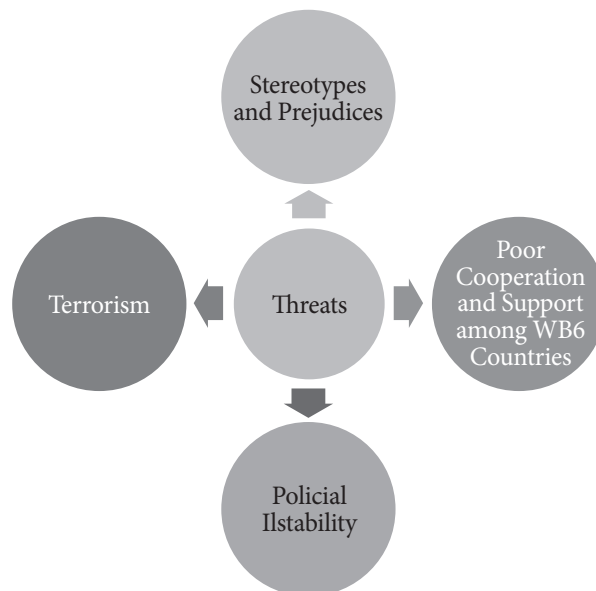
⁷⁵ Pešut D., *Overview of Energy Sector in Balkan Region*, Energy Institute Hrvoje Pozar.

4.3.4. Geographic Location

The Western Balkans' geographical location has been listed most often as a competitive advantage of the countries in the region. The map of the Western Balkans and the EU countries surrounding it - Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece - clearly shows that the fastest way for these countries to develop and become economically sustainable is to have the six Western Balkan countries developing as well. There is also potential in connecting Greece and Croatia by the shortest possible road going through the Western Balkans. From this perspective, geography becomes an advantage. The importance of the six Western Balkan countries also lies in building energy and road infrastructure for a better connected Europe.

4.4. Threats

The interviews conducted with people of various backgrounds and experience have shown that all of them share the same concerns, or fears of threats that might have extremely adverse impact on the region, and BiH in particular, on their path to the EU.



4.4.1. Terrorism

The terrorist attacks that recently hit the major EU cities, endangered global security and the on-going terrorism threats have contributed to the creation of negative perceptions of this post-war region, exacerbated by reports by some of the most popular newspapers in the EU about Islamist radicals buying land in BiH. The Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* wrote that Islamic terrorism was reaching all-time highs in Europe. The German newspaper *Deutsche Wirtschafts Nachrichten* reported on the still large stocks of ammunition and arms left in the region of former Yugoslavia and that the geographic location was convenient for terrorists to enter the Schengen zone. The French newspaper *France 24* reported that BiH has become an important point of recruitment for terrorist organisations such as the Islamic State (ISIS), adding that 40 per cent of BiH's population was Moslem and that one of the top recruiters in Europe was a Bosnian national.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Mchung J., 2016. „ISIS In Europe? Islamist Extremists Buying Land In Bosnia Herzegovina Amid Islamic State Terror Fears: Report“, *International Business Times*, New York

4.4.2. *Stereotypes and Prejudices*

The Western Balkan countries are also up against various stereotypes and prejudices that the Western European countries have about them. A large share of BiH's population is Moslem, which has given rise to the stereotype that all women in BiH wear the hijab, that people do not drink alcohol, and that it is a very conservative society. However, the reality is quite different and it does not take much time before foreign visitors and tourists realise that. Furthermore, the Western Balkan countries, as previously mentioned, carry the post-war label and the question "Is a war still going on in BiH?" pops up quite often in conversations with people from abroad. Of course, there are many reasons for this and the media, which stopped reporting on BiH once the war was over, as it was no longer a "hot topic", carry their share of responsibility. Furthermore, absence of a communication strategy at the state level, which would promote the country in a more positive light, is also one of the reasons why a lot of people think the war is still going on. The stereotypes do not only come from the EU, but also from within the region, which leads to a simple conclusion: that Western Balkan countries need to start dispelling prejudices and stereotypes about their next-door neighbours before they turn to the rest of the world.

4.4.3. *Poor Cooperation and Support among Western Balkan Countries*

The Western Balkan countries need to strengthen mutual support and cooperation at many different levels. The interviews have shown that most respondents share the opinion that the WB6 need to develop synergies to speed up the EU integration process. Regional cooperation is of major importance for this process, and it is, to an extent, incentivised through various EU projects. Also, the Connectivity 2020 platform is aimed at using EU funds to finance the "reconnection" of countries in the region in all areas - energy and road infrastructure, youth exchanges (establishment of the regional youth office in Tirana) - and, hopefully, at spurring more EU driven investments in developing regional industrial clusters. The Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF), a financial platform for Connectivity 2020, will finance two infrastructural projects in Serbia. The one Serbia is particularly interested in is the Belgrade-Sarajevo railway connection. Macedonia will be granted funding to complete the very important Corridor VIII. Albania is expected to get financial support for the Adriatic Ionian gas pipeline. BiH, Serbia and Montenegro have jointly applied for funds for a hydroelectric power plant project, which will enable transfer of electricity from the Drina River via BiH and Montenegro and under the Adriatic Sea to Italy. BiH hopes to receive financial support for finishing an important highway and railway connecting the north and south of the country.

4.4.4. *Political Instability*

Lack of political stability is an obvious threat to the region. This threat first of all relates to the question of Kosovo. The relations between Serbia and Kosovo have been in the media limelight due to both the region's and EU's political and diplomatic interests in the issue and the non-recognition of Kosovo's independence by five EU Member States. The EU Enlargement Commissioner recently openly said that Kosovo could not apply for EU membership unless all EU Member States recognised it. There are reasonable fears that Kosovo will remain in limbo, given that it is the only Western Balkan country whose citizens cannot travel without visas to the Schengen area. This can be a source of instability.⁷⁷

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is another Western Balkan country in limbo. This country has been stuck without prospects of opening accession negotiations although it was granted EU candidate status a decade ago. It has recently been shaken by civic protests and political fragmentation. The threat of the spill-over effect to the region and intra-ethnic, as well as inter-ethnic violence is present.

⁷⁷ Batsavage R., 2011, 162. *Kosovo: Challenge to Balkan Stability*, Global Europe Program.

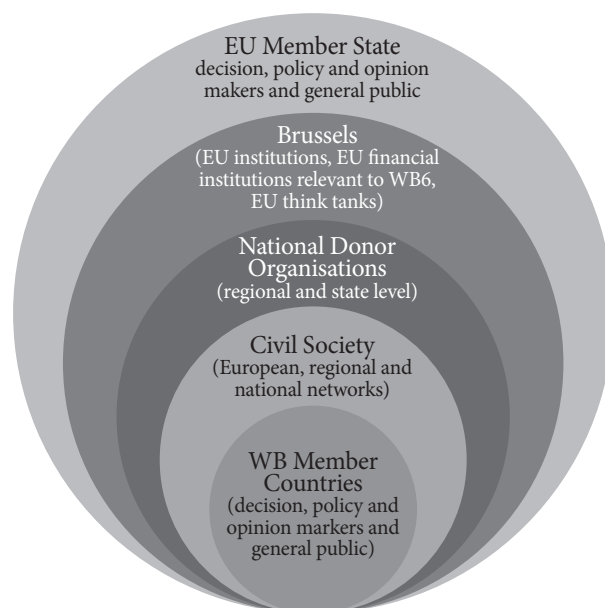
BiH is not a fully stable country either. This was best exemplified by the February 2014 violent protests. Another threat to political stability is the referendum announced by the President of Republika Srpska (the BiH entity with a Serb majority). *Foreign Policy*¹ ran an article on this issue stating that, while the referendum only addressed the judiciary, its destructive intentions made it a de facto declaration of independence.⁷⁸ This article, titled “Is War About to Break Out in the Balkans?” is sending a negative message to the readers about the country and the region.

5. Strategy Goals and Agents

There are several goals the advocacy strategy should try to achieve:

- Increase institutional and public awareness and knowledge of the benefits and responsibilities emerging as the country draws nearer to the EU;
- Help raise the advocacy capacity and motivation of all relevant institutions and agencies implementing EU accession related reforms, including experts, think tanks, media, civil society, et al;
- Highlight arguments for faster accession to the EU;
- Better cope with the EU’s own “enlargement fatigue”;
- Contribute to the development of positive perceptions of the region and the Western Balkan countries in the EU institutions, EU Member States and broader public in the eight countries involved (V4: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, as well as the Western Balkans: Albania, BiH, Montenegro and Serbia).

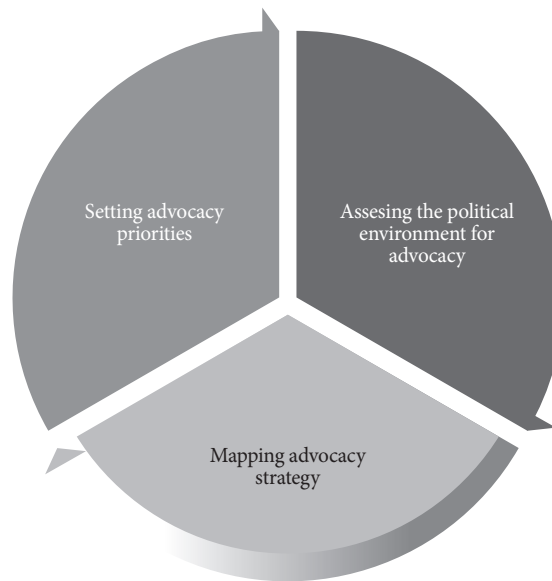
There are several groups of stakeholders that should be involved in the drawing up and implementation of the advocacy strategy. They can also be defined as advocacy agents and presented as follows:



⁷⁸ Lyon J., 2015, “Is War About to Break Out in the Balkans?”, *Foreign Policy*.

6. Strategy Methodology

The advocacy strategy needs to specify the duties of all the listed stakeholders, as well as the channels of communication and key messages to be communicated to each target group. The development of an efficient advocacy strategy involves the following three essential steps:



Source: Pathfinder International, *Straight to the Point: Mapping an Advocacy Strategy*, 2011

6.1. Target Groups and Messages

There are three main groups that should be taken into consideration when defining the key messages that ought to be communicated through the advocacy strategy. The graph below presents three stakeholders: EU institutions, EU Member States and the six Western Balkan countries.

EU Institutions



EU Member States

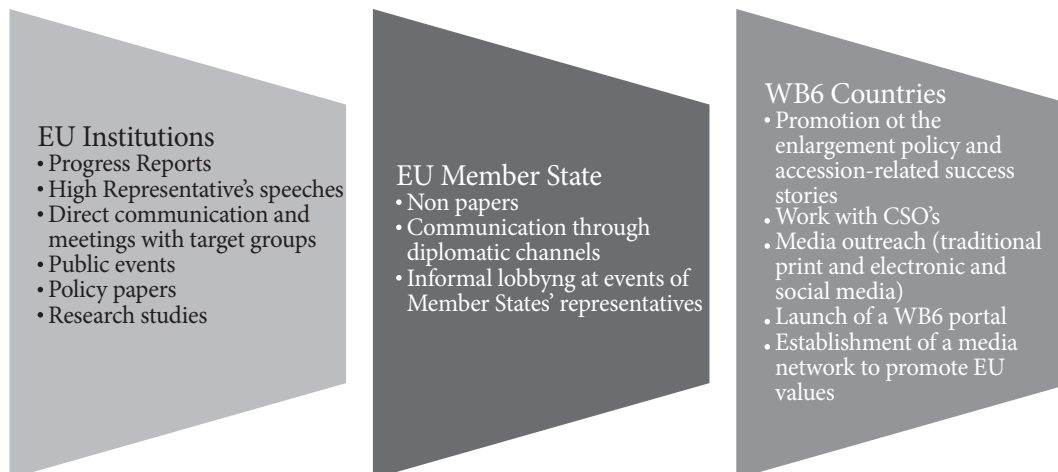


WB6 Countries



6.2. Advocacy/Communication Channels

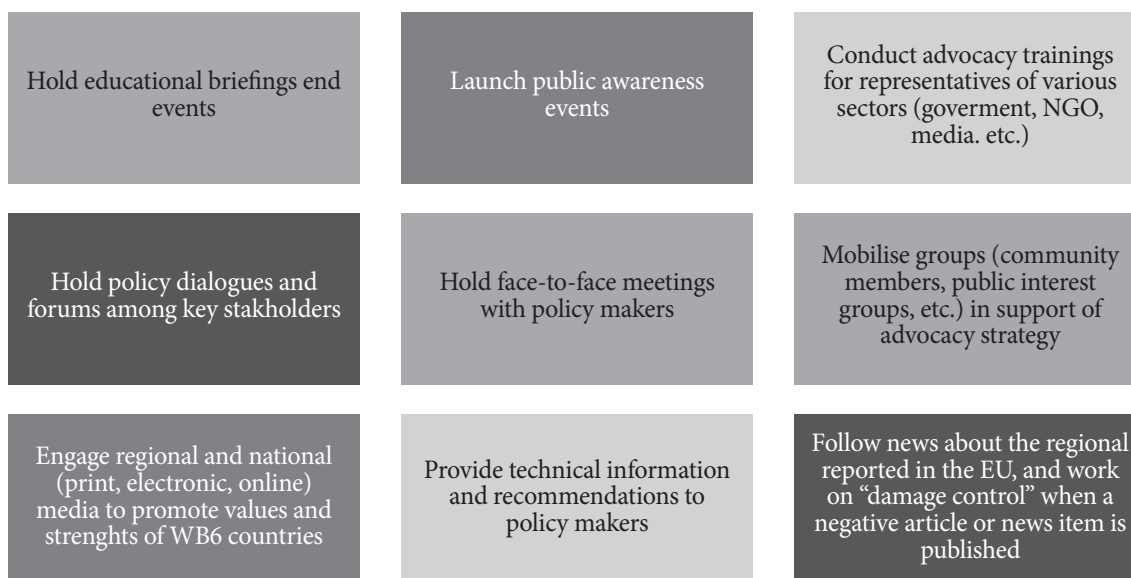
In order to develop an efficient advocacy strategy, it is important to define the advocacy and communication channels. The choice of communication channels depends on the target groups. The graph below outlines channels of communication with the three mentioned stakeholders.



6.3. Advocacy/Communication Activities

Numerous activities can be organised to support the advocacy strategy. One of the questions we asked our interviewees was related to their recommendations for the development of the strategy. In order to develop an effective and efficient advocacy strategy, it is also important to bear in mind who the target groups are and how they are relevant to advocacy effectiveness, improving advocacy capacity and regional advocacy development.

Herewith a summary of the proposed activities and recommendations:



Source: Pathfinder International, Straight to the Point: Mapping an Advocacy Strategy, 2011

7. Monitoring Mechanism (Indicators)

In order for the advocacy strategy to be successful, a set of indicators or a monitoring mechanism needs to be in place to keep the strategy on track. The first question that needs to be answered is what should be measured? Many things, such as:

- digital outreach,
- print media,
- number and structure of media partnerships,
- key messages in related policy analyses,
- lobbying activities,
- trainings held,
- etc.

Advocacy monitoring includes collecting and analysing information on broader issues and may also cover:

- internal issues – how well the staff and partners are working and how well the activities are being implemented (six Western Balkan countries, decision and policy makers, institutions, etc.);
- external issues – covering key changes in the external environment, which might affect the project activities (threats and opportunities identified in the SWOT analysis);
- collaborative issues – including capacity building activities and cooperation with relevant stakeholders;
- progress towards objectives: keeping track of progress being made towards the strategy objectives.⁷⁹

8. Risks and Mitigation Measures

Development of a national and/or regional advocacy strategy involves a great deal of stakeholders, which also entails a greater number of risks in the whole process. The below table categorises and ranks as H-M-L (High-Medium-Low) the main risks related to particular stakeholders and lists the mitigation measures.

Table 1: Risks and Mitigation Measures

Stakeholder	Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Brussels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WB6 countries are not on the top of the priority list due to the EU financial crisis, refugee crisis, etc. • Fear of repetition of mistakes made during enlargement to Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania 	<p>H</p> <p>M</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote enlargement as the most successful EU policy • Counterbalance by specifying benefits of their enlargement

⁷⁹ O'Flynn M., 2009, *Tracking Progress in Advocacy: Why and How to Monitor and Evaluate Advocacy Projects and Programmes*, International NGO Training and Research Centre.

EU Member States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member States are against further enlargement due to domestic policies, public opinion, etc. • Bilateral disputes between Member State(s) and candidate states 	H H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote enlargement through factual information combating superficial views of enlargement • Deepen understanding of broader European interests
Regional Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of operational power due to regional disputes 	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructive approach to resolving disputes without abusing regional initiatives
WB6 Countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of capacity needed for implementation of reforms • Lack of political will 	H H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise trainings, seminars, workshops • Stronger involvement of civil society and broader public
Civil Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of public visibility of their work • Lack of funding from national donors 	M M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase visibility by use of different channels and media • Raise awareness among donors
National Donor Organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of interest in EU integration process 	M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness among donors, communicate needs in an efficient manner

9. Resources Overview

For an advocacy strategy to be effective and efficient, different kinds of contributions are needed: human resources; funding; political and media connections; advocacy, communication and technical expertise, etc. Hence, it is important to assess the available and potential resources in order to gain better insight in BiH's overall capacity to implement an advocacy strategy.

9.1. Available Resources

The interviews have shown that the vast majority of interviewees share the opinion that BiH has sufficient capacity to develop and implement an advocacy/communication strategy. What it does lack, however, is a sufficient number of qualified people who understand the substance of what needs to be communicated. The problem with the EU integration process in BiH is that it is being understood in many different ways by different stakeholders. The government institutions grasp the processes but often fail to appreciate the content or what the process should bring in terms of improving the efficiency of running the state. The NGO sector focuses on the content but with little regard for the difficulty of the decision-making process in BiH. Furthermore, the EU Delegation/EUSR has sufficient capacities and resources, which are not fully used. Also, the vast majority of our interviewees are of the opinion that the Directorate for EU Integration should be in the lead and cooperate closely with CSOs and think tanks.

9.2. Potential Resources

As mentioned, human capacity is not the only capacity needed for implementing an advocacy strategy. Funding and political and media connections are important parts of the equation as well:

- **Fundraising** – it is necessary to approach national donor organisations operating in the six Western Balkan countries at the regional and national levels.
- **Civil Society** – stronger connections should be built with civil society: national, regional and European networks alike. These connections can be used for capacity building activities, exchange of information and experience, etc.
- **EU Institutions** – The EU Delegation and EUSR have sufficient resources and capacities, however they are not being used to their fullest capacity.
- **Media** – raising awareness among the broader public through different media channels (print, electronic and online).

10. Review of Recommendations

A long list of valuable recommendations was drawn up based on the interviews. These recommendations provide insight in the opinions of people from different educational and professional backgrounds, which renders them even more useful as they have given thought to the advocacy/communication strategy from their different perspectives. Herewith a summary of these recommendations:

- **Build a platform** that will focus on the promotion and repositioning of BiH, together with the other six Western Balkan countries, with input from both the government and NGO sectors.
- **Focus on EU institutions** and take stock of their efforts, whether they have done enough and what more they can do in terms of the kinds of support the region and BiH need. Systematically approach the issue of how the WB6 can improve the EU integration process as such.
- **Target groups** also need to be taken into account, as their identification is one of the crucial elements of the strategy. It is impossible to target everybody or to develop separate strategies targeting different target groups due to the capacity gap, wherefore thought should be given to identifying the primary focus group(s) – EU institutions, EU Member States, regional initiatives, Western Balkan countries, civil society organisations or national donor organisations. Perhaps it would also be useful to create clusters of target groups, which would facilitate the definition of the primary and secondary target groups.
- **Capacity building** is one of the key elements for the efficient implementation of an advocacy strategy. It is crucial that capacity building training is provided to staff in each of the involved institutions, as well as to staff in CSOs and think tanks, in order to develop a network of people who are educated and skilled in advocacy.
- **The accession stage of the country at issue** should also be taken into consideration: negotiations under way (Serbia, Montenegro and possibly Albania), static and blocked (Kosovo, FYR Macedonia and possibly BiH).
- **Media** have a crucial role in the region. A fragmented market and divided “national media” allow for manipulations of the public and placement of different messages depending on the media owners’ interests or preferences. Media literacy is a major issue in the entire Western Balkans due to lack of consistent and transparent flow of high quality information. Sending the right message to the EU calls for synergy among the media at both the national and regional levels.

- **Joint focus on economic and social issues** and their importance for the stability of the Western Balkan region needs to be stressed; so does the necessity of implementing new social models (progressive taxation and protection programmes to reduce income and wealth disparities) and new economic models (value added economy should replace the current neoliberal model) in the Western Balkans.
- **Outreach** is critical for the implementation of the advocacy strategy and should be performed via offices, educational projects in schools, (cultural, music, food, film) festivals and media campaigns, which are crucial for a regional strategy. Think tanks and media need to be part of the outreach efforts and their knowledge exchange strategies have to be more interactive and closer to people.

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Annex

Western Balkan 6 – SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted Reform Agenda and Action Plan • EU application submission • Judicial Reform Strategy • Anti-Corruption Strategy • Sports achievements • Film industry achievements • Unified army • Tourism development • Mostar – UNESCO world heritage • Skilled, well-educated and largely bilingual workforce • Skilled vocational workers • Cheap labour compared to EU countries • Natural resources • Natural beauties • Traditional values – work life balance • Well-preserved nature • Geographical location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unaccountability of politicians • High corruption levels • Post-war label • Political intolerance • Nationalism and perpetuation of hostilities • High unemployment rate • Lack of transparent governance • Legal uncertainty • Absence of a solid legal and institutional framework for doing business • Lack of support for education, innovation, culture and sports • No adequate strategic approach to foreign policy
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism – eco tourism, medical tourism, cultural tourism • Industrial development and revitalisation - metal processing, automotive industry, ICT potential; food and agri-business industries, furniture and wood industries, textile industry, etc. • Energy potential – renewable and sustainable energy sources • Organic agriculture • Geographical location – development of road and energy transmission infrastructure • Negotiations to join COSME programme • BiH as the third country eligible for programmes such as Horizon 2020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terrorism • Stereotypes • Prejudices • Neighbouring countries blocking or slowing down processes (Croatia – milk export story, Slovenia – blocking Croatia’s EU membership, etc.) • Mine fields – security threatened after 2014 floods caused sliding of uncleaned mine fields • Political hostilities within the country and in the region • Kosovo – a regional solution is needed

MONTENEGRO

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the current situation in Montenegro with respect to the advocacy strategy for accession to the European Union. It focuses on relevant documents, such as the valid and past Communication Strategy practices evident from publicly available data, as well as interviews conducted with prominent public and civil sector experts, who have for years been dealing with the European integration process. The following pages will provide an overview of the EU accession process, advocacy platform and how it can be improved in the future, since our desk research and interviews show that what is lacking is advocacy targeting the EU and specific Member States, rather than focusing mainly on institutions or national campaigns.

1. Brief Overview of Montenegro's Headway in Accession since 2006

Montenegro is currently considered the leader in the region when it comes to the European integration process, as the European Commission corroborated in its 2015 Montenegro Progress Report. In order to be able to explain and understand this progress, we need to briefly examine the steps Montenegro has made to date.

Montenegro regained its independence on 21 May 2006, but its officials had called for the application of the two-track principle in negotiations with the EU while it was still part of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. This approach meant that the two republics' economic progress and achievements would be measured separately in the negotiating process. Soon after it gained independence, Montenegro took firmer steps on the road to the EU, starting with the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) in October 2007. It submitted its application for EU membership in December 2008 and the Council invited the European Commission (EC) to submit an opinion on Montenegro's application in April 2009.

The European Commission sent Montenegro the Questionnaire in July 2009. The Montenegrin Government submitted its replies in two "takes" - in December 2009 and April 2010. The delay in submitting all the answers was due to the not so prompt response of the Minister for European Integration. Civil society organisations tried to involve themselves actively and contribute to this process, but Montenegro nevertheless wasted almost half a year rewriting several hundreds of answers, which it sent back to the EC in April 2010.

The EU 27 ratified the SAA in November 2009 and as a result of the Commission's positive opinion (in November 2010), the Council granted Montenegro the status of candidate country on 17 December 2010. Meanwhile, in November 2009, the EU showed its commitment not just to Montenegro but to most other Western Balkan (WB) countries as well, by lifting visas for their citizens, allowing them to travel freely to the Member States in the Schengen area and, more importantly, feel more as a part of Europe and that the prospects of future enlargement were within reach.

⁸⁰ Momčilo Radulović is the Chairman of the European Movement in Montenegro. Mila Brnović is the European Movement in Montenegro Programme Coordinator.

Negotiations on Montenegro's EU membership officially started in June 2012, after the Commission's 2011 recommendation was approved by the Council.

Montenegro is currently negotiating 20 chapters, and has completed talks on two of them (Chapter 25 - Science and Research and Chapter 26 – Education and Culture). This headway is a major incentive for Montenegro to push even more strongly for further reforms.

In December 2014, Montenegro adopted Montenegro's Programme of Accession to the European Union 2014-2018, which became its main strategic accession document. Even though this document strives to incorporate as many aspects of this process as possible, its implementation has to be monitored closely by the civil sector, since it should be open to constant improvements and revisions. The Strategy for Informing the Public about Montenegro's Accession to the European Union 2014-2018 (Communication Strategy) is another important strategic document.

The process of Montenegro's Europeanisation was accompanied by the strengthening of regional cooperation. For instance, it recently signed border agreements with Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, along with such an agreement signed earlier with Albania, set an example for other Western Balkan countries.

In addition, Montenegro has won itself the reputation of being a kind of "meeting point" for all Western Balkan countries, helping all the others in the European integration process and becoming a channel of communication and connectivity between those countries in the region still suffering from lower levels of cooperation.

As both the EC Report on Montenegro and the EU Enlargement Strategy state, although Montenegro's progress has been visible, the implementation phase will be a bigger challenge in the future. "EU accession negotiations with Montenegro have advanced. The rule of law legislative framework has been improved and new institutions are being established. It is now essential for the overall negotiation process that the entire rule of law system of Montenegro delivers results, in particular to establish a track-record in the fight against corruption and organised crime."⁸¹

2. Civil Sector Involvement in the Negotiating Groups

The Montenegrin civil sector has been continuously involved in both monitoring and supporting the Government in different stages of the process. The period preceding the membership invitation was marked by a plethora of civil sector activities in the field of European integration and overall reform, especially with respect to strengthening communication between the CSOs, on the one hand, and the Government and other public authorities, on the other.

The NGO European Movement in Montenegro (EMIM) led the two strongest and most important initiatives, which further shaped the negotiation process. First, the civil sector was incorporated in the official working groups set up for the negotiation process. EMIM had lobbied for this until 2011 and 2012, when the CSOs were officially incorporated in all the relevant Government documents related to negotiations. This was the first time an EU candidate country incorporated civil sector representatives in the working bodies conducting the official negotiations. This move was crucial for setting a solid background for further public-private sector cooperation within the negotiation process. Over 300 CSO representatives have joined the Montenegrin

⁸¹ *EU Enlargement Strategy*, Brussels, 10 November 2015, p. 14

Government Groups for Negotiations with the EU, offering their expertise, knowledge and experience in order to improve Montenegro's overall performance in the negotiations.

Although this initiative and its results were positive, the process is still burdened by lack of Government transparency vis-à-vis its CSO partners and by its reluctance to share all the necessary information. This needs to improve significantly, especially in specific "critical" chapters (such as Chapters 23 and 24), as well as in others, since all the chapters are equally important and the CSOs' contribution to each of them is crucial.

At the same time, in 2011, the European Movement in Montenegro launched an initiative for the creation of a platform called the "National Convention on the European Integration of Montenegro", drawing on Slovakia's experience and with the support of SlovakAid, the Slovak and Montenegrin Governments and the Parliament of Montenegro. The platform is based on the idea of rallying public and civil sector experts and activists, to discuss the most critical aspects of European integration and overall reforms and to formulate a number of recommendations for public institutions with the aim of speeding up and strengthening the reform processes.

Based on the impressive results at the national level⁸², the National Convention grew into a regional platform and went beyond Montenegro's borders. Together with the European Movements in Serbia and Albania, as well as its partners in all four Visegrad Group countries, the EMIM in 2014 designed the Regional Convention on the European Integration of the Western Balkans, with the support of the International Visegrad Fund and the German Stability Pact for SEE. This platform has grown over the past two years and now encompasses all WB countries. The greatest achievement of this regional platform is that it has brought together the regional governments and CSOs at five seminars and one regional conference, attended by all six WB Ministers of Foreign Affairs. These events showed both the will for and importance of regional cooperation that involves both government and CSO representatives.

3. Public Opinion on Montenegro's European Integration Process

Both state and civil sector organisations are important actors in shaping the image of Montenegro in the EU. Nonetheless, one of the crucial aspects of creating a good image and improving Montenegro's position in the EU and vice versa are the public's general perceptions of different areas of the accession process. The citizens' level of knowledge about the negotiations with the EU is important and is strongly influenced, first and foremost, by the media.

The latest public opinion poll⁸³, conducted by IPSOS Strategic Marketing, showed clear support for Montenegro's accession to the EU. More precisely, when asked whether they supported Montenegro's EU accession, 61% of the citizens said "yes", 34% said "no" not and 5% were indecisive. When asked whether they would vote on this matter, 60% said they would, 23 % said they probably would, while 10% said they would not vote and 4% said they probably would not vote. The remaining 3% of the respondents did not have an opinion on the matter; 71% of those, who do have an opinion on Montenegro's EU accession, would vote for joining the EU.

⁸² In 2011, EMIM formed four Working Groups with 120 members and issued over 150 recommendations, 30% of which were upheld by the Government. In the following period, EMIM expanded the membership to 400 members and six working groups and issued several hundred recommendations, up to 50% of which were implemented (data as of March 2015, this percentage is probably higher now). In 2013 and 2014, the National Convention was also granted IPA funding by the European Commission and the results of this initiative were hailed both at home and in the region, as well as in the EU Parliament and the Commission, where special presentations for MEPs and EU officials were organised.

⁸³ *Montenegro Public Opinion*, IPSOS Strategic Marketing, April 2016

Interestingly, many citizens still feel that the European integration process is mainly an interest promoted by the politicians and perceive it as something they cannot influence. At the same time, they believe that the integration process is developing too rapidly. Euroscepticism does not exist as an organised or structured approach; rather, it boils down to isolated opinions manifesting scepticism towards domestic developments.

Citizens perceive themselves as quite well informed and educated about the EU and the accession process. However, when they were asked specific questions about the EU, the level of their knowledge turned out to be much lower. The Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and media are recognised as the most important public outreach stakeholders.

As citizens rely on the media for information about the European integration process, it is crucial to have knowledgeable, educated and well-informed journalists keeping abreast of all the relevant developments.

4. Montenegro's Advocacy Strategy

As far as official government authorities are concerned, Montenegro's accession to the EU has mainly been advocated via the traditional channels of communication with European institutions; the CSOs have, on the other hand, been constantly searching for new channels of communication, albeit with rather limited effect.

The only document, which partly deals with pro-accession advocacy, is the Strategy for Informing the Public about Montenegro's Accession to the European Union 2014-2018. As the name of the Strategy indicates, it is primarily a communication strategy targeting citizens of Montenegro, but it is also the only official document tackling the issue of outreach to the EU. On the one hand, this Strategy's primary goal is "to inform the citizens about the commitments, responsibilities, and benefits arising from membership, as well as to reduce some ill-founded stereotypes related to the accession process and membership itself".⁸⁴ The Strategy thus provides numerous tools in order to ensure that the citizens can make informed decisions regarding the EU accession process. This Strategy is an improvement over its predecessor, since it is more comprehensive and lays greater emphasis on monitoring its implementation. There is also the 2011 Law on Lobbying, but its scope is limited to Montenegro and its public institutions.

The Government of Montenegro and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration (MFAEI) are in charge of implementing the Strategy, while a Consultative Committee, comprising both state and civil sector representatives, has been set up to monitor its implementation.

The Strategy makes two crucial references to communication with the EU. The list of objectives includes one concerning the provision of timely and accurate information about the process of negotiations. The Strategy specifies two categories of information to be relayed to the EU as an entity:

- "Create a database containing relevant information for the domestic and foreign public;
- Ensure timely provision of information to the international public about Montenegro's progress in adopting European standards"⁸⁵

The second reference can be found in the part of the Strategy listing the partners. Here, among other international partners, there are three categories relating to communication with the EU: EU institutions (especially the Parliament and the Commission); the Member States' diplomatic representations; and, the foreign media, which can project a positive image of Montenegro in the EU public.

⁸⁴ *Strategy for Informing the Public about Montenegro's Accession to the European Union 2014-2018*, Podgorica, March 2014, page 5

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, page 16

Although these two references do pertain to the advocacy of Montenegro's position in the EU, the Strategy merely mentions these aspects; they need to be elaborated more thoroughly either in this document or a separate one. For example, the most elaborate part concerning communication with the institutions says: "For this reason, great importance is attached to the timely and comprehensive provision of detailed information on all EU agenda matters, as well as consultations with the Commission and the DG ELARG. Moreover, initiation of joint/partner projects and events should have a twofold purpose: to promote Montenegro's results in the Member States and to promote EU values and policies among Montenegrin citizens." Despite this more elaborate reference to the communication strategy towards the EU institutions and reiteration that all the achievements need to be presented to the institutions, the broader public and the Member States' diplomatic representations, the Strategy authors have specified neither any objectives in the Introduction to the Strategy nor any Strategy goals precisely targeting Montenegro's position in the EU.

In practice, advocacy is implemented through the traditional channels. On the one hand, the Government and other public authorities are using the lobbying techniques and the diplomatic and consulate representatives in the EU Member States: non-paper discussions, bilateral meetings, visits and other usual means of communications. On the other hand, CSO representatives are using lateral channels, such as: policy studies and policy briefs, study visits within specific projects, communication with diplomatic representatives in Montenegro and Brussels, as well as with representatives of various EU structures.

5. Key Findings of the Interviews

Several representatives of government authorities, who have accrued additional experience in the EU accession talks during their participation in the Working Groups, were interviewed, as were CSO representatives who have participated in and/or monitored the Montenegro-EU negotiating process on a daily basis. When asked about the existence of a strategic document related to the advocacy of Montenegro's EU accession, the interviewees agreed that such a document did not exist. The Communication Strategy, designed by the MFAEI and dealing with communicating Montenegro's progress in accession talks to the broader public, was mentioned as the closest thing to an advocacy strategy. When it comes to the existence of such documents at the institutional level, only the MFAEI has been designing Communication Strategies, the latest one in March 2014. The MFAEI representative pointed out the importance of the Action Plans, prepared for each Chapter of the *acquis* and noted that nearly 98% of them have been implemented so far. Each Action Plan puts special emphasis on the communication of EU accession activities to the public, media and CSOs, based on the principles of transparency and accountability. In any case, our interlocutors agreed that an advocacy strategy did not exist in written form and that advocacy was instead performed through the lobbying by Montenegro's diplomatic and consular representatives in the EU Member States, non-paper discussions, bilateral meetings, visits, etc.

Therefore, the interviewed government and CSO representatives do not possess significant experience in implementing advocacy strategies targeting the EU, but they claim they participate in advocating European integration via public panel discussions, promotions, press releases, projects and meetings with the media and CSOs. In particular, CSOs in Montenegro apparently lack opportunities to observe and initiate advocacy activities, due to the lack of their inclusion in the negotiating process and the scant existence of relevant agreements and memoranda. This lack of experience is closely related to the key barriers Montenegro is facing in the negotiation talks with the EU. In the view of our interviewees, one such obstacle is the lack of capacity of the modestly sized administration in charge of implementing the adopted legislation. However, most of the interviewed civil servants praised the efforts and coordination of the Montenegrin administration and its alertness and vigilance in view of the upcoming challenges, even though they agreed that its capacities ought to be strengthened. Our CSO interlocutors did not shy away from describing the current capacities as limited

and underdeveloped; adding that such a state of affairs was recognised and addressed in many reports about Montenegro by international organisations. Finally, some interviewees, mainly from the local NGOs, pointed out that communication with the citizens should be more intensive and open and that relevant information on the course of the accession talks should be shared more often.

Our interviewees failed to name particular documents, research studies, expert analyses, public questionnaires, statistics or political statements, which could be of use in the design of a comprehensive advocacy strategy on the Western Balkan countries' accession to the EU. Their answers mostly boiled down to agreeing that all relevant documents prepared by external bodies, the European Commission, expert missions, etc. should be used to analyse the problematic areas and that the solutions and recommendations ought to be incorporated in a comprehensive strategy. Our CSO interlocutors also added that the strategy should be based on detailed public opinion polls, questionnaires, statistics and research reports and analyses, pointing out that, unfortunately, Montenegro did not have a specialised institute focusing on foreign policy analyses that would perform such a demanding task.

Some participants specified which documents produced by their own institutions/organisations should be used during the development of an advocacy strategy. Moreover, they clearly recognised the accomplishments and milestones achieved by the bodies they represented, opining that their achievements have significantly contributed to Montenegro's progress on the road to EU accession. Montenegrin institutions can share their experiences with the authors of a local, national or regional advocacy strategy due to the fact that talks on two-thirds of the Chapters have been opened and many successful benchmarks in the most problematic ones have been addressed adequately. In addition, the very adoption of Montenegro's common positions to be defended before EU institutions was perceived as a success and a potential contribution to a communication/advocacy strategy, in spite of the increasing difficulties in finding common ground given the numerous interests, opinions and agendas. The civil sector interviewees also recognised and extolled the Montenegrin administration's efforts in the EU accession talks, but warned of the necessity of its closer cooperation with CSOs and more intensive communication with the broader public.

A regional platform for such communication is deemed indispensable by all our participants. They are familiar with the past and present regional initiatives and synergies but hardly any of them have a positive opinion of the success of such collaborative efforts. They recognise the Berlin process as a key development and catalyst of closer cooperation among the WB countries, as well as the significance of various cross-border initiatives, summits, conferences and visits. However, they also think that stronger cooperation is necessary for the common development of the regional infrastructure, trade, policy cohesion and particularly bilateral relations among certain WB countries, which have deteriorated lately. It needs to be noted that some ministry representatives consider regional synergies in the field of EU negotiations unnecessary; mainly because of the WB countries' different levels of progress in that area, with Montenegro clearly in the lead. In such a context, Montenegro (and Serbia) ought to share advice and experience but not let them be slowed down within the activities prescribed by the joint regional strategic documents.

Our interlocutors also shared their recommendation for the development of a potential advocacy strategy related to the WB countries' EU accession process. An MFAEI representative emphasised the importance of following the developments in the EU Member States, such as the popularity of the EU and the Eurozone, the migrant crisis or Brexit, so as to stay abreast of the latest attitudes and opinions in the EU, which can then be used as a basis for relevant and up-to-date advocacy. CSO representatives reminded us that as many as possible target groups and stakeholders should be brought on board and that a broad approach to the media, local and foreign organisations and the general public needed to be taken. Moreover, it is also important to maintain the principles of transparency and accountability, not only with respect to achievements but failures as well. Montenegro is one of the few countries in which the EU's popularity has actually increased and this momentum should be used in planning future public relations. Indeed, Montenegro and the WB have a lot to

offer the EU. The interviewees emphasised the common values of the WB, such as multiculturalism, natural resources, interconnectedness and cohesion. EU's stability on its South East borders will be ensured by its enlargement to the WB; its security dimension is incomplete without the WB. With regard to this last point, it should be noted that a minority of our participants claimed that the EU and WB shared hardly any common values, specifying that their links were merely geographical.

Our interlocutors identified several challenges with regard to the WB countries' future in the EU. First of all, for many in the EU, the term "Balkans" is still synonymous with the turbulent developments in the 1990s, lack of rule of law, transitional failures, corruption and organised crime. Even though the situation has improved dramatically, certain aspects of the political and economic situation in WB countries have only reinforced these stereotypes. The participants agree that the political elites in the WB are reluctant to face the past and relinquish political power to open and democratic processes, whilst closely cooperating in order to achieve common regional interests. Moreover, they perceive politics as much too nationality-oriented; instead, civic values should be at the core of public policy. Interestingly, a Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development representative opined that there were no negative perceptions of the WB countries among EU citizens, while a CSO representative pointed out that Montenegro was not advertising its achievements enough and needed to talk more about the good results. There were also complaints that the literal enforcement of EU standards and legislation was simply impossible in specific areas due to the specificities of Montenegro's law and customs. In any case, Montenegro and the WB need to invest additional efforts in improving their reputation in the EU.

Unfortunately, as our interlocutors agree, the EU itself currently seems to be grappling with problems much more challenging than enlargement. They describe the current political context as unpropitious for the EU's further expansion, most of them singling out the migrant crisis, security issues, the rise of ultra-right ideologies and movements, Eurozone instability and criticisms of the complicated bureaucratic procedures as the culprits. There are views that these problems would deepen if new countries joined the EU structure. On the other hand, our participants, especially those from CSOs, criticised the EU for sending mixed signals and hesitating to engage in a thorough, unambiguous and wholehearted endeavour to address political problems in some of the WB countries, namely Kosovo, Macedonia and BiH. Also, some have noted that the aforementioned problems diverted the EU's focus away from negotiations with the WB countries and support to their sorely needed reforms. This, in turn, contributed to a drop in eagerness and agility of candidate countries, especially of their general public, to continue their European pursuit. This is why, our interviewees agree, a solid advocacy strategy is needed more than ever, whether on a national or a regional scale, in order to dispel fears and doubts and bring the benefits of an enlarged EU into the limelight. As one of our participants stated "... in spite of all the risks and challenges this region may pose, stable WB are an important geo-political factor and should be used as an opportunity to strongly advocate the comparative advantages WB enlargement would bring to the EU".

6. Conclusions and Recommendations for the Design of a Regional Advocacy Strategy

We drew the following conclusions about the current state of play in Montenegro on the basis of our desk research as well as the interviews we conducted with experts dealing with the European integration process in various fields:

6.1. Advantages of Montenegro and the Region

- There is unanimous support for Montenegro's European integration among all the political stakeholders in the country.
- There is strong public support in Montenegro for EU membership (almost 74%) and this support has not been diminishing with time.

- CSO representatives are members of official working groups involved in EU accession negotiations.
- NGO representatives were members of the working group charged with drafting the Communication Strategy.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration owns the process of communication both with Montenegro's citizens and the EU and its performance has improved.
- Montenegro opened 22 out of 35 negotiating chapters (and closed talks on two chapters). This makes Montenegro the most successful EU candidate country in the region.
- Montenegro has actively participated in all regional initiatives and itself launched some of them. One is the Regional Convention on European Integration of the Western Balkan countries, which was launched in 2014 and is still ongoing. Although led by an NGO (European Movement in Montenegro), its events have been rally ingthe most prominent representatives of both the civil society sector and the state institutions throughout the WB.
- Montenegro is seen as a stable and connecting force in the WB region, thus its EU membership can be perceived as very important. In addition, the whole WB region, as seen from the perspective of the experts we interviewed, is a region of major relevance to the EU because of the need for stability.
- Other advantages identified as regional ones as well include: multiculturalism, natural resources, interconnectedness and cohesion.

6.2. Deficiencies in Montenegro and the Region

- The valid Communication Strategy does not focus enough on the process of advocating Montenegro's positions in the EU.
- There is no clear institutional structure, which would ensure that Montenegro's positions are advocated in the EU.
- Since Montenegro is ahead of the other WB countries in the accession process, some interviewees (those working in state authorities) see the process of creating a regional strategy and a common approach as useful to a certain extent. They believe it might slow Montenegro down, but emphasise the necessity of regional cooperation.
- Citizens of Montenegro see the process of European integration as something solely in the hands of the politicians that they cannot influence. Even the mere fact that there is no Euroscepticism allows us to conclude that not enough informed discussions are being conducted.
- Our interviews demonstrate that different experts in various fields, involved in the European integration process, are often reluctant to speak about an advocacy strategy since they are not at all familiar with what such a strategy entails.
- Most interviewees held the view that Montenegro's administrative capacities were underdeveloped, although some of them argued that the problem became smaller when it was compared to the size of the country.
- EU perceptions of Montenegro and its problems are mostly related to corruption, as stated by most of the interviewed experts. In their opinion, the bad image of both Montenegro and the entire region is caused by the legacy of the 1990s and the wars that raged in the WB.
- An interviewee from the Ombudsman's Office noted the importance of a regional approach because of the problems arising from the fact that some EU institutional structures had inaccurate information about the region, which can be only addressed by a comprehensive regional approach.

7. Recommendations for Designing a Good Western Balkan Advocacy Strategy

- Every single Western Balkan country needs to have an EU accession advocacy strategy;
- These strategies should be aimed at the following target groups: EU institutions, Member States' representations in each of the WB countries, CSOs in the Member States, especially those in Brussels, media in Brussels, domestic media, academics dealing with European integration, EU citizens, citizens of WB countries;
- It is necessary to emphasise the advantages of the WB countries' membership in the EU, notably: stability in Europe, multiculturalism and diversity, adaptability and reforms, tourist potential and natural resources. This would greatly contribute to dispelling stereotypes about the WB countries.
- Each country in the WB should continue strengthening its position in the region and focus on the advantages of its potential membership in the EU. Thus, Montenegro can argue that the size of the country and its administration allows for the faster implementation of the accession-related reforms.

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Annex

Montenegro - SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New and improved Communication Strategy • Negotiations on 22 out of 35 chapters under way or completed • Positive EC report on Montenegro's progress in 2015 • Tourism development (many destinations on the coast ranked within top 10 in the world) • Size of the administration – easier reforms • Natural resources • Stability • Geo-political position • Regional cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of a separate chapter or even a separate strategy on communication towards the EU • Poorly informed citizens • Lack of understanding and practice of both advocacy and lobbying beyond traditional channels • Development disparities among the countries in the region • Corruption in many important walks of life • High infrastructural and other costs of reforms in environment-related chapters/areas • Lack of administrative capacities • Regional disparities within Montenegro • Youth unemployment
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement in regional initiatives, such as the Berlin Process, Regional Convention on European Integration • Leading role in the region in sharing practices and knowledge • Tourism • Sustainable development in northern Montenegro • Organic agriculture • Youth involvement and skills development • Innovations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotypes and prejudices from the 1990s period • Image of corrupt and nepotistic societies • Issues with or among neighbouring countries • Enlargement fatigue • EU crises: migration and financial

SERBIA

Abstract

This paper is about national perceptions of advocacy and Serbia's capacity to communicate and advocate its aspirations to join the European Union. It explores the roles of various actors in the administration, parliament, parastatal organisations, think tanks, civil society, media and others in promoting the EU in Serbia and, *vice versa*, Serbia in the EU. The research was based on vast available literature, official documents, expert analyses and 40 interviews with different interlocutors at home and abroad. The results offered in this chapter represent a rather detailed mapping of what has been and can be done in the future in order to position Serbia better on the regional and European scene. This research focused on how to achieve faster headway in the European integration process. A short history of Serbia's EU integration is followed by a description of the roles of diverse players and views of the broader public. The proposed set of provisional "advocacy messages" emerged through numerous interviews. The main proactive protagonists were named advocacy stakeholders and their role was analysed in greater detail. The summary of their activities is provided in the conclusions. The recommendations identify the key target groups, methods and channels of communication and advocacy, as well as training as one of the indispensable conditions for successful advocacy.

This chapter aims at contributing to the development of a regional advocacy strategy for the EU integration of the Western Balkans.

Key words: *Western Balkans, Serbia, European Union, enlargement, communication, advocacy strategy*

1. Introduction

Communication and advocacy of Serbia's EU integration have not been taken into consideration either in the 2014-2018 National Programme for Adoption of the EU *Acquis Communautaire*⁸⁷, the action plans for different negotiating chapters or the public debate on Serbia's progress in accession to the European Union (EU). The 2011 Communication Strategy for the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union⁸⁸ has not been implemented since an Action Plan for its implementation has not been adopted yet. Although the opening of talks on Chapters 32 and 35 in 2015 and Chapters 23 and 24 in early July 2016 has been qualified as respectable advancement in the process, there has been no appropriate information, explanation or advocacy of faster reforms in these areas; nor has the achieved success been adequately capitalised on publicly either at home, in the Brussels institutions or the EU Member States.

Some might say that Serbia deserved even earlier to involve itself more deeply in the accession process and occupy its administration and society with the relevant reforms, thus preventing other external factors from making use of the geopolitical void. Others might say that Serbia is not ready even now to act in accordance

⁸⁶ Jelica Minić, President of the Forum for International Relations of the European Movement in Serbia. Dragan Đukanović, Deputy Director of the Institute of International Politics and Economy, Belgrade.

⁸⁷ National Programme for the Adoption of the EU Acquis, Serbian European Integration Office, July 2014, Available at: http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/npaa/npaa_eng_2014_2018.pdf

⁸⁸ *Communication Strategy for the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union*, Serbian European Integration Office, Belgrade, 2011. Available at: http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/communication_strategy_2011.pdf

with the accession rules and procedures, and that Brexit will complicate the situation even more, in the context of the still unclear reforms in the EU and already rigorous conditions the Union set the candidate countries. Besides, there is an impression that there is a discrepancy between official, declarative commitments to proceed on the European road and the frequent opposite messages voiced by the media under government control or a number of politicians both in the ruling coalition and the opposition.

The purpose of this research is to create a more balanced discourse, based on facts and analyses, in the context of the multiple crises the EU is passing through, the increasing tensions in the Western Balkans due to poverty, unemployment, absence of visible headway and the fact that the progress achieved towards the EU is mostly “on paper”. The achievements in various walks of life within rapprochement to the EU have not been perceived as sufficiently important to maintain the enthusiasm of EU accession advocates. At the same time, concrete and competitive options have started emerging in economy and society, materialised through major investments, above all, Russian (Serbian Petrol Industry-NIS and other energy companies, railways) and Chinese (Smederevo steel mill, bridges, railways, highways), in addition to those coming from the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. Good communication of Serbia’s and EU’s mutual interests and intentions is therefore pivotal. This chapter offers some guidelines for identifying where Serbia really is and the direction it will most probably take in advocating its long-term strategic interests.

2. Serbia in the European Integration Process

Serbia embarked on the road to the EU at the beginning of the previous decade, after Slobodan Milošević stepped down on 5 October 2000. The new political elites then in fact defined the state’s integration in the European Union as their main foreign political goal. Serbia started pursuing that goal first within the framework of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (2000-2003) and then the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (2003-2006).

The most important events during Serbia’s EU integration process include the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (2008), and, a year later, visa liberalisation (abolishing Schengen visas for Serbia’s citizens). In March 2012, Serbia was granted EU candidate status. In mid-2013, the European Council decided to open membership negotiations between Serbia and the European Union; this decision was subsequently formalised at the Intergovernmental Conference in late January 2014. However, it was not until the end of 2015 that the first negotiating chapters were opened.

Unlike the rest of the region, Serbia faces the specific issue of Kosovo, defined as its province in its Constitution, but the authorities of which unilaterally declared independence in 2008. The dynamic of Serbia’s European integration has therefore largely depended on headway in negotiations between Belgrade and Priština. The most important result of this process was the Brussels Agreement of 19 April 2013 (The First Agreement on Normalization of Relations), under which the two parties essentially committed themselves to regulating specific open issues, primarily those concerning the status of Serbs in Kosovo. The Association of (majority) Serb Municipalities envisaged in the Agreement has not been established yet, although three years have passed since the Agreement was signed, partly due to the Serbian authorities, but mostly due to obstruction by the Kosovo government and some of the opposition parties there.

Despite many internal problems in mustering majority public support for EU accession, Serbia managed to consolidate itself mostly around the stable majority of citizens in favour of EU membership after the once monolith Serbian Radical Party split in 2008. The parliamentary elections held in 2008 and 2012 confirmed the predominance of pro-EU political parties in Serbia. The previous two election cycles in Serbia (2012 and

2014) also showed a relatively stable pro-EU majority among the citizens.⁸⁹

The improvement of relations with the European Union and full membership in it are Serbia's foreign policy priorities. The EU is not only Serbia's main foreign political partner and main source of support to its democratic reforms; it is Serbia's biggest trade partner as well. More than 63% of Serbia's overall foreign trade is with the EU. Over 70% of the 22 billion EUR of direct foreign investments in Serbia in the 2001-2015 period came from EU countries. In the same period, Serbia received over 3 billion EUR of EU assistance, plus over 2.9 billion EUR of bilateral donations from EU Member States. Serbia is the biggest recipient of EU pre-accession assistance in the entire region, standing at 200 million EUR per annum. In addition, the EU is the biggest creditor of the Serbian economy, through the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Furthermore, Serbia has been withdrawing additional funds from international financial institutions and bilateral donors combining grants and loans through the Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF), initiated by the European Commission.

The general public is insufficiently aware of the fact that both the scope and intensity of Serbia's relations with the EU are dominating its political, social and economic life. It can, thus, be concluded that the level of Serbia-EU communication is limited and that both sides bear their share of responsibility. The lack of a strategic approach to pro-accession communication and advocacy was in the previous period reflected in the insufficient, mostly "technical" nature of information disseminated by the institutions, in a language incomprehensible to the man in the street. Likewise, partial information reported by the media has prevailed, as it is more attractive and often spiced with sensationalism in both directions – bad news from Serbia and the region in exchange for bad news from the EU. Periods of praise to the former Serbian governments for the achieved results have never lasted long, whereas floods of bad news from the EU have been appearing with increasing frequency on the pages of the Serbian and regional media. These outlets have recently been mostly concerned with the disagreements in managing the Eurozone or refugee crisis, abandonment of membership aspirations (Iceland), and, above all, Brexit. The counterbalance to this set of information - about successful EU programmes and policies, about the EU as the best peace project in contemporary history, about the stabilising effect of membership, from Portugal and Greece, to Central European, Baltic or South East European countries - has been insufficiently represented in the public arena in Serbia and the region.

3. Communicating EU, Promoting Serbia

3.1. *Activities of the Serbian Administration and Civil Society*

The Government of Serbia adopted the National Strategy of Serbia for Serbia and Montenegro's Accession to the European Union⁹⁰ back in 2005. It has been amended several times since Montenegro opted for independence in 2006. This Strategy includes three pages on the then draft of the Communication Strategy of Serbia that provide a good conceptual framework, but the draft had not been publicly available. In 2011, the

⁸⁹ The most important and the most influential party at the 2012 elections was the Serbian Progressive Party with its proclaimed European agenda, followed by the Socialist Party of Serbia, the Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party. The elections held on 24 April 2016 brought certain changes, as the evidently anti-European Serbian Radical Party managed to win about 8% of votes, while the coalition Dveri-Democratic Party of Serbia, holding rather similar views of the European Union, barely made the 5% threshold. The pro-EU ticket "Enough!" won around 6% of the votes and also entered the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in 2016. Therefore, the new election round also demonstrates that pro-EU parties won slightly over 85% and the anti-EU parties circa 15% of the votes.

⁹⁰ *National Strategy of Serbia for Serbia and Montenegro's Accession to the European Union*, Serbian European Integration Office, Belgrade, 2005. Available at: http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/national_strategy-pdf.pdf

Government adopted the Communication Strategy for the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union, but there was a significant delay in drafting the Action Plan for its implementation, until 2016.⁹¹ The Communication Strategy identifies the most important problems (internal instability, the citizens' insufficient pro-EU commitment as well as their lack of information, etc.). In that sense, the Strategy puts emphasis on the following important communication actors: decision-makers (officials, civil servants, MPs, politicians, etc.) and public opinion makers, youth, "groups sensitive to change" (the unemployed, pensioners, persons with disabilities, etc.). The Republic of Serbia's Coordination Body for the EU Accession Process (which has not met for quite a while), the Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO), the EU Integration Committee of the National Assembly of Serbia, expert groups, etc. are listed as the main institutional stakeholders possessing communication capacities. Departing from the described circumstances, the Strategy envisages that the communication activities related to Serbia's accession to the EU are to be based on trainings, clearer and more accurate media coverage, organisation of exhibitions, via the Internet, as well as the establishment of EU Info Points throughout the country. Equally important is the cooperation of the Government of Serbia with the media, civil society organisations, the academic and educational community, local authorities, religious communities and diplomatic staff in the country, particularly the EU Delegation to Serbia.

A lot has been done over the past years to promote EU ideas and Serbia's EU integration process. One can often notice a synergy of activities of numerous state and non-state actors in the EU integration process and public advocacy of continuing the reform processes. At the moment, Serbia has good administrative capacities for adopting the *acquis* and, partly, implementing it. Serbia has a Minister in charge of EU Integration, the European Integration Office, the Chief Negotiator, the Negotiating Team and other institutional actors requisite for the successful continuation of the EU integration process.

In addition, it should be emphasised that state and civil society organisations and academic institutions have over the past fifteen years issued numerous publications on the European integration of Serbia (and previously, of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro).⁹² The general public has easy access to the relevant sources about the EU institutional framework, advantages and disadvantages of European integration and the accession process.

3.2. Serbian Public Opinion on EU Integration

It should, however, be borne in mind that the citizens of Serbia have not yet been adequately informed of the level of the achieved legislative reforms, i.e. the incorporation of the *acquis communautaire* in the national legislation. Furthermore, they are insufficiently familiar with specific mechanisms, such as the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), or with the necessity of Serbia adjusting its foreign policy positions to CFSP rules and practices. The latter has, indeed, provoked major disputes among different political options and parties.

What do Serbia's citizens expect from EU membership and what are they afraid of? Almost a fifth of citizens perceive EU membership as a chance to bring order to the state, while almost a third see it as providing them

⁹¹ *Communication Strategy for the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union*, Serbian European Integration Office, Belgrade, 2011. Available at: http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/communication_strategy_2011.pdf

⁹² The Serbian European Integration Office (www.seio.gov.rs), the European Movement in Serbia (www.emins.org), the EU Delegation to Serbia (www.europa.rs), the Institute for International Politics and Economy (www.diplomacy.bg.ac.rs), the Institute for European Studies (www.ies.rs), with a significant contribution made through the publication of supplements to the daily *Danas* and the weekly *Vreme*. The special edition of *Privredni pregled* and specialised TV shows produced by the *Mreža* production group are also worth mentioning.

with more employment opportunities and a road towards a better future for young people; 12% of the citizens see the EU primarily as an opportunity for freedom of movement. On the other hand, 11% of citizens perceive the EU as a bulky, bureaucratic apparatus wasting time and money, while as many think of it as a risk that they will lose their national identity. The EU is only a dream, a utopian idea for 8% of the citizens, while only 3% perceive it as a guarantor of durable peace in Europe⁹³. It is indicative that Serbia's citizens can be considered the most sceptical about the benefits they can expect from EU membership in the Western Balkans.⁹⁴

The opening of talks on the Chapters and negotiations with Priština were perceived as the most important events in Serbia's EU accession process during 2015; everything else ranked much lower in importance.⁹⁵ All these are topics politicians and communication strategies should deal with in order to bring the EU closer to the Serbian citizens.

We have already noted that the breakdown of parties in parliament mirrored the majority pro-EU public opinion. It should, however, be borne in mind that no Eurosceptic and/or anti-EU political parties had seats in the Serbian parliament in the 2014-2016 period, wherefore the parliamentary breakdown in that period did not reflect the actual public mood.

However, the concrete and periodic public opinion surveys of the Serbia's citizens' commitment to EU membership show oscillations in the public mood. The SEIO annual survey data differ from one year to another, depending on numerous additional EU accession conditions set Serbia. Thus, the obtained results differed depending on the citizens' perspectives of the state's cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the Hague, the resolution of the Kosovo status and other regional problems (Serbia-Montenegro relations, for example).⁹⁶

The SEIO survey published in late 2015 shows that only 48% of the citizens are in favour of EU membership, while 28% are firmly against it.⁹⁷ Only 15% would not vote at a referendum on Serbia's accession to the EU; 9% of the respondents said they did not know whether they would vote.

Pro-EU parties (the Serbian Progressive Party, the Socialist Party, the Democratic Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, etc.) again won most of the votes at the April 2016 parliamentary elections and thus have the possibility of carrying out the necessary reforms, amending the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and accelerating the EU negotiation process. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the mood of Serbia's citizens concerning EU membership will oscillate and that we can expect the gradual strengthening of Euro-scepticism. However, according to the experiences of some neighbours, Croatia above all, a strong pro-EU referendum campaign in Serbia would ultimately lead to the (pre)dominance of European forces. Of course, it calls for more coordinated action of numerous actors and institutions and an objective perception of the importance of Serbia's EU membership. In that sense, a proactive European rhetoric by the power wielders and its presence in the Serbian media are very important. Keeping the EU integration topic in the focus of public discourse and drawing the citizens' attention to the causal relationship between the improvement of the economic situation in the country and the European integration process are just as important.

⁹³ *Serbian Citizens' Attitude towards the EU: public opinion poll*, December 2015, European Integration Office of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, Slide 11. Available at: http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/istrazivanja_javnog_mnjenja/opinion_poll_december_15.pdf

⁹⁴ *Balkan Barometer 2016 – Public Opinion Survey*, Regional Cooperation Council, Sarajevo, 2016, Figure 17, p.50. Available at: http://www.rcc.int/seeds/files/RCC_BalkanBarometer_PublicOpinion_2016.pdf

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* Slide 7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* Slide 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* Slide 4.

It is indicative that most of the interviewees consider a joint advocacy effort by the Western Balkan countries justified although some of them question the effectiveness of a joint approach. They believe that there are some areas where development of a joint platform could bring more results than in others, but they consider regional cooperation in general and advocacy of faster EU integration of the Western Balkans, in particular, as positive developments.

3.3. *EU Public and Institutional Perceptions of Serbia*

How do the EU citizens see Serbia? Judging by the EU media⁹⁸, its image is usually bad. It is partly based on stereotypes related to the wars of the 1990s and the trials before the Hague Tribunal (ICTY) and partly on the latest developments in Serbia, where the commencement of reforms, opening of negotiating chapters and the role Serbia had in the refugee crisis are the rare bright points. Serbia is usually described as a country with declining democratic standards (with emphasis on the endangered media freedoms); with the most frequent parliamentary elections in the region and therefore never-ending political campaigning; as a country under visibly increasing Russian influence (particularly its “soft power”) and under increasing influence of right-wing and pro-Russian political forces. The prevailing belief is that the new government, formed after the 24 April 2016 parliamentary elections, will not change its pro-EU policy, but that the permanent distance of the EU membership perspective can result in the slowdown of the reforms and risks of internal social and even ethnic conflicts.

Such a media image, as a rule, does not contribute to an improvement of the EU citizens’ mood for further enlargement. Serbia, on the other hand, has not been systematically working on improving its image, even when it has had good arguments, like progress in harmonisation with EU standards in specific areas (public procurement, intellectual property etc.), sports, culture, creative industries, et al. The state institutions are in that sense lagging behind the Tourist Organisation of Serbia, Serbian Chamber of Commerce, civil society and cultural and professional organisations.

4. **Advocacy and Communication Messages**

Who is formulating the messages, who is conveying them and how? Can the ambivalent social power structures articulate clear and motivating general messages targeting the domestic and foreign publics and institutions? Which stakeholders dare able to tailor their communication to various target groups? Does civil society have a special role in such circumstances?

The problem in Serbia is that all its post-2000 governments have been pro-EU in words, but less so in practice. The messages of the pro-government media have therefore been sowing confusion both among the domestic and the EU publics. Most of these messages are in fact anti-European. Political leaders have been travelling around the region, negotiating normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Priština, showing political readiness to improve bilateral and regional relations; however, the discourse prevailing in the media has been against regional cooperation, against dialogue with neighbours and Kosovo and against EU integration.

There is, however, always good news somewhere. In addition to the administration’s successes in the adoption of the *acquis* (albeit often in an urgent parliamentary procedure, without prior broader consultations with experts and stakeholders), many steps forward have been taken silently, without high publicity. They are a

⁹⁸ Minić, Jelica, “April 2016 – Media Image of the Western Balkans”, in *Western Balkans between Geography and Geopolitics*, ed. Simurdić, Milan, *Foreign Policy Papers No.1, 2016*, European Movement in Serbia Forum for International Relations, Belgrade, 2016, pp. 17-27. Available at: <http://www.emins.org/uploads/useruploads/forum-mo/spoljnopoliticke-sveske-01-2016-web.pdf>

consequence of the praiseworthy work of bodies vested with public powers, such as standardisation offices, consumer organisations, professional associations (primarily of engineers in various fields, such as, for example, forestry or agriculture), which managed to introduce European standards and procedures in some areas without the state's active support or participation.

Civil society has most often spearheaded the introduction of EU standards, both in the areas of human rights, fight against discrimination, environmental protection, energy efficiency, food safety, social entrepreneurship, improvement of working conditions for small and medium enterprises, and in cultural programmes, festivals, creative industries.

When asked what Serbia could offer Europe, the interviewed respondents most often cited: human resources, transit geographical location and geopolitical position (as an advantage or disadvantage). The Danube was mentioned several times as one of Serbia's key transport, energy, water and tourist resources, together with its agriculture and agro-industry. Some of them recalled several attempts to "brand Serbia" in the 2007-2010 period by the Ministry of Trade and Tourism, the Chamber of Commerce, research institutes and individual PR companies, which were not successful⁹⁹. But the idea of promoting, branding, identifying specific values and advantages born at that time was mostly at the level of "products" like the Guća and Exit music festivals, film, theatre and dance festivals, successes of Serbian tennis players and other athletes, tourism, good entertainment in Belgrade, excellent music, good food and, above all, creative people.

According to the people interviewed within this research, Serbia needs to convey the following main messages to the EU public and institutions:

1. Serbia has an important geo-strategic position that the EU can use much better. It proved to be a reliable partner in the refugee crisis, being part of a solution and not of a problem throughout;
2. Security and stability of the region largely depend on Serbia. Thus, the entry of Russia, and increasingly of China, Turkey and the UAE into business and the infrastructural and political space of Serbia, in which a sort of vacuum has been created due to the sluggish EU integration process, can have long-term impact on peace and stability in the region, which is completely surrounded by EU and NATO members;
3. Serbia is the biggest country in the Western Balkans (by area, population, market) and is playing a constructive role in the region;
4. Both within the region and in relation to the EU, Serbia is the axis of the Western Balkan Connectivity Agenda, launched within the Berlin Process as a basis for the region's integration in the trans-European transport and energy networks;
5. Serbia has respectable human resources as corroborated by its successful diaspora – a great number of engineers, IT experts, university professors, scientists, managers, doctors and other medical professionals, artists and skilled labour pursuing their careers in many EU member countries;
6. It has significant institutional capacities enabling it to accelerate the negotiating process with the EU at the moment, in case talks on a larger number of chapters are opened.

⁹⁹ See, for example, the following articles available in Serbian at: <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/100794/Drustvo/Brendiranje-Srbije-ostalozelja> and <http://www.b92.net/mobilni/zivot/423601>

All these messages are important for the domestic public as well; what is, however, crucial is that the latter be briefly and clearly informed of the gains EU membership brings different interest groups and each and every citizen and what obligations, individual and institutional, it entails. That sort of information, with specific features of advocacy, has to date been partly provided in different areas by some civil society organisations, to some extent by the EU Delegation, and the least by the Serbian administration, despite numerous popular publications that have not been sufficiently and adequately promoted.

5. Stakeholders

No proper attention has been given in the Serbian administration, political circles or CSO sector to the development of a strategic framework for advocacy, into which numerous institutions could feed quality input from their areas of work and in which they have accumulated knowledge and expertise. There is capacity to define the tactical moves and operational plans in many areas but no capacity for developing an overall strategic framework. Moreover, it is necessary to train people to implement any advocacy strategy. Many of those, who have the knowledge, have no awareness of the need of sharing and implementing it for different purposes, including advocacy. About half of the staff in the administration or parliamentary services is elderly and unable to adjust to the new communication methods. If they are expected to engage in any advocacy, they have to be trained and assisted.

5.1. Institutional Setting for Accession Negotiations

Serbia has rather good negotiating capacities compared with the other countries in the region, but, at the same time, it suffers from deep political disagreements on the future of political alignment with the key international partners. Generally, the Serbian administration's advocacy capacity is low, primarily due to the politicians' essentially ambivalent attitudes towards the European integration process.

There is an appropriate organisational set-up for negotiations with the EU at the state level. The "core network" in the negotiating process (Serbian European Integration Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Chief Negotiator's Office and the Cabinet of the Minister in charge of EU Integration)¹⁰⁰ has been established and is functioning. Each Ministry has a sector/unit tasked with EU integration and headed by a State Secretary or Assistant Minister. Serbia's whole diplomatic network has been progressively involved in the process, at least at the level of inter-institutional communication.

There is also a satisfactory level of knowledge in the administration of various areas of the *acquis*. But, there is no real devotion to introduce the needed reforms, pass the new laws and transform public administration. There is no visible change in the approach, ideas or level of coordination although 177 strategies have been adopted in different areas.

The intensification of the negotiating process has not been accompanied by the adequate development of the human resources involved. There is no way to stop the outflow of experienced and capable civil servants to the private sector. Therefore, the administrative capacities are on the edge. 2016 will be critical for testing the available capacities given that the real negotiations on individual chapters are starting now. Hypothetically, administrative capacity will become a problem once 20 negotiating chapters are opened. Although units and institutions dealing with EU integration affairs are excluded from the process, the ongoing downsizing of the state administration is not propitious for strengthening the country's negotiating capacities.

¹⁰⁰ See Annex 1.

The coordination of the established negotiating structure/relevant institutions has become more functional, but it can be further improved. There is an established institutional procedure, as well as prompt informal exchange of information as soon as it is received. The Chief Negotiator is leading the team consisting of the SEIO Director, the State Secretaries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Finance and the Chief of Cabinet of the Minister for EU Integration. Cooperation among the government authorities, the National Assembly (and its relevant committees for EU integration and foreign relations) and civil society organisations is satisfactory. There is exchange of information on different chapters and the negotiating process in general, permanent dialogue and growing confidence in mutual relations.

Two institutions in the negotiating structure warrant particular attention with respect to communication and advocacy: the Serbian European Integration Office and the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also included in the analysis but as an example of a large albeit underused institutional resource.

5.1.1. Serbian European Integration Office

The Serbian European Integration Office as the Secretariat of the Coordinating Body of the Government of Serbia and institutional coordinator of the negotiating process warrants particular attention. The SEIO is the only institution in Serbia, which has EU integration-related institutional memory and which has been providing expert and technical support to the political process ever since it was established in 2005. But organisations like SEIO cannot engage in advocacy.

As mentioned, the first institutional initiative for improving the dissemination of information about the integration process to the public – the Communication Strategy for the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union – was formulated by the Serbian European Integration Office in 2011, but has remained a dead letter due to the lack of an action plan that would ensure its implementation. However, it defined the needs and limitations, as well as the direction of action. The drafting of the action plan for the implementation of the Strategy started in 2016, in cooperation with the EU Delegation to Serbia.

As stated in the Strategy, its main goals are to ensure the public's understanding and broadest possible support for all aspects of EU accession. "Therefore, it will be necessary to provide target groups with easily accessible, timely and understandable information about EU accession. In practice, this means the following:

1. Raising public awareness highlighting that the EU accession process is of vital interest to individuals, society and the state. This implies familiarising the public with the necessary reforms to be implemented as part of EU accession, including the advantages brought to citizens by EU membership, but also the obligations membership brings.
2. Raising the level of preparedness and motivation of target groups for participation in the EU accession process, especially by preparing decision- and policy-makers for the role they have in the accession of the Republic of Serbia to the EU and in raising public awareness with regard to that process."¹⁰¹

The Strategy, therefore, targets the domestic public and decision-makers, failing to cover advocacy and communication of Serbia's needs and interests vis-a-vis the EU and its Member States. The EU's readiness to acknowledge and understand Serbia's needs and interests and the progress it achieves is taken for granted.

¹⁰¹ *Communication Strategy for the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union*, op.cit. p. 9.

5.1.2. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

The MFA has been preparing and frequently presenting all the required information to the relevant parliamentary committees. It is charged with preparing different information on European affairs, regional cooperation and regional organisations and transferring the information prepared by the Chief Negotiator and other relevant information of other branches of the administration or the parliament to the diplomatic network. However, it has been mostly marginalised in the EU integration process.

Although the MFA State Secretary, the Assistant Minister heading the Sector for the EU and the Chief of the Serbian Mission to the EU have been heavily engaged in the negotiating process, Serbian embassies in EU Member States are mostly underused; one-way flow of information prevails. Embassy staff have not been adequately mobilised to convey messages that would help improve Serbia's image to the institutions and broader public in the EU Member States. Moreover, the MFA does not use the public diplomacy instruments as civil society organisations do. Some of the interviewees are of the opinion that advocacy of EU integration has to be properly structured and institutionalised if it is to be effective. Serbia will have to follow suit of the countries that joined the EU during the previous circles of enlargement and maximally develop the capacities of its diplomatic service.

5.1.3. *National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia*

The Resolution on the Role of the National Assembly in Serbia's Accession to the EU, adopted on 16 December 2013, imposed upon the parliament the obligation to cooperate with civil society and other stakeholders and facilitated the launch of the Serbia's National Convention on the European Union with a view to increasing the involvement of the relevant stakeholders in the consultative process and monitoring. However, the Resolution recommendation that the Government regularly report to the parliament on the accession process has remained unfulfilled.

The Delegation of the European Parliament for relations with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo and the Serbian National Assembly EU Integration Committee adopted joint statements by the Chairpersons of the Delegations every year in the 2008-2013 period. A new document – the joint Declaration and Recommendations to the Council for Stabilisation and Association and institutions of Serbia and the EU – has been issued by these stakeholders since 2013. This document has been adopted by the two Delegations twice a year since 2015. It largely reflects the findings and recommendations, as well as the debates related to the preparation of resolutions on Serbia drafted twice a year by the EP-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Committee and by the Rapporteur on Serbia. The established inter-parliamentary dialogue with the EP on accession issues is of major importance for all candidate countries and provides opportunities for better advocacy.

All candidate countries are invited to take part in sessions of all sectoral committees of the European Parliament. They have joint committees with the EP and take part in the political parties' groups in the EP. The Democratic Party is the only Serbian party that is an associate member of the European Socialists' party group. It also takes part in the Socialist International. But, as an opposition party, it has an ambivalent position as it represents Serbia's interests, on the one hand, whilst maintaining a critical view of the Serbian Government's work, on the other.

The parliamentarians are also involved in various multilateral parliamentary cooperation frameworks, such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, CEI, SEECP, BSEC and COSAP¹⁰². There is a bilateral cooperation framework as well, through bilateral friendship parliamentary groups or parliamentary committees for European affairs/integration depending on the counterparts – EU Member States or candidate countries. All these parliamentary cooperation frameworks and numerous contacts of diverse formats and levels provide great opportunities for advocacy related to Serbia's EU integration. However, the Serbian National Assembly lacks administrative staff capable of extending it high quality expert support. Thus, parliamentarians are only reactive, rather than proactive, and can count only on themselves (or their parties' support) to follow the legislative process in a qualified manner or to advocate Serbia's interests in the accession process in international fora.

5.2. Role of Civil Society

Civil society's engagement in Serbia's accession-related negotiating process has been institutionally defined and determined, thus opening the way for its stronger involvement in pro-accession communication and advocacy, both at home and abroad¹⁰³. Hence, a comprehensive framework has been laid down and it is necessary to complete the strategic design and operative structuring of such activities. However, the work of both the state institutions and civil society is primarily oriented towards the domestic stage and important interest groups from the perspective of negotiations and realisation of the assumed obligations. There is no clearly defined focus on the public at large in Serbia or abroad.

5.2.1. National Convention on the European Union in Serbia (NCEU)¹⁰⁴

The Convention is a good mechanism for involving Serbia's civil society in the European integration process and in fact communicates the most important aspects of the EU integration process to specific public strata directly affected by the negotiating process in their areas of expertise. The Convention is modelled after a mechanism that proved successful in Slovakia during its EU accession process and was aimed at helping the EU integration process democratise and gain legitimacy by rallying different interest groups from the areas of politics, administration, professional organisations, civil sector, academic and business circles and media in order to analyse the undertaken reforms and their effects, whilst simultaneously building consensus on the European agenda.¹⁰⁵

The Convention rallies around 700 civil society organisations in 21 working groups, covering all 35 negotiating chapters. It, too, predominantly targets the national actors. The NCEU's value added is that it has

¹⁰² The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Central European Initiative, South-East European Cooperation Process, Black Sea Economic Cooperation, *European Integration Parliamentary Committees of States Participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process in South-East Europe*.

¹⁰³ *Annual Report on the Participation of CSOs in the Negotiation Process for the Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union in 2014*, Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, Government of Serbia, Belgrade, 2014. Available at: http://www.google.rs/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKewjUnrOCIKDOAhWJbZoKHaOQADwQFggaMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcivilnodrustvo.gov.rs%2Fupload%2Fdocuments%2Fdokumenta_engleska_verzija%2FEU%2FReport-on-CSOs-participation-in-negotiating-process-in-Serbia%2520December.docx&usg=AFQjCNE5buvSQEqPRyDte0B_hUIjKp53w&sig2=Wlk2mKGpCeZ6etDeNmCwUg&bvm=bv.128617741,d.bGs

¹⁰⁴ NCEU Work Methodology, National Convention on the European Union in Serbia, European Movement in Serbia, 2014. Available at: <http://eukonvent.org/eng/work-methodology/>

¹⁰⁵ Bobić, Maja, "Beyond civil society: Prospects and limits for civil society's role in EU integration in the Balkans," *BIEPAG Blog*, 2016. Available at: <http://www.biepag.eu/2016/03/23/beyond-civil-society-prospects-and-limits-for-civil-societys-role-in-eu-integration-in-the-balkans/>

enabled higher transparency and inclusiveness of the negotiating process¹⁰⁶, contributed to the development of the culture of dialogue between state institutions and civil society and included local organisations on a broad scale (one-third of the Convention's members are local-level civil society organisations). The NCEU endeavours to maintain regional balance by holding some of its sessions at the local level.

The consultative role of the Convention has been defined in the documents of the National Assembly and the Government of the Republic of Serbia:

“Before considering a proposed negotiating position, the EU Integration Committee shall consider proposals, contributions and recommendations of civil society representatives, i.e. the National Convention on the European Union (NCEU).”¹⁰⁷

“During preparations of negotiating positions, negotiating groups shall consult the interested public through the National Convention on the European Union or the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, in accordance with the regulations and international agreements governing the protection of and access to confidential data.”¹⁰⁸

“At the initiative of and through the National Convention on the European Union and/or Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, the Negotiating Team shall inform the interested public of the developments, content and important documents regarding the negotiations on accession, in accordance with the regulations and international agreements regulating protection of classified information and access to classified information.”¹⁰⁹

The NCEU went beyond Serbia's borders by joining the Regional Convention on European Integration, initiated by the national councils of the European Movement in Serbia, Montenegro and Albania. The work of the Regional Convention entails thematic conferences discussing progress in negotiations about the key chapters across the region. These conferences serve to exchange experience, identify common problems and lay foundations for joint advocacy of the region's common EU membership prospects¹¹⁰. This regional mechanism can play a significant role in the further development and implementation of a Western Balkans EU integration advocacy strategy.

5.2.2. Coalition prEUunup

The prEUunup (prEUgovor in Serbian) is the first coalition of civil society organisations formed to monitor the implementation of policies related to the Serbia-EU accession negotiations, with emphasis on Chapters 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security). The “prEUunup” rallies seven non-government organisations active in the fields covered by Chapters 23 and 24 and tasked with proposing measures to improve the conditions in these areas. The coalition members' regular public debates, publications and activities have considerably contributed to the visibility of the issues they cover, European standards in these areas and the obligations Serbia is to assume. In doing so, the coalition uses

¹⁰⁶ The NCEU has held more than 80 sessions attended by over 1200 participants since June 2014. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Decision of the National Assembly EU Integration Committee of 4 June 2014.

¹⁰⁸ Serbian Government Conclusion of 13 August 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Serbian Government Decision Establishing the Negotiating Team for Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union, 13 August 2015. Available at: http://www.seio.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/pregovori_sa_eu/decision_negotiating_team_avgust_15.pdf.

¹¹⁰ Bratković, Aleksandar et al, Book of Recommendations of the National Convention on the European Union 2015-2016 (*Knjiga preporuka Nacionalnog konventa o Evropskoj uniji 2015-2016*), European Movement in Serbia, Belgrade, 2015, p.7. Available in Serbian at: http://www.emins.org/uploads/useruploads/knjige/Knjiga-preporuka-NKEU-2015_2016---za-web.pdf

the process of EU integration to help accomplish substantial progress in the further democratisation of Serbia's society.

In its recent 6th Independent Report on Serbia's Progress in Negotiations with the EU on Chapters 23 and 24¹¹¹, presented in May 2016, the coalition praised the Serbian authorities for some of the progress they made in specific areas related to the Chapters 23 and 24, but its assessment of the implementation of the adopted policies was less positive. The New Law on Police, the first assessment of organised crime according to the EUROPOL methodology and good treatment of migrants were listed as examples of positive developments. But the coalition also noted the serious problems indicating lack of respect of the rule of law by the authorities, such as the razing of a block of buildings in downtown Belgrade by anonymous construction workers - bodyguards (the so-called 'Savamala Case'), which provoked a series of large-scale civic protests.

5.3. Role of the Media

There is a major void in media coverage of European values and EU integration benefits for the citizens and countries in the region. The central media are not covering these issues because they lack the political backing and knowledge for fulfilling this mission. They are neither able nor willing to present to the wider public the EU scene, in which the region's political leaders claim they want to take part.

Pro-government media are confusing both the local and EU publics with their predominant messages. Political leaders are travelling around the region, negotiating normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Priština, Belgrade and Sarajevo etc., demonstrating political readiness to improve bilateral and regional relations, but the general attitude projected by the media is against regional cooperation, against dialogue with neighbours and Kosovo and against EU integration.

The level of the journalists' professional skills is still relatively high, although general and classic modes of communicating news prevail over multimedia news. The character of journalism has been transformed into a multimedia concept in the digital era. Photo services are crucial in the news agencies. The multimedia package includes four products: news, photo service, video service, and audio service. The package consists of multimedia products that can be combined in different ways depending on the media that use them (print, electronic, Internet). But, with the ongoing privatisation of media, public outlets are disappearing and private ones have difficulties making ends meet. Journalists are in a precarious position with scarce opportunities to engage in investigative journalism, attend multimedia training, find new jobs and earn decent salaries.

There are only a few outlets/agencies adequately covering the regional and European scenes, international organisations where policies towards the Balkans are created, or the countries of strategic importance for Serbia and the region. Hardly any attention is devoted to the activities of European institutions (EC, European External Action Service, European Council, European Parliament, and Council of Europe, including EU Member States), and related Serbian policies and institutions, as well as relevant regional activities and organisations.

If the media market were regulated and all actors were guaranteed a level playing field (without political or a combination of political and financial interference), there would be enough knowledge, experience and production potential to compete at the European media scene. If the media were free from pressure, they would be able to ensure very good coverage through networking, as demonstrated by the New Network of Serbia comprising local private electronic media. They buy and broadcast together new series and films

¹¹¹ Aleksić, Milan, ed. *PrEUnup – Report on Serbia's Progress on Chapters 23 and 24 (PrEUgovor – izveštaj o napretku Srbije u poglavljima 23 i 24)*, Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, May 2016. Available in Serbian at: http://www.bezbednost.org/upload/document/preugovor_izvestaj_-_maj_2016.pdf

and have several hours of joint programming, and they air each other's productions. This is how they have acquired a high share of the electronic media market, without any support from public funds.

If the region's media succeed in striking an adequate balance between public and business interests, they will be able to offer the European audience their own features on history, tradition, culture, long coexistence of ethnic/confessional/cultural differences, which the latter will surely find attractive. Even the difficult reports on the recent past – conflicts and transition problems – can be presented in an acceptable way, facilitating the understanding of the Western Balkans among the EU public at large and conveying the message that the region wants to be part of the modern world and build a new image compatible with its EU future.

5.4. Parastatal Organisations

5.4.1. Serbian Chamber of Commerce (PKS)

The Serbian Chamber of Commerce represents the interests of its members before the Government and other state bodies and institutions and simultaneously promotes Serbia's economy in the country, region and worldwide by advancing foreign economic cooperation and promoting Serbia as a favourable investment destination. Its advocacy activities therefore run in both directions - towards the domestic and towards the foreign key target groups, primarily in the EU. The PKS is predominantly oriented towards the EU market and its Member States, which are Serbia's main economic partners (notably, Germany, Austria and Italy). The PKS is one of the few institutions in the country attempting to communicate with the diaspora in the domains of its expertise. It extends broad support to domestic and foreign companies through services, mediation, consulting and business information. It also has an educational role as it renders business training services to improve managerial and staff skills and knowledge needed for increasing the national economy's capacity and competitiveness in the EU accession process.¹¹²

The PKS membership of several international chamber associations - EUROCHAMBERS, Association of the Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASCAME), Association of Balkan Chambers (ABC), the CEFTA Forum of Chambers of Commerce, Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Chambers of Commerce within the Adriatic Ionian Initiative (AII) and the like – provide it with good advocacy and lobbying opportunities.

A new initiative of the Chambers of Commerce of the Western Balkan countries emerged within the Berlin Process. The region's Chambers of Commerce met at the WB6 Summits in Berlin, Vienna and Paris, and with the support of the Western Balkan Ministers of Economy, agreed to establish a regional investment forum – the Chamber of the Western Balkans Investment Forum (KIF). The main initiators of this Forum were the Chambers of Commerce of Serbia and Kosovo.

5.4.2. Tourist Organisation of Serbia (TOS)

Like the PKS, the TOS' communication endeavours are carried out in two directions. They are directed towards “positioning Serbia's tourist products in the domestic and international markets and the valorisation of Serbian tourism and its competitive advantages, such as its geostrategic position, historical, cultural and natural identity”.¹¹³

¹¹² Serbian Chamber of Commerce, About Us, available at: <http://www.pks.rs/onama.aspx?idjezik=3>

¹¹³ More is available in Serbian at: <http://www.turistickiputokaz.rs/adresar/414-turisti%C4%8Dka-organizacija-srbije>

The TOS is a member of major international organisations: the European Travel Commission (ETC), the Danube Tourist Commission (DTC), the Danube Competence Centre (DCC), the International Association Transromania, the International Coach Tourism Federation (RDA) and the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) dealing with congress tourism¹¹⁴. It participates in all the relevant world tourism fairs, cooperates with other national tourist organisations and other international, regional and professional tourist associations.

A new national strategy on the development of tourism has been drafted and its implementation is expected to begin as soon as it is adopted by the new Serbian Government. The strategy for the first time clearly defines Serbia's tourist products and offer to foreign guests¹¹⁵. The Action Plan envisages the updating of 18 master plans on particular tourist destinations¹¹⁶. The propaganda and communication activities, however, focus primarily on the neighbouring countries, Russia and China.

5.5. EU Delegation's Projects and Activities

The EU Delegation has its Information and Communication Strategy, which is not publicly available. Its numerous activities are mostly personified by the very active heads of the Delegation, who meet with the high ranking politicians, senior political figures in the opposition and leaders of the independent regulatory bodies and agencies, NGOs and academia, as well as the local leaders; take part in public debates; give lectures and interviews; launch various public construction projects, from schools and infrastructure to those preserving historical heritage, etc. The EU Delegation has a rich publishing activity, often within the various projects with CSOs, SEIO, EU Info Centres and other partners. All these activities have rendered the EU visible to the common people. But, in view of its abundant resources, the EU Delegation can achieve even greater results by providing, on a daily basis, different news from the EU as well. This news should be edited and disseminated in a more "user friendly" way, as familiarity with the processes in the EU and their relevance to and implications for Serbian citizens is considered very limited.

5.5.1. EU Info Centres¹¹⁷

The EU Info Centres are a broad network of information centres, the activities of which go beyond the EU borders. This network is one of the best-known EU communication mechanisms and its approach and content usually provoke positive public reactions and attract large numbers of visitors at its events and relevant web presentations. The Serbian network (comprising centres in Belgrade, Niš and Novi Sad) is financed by the EU through its project "EU in Serbia Communication Network (EUIFONET)". The main goal of this project is to increase public awareness of the EU and its activities in Serbia. The network of centres supports the public diplomacy activities of the EU Delegation to Serbia through the provision of a broad range of information on both the negotiating chapters in the EU-Serbia negotiations and numerous EU programmes, culture, European values and policies, etc.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ More is available in Serbian at: <http://www.tourism.in.rs/>

¹¹⁶ It turned out that Serbia has problems with human resources. The sector, which today has about 35,000 employees, needs a much higher number of professionals, than there are in the labour market. This will certainly influence the information-advertising aspect of tourism development; however, at least the shortcomings have been identified and significant investments (primarily in the necessary infrastructure) totalling nearly 5 billion EUR are planned in the next ten years. See the article in the Belgrade daily *Novosti*, available in Serbian at: <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/turizam.90.html:603793-Sta-sve-Srbija-nudi-stranim-turistima>

¹¹⁷ More is available in Serbian at: <https://sr-rs.facebook.com/euinfo.rs>

The immediate tasks of this network are to: assist, support and advise the EU Delegation in implementing its Information and Communication Strategy; improve knowledge and understanding of Serbia's EU accession process and related activities of the EU Delegation; provide the citizens of Serbia with easy access to information about the EU; enable insight in the gains and advantages, as well as obligations deriving from Serbia's EU integration through well designed forms of communication; support events and established networks in Serbia (Team Europe or EU libraries), which increase the visibility of and public debates about the EU; organise different activities and events for particular target groups (media, youth, business community, civil society) to improve understanding of the negotiation and accession process, EU policies and functioning of European institutions; and, to increase the visibility and general knowledge of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and other modes of EU assistance to Serbia.

The EU Info Centres are open to all citizens of Serbia and offer various services such as EU FAQs; online search of EU-related issues; free brochures and publications about the EU; Reading Corners with foreign and local press and a library of EU-related books and brochures.¹¹⁸ Like the other above-mentioned information and communication channels and mechanisms, this one, too, is a one-way channel, disseminating information on the EU (about EU related issues) to the Serbian public.

6. Role of Regional Structures

Serbia is a member of close to 50 different regional organisations, networks, initiatives or regional long-term projects¹¹⁹. Many of them are inter-governmental organisations, networks of parastatal (Chambers of Commerce, tourist organisations, foreign investors councils, associations of local authorities, etc.) or civil society organisations (think tanks, educational, environmental, energy saving, or human rights organisations, employers' associations, etc.). Compared to the Visegrad Group, the complex structure of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans is much more comprehensive and diversified, covering a broad spectrum of vital areas of the region's political, social and economic life.

The Regional Cooperation Council is a hub of regional cooperation in South East Europe, with strong political backing from the South East Europe Cooperation Process and special focus on the Western Balkan 6 (WB6) through the South East Europe 2020 Strategy (SEE2020)¹²⁰ designed specifically for this group of countries. A core group of a dozen regional organisations has been involved in the development and implementation of this Strategy. Representatives of five regional organisations (RCC, SEETO, RESPA, NALAS, REC)¹²¹, which have developed and/or implemented communication or lobbying strategies in their fields of operation, were interviewed within the ASWB project. The Civil Society Development Network (CSDN) was also included in the ASWB project sample as one of the most relevant civil society networks in the region.

With the exception of NALAS, which developed a lobbying strategy as the key part of its overall strategy, the regional organisations' communication strategies address both the European, international and regional/national Western Balkan target groups. All these documents and activities were developed in the past few years indicating that awareness of the importance of communication/advocacy/lobbying emerged only recently.

¹¹⁸ More is available in Serbian at: <http://euinfo.rs/o-nama/dobrodosli-u-eu-info-centar/>

¹¹⁹ A recent overview of regional organisations is available at <http://www.rcc.int/admin/files/docs/reports/RCC-Strategy-and-Work-Programme-2017-19-text.pdf>

¹²⁰ The Strategy is available at: <http://www.rcc.int/files/user/docs/reports/SEE2020-Strategy.pdf>

¹²¹ Regional Cooperation Council, South East Europe Transport Observatory, Regional School for Public Administration, Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe, Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe

These organisations have thus recognised that raising visibility is an indispensable part of their work and that it will considerably support the achievement of their main objectives. Strong alliances with already well-established Brussels-based or related international organisations increased the effectiveness of the communication or lobbying¹²² activities, in particular due to their regional dimension, which has been attracting greater attention among various partners and donors. However, the visibility of most of these organisations has remained very low. The initiatives coming from the EU, like the Berlin Process, have contributed more to their visibility than their own efforts despite indisputable achievements in their core activities.

The regional organisations' role and sustainability can be further strengthened if they join forces and share experiences, as demonstrated by the SEE2020, implemented by a group of strong partners, most of them supported by the EU. Moreover, dialogue with the EU is easier and more productive if the latter has one or a few points of contact in the region in most of the relevant areas. Annual high-level political or sectoral meetings help streamline a broad range of activities conducted within regional initiatives. Still, WB countries hosting these numerous regional structures have not learned yet to benefit from their presence and use them for raising the awareness of specific target groups and the public at large of what they have been doing and how they have helped the EU integration of the region.

7. Conclusions

An advocacy strategy on Serbia's EU integration cannot succeed without the engagement of the most relevant policy/opinion makers and policy implementers: senior politicians, state officials, parliamentarians, and business, civil society and media representatives. They take part in setting the advocacy agenda and in transmitting the messages to the target groups.

The above analysis has shown that awareness of the importance of communication, advocacy and lobbying in the EU integration process is generally low in Serbia. The perception that information on EU affairs and accession progress has to be communicated on a reciprocal basis is missing. There is awareness that the general image of Serbia is bad (although slightly improving), but there is no systematic or structured approach to developing a new image of the country. General and specific messages to different target groups have not been developed. An analysis of channels and mechanisms of communication and advocacy is missing or limited.

The refugee crisis demonstrated the deepest interconnection of the region with the EU – geographic, functional and sectoral. But relevant target groups in Serbia do not follow the processes in the EU, do not speak the “common language of the EU” and its Member States' institutions. They do not have sufficient knowledge of the key EU Member States, an interactive relationship with partners in the EU institutions and member countries, and have not been informing the general public in Serbia, the Member States or Brussels of our interests and achievements. Serbian officials usually speak about their own problems, showing no interest in those of their European counterparts; nor have they demonstrated the ability to have a dialogue on an equal footing – as a future EU Member State.

¹²² For example, NALAS' greatest success is the establishment of strategic partnerships with similar organisations in Europe, starting with a Cross-Membership Agreement with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), a powerful lobbying organisation with strong members representing the interests of local governments. Moreover, NALAS has four members in the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), the EU assembly of local and regional representatives providing sub-national authorities (i.e. regions, counties, provinces, municipalities and cities) with a direct voice within the EU's institutional framework.

There are numerous fragments of the Serbian institutional structure, which can easily be engaged in playing a specific role in the general communication/advocacy/lobbying efforts. Some of the parastatal organisations (such as the Serbian Chamber of Commerce or the Tourist Organisation of Serbia) have already undertaken steps to improve their input in this respect. However, although Serbian engagement at the administrative level has been continuously praised by the EU institutions, it seems that, for the time being, civil society is the most motivated, qualified and boasts the appropriate capacity to develop and implement a “pilot” advocacy strategy for Serbia’s faster EU integration.

8. Recommendations

8.1. Key target groups

- The advocacy strategy should target Brussels institutions and institutions of both the EU Member States interested the most and those not interested in Serbia. It is vital that the key diplomatic missions in the European Union (Brussels) and the interested Member States (Germany, Italy, Austria, France, UK, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, The Czech Republic and Poland) are staffed with high quality officials, who are well acquainted with EU policies.
- Influential individuals (like Romano Prodi, Franco Frattini, Erhard Busek, Marta Dassu, Erik Berglof, Tim Judah, Eduard Kukan, Miroslav Lajčak, Rosa Balfour, Judy Dampsey, Misha Glenny, Branko Milanović, Ivan Vejvoda, Dušan Reljić etc.) should be identified and mobilised to support the region. The Friends of the Balkans – foreign supporters and distinguished members of the diaspora from the region – should be identified, contacted, and involved in the network of advocates.
- The advocacy strategy should also focus on developing closer links between Serbian and EU citizens, through the promotion of Serbia’s culture, arts, natural beauties and tourism.

8.2. Stakeholders

- The coordination of Serbia’s policy towards the EU is an essential element of any successful strategy to influence the Member States or the EU institutions.
- Ministers and Assistant Ministers should be given prominent roles in the public policy advocacy strategy.
- Line ministries, which have the technical expertise for integration with the EU, should be deployed in an advocacy action programme to influence the Member States.
- Senior Serbian officials should organise frequent contacts with senior EU politicians and communicate with the broader European public.
- All officials and politicians officially visiting the EU Member States and the EU institutions should be instructed that these visits always have a public policy advocacy element. Every official should be able to explain the key elements of Serbia’s policies to the people he or she meets. This, however, requires a better information policy at the government level to ensure that all officials have access to policy analyses enabling them to engage in more meaningful discussions when they are abroad.
- It is important to involve business leaders in advocacy and lobbying programmes and explain the benefits such involvement provides.
- Engagement of civil society organisations will be indispensable, particularly in the initial phase of developing and implementing the public policy advocacy strategy for Serbia’s EU integration.

8.3. *Methods and Channels of Communication/Advocacy*

Methods of communicating and advocating Serbia's EU integration depend on the target groups and types of messengers. The following classical means of communication are recommended to Serbian institutions targeting European institutions and EU Member States:

- Meetings with leaders of the important Member States and the EU institutions;
- Official planning and coordination of meetings and mailing lists;
- Regular briefings of the Belgrade-based diplomatic corps;
- Annual cocktails with official speeches;
- Addresses to the European Parliament and national parliaments, as well as other European fora to which WB candidate countries have access (COWEB, etc.);
- Keynote speeches in distinguished settings such as events on the margins of the WB6 Summits, Friends of Europe, European Policy Centre, Davos, London School of Economics and Political Science, the College of Europe in Bruges, Humboldt University in Berlin, etc.;
- Writing key policy statements for influential print media: Economist, Financial Times, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, le Monde, New Europe, Balkan Insight, Politico, etc.;¹²³
- Appearance in TV shows in Europe and the region (Vicinity, Al Jazeera, BBC, Voice of America and national electronic media);
- Government-led information campaign demonstrating the positive aspects of Serbia's integration in the EU.

The following opportunities can be used to reach out to other target groups:

- Trade and tourist fairs and exhibitions;
- Business and cultural road shows;
- Foreign investor councils' events;
- Kopaonik Business Forum;
- Literature, music, film, theatre and dance festivals with pro-EU messages tailored to their topics/concepts of the year;
- Civil society events related to EU integration;
- Special events supported by donor organisations in Brussels (Open Society Institute, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Foundation etc.) and Brussels think tanks;
- TV stations (talk shows, propaganda spots);
- Websites, social media, You Tube;
- Press releases and media announcements.

Many of the listed methods and channels of communication/advocacy have already been used but in the absence of a strategic approach, general framework and guidelines, systematic activity or coordination, thus amounting to sporadic activities without a track record or evaluation.

¹²³ *Montenegro Needs to Upgrade Its Public Policy Advocacy Strategy vis-a-vis the EU*, Association of Accredited Public Policy Advocates to the European Union (AALEP), 2013, p.2. Available at: <http://www.aalep.eu/montenegro-needs-upgrade-its-public-policy-advocacy-strategy-vis-vis-eu>

8.4. Training

- Communication/advocacy/lobbying should become an important part of the training of young diplomats, primarily at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Diplomatic Academy;
- Higher education centres should offer more courses, in particular at the graduate level, on the law, economics and politics of EU integration, in order to develop a 'pipeline' of new recruits for the administration. They should also facilitate sending students to study at specialised university centres on European studies abroad;
- Trainers need to be trained and training programmes need to be established for officials in all ministries and for the training of selected young officials abroad¹²⁴.

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¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p.1.

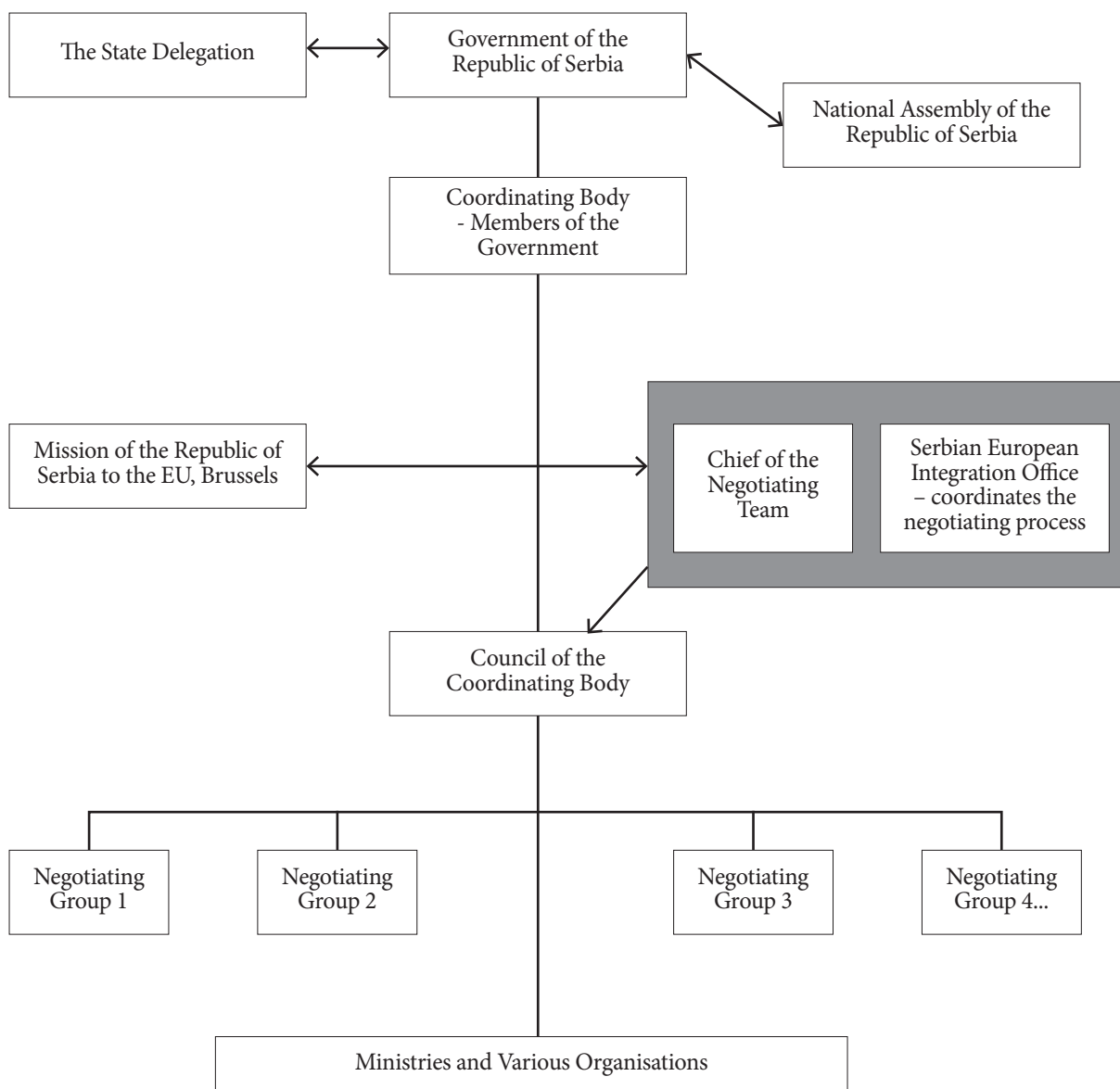
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Annex 1

Figure 1: Republic of Serbia's EU Accession Negotiating Structure



Source: Chief of the Negotiating Team Office, 2014

Annex 2

Serbia – SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important geo-strategic position; • Respectable human resources; • Significant institutional capacities; • The biggest country in the Western Balkans (by area, population, market); • The axis of the Western Balkan Connectivity Agenda (Danube and Corridor X); • Relatively unpolluted environment; • Experience in civic activism; • Unique mentality, culture, art and food. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative image - perception of Serbia as a society which has not clearly opted for the EU yet; • Modest progress in adopting the acquis and its limited implementation; • Major gap in development between Serbia and the EU; • Infrastructure is in poor shape; • Insufficient awareness of existing internal capacities and resources; • Weak national advocacy capacity - lack of internal communication on existing projects and experiences; • Only a few CSOs have good links with EU decision makers and some level of influence.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security and stability of the WB largely depend on Serbia and its constructive role in the region; • Capitalise on the image of a reliable partner of the EU in the refugee crisis; • Ability to accelerate the negotiating process with the EU in case talks on a larger number of chapters are opened; • Interest of neighbours, V4 and some other countries in supporting further enlargement; • Successful diaspora – great number of engineers, IT experts, university professors, scientists, managers, doctors and medical staff, artists and skilled labour in many EU Member States. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfavourable climate for further enlargement of the EU (marginalisation of the enlargement issue on the EU agenda; lesser focus on the WB at the institutional level; “nationalisation” of the EU Enlargement Policy; decreasing support for further enlargement in the Member States); • Decreasing support for EU integration in some Western Balkan countries; • Growing influence of interested non-EU players in the Western Balkans; • Weak communication, branding and channels, including social media; • Very limited funds for proper branding and communication.

Annex 3

The Western Balkans – SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important geostrategic position of the region (surrounded by EU and NATO); • High security relevance (migration, cross-border organised crime, terrorism); • Transit region - important position for European energy security and transport connectivity; • People are the region's biggest asset; • Small size and low costs of integration of the region; • Existing sectoral/communication/lobbying strategies in quite a number of regional organisations (RCC, CEFTA, SEETO, Energy Community, REC, NALAS, RESPA, BCSDN...) with good access to EU institutions and funding; • Great capacity of CSOs and particularly NGOs in WB for advancing and advocating WB EU integration; • Numerous and widely dispersed diaspora. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative image of the Western Balkans – lack of knowledge, limited means and channels of communication; • Only bad news coming from the region (FYROM-Greece, Serbia-Kosovo, Serbia-Croatia...); • Identity crisis; • Lack of continuity: institutional, strategic alliances, education, business, culture...; • Slow reforms, poor infrastructure, major gap in development between the WB and the EU; • Slow progress in bilateral relations; • Limited advocacy efforts to sell “good stories” from the region (regional and bilateral).
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WB countries share the same political objective - EU accession; • The region consists of small countries, which can defend their interests only as an interest group, such as the Nordic countries, Benelux and V4, when it joins the EU. • Sharing of and building on the experiences of successful campaigns/communication activities of V4 and other new EU member countries; • Only together can the region attract big investments and reindustrialise; • Berlin Process provided further support to infrastructure development as the generator of economic development in the region; • An AS can contribute to closer cooperation between WB and V4 administrations, entrepreneurs and CSOs; • An AS is a chance for improving the WB's image among EU citizens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfavourable context for enlargement (internal crisis in the EU and decreasing interest of some candidate countries); • EU neglect of the region; • “Nationalisation” of the EU Enlargement Policy and decreasing support for further enlargement in the Member States; • Growing influence of non-EU players in the region (Russia, China, Turkey, United Arab Emirates...); • Potential political turbulences in WB countries - risks of new conflicts breaking out; • The process of enlargement works better at the technical than the political level; • The danger of the Turkish scenario – decades of negotiations; • Low feedback from the AS target groups and beneficiaries.

The Visegrad Group - National Chapters

HUNGARY

Abstract

This report provides an overview of Hungary's communication strategy in the period of its accession to the EU. It presents the key institutions and bodies tasked with EU communication, communication actors, as well as internal and external communication channels, used during the communication campaign in the country. The paper also touches on Hungary's status in the EU decision making process and its position on enlargement towards the Western Balkans. The EU integration of the Western Balkans is the core interest of Hungary in order to ensure security and stability in the region, enhance economic cooperation and protect ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries. At the time of Hungary's EU accession, the climate was conducive to enlargement and there was genuine interest to have Hungary and other Visegrad countries join the EU. Based on Hungary's experience, the paper provides some lessons for the Western Balkans when it comes to organising and implementing an official communication campaign and outlines the main strengths the region can use as leverage in advocating its accession to the EU. The report ends with a description of the Visegrad Group cooperation and joint activities that can serve as a role model for prospective EU Member States. The Western Balkan countries can naturally benefit from this experience as well.

Key words: *Visegrad Group, Western Balkans, Hungary, enlargement, communication, communication strategy, European Union*

1. EU Enlargement to the Western Balkan Countries

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s gave rise to long-term challenges in the Western Balkans¹²⁶, which this region is still dealing with. The Western Balkan countries have been struggling to (1) establish democratic institutions, (2) mitigate social tensions in terms of ethnic issues, and (3) put in place functioning market economies that may eventually catch up with the developed economies. These challenges imposed a heavy burden on the region, which it can barely handle on its own. Such a complex situation in the Western Balkans has created room for the EU Member States and the countries in the region to pursue mutual interests involving the implementation of reforms and building a framework for the long-term stability of the region. It seems that the EU is offering a European perspective which contributes to the long-term democratic state-building process the Western Balkan countries need.¹²⁷ In other words, the EU's fundamental objective for this region is to create a situation where military conflict is unthinkable – expand to this region the area of peace, stability, prosperity and freedom established over the past 50 years through gradual European integration. Viewed from this perspective, the Western Balkan countries are the first on the waiting list for EU enlargement.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Central European University (CEU), Center for European Neighborhood Studies (CENS), Research Fellow

¹²⁶ In terms of the enlargement process, the Western Balkans refer to the following countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Kosovo* (This *designation is without prejudice* to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the *Kosovo* Declaration of Independence), Montenegro and Serbia.

¹²⁷ Orosz, Anna. "European Integration of the Western Balkan Countries: the Way Behind and Ahead". Summary for the conference EU Integration of the Western Balkans and the Hungarian EU Presidency held on 11 November 2010. p. 7. Accessed on 13 April 2016. Available at: <http://www.icdt.hu/documents/publications/Summarizing-Study-European-Integration-of-the-Western-Balkan-Countries.pdf>.

¹²⁸ Visegrad.info. "European future of the Western Balkans". Accessed on 13 April 2016. Available at: <http://www.visegrad.info/eu-enlargement-western-balkans/factsheet/european-future-of-the-western-balkans.html>.

Consequently, EU support for the promotion of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans concentrates on post-conflict stabilisation. In this process, the Western Balkans may benefit from the guidance of inter-governmental organisations, such as the Visegrad Group (V4). Moreover, multilateral cooperation in the Western Balkans is a shared interest of the WB countries' governments and their citizens and it goes beyond the scope of EU membership. It is hence likely that the EU integration of individual countries (Croatia's accession in 2013, ongoing accession talks with Montenegro and Serbia) will establish firm foundations for the further consolidation of cooperation in the Western Balkans. Regional cooperation, which is an explicit requirement for the aspirant countries in their EU membership bids, can transform into a self-sustaining coordination mechanism contributing to minority rights, the fight against corruption, regional trade and investments.¹²⁹ Croatia, as the 28th EU Member State, should have a crucial role in the process of enlargement to the Western Balkans. It is the first country in the region that had to fulfil the Copenhagen Criteria. Croatia should, therefore, set an example for the region when it comes to full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), respect for minority and human rights and regional cooperation.¹³⁰

There have been major changes in the EU's approach to enlargement since the Visegrad countries joined the EU. Viewed from this perspective, the V4 group has provided four main thrusts to the EU in terms of (1) improving the foreign and security policy field, (2) establishing democratic institutions and conducting public administration reforms, (3) using the EU funds to boost the regional economies and social systems, and (4) establishing a basis for regional structures for EU accession.¹³¹ All the V4 countries have given an important incentive in light of these objectives. Consequently, this group has also justified further enlargement efforts towards the Western Balkan region.¹³²

In addition, the EU vowed to the Western Balkan countries that all of them would become EU members one day.¹³³ Some countries in the region have since gained candidate status, others are considered potential candidates states. However, the accession process in the Western Balkans is not a one-way street; it advances in a successful enlargement continuum requiring both the candidate countries' efforts and the EU member states' willingness to embrace the Western Balkan region. It goes without saying that EU's further enlargement depends on the aspirant countries' fulfilment of the set requirements, but it may equally hinge on the climate prevailing in the Union (various crises, usually unexpected ones, such as Brexit et al)¹³⁴. This chapter will, therefore, focus on the Western Balkans' integration in the EU, the accession talks and the enlargement process in terms of the development of cooperation.

The European Community was the most important economic (trade, investment and transfer of technology) partner of the former Yugoslavia, with which it also had very close political, cultural, scientific and educational links. Yet, EU presence (interference) in the Western Balkan region started when the latest wars broke out. However, the inability of EU member states to address the crisis under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has largely affected the region to this day. Despite the failure of the entire international

¹²⁹ Research Forum of the European Movement in Serbia. *European Integration of the Western Balkans - Can the Visegrad Group Countries Serve as Role Models?* Accessed on 13 April 2016, p. 18. Available at: <http://www.emins.org/uploads/useruploads/forum-it/02-PA-V4Studija.pdf>.

¹³⁰ Walsch, Christopher, "Fostering EU Enlargement. Is the Visegrad Group a Credible Advocate?" *Donau-Institut Working Paper, No. 29 (2014)*: 1. Accessed on 13 April 2016. Available at: http://www.tankonyvtar.hu/hu/tartalom/tamop422b/2010-0015_3_kotet-cikk49/1-2010-0015-cikk49_1_1.html.

¹³¹ Research Forum of the European Movement in Serbia. *European Integration of the Western Balkans...* op.cit, p. 3

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹³³ McDonald Bingöl, Deniz, "EU Enlargement and Global Implications of the Balkan Problem" (2008): 320.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*.

community to provide a solution for the crisis in ex-Yugoslavia, the EU remained an important actor in the region, contributing to its stabilisation and recovery *via* its integrational powers.¹³⁵ In result, the EU launched the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) in Feira and Zagreb in 2000, providing the main framework for the EU integration of the Western Balkans. The framework also underlined that all the Western Balkan countries were considered potential candidates for EU enlargement within the SAP. Moreover, the framework was followed by the provision of financial aid via CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation). The enlargement process, however, gained the greatest momentum at the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, which laid stress on the future of Western Balkans within the EU.¹³⁶

The Copenhagen European Council provided the possibility of the EU's enlargement to the East in 1993. The Council emphasised that a European country that wanted to become an EU member had to fulfil a set of criteria, notably (1) have stable democratic institutions, (2) respect human and minority rights, (3) have a functioning market economy, and (4) reach a satisfactory degree of legal harmonisation.¹³⁷ The EU subsequently extended its requirements for the Western Balkan countries' accession to the EU. The Copenhagen Criteria, specifying political and economic conditions that had to be fulfilled by the countries joining the EU in the past, have been supplemented by additional political criteria regarding the increase and participation in regional cooperation. They require full cooperation with the ICTY and good neighbourly relations¹³⁸. The conditions for establishing contractual relations with the Western Balkan countries were first laid down in the EU Council Conclusions of April 1997. In 1999, the Council established the Stabilisation and Association Partnership (SAP). This decision led to confirmation that the Western Balkan countries were eligible to apply for EU membership provided they fulfilled the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria.¹³⁹ Moreover, the European Commission (EC) designed a new enlargement strategy envisaging a new financial assistance tool known as the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). Through this Instrument, the EC provided €11.5 billion worth of economic aid to the Western Balkans and Turkey under the European Partnership and Accession Partnerships in the 2007-2013 period.¹⁴⁰

Finally, the Strategy of the European Partnership and Accession Partnership has been founded on three basic principles, notably on: (1) strengthening existing commitments towards the Western Balkan countries involved in the enlargement process, (2) implementing fair and rigorous conditionality, and (3) increasing communication with the public on the enlargement process. The Strategy, therefore, pays special attention to political reforms enhancing the quality of the accession talks and invigorating the required reforms in the candidate states.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*.

¹³⁷ Vida, Krisztina and Pyszna, Dorota, "The Management of Accession to the European Union in Poland and Hungary". The Institute for World Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Working Papers, No. 128 (2002): 48. Accessed on 13 April 2016. Available at: <https://ideas.repec.org/p/iwe/workpr/128.html>.

¹³⁸ Orosz, p. 10.

¹³⁹ European Union External Action Service. "EU relations with the Western Balkans". Accessed on 13 April 2016. Available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/western_balkans/index_en.htm.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

2. Hungary's Status in the EU Decision Making Process

Hungary's attitude towards Euro-Atlantic integration has always been pro-Western, ever since World War II. It therefore came as no surprise that Hungary was, therefore, expected that it would pursue a different agenda from the other Communist countries when it joined the GATT in 1973. Thus, Hungary built cordial ties with the capitalist world in the aftermath of the Helsinki Process (the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe /CSCE/, later called the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe /OSCE/).¹⁴² In addition to GATT, Hungary became a member of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1982. In the late 1980s, Hungary became one of the most influential countries in the region of Central Europe¹⁴³. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Hungary held its first free elections in March 1990 and oriented itself towards EU and NATO integration. Budapest started the association talks and signed the Association Agreement in 1991. After the European Council confirmed the Copenhagen Criteria and opened the EU's door to Central Europe, Hungary applied for EU membership in 1994.¹⁴⁴

In the early 1990s, Hungary put in place the bilateral treaty network with a view to stabilising its relations with the other countries in the region. Therefore, Hungary signed friendship treaties with the neighbouring countries under the Antall Government in the 1990-1993 period. These treaties helped the countries of the region commit themselves to upholding basic principles and international norms enshrined in the UN Charter and OSCE documents. The treaties also provided for the signatories' mutual support to each other's integration in the EU and NATO.¹⁴⁵ In addition to signing the Association Agreement in 1991, Hungary demonstrated that its main objective was accession to Euro-Atlantic organisations.¹⁴⁶ In this spirit, Hungary commenced negotiations on NATO membership in June 1990 and concluded them in 1999. After it launched the talks with NATO, Hungary submitted its application for EU membership on 1 April 1994. This process was completed in May 2004 – Hungary became an EU Member State on 1 May 2004.¹⁴⁷

Hungary's EU membership influenced its political parties' and government's views on the national foreign policy. There has been general consensus on supporting further EU enlargement, maintaining good neighbourly relations and protecting the Hungarian minority in the region since 2004. These are also the main reasons why the Hungarian government is supporting EU enlargement to the Western Balkans. However, Hungary's new foreign policy agenda has placed the greatest emphasis on the economy since 2012, but the importance it has been attaching to the Balkans has not diminished and its support for enlargement is perceived as a potential contribution to EU's external policy.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Jeszenszky, Géza, "Hungary's Foreign Policy Dilemmas after Regaining Sovereignty". In "Society and Economy", Akadémiai Kiadó, Vol. 29(1) (2007): 45. Accessed on 31 March 2016. Available at: <http://www.hungarianhistory.com/lib/jeszenszky/jesz18.pdf>.

¹⁴³ Semanić, Hana. "Ten Years of Membership in the European Union – Hungary". In *European Integration of the Western Balkans...* op.cit, p. 46.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁵ Jeszenszky, Géza, p. 53.

¹⁴⁶ Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Hungary in the European Union*. Accessed on 13 April 2016. Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.hu/NR/rdonlyres/F3C63FCB-8B7A-431E-910A-CE5F7D4B7C6F/0/EU_angol.pdf.

¹⁴⁷ Semanić, p. 47.

¹⁴⁸ Huszka, Beáta. "EU Member States and Enlargement towards the Balkans", eds. Rosa Balfour and Corina Stratulat, *EPC Issue Paper, No.79* (2015): 115. Accessed on 31 March 2016. Available at: http://epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_5832_eu_balkans_-_issue_paper.pdf.

3. Hungary's Position on EU Enlargement to the Western Balkans

Hungary's national position and interests regarding the EU's enlargement policy emerge from its historical ties and geographical proximity to the Western Balkans. In other words, EU integration of the Western Balkan countries is Hungary's core interest. In July 2011, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán stated that the Western Balkans were "an enclave of the EU surrounded by the EU"¹⁴⁹ and that the integration of this region in the EU would mean the "completion of the unfinished business of reuniting Europe".¹⁵⁰ Orbán's support for the enlargement process has been driven by the desire to ensure long-lasting stability and security in the Western Balkans, protect ethnic Hungarians living in the Balkan states and enhance Budapest's economic interests in the region.¹⁵¹ Many have argued that speeding up the enlargement process would reduce security threats that might be caused by an outbreak of conflicts in the region and subsequently impinge on Hungarian security. Approximately 300,000 ethnic Hungarians live in the Western Balkans, most of them in the Vojvodina region in northern Serbia. In other words, the Hungarian government is using the enlargement process to protect its Hungarian communities outside its borders.¹⁵² The Orbán government, on the one hand, supports EU enlargement to the Western Balkans driven by national security concerns, whilst, on the other, the government wants a looser rather than a more integrated Europe.¹⁵³ Moreover, Viktor Orbán changed his rhetoric on national interests in 2002, saying that joining the EU was merely a 'marriage of convenience' – that it was not about EU values, merely about common interests.¹⁵⁴

As far as the EU security and foreign policy is concerned, it is less likely that Hungary can influence that policy alone, but the V4 countries are an important bloc given they represent 35% of the EU population. Also, Hungary has strategically benefited from both EU and NATO membership in terms of promoting Hungarian interests in the region. NATO membership has been advantageous for Hungary inasmuch as it (1) transformed its security and defence policy, (2) rendered the country compatible and interoperable with other NATO members, and (3) increased its military ability in accordance with NATO's collective defence and crisis management capabilities. EU membership has impacted on Hungarian foreign and security policies as well. Hungary has been using the European External Action Service (shared pools of diplomatic services) in order to expand its global reach. It is thus resolved to develop the European External Action Service and improve its role in the EU international crisis management missions.¹⁵⁵ It seems that Hungary has been more active in regional politics via its V4 involvement, while using the EU as a means to implement a globally open foreign policy. The Hungarian security strategy states that EU enlargement to the Western Balkans lies at the core of Hungary's national interests. Hence, Hungary advocates EU cultural diversity policies and even supports Turkey's accession.¹⁵⁶

In addition, Hungarian support for enlargement to the Western Balkans is further influenced by economic motives. Hungary has a trade surplus with the Western Balkans. Despite the fact that the region has a small market, it accounts for an important share of Hungarian trade and foreign investments.¹⁵⁷ Along with Hungarian economic and political interests in the Western Balkans, Budapest has also increased its

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 117.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*.

¹⁵² *Ibid*.

¹⁵³ Anonymous, interviewed by the author, 4 February 2016.

¹⁵⁴ Anonymous, interviewed by the author, 2 February 2016.

¹⁵⁵ Semanić, Hana, p. 48.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

political and diplomatic involvement. Since its EU chairmanship in the first half of 2011, the country has enhanced its ties via high-level meetings with regional heads of state and at lower administrative levels.¹⁵⁸ Consequently, prospects of EU enlargement have been conducive to the interests of Hungarian investors. A region that is stable, peaceful and market friendly will facilitate an increase in the volume of Hungary's trade and investments.¹⁵⁹ Hungary's economically-motivated support for EU enlargement and its dynamism have not faded despite the global economic crisis in 2008.

As noted, protection of Hungarian minority rights and interests in the Western Balkans is one of the reasons why Hungary has been supporting EU enlargement. Hungary stressed the importance of minority rights before Serbia opened talks on Chapter 23. In December 2011, Hungary went a step further, warning it would veto granting Serbia candidate status if Belgrade did not modify the law on minority rights related to the Hungarian community in Serbia.¹⁶⁰

Finally, Hungary has over the past decade proven that it is one of the most important supporters of EU enlargement to the Western Balkans. Consequently, Hungary's advocacy of the value of EU integration to the region suggests a positive approach to the EU. In result, pushing the enlargement process, as seen in the case of Croatia's accession to the EU, is regarded as a tool by which Hungary has built its legitimacy and strengthened its position within the EU.¹⁶¹

4. Hungary's Communication Strategy in the EU Accession Period and Post-Accession Changes

4.1. Introduction

Like all other Visegrad countries, Hungary implemented its own communication strategy in the period of accession to the EU. At the time of Hungary's accession, there was genuine EU interest to take in the Visegrad group of countries. There was a favourable consensus among all the political parties in Hungary on the principle of EU integration and the other accession-related matters enjoyed full support within the country until the day of accession. There was not a single political party that opposed the European project.¹⁶²

The strategy, officially called "The EU Communication Strategy of the Hungarian Society" (Expert Document), is a 202-page-long document written in Hungarian and covering a broad range of issues. Its main chapters are:

- Context and Challenges
- Goals and Messages
- Conditions of Implementation
- The Four-Tiered Decentralisation of the Communication Strategy
- Communication Strategy Target Groups
- Communication Tools and Feedback.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 118.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 124.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 126.

¹⁶² Bálint Magyar, interviewed by the author, 13 February 2016.

The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was initially the main implementer of the national Communication Strategy, adopted by the Government on 6 December 2002 (1198/2002. XII. 6. Government Decree on the social communication of European Union accession). The authors of the Strategy planned that it supports communication in the following 2-3 years, wherefore it directly concerned the pre-accession period and was only mid-term. It was developed by the EU Communication Expert Working Group (EU Kommunikációs Szakmai Műhely) composed of Zoltán Horváth, Dóra Husz, Gábor Sarlós and Miklós Sükösd. They were supported by a unit in the Prime Minister's Office led by Ferenc Baja. József Böjte, Gábor Bruck, Gábor Hargitai, Ádám Levendel, Viktor Szigetvári and László Vass were also involved as consultants. The Strategy was adopted soon after the Socialist government took office. The European Commission Representation in Hungary directly backed the process of developing the Strategy.

External actors were involved as well. The Szonda Ipsos Group was in charge of collecting survey data on the public's views on EU integration, an issue also studied by individual researchers, such as Tamás Pál, András Inotai and a number of other devoted EU champions in Hungary. The European House (Európa Ház), led by the current Hungarian member of the EP Tibor Szanyi, who was not politically affiliated at the time, was in charge of implementing the Strategy. The European House organised a number of public events and communication campaigns at a later stage. Judit Fekete-Gyárfás headed the EU Communication Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the implementation of Hungary's EU Communication Strategy.

The enlargement environment today is very different than it was at the time. When Hungary was acceding the EU, there was no need to convince Hungarians that it was a good opportunity for them to join the Union – that went without saying. The debate revolved around the actual benefits accession would bring and it was well covered by the media. In that respect, it is hard to draw tangible lessons from the Hungarian experience given the current state of affairs, since the enlargement climate was very propitious a decade ago, which is not the case nowadays. The reality today is that the conditions are much harsher and that the EU faces more pressing issues than enlargement.

In addition to the Communication Strategy, some interlocutors pointed out the importance of some other strategies, such as the strategy on legal harmonisation with the *acquis*, and preparations of the government officials. All three were interrelated and continuously developed. In Hungary's case, all versions of the strategies were adopted by the National Assembly and all the governments implemented them from 1995 until the day of accession.

4.2. *Institutions and Bodies Tasked with EU Communication*

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had conducted and implemented the EU Communication Strategies since the mid-1990s. In 2003, EU communication was transferred to the Prime Minister's Office and the EU Communication Section was put in charge of coordinating the government's EU communication, supervised by the Inter-Ministerial Committee for European Coordination (ICEC).¹⁶³ Its tasks included (1) maintaining contact with EU communication authorities of the Member States, the European Commission, Parliament and Council, (2) participation in the Council working group dealing with communication, (3) coordination of the EU communication activities of the different ministries, (4) implementation of projects and campaigns, (5) publications, (6) organisation of conferences, events and trainings, (7) public relations, (8) administration of eu.kormany.hu and related online media, and (9) maintaining relations with networks dealing with EU communication in Hungary.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Smidt, Krisztina. *Bringing Closer EU and Its Citizens. Implementing Strategies for Bridging the Gap by Communicating EU in Hungary*. p. 5. Accessed on 31 March 2016. Available at: <http://www.eu-consent.net/library/phd/smidt.pdf>

¹⁶⁴ Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *EU communication*. Accessed on 31 March 2016. Available at: <http://eu.kormany.hu/eu-communication>.

In October 2002, the government established the EU Communication Public Endowment to ensure access to information about the EU, present the opportunities of EU membership, and inform the citizens about the EU institutions and the impact of their decisions on their everyday lives.¹⁶⁵ However, in 2004, the Endowment was qualified as ‘a total fiasco’ by Fidesz’s MP Zoltán Bagó because it spent HUF 2.3 billion (approximately €7 million today) but produced no successful communication results.¹⁶⁶ In 2003, the EU Line (EU Vonal) was established with an online information database, a call centre, and an event calendar.¹⁶⁷

The above-mentioned European House is a non-government organisation that played an important role in implementing the Hungarian Communication Strategy. Founded in 1990, its main goal has been to promote the EU and its benefits and opportunities, strengthen civil society, exchange information, promote international participants and build relations with the EU.¹⁶⁸

4.3. Communication Actors

Civil society organisations: There were 86 civil society organisations across the country that organised events and forums about the EU; these activities were financed by the Prime Minister’s Office, which extended them HUF 20 million (approximately €64,000 today). In July 2005, the Prime Minister’s Office also initiated the ‘EU: It’s more roomy inside’ campaign with the Pillar Public Foundation that aimed to inform citizens about the EU. They organised nine events consisting of interactive presentations and discussions.¹⁶⁹ The Prime Minister’s Office and the Non-Profit Information and Education Centre Foundation held discussions forums ‘Take your part!’ in seven Hungarian regions, familiarising the other civil organisations with the EU and how they could benefit from it. The Merlin European Information and Cultural Centre was established as part of the Budapest Merlin International Theatre, which provided a venue for forums and discussions, devoting particular attention to the young generations. The Centre was opened in November 2005 by the then President of the EC, José Manuel Barroso. The European House also had an important role in the communication process by implementing the Strategy, organising live discussions and essay competitions for secondary school students; it also held a ‘European Parliament Model’, organised an international conference about the Lisbon Strategy, established the Hungarian Civil Office in Brussels, discussed the White Paper, etc.¹⁷⁰

Schools and Universities: A programme called ‘EU Lessons’, targeting secondary school students with a view to making the EU more appealing to them, involved interactive lessons and interactive presentations about the EU and used very understandable and simple language and vocabulary. Some universities provided specific EU specialisation courses, while others held lectures on EU issues. Many professors were engaged in the Jean Monnet framework providing them with the opportunity to spend some time in the Commission as researchers or trainees. At the time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was eligible to send 10 people a year for the duration of three months. Individuals were also entitled to apply under other programmes.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Smidt, Krisztina. *Bringing Closer EU...* op.cit, p. 5.

¹⁶⁶ Magyar Nemzet. *Total Fiasco of EU communication*. Accessed on 31 March 2016. Available at: <http://mno.hu/migr/total-fiasco-of-eu-communication-638415>.

¹⁶⁷ EU Vonal. Accessed on 31 March 2016. Available at: <http://www.euvonal.hu/>.

¹⁶⁸ European House. Accessed on 31 March 2016. Available at: <http://www.eucivil.hu/news.php>.

¹⁶⁹ Smidt, Krisztina. *Bringing Closer EU...* op.cit, p. 6.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Ágnes Hargita, interviewed by the author, 11 February 2016.

Hungarian Government: All the ministries at the time set up their own communication departments that were organising forums, discussions, panels and training courses. Ministries invited experts from other EU countries, who not only delivered lectures, but were directly involved in the training process as well (e.g. how to write applications for the PHARE program). These skills turned out to be very important as they were later used to apply for pre-accession funds (e.g. ISPA - assistance in environment and transport and SAPARD – assistance in agriculture and rural development).¹⁷²

European Commission: This institution was one of the key players in the whole process, providing guidance and advice, as well as financial support, and actively participating in the promotional activities.

European Commission Representation in Hungary: This institution was an important player in communication with the citizens. The Representation directly supported the Strategy development process.

The European Parliament Information Office in Hungary: This institution played an important role in familiarising the citizens with the European Parliament.

Hungarian Members of the European Parliament: They actively took part in the Hungarian communication endeavours, but it was hard to keep track of the events they attended, whether they had contributed to them, and how significant their roles in these events were.

The Hungarian National Assembly: Communication and outreach activities were one of the Hungarian parliament's key tasks. Even though this institution was sometimes criticised for not communicating the EU well to the citizens, its Foreign Affairs and EU Committees actively implemented the outreach activities and, since Hungary's EU accession, helped around ten other parliaments prepare for their role within the accession process and post-accession through twinning and technical assistance programmes.

4.4. Communication Channels

Communication channels in Hungary were two-fold: internal and external. Internal communication involved sharing information, knowledge and know-how among the staff at different levels within an organisation, while external communication entailed exchange of information and messages between an organisation and other organisations, groups or external stakeholders.

4.4.1. Internal Communication Channels

Hungarian ministries conducted many internal studies and published booklets and pamphlets with the aim of explaining the EU to the citizens. The Integration Strategic Working Group (Integrációs Stratégiai Munkacsoport - ISM), led by Professor Andras Inotai, was established in 1994 under a Government decree. Academics, researchers and officials authored studies that were part of more than a hundred Blue Booklets (Kék Könyv). The studies focused on issues of relevance to preparations for accession to the EU (functioning of the EC/EU, various community policies). The Blue Booklets were published in the 1994-2004 period.

The State Secretariat for EU Integration also published booklets on various topics (e.g. internal market or effects of the Association Agreement, advantages and disadvantages of accession, etc.) thanks to PHARE financial support. Research institutes were often involved in the process. A couple of months after the State Secretariat for EU Integration concluded the Intergovernmental Conference on Accession, a summary of

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

the accession results was published and disseminated across the country. It was a simple document, using vocabulary and terminology easily understood by the man in the street. All the government departments regularly underwent EU courses. The countries that had joined the EU before Hungary, in particular Sweden, Finland and Austria, sent their lecturers and former negotiators, who shared their experiences and lessons learned. For instance, the Swedish chief negotiator for agriculture spent two years working in Hungary, explaining the complex common agricultural policy and training many people in the *acquis*.¹⁷³

4.4.2. External Communication Channels

Electronic Media: The electronic media broadcasted TV and radio programmes and series about the EU. Despite the abundance of such shows, many interviewed Hungarians said that the accession process was too comprehensive and the EU too complex to be explained to the citizens by use of visual images. A dose of Euro-pessimism could be felt at the beginning of the accession process in Hungary, too. It was a consequence of the fact that the citizens were insufficiently informed about the EU and felt apprehensive about the future, as they did not know what they were signing up for. In addition, some media resorted to propaganda that accession would create its own losers. However, the interviewees generally agreed that everyone was a winner one way or another. Even agricultural producers, who might have seemed to be on the losing side initially, ultimately benefited greatly from the Union. Public concerns were, for instance, raised by rumours/talk of the total ban on the famous poppy seed, largely used in Hungarian cooking. These are only some of the examples corroborating the general notion that there was poor regional coverage, especially coverage by the regional media.

Billboards: Posters and billboards that appeared before the referendum were an important part of the promotional campaign. Some of them carried, however, quite simplistic and naïve messages ridiculed at the time and long afterwards. One scorned billboard said “you will be able to open a coffee shop in Vienna”. Such messages were mainly targeting entrepreneurs, not ordinary citizens, who were never told what they would get from the EU. There were messages about the ‘four freedoms’, especially the freedom of movement, but it was no longer high on the Hungarians’ priority list. At the time, Hungary was doing quite well economically and unemployment was relatively low. Hungarians did not wish to go work abroad; consequently, messages about the freedom of movement did not matter much. Their trips abroad depended mostly on their financial means, not the freedom of movement. Ten years later, however, many Hungarians are leaving the country and using the opportunity to move freely.

Print media: Political, economic and daily newspapers (Népszabadság, Magyar Nemzet, Népszava, Magyar Hírlap) dedicated some of their pages to EU affairs in the period between the signing of the Accession Agreement and the completion of the negotiations, focusing on and explaining particular EU areas. The papers in principle addressed different strata of the society. As of 1996, the periodical European Mirror published scientific studies and detailed information on the accession negotiations. Economic journals, such as the Daily World Economic, addressed one type of audience. Other editions - newsletters, e-newsletters (e.g. EUvonal, Euractive or the Newsletter of Civil Europe) - were also published.

Internet: Some of the most important websites for the Hungarian public included www.euvonal.hu, www.euractive.com, www.europeanhouse, www.eu.hu and www.europapont.hu. However, their online forums were not used often and they did not make most of the opportunity to inform the citizens about the EU. Despite a variety of communication channels, according to the 2006 Special Eurobarometer Report on Hungary, most people got their information about the EU from TV news programmes (75%), the radio (35%) and dailies (35%)¹⁷⁴.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ “The Future of Europe”, Special Eurobarometer Report on Hungary of April 2006. Accessed on 13 April 2016. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb65/eb65_hu_nat.pdf.

Finally, many of the interviewees said there were other elements in addition to a communication strategy that should be taken into account. A country has to know its strategic interests, to be aware of its partners' interests, to be ready to find its allies and determine its readiness to compromise. In the case of the Western Balkans, the countries should forge alliances with those countries both in the region and the EU with which they share interests (e.g. fisheries, environment and agriculture). Another key element is good English, crucial for the questionnaires, negotiations, legal translation, public procurement, etc. These small components are also parts of a strategy.

4.5. *Lessons for the Western Balkans*

The official communication campaign in Hungary was organised and implemented by the Social Democrats. Some of my interviewees said it was a corrupt and a badly organised campaign. Prime Minister Orbán and his party Fidesz introduced the new rhetoric of 'national interest' already in 2002/2003, when he said that joining the EU was simply a 'marriage of convenience' that was about common interests rather than about EU values. Below is the list of the most important lessons for the Western Balkans drawn from the Hungarian experience:

- Organise more intellectual, academic and sophisticated events, forums, debates and programmes about the EU;
- Offer different kinds of narratives (pro-European, Federalist, Eurosceptic) enabling the citizens to choose and decide what they prefer;
- Pro-EU organisations and pro-EU civil groups should play a more active role in communication campaigns;
- Avoid nationalistically tainted campaigns and propaganda;
- Avoid communicating too simplistic and one-dimensional messages;
- Conduct communication campaigns that are open and transparent;
- Discuss crucial issues without pretending the EU is ideal;
- Avoid only city-centred events, forums, debates and programmes about the EU;
- Inform citizens well in advance about the referendum to increase turnout;
- Include a competitive element that will make the Western Balkans attractive to the EU and vice versa.

5. Main Strengths of the Western Balkans in the Accession Period

Security: All the interviewees agreed that security was the strongest Western Balkan's argument in the accession period and that it would not be lost in relevance for many years to come. The region can also build on its geographical location and use the security argument more strongly in its favour by saying that the Western Balkans is now "a defender of Europe".¹⁷⁵ A few warned, however, that some Western Balkan countries could bring "more insecurity than security"¹⁷⁶ given all the internal problems they faced at the moment.

Stability: Integrating the Western Balkan countries in the EU would strengthen stability in the region, which is the EU's genuine interest. If the region emphasises this factor, it will not encounter any real opposition within the Union.

¹⁷⁵ Györgyi Kocsis, interviewed by the author, 4 February 2016.

¹⁷⁶ Marianne Berecz, interviewed by the author, 8 February 2016.

Markets and Investment Opportunities: The Western Balkans' markets are small and fragmented compared with some other regional markets. If the region's markets were united, however, they would bring economic stability and more potential for engagement in common projects and joint ventures. The region also has capacities for investments, which are already being used, but such activities can be enhanced further.

Safe Tourism: At the time when the entire North Africa and Middle East are no longer safe, the Western Balkans can re-establish itself on the map of Europe's safe tourism regions (ecotourism, rural tourism, sustainable tourism).

Shared Values: The values the Western Balkans can bring to the EU do not differ from those the EU itself espouses. However, it is possible that the "fulfilment of the core values in the Western Balkans will still take a while".¹⁷⁷

All the Hungarian interlocutors interviewed within this project generally called for a more comprehensive EU approach to the Western Balkans. The absence of a long-term strategy for the region partly contributes to negative perceptions of these countries. The EU is also partly to blame as the Union frequently creates the wrong image that it is doing everything right in the region. It is also worth noting that the majority of interviewees think that the Western Balkan countries will be taken on board in the EU collectively. The different paces of the region's countries on their way to the EU might, however, hinder this. However, the accession negotiations will be tougher than ever. The fact that the EU is not speaking with one voice risks to further slow the enlargement process down.

6. The Impact of Visegrad Group Regional Structures on European Integration Advocacy and Communication

The main idea of the Visegrad integration can be summarised as the concept of returning to Europe¹⁷⁸ after the political changes in 1989 allowed the Central European countries to open up towards the West. The new political climate enabled the Central European countries to change their economic and political orientations – from a centrally-planned economy to a free market system and from an authoritarian to a democratic regime. It was the time when three post-Communist countries – Czechoslovakia¹⁷⁹, Hungary and Poland – launched their strong cooperation founded on their solid historical, geopolitical and cultural ties. These Central European countries opted for strong integration with the West (EU, NATO) and aimed to join the Western structures as soon as possible. From this point of view, the Visegrad Group structure was regarded as an integral component of the European project.¹⁸⁰

In order to overcome the challenges inherited from the Communist legacy and move closer to Western integration, the Visegrad Group signed a declaration in 1991. This declaration demonstrated that the Visegrad countries defined the basic goals of regional cooperation and further improved the joint activities towards

¹⁷⁷ Zsuzsanna Végh, interviewed by the author, 25 February 2016.

¹⁷⁸ Strážay, Tomáš. "Visegrad - Arrival, Survival, Revival". In *Two Decades of Visegrad Cooperation - Selected V4 Bibliography*, International Visegrad Fund (2011): 14–38. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/bibliography/visegradarrival-survival-120628>.

¹⁷⁹ Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993.

¹⁸⁰ Strážay, Tomáš. "Visegrad - Arrival, Survival...", op.cit, pp. 14–38. Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/bibliography/visegradarrival-survival-120628>.

EU accession and their future involvement in the Union.¹⁸¹ In light of these events, the Visegrad Group was created as a top down structure; it was not the result of a civil society project.¹⁸²

Cooperation among the Visegrad countries slowed down in the mid-1990s due to the weak structure of the organisation. The Group's positive activities were endangered during the volatile political times, when the V4 was dysfunctional (1991-1998).¹⁸³ Although the Group experienced its ups and downs during the seven-year period, the regional leaders realised that the benefits of closer cooperation and ties would promote the future prosperity and stability of Central Europe on its way to the EU. The history of the Visegrad Group has been characterised by the establishment of regional solidarity and cooperation. This solidarity among the Visegrad countries and their common participation in the integration process greatly promoted their accession aspirations.¹⁸⁴

In the aftermath of the Visegrad leaders' joint initiatives and efforts, these countries joined the EU in 2004. Since then, the V4 countries have engaged in broader forms of regional cooperation. They expanded their cooperation to the 'V4+2' framework (Visegrad countries plus Austria and Slovenia), which deals with common interests, such as internal security, border control, asylum issues, cultural cooperation and common infrastructural projects. In addition, the Visegrad group has engaged with non-EU states with a view to improving cooperation and strengthening reforms that will facilitate their democratisation. For instance, between 2004 and 2006, the V4 Group worked with Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine on strengthening their political and economic reforms and finding ways to support the process of democratisation.¹⁸⁵

In conclusion, advocates of the Visegrad Group emphasise that the EU membership of the four countries was a success story in the history of EU enlargement. Their cooperation and activities indicate that they can serve as role models to prospective EU member states. It would be a reasonable policy on behalf of the EU to demonstrate a successful pattern of cooperation by drawing on the example of the Visegrad countries and exporting it to the regions striving to join the EU.¹⁸⁶

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¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Mykulanyets, Lyubov, *Whither V4? EU Entry as a Turning Point in Visegrad Cooperation*, International Visegrad Fund (2007). Available at: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/students-section/whither-v4-eu-entry-as>.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Paraubek, Jiri, *Visegrad Group Celebrates its Fifteenth Anniversary*. International Visegrad Fund (2009): 15. Accessed on 13 April 2016. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/Administrator/Downloads/book2.pdf>.

¹⁸⁶ Walsch, Christopher, "Fostering EU Enlargement. Is the Visegrad Group a Credible Advocate?" *Donau-Institut Working Paper, No. 29 (2014)*: 7. Accessed on 15 April 2016. Available at: http://www.tankonyvtar.hu/hu/tartalom/tamop422b/2010-0015_3_kotet-cikk49/1-2010-0015-cikk49_1_1.html.

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Annex

Western Balkan 6 – SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security • Stability • Markets • Investment opportunities • Safe tourism • Shared values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak capacities for developing AS • Weak promotional capacities • Weak links between and among the countries for developing a common AS • Wide gap between government and civil society • Lack of practical experience required for AS implementation • State structures often unwilling to take advice from the NGO sector
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to learn from the experience of neighbours and other regions • Better understanding of the importance of common actions, one of them being AS, among national governments • Emphasis on joint communication by the EU and its bodies • A joint AS would demonstrate, from a political point of view, that the region is willing and able to work together • AS is a good opportunity for the region to deepen its ties with the EU and demonstrate constructive cooperation in the region • Build on the argument of WB's geographical position and start calling the region 'defenders of Europe' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No enlargement at least not in the next five years • Slow reforms, especially economic ones • Corruption in every country and almost in every single sector • Bad transport connectivity with the EU • Other pressing issues pushing the WB to the margins of the EU agenda • Semi-autocratic regimes in some of the WB countries

POLAND

Abstract

The paper presents Poland's communication strategy before its accession to the EU, which aimed to reshape the country's image and convince its own society of the benefits of EU membership. It outlines the key priorities in preparing and implementing this strategy and goals achieved in the process. It describes major documents outlining the strategy, the applied tools and institutions responsible for its implementation. The report also touches on Poland's public diplomacy after joining the EU, relying on cultural diplomacy to enhance the country's positive image abroad. Based on the Polish experience, the study draws conclusions Western Balkan countries may find helpful in preparing their communication campaign. The interviews conducted with Polish officials, journalists, think tankers and scholars helped identify the main strengths and weaknesses of the Western Balkan countries, which should be used and addressed in this strategy. The paper also examines the advantages and disadvantages of developing one communication strategy for all the countries in the region. The report refers also to the current enlargement crisis in the EU and concludes that the joint promotion of the enlargement policy is in the interest of both Poland and the other V4 countries and their partners in the Western Balkans.

Key words: *Visegrad Group, Western Balkans, Poland, enlargement, communication, communication strategy, European Union*

1. EU Enlargement to the Western Balkan countries

In 2003, on the eve of the EU's biggest enlargement, the European Council declared at the Thessaloniki Summit that the future of the Balkans was within the European Union. Over a decade later, only one country in the region, Croatia, has joined the EU (in 2013). The other WB countries' prospects of membership, however, remain in the distant future, although they are formally closer to the EU because they gained candidate status or even started accession negotiations.¹⁸⁸ Moreover the enlargement policy turned out to be a predominantly bureaucratic instrument, which has lost its ability to enhance and accelerate democratisation and economic transformation. Paradoxically, the WB countries that are closer to the EU are less democratic. It means that the European Union is losing its most powerful policy tool, which has for decades enabled it to significantly extend democracy and economic prosperity in Europe. The crisis of the enlargement policy is twofold – enlargement fatigue can be observed both in the EU and the Western Balkans. The EU is less keen on admission of other poor countries. The political elites in the Western Balkans pay lip service to membership and the adoption of the EU *acquis*, but in reality resist introducing comprehensive changes that would challenge their system of governance based on nepotism and subordination of the state institutions, judiciary and media. Moreover, the economic and migrant crisis have deepened enlargement-related public concerns, such as the increase in the number of immigrants and security risks. The crises have undermined the principle of solidarity on which the EU is based as Member States have focused more on their narrow national agendas and are less keen to

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¹⁸⁸ The following four Western Balkan countries have gained candidate status: Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The latter two have already started negotiations: Montenegro in 2012 and Serbia in 2014. Bosnia and Herzegovina formally applied for membership in 2016 and Kosovo only signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in 2015.

take on the burden of the next enlargement even if it would bring everyone benefits in the longer term and enhance stability and security in Europe.

Compared with 2004 and 2007, the process of admitting new members has become more complex and difficult, but also more demanding for the candidate countries, European institutions and those EU members in favour of further enlargement. First of all, public support for enlargement has fallen significantly. More than half of the Europeans (51%) oppose and 38% are in favour of the inclusion of other countries in the coming years.¹⁸⁹ This marks a major change over 2008, when 39% opposed further enlargement and 47% supported it.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, opposition to enlargement is dominant not only in the 15 “old” Member States, led by Austria (75%), Germany (73%), Luxembourg (69%) and France (67%), which have traditionally been against enlargement, even before 2004, but has been rising in the “new” Member States, such as the Czech Republic (58%), Slovakia (43%) and Hungary (41%), as well. Support for enlargement can be expected to continue declining. Moreover, during the previous enlargement rounds, the political elites were convinced that they should support admission of new members because it was Western Europe’s historical and moral duty to put an end to divisions in Europe. Many Western politicians also thought, and rightly, that enlargement would bring economic benefits to the old members. Nowadays, few political leaders openly advocate further enlargement, especially in the near future.

Popular opinion about the enlargement policy is definitely more important now than it used to be, mainly due to the fact that present-day societies have greater influence on the shaping of foreign policy and politicians tend to follow the public mood rather than try to shape public opinion and convince the society to uphold less popular solutions. Additionally, we can observe the nationalisation of the EU enlargement policy since the Treaty of Lisbon came into force.¹⁹¹ As opposed to the previous enlargements, when the enlargement process was mainly masterminded by the EU institutions, the Member States have now enhanced their control over the procedure. Furthermore, the introduction of benchmarks at various stages of the process has provided the Member States with more opportunities to block accession. That has also provided the societies in these States with more power to influence the process. Moreover, political elites in the Member States are not hesitating to use the enlargement policy to score points at home and resolve their bilateral problems with the candidate countries. In consequence, the process of enlargement is now more dependent on the general perceptions of the candidate countries in the EU, especially as all decisions concerning the enlargement process are taken unanimously, by all the Member States.

Negative assessments of the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, which are popular in the “old” Member States, have also caused declining support to further enlargement. Their publics are of the view that the new members were not prepared well enough to be granted membership. Some commentators even said that the single currency and Eastern expansion were two big mistakes that ruined Europe.¹⁹² This conviction has influenced the still persisting perceptions that the new Member States have not fully embraced EU norms and values yet, even though most of them have been EU members for over ten years.

¹⁸⁹ *Europeans’ views on the priorities of the European Union*, Standard Eurobarometer 84, p. 16.

Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/72444>

¹⁹⁰ *Europeans’ State of Mind*. Eurobarometer 69, p. 306.

Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69_part1_en.pdf,

¹⁹¹ Hillon C., *The Creeping Nationalisation of the EU Enlargement Policy*, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, Stockholm 2010, p. 7

¹⁹² Münchau W., *Enlargement and the Euro are two big mistakes that ruined Europe*, available at: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/fbaae6e0-7f35-11e5-98fb-5a6d4728f74e.html#axzz49CaPXTJW>

The improvement of the perceptions of the enlargement policy and its influence on the transition of the Central and Eastern European countries is a common interest of the Visegrad Group, Romania, Bulgaria and the Western Balkans. In the case of the former, undermining the effectiveness of the enlargement policy in enhancing democratic transition is intended to marginalise them and weaken their position in the EU. In the case of the latter, positive perceptions of this policy are a *conditio sine qua non* of further enlargement. All of them should emphasise that enlargement has had positive impact not only on the new members, but has also been extremely beneficial to the old ones and, contrary to common belief in Western Europe, the 2004 and 2007 enlargements were spectacular successes and enhanced the economic development of both the old and new Member States. Accession to the EU accelerated democratic and economic transformation of V4, Bulgaria and Romania. It also strengthened their institutions, rule of law and, despite popular perceptions, their ability to fight against corruption and organised crime. This is especially visible in the case of Romania, where the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) was able to bring corruption charges against 1,250 public officials in a single year; it can serve as a model of an anticorruption agency for the entire EU.¹⁹³ Although some problems persist in the new Member States, their democratic institutions are definitely stronger than they were at the time of accession. EU membership provides countries with greater ability to adjust their economies and political systems to high European standards through European funds, the transition period and, above all, daily interaction with EU institutions and Member States. Relying on this experience, the new members should also underline that the assumption that the less developed countries from the Western Balkans should fulfil all the conditions and adopt all the standards before accession will not only significantly extend the process, but render it impossible for them to catch up with the rest of the EU as well. They will not be able to transform themselves if they remain outside the EU. Of course, the requirements concerning democratic standards, rule of law and effectiveness of the administration and judiciary should be fulfilled, but setting the bar too high for the Balkans has led to the current reform fatigue.

2. Poland's Position on Enlargement to the Western Balkans

Poland supports further enlargement and believes that all the countries, which meet the criteria and adopt the *acquis communautaire*, should be allowed to join the EU. But, at the same time, Poland is pushing for the candidate countries' strict fulfilment of all the conditions.

Polish society has constantly been one of the main supporters of EU's further enlargement: 56% of the population supports the idea of including other countries in the coming years. Support for enlargement is higher only in Spain, Croatia, Romania and Lithuania,¹⁹⁴ while the EU average stands at 38%. Broad support for the enlargement policy is primarily linked to Poland's own very positive experience with the EU. After Romania, the Polish society has the most positive views on the EU (55% of the population associates the EU with a positive image) and is also one of the most optimistic about its future.¹⁹⁵ There is also widespread belief that all the ex-communist countries should be entitled to join the EU to redress the divisions in Europe. However, it is worth noting that support for enlargement has been decreasing since Poland's accession to the EU (it stood at 74% in 2008). This is due mainly to the fact that the society as a whole tends to forget the poor living conditions before accession and the positive changes EU membership has brought it. In consequence, the attitude towards enlargement in Poland has conformed to that of "old" Europe, where people tend to view

¹⁹³ Daborowski T., *Romania's Anticorruption DNA*, Centre For Eastern Studies, Warsaw 2015, available at: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-09-30/romania-anticorruption-dna>

¹⁹⁴ Standard Eurobarometer 84. Autumn 2015. Annex. p.101. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/70297>

¹⁹⁵ Seventy percent of the 70% of respondents are optimistic about the EU's future of the EU.

the candidate countries more harshly, perceiving them as their future competitors in the distribution of the EU budget.

Although the Western Balkans are not a major foreign policy priority for Poland, it has increased its engagement in the region in the past years, mainly due to its importance for the Visegrad Group partners, security concerns and support for a more active EU policy in the East. The Western Balkans are an area of crucial significance for Poland's partners in the V4, which is now the most important format of regional cooperation. In terms of security, as this aspect of foreign policy is especially important for Poland, potential destabilisation of the Western Balkans would seriously impinge on Poland's security¹⁹⁶. It would divert attention from the NATO's Eastern flank, the reinforcement of which is Poland's main priority. Poland has also been advocating greater EU involvement in Eastern Europe, which will be impossible without the stabilisation of the Western Balkans.

3. Poland's Communication Strategy during the Accession Period and Changes after Accession

Poland started accession negotiations on 31 March 1998 and completed them in December 2002. The Treaty of Accession was approved by the European Parliament and EU Member States and ratified by the candidate countries in 2003. All EU members except Ireland, which organised a referendum, approved the Treaty in parliament. In Poland, the Treaty was ratified at a referendum organised in June 2003 - 77.45% Poles voted for accession to the EU.

The process of EU accession forced Poland to focus not only on technical adjustments to European norms and values but on reshaping its image abroad and convincing its own society that membership in the EU would be advantageous as well. Poland was unknown to the Western public and, like most other Central and East European countries, was seen as a grey undifferentiated splodge¹⁹⁷. The key challenge for the Polish government at the time was not only to persuade sceptical audiences in Western Europe to support Poland's EU membership, but also to persuade the Polish society that this process was in its vital interest given that it would have a final say on accession at a nationwide referendum. The pre-accession campaign was, therefore, twofold. The first programme focused on opinion leaders, elites and societies of EU Member States and its aim was to create a new, positive brand for Poland in order to obtain support for its membership. The second programme targeted the Polish society.

3.1. Promotion of Poland Abroad

The promotion of Poland and Polish membership in the EU was an indispensable element of the accession strategy and led to the successful ratification of the Treaty of Accession and Poland's membership in the EU. This was the first time the Polish government applied the concept of public diplomacy, in addition to classical diplomacy. The first complex programme aimed at promoting Polish membership in the EU abroad was adopted in 2000, before the political stage of the negotiations.¹⁹⁸ The first step of the campaign was geared at identifying the image of Poland and Polish society abroad and involved surveys and content analyses in countries most decisive for the accession process. Comprehensive and long-term project monitoring of

¹⁹⁶ Gniazdowski M., Strážay T., "Visegrad Cooperation on Bosnia and Herzegovina Challenges and Opportunities", In: *Paradoxes of Stabilisation Bosnia and Herzegovina from the Perspective of Central Europe*, Szpala M. (eds.), Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, Warsaw, 2016

¹⁹⁷ Melissen J. (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy. Soft Power in International Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2005, p. 177

¹⁹⁸ *Program ramowy promocji zagranicznej procesu akcesji RP do UE w latach 2000-2002* was adopted by the Council of Ministers in June 2000.

the perceptions of Poland was implemented by the Polish think tank Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) and financed by the Polish MFA, State Committee for Scientific Research (KBN), the British Embassy and various foundations. Public opinion polls were conducted in six Member States in cooperation with local organisations. The quarterly and annual analyses of media coverage of Poland and consequences of its EU membership conducted in this period were published in the ISP's special reports.¹⁹⁹ These analyses focused on the perceptions of the benefits, costs and risks of Polish accession to the EU.

The results of the research revealed two main problems, which were then addressed in the strategy for promoting Poland abroad. First of all, the level of knowledge about Poland in the EU countries was very low (including lack of information about the basic facts, such as system of governance, economic system, history, culture etc.). The second problem was the popularity of the negative stereotypes about Poland and Poles among Western societies.²⁰⁰

According to the conducted research, Poland was seen as a difficult partner, unwilling to compromise during the negotiations, frequently making excessive demands citing its difficult history, and as ill-prepared for membership, especially in comparison with the other candidates, such as, for example, Estonia.²⁰¹ Moreover, Poland was perceived as an underdeveloped, poor country with huge unemployment. Poland was also associated with poor work organisation, bureaucracy, a weak market economy and a low level of the rule of law.²⁰² In addition, despite 12 years of transition, Poland was still seen as geographically different, its civilisation differing from that of Western Europe due to its conservative Catholicism and attachment to traditional values. Furthermore, most EU citizens knew little about Poland. For instance, 80% Swedes, 68% Spaniards, 63% Brits and 57% French did not know whether Poland was a parliamentary democracy. These negative stereotypes, combined with lack of knowledge, were exacerbated by concerns regarding Poland's accession to the EU, to which the media devoted a lot of attention. The societies of the "old" Member States were afraid of the influx of cheap workers, growing crime rates and concerned about safety, the huge costs of Eastern enlargement and the EU's functional capacity.²⁰³

Additionally, the broader context was also unfavourable for enlargement at the time. Like now, support for enlargement in the Member States was relatively low - 44% of EU citizens were for and 34% against enlargement in 2000.²⁰⁴ Support for Polish membership was extremely low, especially in the most influential countries, notably Austria (23%), Germany (34%) and France (39%). The enlargement policy was not seen as a priority. Moreover the accession of the other ten countries was seen as a huge obstacle for the effective functioning of the EU. Some EU countries were also suffering economic stagnation in the period before Polish accession and were afraid that enlargement would exacerbate their problems.

The Government of Poland adopted the Framework Programme for the Foreign Promotion of Poland's EU Accession Process in 2000 to address the above challenges. It was to be implemented in the 2000-2002 period. Its main target groups were public opinion leaders (politicians, journalists and experts) and the general

¹⁹⁹ See, for example: Fałkowski M., Grabowska-Córdova B., Skrobotówna I., Warchala M., *Obraz Polski w prasie krajów członkowskich Unii Europejskiej. Raport roczny 2000*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa 2000.

²⁰⁰ *Stenogram z 92. Posiedzenia Komisji*, Komisja Spraw Zagranicznych i Integracji Europejskiej, Senat Rzeczypospolitej, p. 2

²⁰¹ B. Ociepka, M. Ryniejska, *Public diplomacy and EU enlargement. The case of Poland*, Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', Hague 2005, p. 2

²⁰² K. Jasiocki, *Rola marski w promocji wizerunku Polski i polskiego biznesu*, in *Studia Europejskie* 1/2004, Centrum Europejskie UW, p. 70

²⁰³ Fałkowski M., Grabowska-Córdova B., Skrobotówna I., Warchala M., *Obraz Polski ...*, op.cit.

²⁰⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/62933>

public. Emphasis was put on countries whose societies were especially sceptical about Polish membership in the EU, such as Austria, Germany and France. During the negotiating period, the main short-term goals included countering false information about the problems Poland had in fulfilling the membership criteria and presenting reliable and comprehensive information about the real problems. The information was prepared by the relevant ministries and institutions responsible for formulating negotiating positions in their particular areas and distributed by the Polish MFA through the Polish diplomatic missions in the Member States. Agriculture, perceived as extremely underdeveloped, and regional policy were considered especially problematic. High costs of adjusting to European standards were expected in both of these fields. The long term goals of the strategy included creating a positive image of Poland and promoting the enlargement process as advantageous to both sides – the members of the EU and the candidate countries.

Once the negotiations were completed, the second programme was prepared in 2002 – Programme of Promoting Poland in the EU during the Ratification of the Treaty of Accession.²⁰⁵ The main aim of this programme was to ensure the ratification of the Treaty by the national parliaments and the European Parliament, wherefore its main target groups included members of parliaments, representatives of other institutions involved in decisions on ratification and, to a lesser extent, the societies of the EU¹⁵. The strategy's main goal was to enhance the positive image of Poland and Poles by: (1) disseminating knowledge about Poland's role in European history and presenting enlargement as a natural process for overcoming divisions in Europe; (2) increasing the support for Polish membership in the EU; (3) identifying the main opponents of Poland's membership and presenting to them the advantages of its accession to the EU; and (4) identifying the main supporters of Polish membership in the EU and engaging them in its active promotion.

The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs played a major role (mainly through the Promotion Department) in the implementation of both programmes and coordinated all activities of the Polish embassies, consulates and Polish Institutes²⁰⁶ in the Member States. It was supported by the Ministry of Culture, which implemented a cultural diplomacy programme in cooperation with the Adam Mickiewicz Institute²⁰⁷, and the Ministry of Economy in cooperation with the Polish Tourist Organisation and its offices in EU states, the Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency²⁰⁸ and entrepreneurs' organisations. In some cases, the MFA also involved representatives of Polish local governments (*voivodships*), boasting vast self-promotion skills. The Ministry cooperated with professional companies specialising in promotion activities in the organisation of specific events, as well as Polish non-government organisations. There was also a plan to engage the large Polish diaspora in the promotional activities, but no success was achieved in this area at the time.

Despite the fact that the enlargement process is to be qualified as multilateral diplomacy, the promotional activities were conducted mainly within the framework of bilateral relations. Moreover, they were diversified not only in terms of geography but also in terms of specific target groups, those that had major objections about the accession of new countries. The research conducted during the development of the strategy was useful as it identified these specific groups and the problems to be tackled.

²⁰⁵ *Wiadomości Europejskie*. 23 grudnia 2002 r. Nowe dokumenty Rady Ministrów.
<http://www.kurylowka.pl/asp/pliki/ue/20021223.htm>

²⁰⁶ The Polish Institutes are parts of the diplomatic missions of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and operate in 16 EU Member States and Russia, USA, Israel, Ukraine, Japan, India and Belarus. They promote cultural ties between the host countries and Poland and present Poland's cultural achievements, inter alia, by arranging visits of Polish artists and scholars.

²⁰⁷ The Adam Mickiewicz Institute (*Instytut Adama Mickiewicza*) is a public institution sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of Poland. It was founded in 2000 and named after the famous Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz. Its goal is to promote the Polish language and Polish culture abroad.

²⁰⁸ See: <http://www.paiz.gov.pl/en>

The following four main target groups were identified during the development of the strategy: (1) participants in the negotiation process and decision makers in the ratification process; (2) opinion leaders - journalists, commentators, academics, local leaders; (3) society as a whole; (4) other “invisible” actors, which could influence the process – for example the USA.²⁰⁹ Specific activities were undertaken vis-à-vis each group; they were tailored to their needs, expectations and concerns.

In order to demonstrate that Polish membership would not undermine the smooth functioning of the EU, the main message conveyed to decision makers and negotiators was that Poland was well prepared to assume the obligations arising from membership and was successfully cooperating with EU institutions. The materials for this group contained information about practical and economic benefits of Polish membership in the EU for each Member State country and for the EU on the whole.

As per the opinion leaders, emphasis was put on the information that Poland fulfilled all the membership criteria (economic and political) and wanted to share its experience with other countries, which were willing to join (Ukraine, Romania). Poland was also presented as an active member of Western cooperation structures (NATO, OSCE).

The activities targeting societies in EU Member States mainly focused on promoting Polish culture, tourism and products to improve Poland’s image of a modern, attractive and beautiful country with vibrant society. A festival about Poland “Europolia 2001 – Poland” was organised in Brussels in 2001. Poland also organised a special Polish Year - comprehensive presentations of Polish culture in the countries chairing the EU (Spain in 2002 and Sweden in 2003). Such events were also organised in Austria in 2002/2003, which was particularly sceptical about Polish membership in the EU.

The main tools of the campaigns were: study trips for politicians, journalists and opinion leaders; conferences, seminars and lectures about Poland’s European integration; media events and economic promotions, regional and sectoral presentations, trade missions and participation in fairs and exhibitions. For example, Poland was the honorary guest of the Frankfurt International Book Fair in 2000. The intensive promotion of the Polish economy and Polish products was aimed not only at attracting investments and boosting trade, but at weakening the negative stereotypes about Poland as an underdeveloped country as well.

3.2. *Persuading its Own Society*

Together with the activities aimed at reshaping Poland’s image of Poland abroad, the Polish government implemented actions to convince its own society that the enlargement process was in Poland’s vital interest. It therefore adopted a special Programme to Inform the Society (PIS)²¹⁰ in 1999. This programme was aimed at familiarising the Polish society with the consequences of EU membership in order to convince it about the necessity of the process. The implementation of this programme was preceded by a thorough analysis of who and why supported or opposed the EU accession.

Generally speaking, support for EU membership in Poland stayed at the same level for five years before accession - about half of the population was in favour of accession. The expected benefits arising from EU membership were one of the main reasons for support. In this five-year period, between 52% and 64% of the population expected benefits from accession. Such an attitude was strongly connected to the level of knowledge

²⁰⁹ Ociepka B., Ryniejska M., *op. cit.*, p. 13

²¹⁰ *Integracja Polski z Unią Europejską. Program Informowania Społeczeństwa.*
<https://grypa666.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/integracja-z-ue-program-oglugupiania-spoleczenstwa.pdf>

about European Union. People with greater knowledge were more likely to support membership or expect benefits.²¹¹ Some problems were, however, identified in providing information about Polish accession. First of all, the media focused on negative information. The news were mainly related to obstacles in the negotiating process and the negative consequences of accession. There were no attempts to dispel the Polish society's main concerns about accession, regarding loss of sovereignty, price hikes, collapse of the national industry and agriculture, which could not compete with the Western European ones, inability to use the EU's funds and apprehensions that Poland would be the net payer to the EU budget and become an open market for Western goods and services.²¹² The information provided was frequently contradictory, deepening the feelings of informational chaos and uncertainty in society. Lack of reliable information provided in a user-friendly way by trustworthy experts was the main problem. Also, the society did not feel that the negotiators were representing its interests well, because the opponents of accession were often undermining their competence. These challenges were to be addressed by the Programme to Inform the Society.²¹³

The Programme was mainly implemented by the Office of the Committee for European Integration (UKIE) in cooperation with the Regional European Information Centres (RCIEs), which operated in 34 cities in Poland. RCIEs were led by non-government organisations, selected in open competitions organised by UKIE. The only exception was Warsaw where the UKIE assumed the RCIE's role itself. The RCIEs were mainly tasked with: managing EU info Points for citizens, organising meetings, conferences and trainings and conducting promotional activities. In 2002, the government appointed its special plenipotentiary for information about the EU. The promotional activities intensified in the run-up to the accession referendum. In 2003, a special minister for the accession referendum was also appointed and special Info Points were organised in the municipalities. The main tasks of the plenipotentiary and the minister were to coordinate the actions of government institutions in implementing the information policy about the EU, enhance cooperation among national and local government and non-government bodies involved in conducting this policy and develop the whole system of providing information about the EU. The first stage of the information strategy was the campaign "Union without Secrets", the main goal of which was to dispel the stereotype that information about the EU was hardly available. Fifty short films about the EU were produced within this campaign. The second stage of the campaign "Poland in the EU without Secrets" about benefits of accession ensued. The last, third stage was the campaign before the referendum.

The whole strategy brought mixed results. The pre-referendum campaign temporarily increased the share of those in support of EU membership, to 61%.²¹⁴ At the same time, only 30% of the society thought their knowledge of the main positive and negative effects of Poland's EU membership had improved thanks to the government campaign.²¹⁵

²¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 20

²¹² *Nadzieje i obawy związane z integracją*, Badanie opinii BS/110/2003, CBOS, Warszawa 2003.

²¹³ Apart from the government programmes, information about the EU was also disseminated by EU's institutions in Poland, notably the European Commission and European Parliament Representations, which organised European Documentation Centres, Euro Info Centres for small and medium sized enterprises and Carrefours in rural areas.

²¹⁴ Eurobarometer 2004. *Opinia publiczna w krajach kandydackich. Raport Krajowy: Polska*. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb61/nat_pl.pdf, p. 18

²¹⁵ *Informacja o wynikach kontroli działań informacyjnych i edukacyjnych administracji rządowej w za kresie integracji Polski z Unią Europejską*, Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, Warsaw 2003, p. 13.

3.3. *After Accession – Improvement of Poland’s Status in the EU*

Accession to the EU has given a new dimension to Poland’s diplomacy focused on strengthening the country’s status in the EU to ensure it greater influence on the common policies and promote the positive image of the new members and enlargement²¹⁶ among the societies and elites of the “old” members, which were highly sceptical about the newcomers. Poland, the biggest country that joined the EU, was the most active in this area, assuming the role of advocate of the other countries that joined at the time. First of all, Poland’s Office of the European Integration Committee prepared comprehensive assessments of the consequences of enlargement every year with a view to presenting reliable data and combating negative stereotypes (that enlargement has brought only negative effects) and, simultaneously, to highlighting the positive effects enlargement has had on both the old and new members.

Apart from actions directed primarily at the governments of the other Member States, the Polish government has been implementing more activities aimed at communicating directly with the societies of other countries and the role of public diplomacy in Polish foreign policy increased significantly. The main aim of this policy has been to foster understanding of and support for Polish national interests and government policies (i.e. towards Russia and Eastern Neighbourhood) and thus secure Poland’s vital interests.

An Intra-Governmental Council for the Promotion of Poland was established in 2004. It coordinated Polish public diplomacy, conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with other ministries, the Polish Tourist Organisation, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Polish Institutes abroad and NGOs. Economic and cultural diplomacy were the main tools for improving Poland’s image and promoting it abroad. The main goal of economic diplomacy was to publicise Poland’s successful economic transformation, present the country as a reliable partner and an attractive investment destination and promote Polish products and companies abroad. Campaigns conducted mainly by the Ministry of Development and Ministry of Economy were financed from EU funds. Paradoxically, the economic crisis provided new momentum to Poland’s promotion abroad as it was the only country in the EU that had not witnessed a decline in its GDP at the time.

Cultural diplomacy is vital for Poland’s promotion.²¹⁷ It focuses not only on presenting the Polish culture and promoting Polish scientists, but on politics of memory as well – to familiarise others with Poland’s tragic history (especially its exclusion from Western Europe due to the USSR’s imposition of the communist regime and World War II). Polish culture is, on the one hand, presented as modern and dynamic (under the slogan Poland – Creative Enclave of Europe); on the other hand, various institutions have tried to present Polish history to the Western public in an interesting manner. Not only have the Polish Institutes abroad engaged in this endeavour (with over 6000 events in 2014); so have numerous museums in Poland (like the Museum of Warsaw Rising, European Solidarity Centre), mounting various interactive exhibitions and video materials attractively presenting Polish history to tourists. Another important tool are the Internet websites with information about Polish culture and history in many languages (<http://www.nina.gov.pl/en/>, www.polishhistory.pl, <http://culture.pl/en>). The Polish MFA manages the website www.poland.pl, which contains updated information about Poland, its politics, society, history and culture.

Poland also used its chairmanship of the European Council in 2011 and the Championship EURO 2012, which it co-hosted with Ukraine, to boost its image of a modern and rapidly developing country. The Polish

²¹⁶ The symbol of this negative perception was the notion of the “Polish plumber”, which was especially popular in France, threatening to deprive the French of their jobs. It was wisely used on the poster of the Polish Tourist Organisation, depicting a male model dressed as a plumber with the slogan “I’m staying in Poland, come in large numbers!”

²¹⁷ More in: Jurkiewicz-Eckert D., “The Polska Brand as a Challenge for Polish Cultural Diplomacy. Old Determinants, New Strategies”. In: *Yearbook of Polish European Studies*, 17/2014, Centrum Europejskie UW.

Presidency was accompanied by numerous cultural programmes (“I, Culture”. “Made in the EU. Powered by Poland”) and the EURO 2012 it successfully organised was an opportunity for many Europeans to visit Poland.

A 2013 survey commissioned by the Polish MFA showed a gradual improvement of Poland’s image and weakening of the negative stereotypes about the country. This change can be ascribed not only to government policy, but also to many members of the Polish diaspora in the other EU Member States, most of whom are hard-working and well educated and who helped improve the image of Poland as a modern country. Poland, however, still lacks a clear image, strong attributes clearly associated with this country, which would distinguish it from the other countries.²¹⁸

3.4 *Lessons for the Western Balkans*

Western Balkan countries now face similar image-related and other problems as Poland and other V4 countries before their accession to the EU. The Western Balkans, like Central Europe before the 2004 enlargement round, is a region unknown either to the Western or the Central European publics, where its image is predominantly negative, especially in the press. Despite significant differences among the countries in the region and their progress in the enlargement process, the public opinion, decision makers and opinion leaders in the EU do not distinguish between the individual countries and see the region on the whole as poor, underdeveloped and corrupt. This image is reinforced by the stereotypes usually dominating the news about the Western Balkans in the European media. The articles about the region focus on organised crime, mafia, the violent past and Islamic radicalism. Even the modest research conducted within this project shows that journalists have more negative opinions about the Western Balkan countries than other respondents, indicating a huge problem when it comes to informing about these countries’ successes and achievements. Furthermore, Western Balkan governments appear not to be paying enough attention to public diplomacy (Kosovo being the only exception) and lack comprehensive strategies to promote their countries abroad. Except for the websites of tourist organisations, containing only limited information, mainly about the countries’ geography and nature, there are no professional websites presenting these countries, their histories, societies, political systems, etc. that are maintained by official institutions. Most official government websites are outdated and contain only daily news, without presenting the national strategic goals and reform processes.

Therefore, the main challenge, which should be addressed in the Western Balkan advocacy strategy, is the lack of reliable information about the states in the region, their transformation process and the reforms they have already implemented. Objective reports about the enlargement process itself and positive and negative consequences of the Western Balkan countries’ accession to the EU are also missing. No comprehensive analysis of the possible impact of the next enlargement on the functioning of the EU has been conducted. In cooperation with EU institutions, the Western Balkan countries could prepare a database about enlargement and the candidate countries, providing the information in a user-friendly format. The region’s ministries could also engage in preparing studies addressing the EU societies’ main concerns on a case by case basis. They could also react in case false information about the candidate countries is disseminated.

The Western Balkan countries should also use classical diplomacy tools to strengthen cooperation with countries supporting enlargement in order to build a “coalition of the willing”. This coalition should push the enlargement agenda at the EU level. At the same time, the concept of public diplomacy should be applied to convince the EU societies that enlargement does not pose a risk to EU stability, quite the contrary, that

²¹⁸ Sochańska-Kawiecka M., Zielińska D.A., Makowska – Belta E., Kołakowska – Seroczyńska Z., Milczarek D., *Badanie opinii “Określenie wizerunku, który Polska powinna promować zagranicą”. Raport Końcowy*, Laboratorium Badań Społecznych/MANDS Badania Rynku i Opinii, Warszawa 2013.

abandonment of this policy and the closure of the EU to new members would create serious risks for the Union. The communication strategy should focus on opinion leaders and societies. As far as opinion leaders are concerned, special emphasis needs to be put on journalists as they are the ones that mainly report to their societies on the region. They should be offered positive stories and examples from the Balkans, which might help dispel negative stereotypes.

Experiences of Poland and the other V4 countries might also prove very useful in gaining broader public support for reforms and enlargement in the candidate countries. Declining support for membership has become a problem in countries such as Serbia or BiH, where the political elites have been playing the blame game with the EU institutions. Every hard decision or reform is presented as a condition that has to be fulfilled if the country is to become a member of the EU. Consequently, the EU is associated with sacrifice rather than betterment. The Western Balkan societies' impressions of what membership will really bring them are becoming vaguer and vaguer. Poland, along with its V4 partners, is an example of relatively successful transformation and the benefits of integration, which can be used to build public support for reforms and European integration. And the V4's strategies to inform their own societies can be used to dispel the main concerns of Balkan societies and explain to them the consequences of EU accession.

4. Western Balkans' Main Strengths in the Accession Period

4.1. Size and Relevance

The small size of the populations of Western Balkan countries is one of the assets of the region. The population of all six countries adds up to a mere 18.4 million, which is less than a half of Poland's and 3.8% of the EU population. A rapid increase in labour migration after accession is impossible due to the age breakdown and size of the populations of the countries in the region. In consequence, the impact of enlargement on the EU labour market, one of the major concerns of the EU Member States' societies after huge migrations from Central European countries, will be limited.

4.2. Limited Costs

Given the scale of the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, EU enlargement to the Western Balkans will not involve significant costs. According to a 2008 study of the Western Balkans and European Integration²¹⁹, accession of the Western Balkans (including Croatia) would entail a circa 7.5 billion EURO or 6% increase in EU spending.²²⁰

²¹⁹ The report was written by Office of the Committee for European Integration and the Centre for Eastern Studies. Its main objective was to evaluate the impact of the Western Balkans' accession to the EU. It assessed the membership of those countries in the most important areas: foreign policy, economy, security, migration, agriculture and potential financial costs of the next enlargement. The study was used to support the enlargement policy since the main conclusion of the research was that the benefits of the next enlargement significantly outweighed its costs. The report was prepared in 2008, wherefore it is high time to once again carry out a similar evaluation to shed light on the costs and benefits of the next enlargement. See: *The Western Balkans and European Integration. Perspectives and Implications*, Muś J., Sadowski R. (eds.), Urząd Komitetu Integracji Europejskiej/Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, Warsaw 2008.

²²⁰ Sosnowski Ł., *The Financial Aspect of Accession*, in *The Western Balkans and European Integration. Perspectives and Implications*, Muś J., Sadowski R. (eds.), Urząd Komitetu Integracji Europejskiej/Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, Warsaw 2008, p. 112.

4.3. Gradual Integration

Once they join the EU, Western Balkans countries will have to continue pursuing their reforms in order to join the Schengen area and the Eurozone. Border controls will therefore still exist and the risks of uncontrolled migration will be very low. The old members will also still have the instruments to push for reform. The old Member States are also entitled to protect their markets and insist on transition periods in various areas.

4.4. High Degree of Integration with the EU

The Western Balkans countries are already strongly integrated within the EU in economic terms through various forms of cooperation with the EU, its members and the EU institutions, and they have incorporated parts of the *acquis communautaire* in their legal systems. The Stabilisation and Association Agreements²²¹ established a free trade area between the countries in the region and the EU and created a framework for the harmonisation of national legislations in areas such as protection of competition and control of state aid allocations (subsidies), intellectual property rights, public procurement, standardisation and consumer protection. The EU is also the main trading partner of the countries in the region as its share in their foreign trade corroborate (FYROM – 66.1%, Montenegro – 69.6%, Serbia – 59.3%, Albania – 66.5%, Bosnia and Herzegovina – 65.1%).²²² The Western Balkans countries adopted some EU rules on document security, illegal migration, public order and security and fundamental rights during the visa liberalisation process, initiated in 2008. The EU wanted to extend the EU internal energy market to the Western Balkan countries within the framework of the Energy Community established in 2005; the latter gradually adopted the EU rules in the energy sector and related areas.

4.5. Enclave within the EU

Western Balkans countries are surrounded by EU Member States and they are strongly interrelated and interdependent. Crises in the EU, like the economic and migrant crises, have strongly influenced the internal situation in the Western Balkan states as well. Similarly, problems in the region can spill over to the EU very quickly. It is in the vital interest of the European Union as a whole to extend the area of stability and security to the Western Balkans, which will be facilitated by their accession to the EU.

4.6. Filling the Geopolitical Void

Leaving the Western Balkan region outside the EU renders this region vulnerable to the influence of other regional powers, such as Russia or Turkey. The former has, in particular, been using its influence in the region as a bargaining chip in its relations with the EU or its Member States, to gain acceptance for the advancement of its own geopolitical ambitions in its 'near-abroad'. Therefore, the EU's enlargement to the Balkan states would enhance its geopolitical position and render it less susceptible to the pressure of the other power, capable of destabilising the situation in the countries bordering with the EU.

²²¹ All the WB countries have signed SAAs with the EU: the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2001, Albania in 2006, Montenegro in 2007, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2008, Serbia in 2008 and Kosovo in 2015.

²²² *Are the Western Balkan countries prepared to wait for EU membership?*
<http://www.debatingeurope.eu/2014/12/15/balkans-eu-membership/#.V0MrieQ2Uqg>

4.7. EU Stability and Security

Leaving Western Balkans countries outside the EU and without credible accession prospects may result in the creation of weak states in EU's immediate neighbourhood. This would negatively affect the security of the entire Union given the ease of penetration of threats such as organised crime, illegal migration, human and drug trafficking or terrorism. The worst case scenario involves the establishment of a belt of instability with high risks of another armed conflict breaking out. The other negative consequence is related to the low level of environmental protection, which may result in pollution of air, water, or soil, etc.

4.8. Consolidation of the EU Itself

The successful transformation and stabilisation of the Western Balkans proves the effectiveness of the EU's foreign policy, its ability to change its neighbourhood and extend the area of democracy.

4.9. Cultural Proximity

The Western Balkans is usually presented as a region significantly differing from Western Europe due to their different historical backgrounds and religions. The communication strategy should therefore focus on highlighting the region's cultural proximity to the Western Europe. The states in the region, once parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Byzantium, had played the role of the centre of Europe, not its periphery. They are part of Europe culturally, socially and politically.

4.10. The Culture of Coexistence of Various Nations and Religions

Despite the legacy of war, the Western Balkan region provides multiple positive examples of coexistence of different ethnic and religious communities. The tradition of practicing the moderate version of Islam is also one of the region's strengths. This experience can be presented as a good model for Western Europe, especially now, in times of crisis, when the Member States are looking for a new model of coexistence with people of different backgrounds. Montenegro or the Vojvodina province can be promoted as a good example of peaceful cooperation of multi-ethnic communities, now contested in Western Europe. Also, the reaction to the migrant crisis in the Western Balkans can be used to enhance the positive image of the region. During that crisis, the Balkan societies proved to be much more open to other cultures, tolerant, friendly and willing to help those in need than many Western societies.

4.11 Economic Benefits

The Western Balkan region is a rather small and fragmented market wherefore the economic arguments are not so important in the context of this enlargement. Human capital is the region's main resource, especially when we take into account the low wages and skilled workforce, coupled with its close proximity to the EU and high level of productivity. The Western Balkans' accession to the EU can enhance the competitiveness of the EU as a whole, while the region, due to its small size, does not pose a serious threat to the EU's labour market. Other assets of the region include its natural resources and developed agricultural sector.

4.12 Southern Energy Corridor

The Western Balkan region is especially important for Central Europe in terms of the diversification of energy supplies and transit of gas and oil from the Caspian and Middle East regions to Europe. Inclusion of the Western Balkans in the European interconnections system and realisation of such projects, such as the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) and the Ionian-Adriatic Pipeline (IAP), would increase the energy security of the EU.

4.13 Changes in the Enlargement Process

Most Western European countries are afraid that the Balkan states will accede to the EU unprepared. The communication strategy should thus also underline the changes in the accession process, which is now more rigorous and demanding. In consequence, the entry of a country not fulfilling the conditions is now impossible.

5. Main Deficiencies of the Western Balkans Countries

The perceptions of the region as an unstable area divided along ethnic lines have been shaped by the wars in the nineties. This negative image was enhanced lately with frequent descriptions of the states in the region as weak, without effective administrations and media freedoms, but with high levels of corruption and nepotism, political interference in the judiciary and undemocratic systems of governance. As far as the enlargement policy is concerned, the situation is further aggravated by the fact that attitudes towards enlargement in the EU are mainly shaped by perceptions of Turkey, as the biggest of the candidate countries, the membership of which would significantly change the nature of the EU as a whole.

One of the main challenges in creating a regional advocacy platform is that the countries in the region do not have a coherent vision of themselves and the region as a whole, which they would like to promote to counterbalance this negative image. The countries' promotion strategies are mostly limited to their natural beauties and tourist attractions as their main features. In the individual countries, internal divisions and the difficult wartime past have led to lack of consent about interesting and attractive elements of their history, identity and culture. There are no common heroes or popular figures who can be promoted as positive symbols either at the regional level or by the individual countries. In consequence, the only widely known figures from the region are related to the wars in the 1990s, which is also the best known part of Balkan history. The advantages of the region are usually not seen as such in the Balkans. This applies, for example, to the tradition of coexistence of different ethnicities in the region, which was seen by the respondents as one of the main virtues of the region. The elites in the region, however, usually do not subscribe to this approach and exploit the divisions. The situation in culture is similar: most writers and directors enjoying great popularity abroad are disputed at home.

The divisions and conflicts in the Balkan societies usually overshadow the spectacular successes of these states. One such example is Montenegro, which has been invited to join NATO. This event has not been used to underline Montenegro's successful transformation; rather, the Western press took the opportunity to remind of the deficiencies in the country's democracy and divisions in its society. The Serbian – Kosovo negotiation process is a similar case. It can be used as a symbol of a peaceful resolution of a conflict and positively change the image of the region.

6. Synergies Justifying a Regional Advocacy Platform

The development of a common strategy, as hard as it will be, and the joint presentation of the whole Western Balkans would help address the main negative stereotype of the states in the region as those that cannot cooperate with each other and focus only on local conflicts and mutual pretensions and prejudices. Such a strategy would be proof of the maturity of the local leaders, capable of overcoming divisions for the sake of a better future. It would also be proof that concerns that Western Balkans countries will bring their mutual conflicts to the EU when they join it are groundless.

The societies in the EU Member States do not distinguish between the individual WB states and tend to view the region as a whole. In consequence, the negative information about one country leads to the deterioration of the image of the entire region. The implementation of the communication strategy by one country, which would aim to distinguish it from the other states in the region, would be costly and long lasting and there would be no guarantee of success. Instead of such individual efforts, joint actions would stand greater chance of success. Relatively small states have greater persuasion powers if they act in concert.

The development of a common strategy would enable the better use of the strengths of the individual states. Some of them have experienced and well-organised classical diplomacy staff, others have specialised in public diplomacy. Some have good relations with Germany, others with the USA, or the V4 countries. A common strategy would allow them to use all of these tools. Especially due to the fact that these states face similar problems and challenges despite their different progress in European integration.

7. Conclusion

Back in 2010, the European Commission pointed out that a successful enlargement policy required solid public support, which has been declining mainly due to lack of freely available and accurate information about the enlargement process²²³. The Commission also declared that it would improve the flow of objective information about enlargement and urged the Member States' political leaders to explain how enlargement could help the EU attain its objectives in crucial areas²²⁴. In retrospect, it may be concluded that the Commission was unable to achieve the goal of improving perceptions of this policy, while the political leaders, instead of highlighting the benefits of the Balkan states' accession, exploited the anti-European sentiments and fear of outsiders, thus rendering enlargement less possible. Given the circumstances, the candidate countries should engage in the active promotion of the enlargement policy and improve the image of the individual countries and the region as a whole. The Western Balkans have so far mostly been a policy-taker and have not tried to shape EU's policy on the region. Since the Commission is less focused on enlargement and political leaders of many EU Member States are not interested in accepting new members, the governments of the Western Balkans countries should try to explain to the EU public what is at stake in case of enlargement, the benefits of this process for both the member and the candidate states and the risks of halting it. The V4 countries, which have adequate experience and still support the enlargement process, are the right partners for the development of such a strategy. In doing so, they would not only gain new allies but would improve their own image in the EU as well. Critical discourse about enlargement affects not only the EU's ability to conduct its policy on the Western Balkans but strengthens the arguments that the "new" Member States do not meet EU criteria as well. Changing this attitude is a vital interest of both regions – V4 and the Western Balkans.

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²²³ *Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2010-2011*, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010_package/strategy_paper_2010_en.pdf, p.14.

²²⁴ *Ibidem*.

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Annex

The Western Balkans - SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High degree of integration with the EU; • Geo-strategic enclave amidst the EU; • Limited size – limited costs of integration and limited influence on the EU as a whole; • Gradual integration; • Cultural proximity with the EU; • Culture of coexistence; • Human capital. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative effects of linking the Western Balkans with Turkey in the enlargement process; • Candidate countries' lack of a coherent EU accession strategy to gain membership in the EU; • Lack of consent on the common advantages of cooperation; • Lack of a coherent vision of the candidate countries and the region; • Divisions and conflicts in the Western Balkans; • Weak ability to use the achievements to change the perception of the region i.e. Montenegro's accession to NATO, Belgrade-Pristina dialogue.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Region is seen as a whole in the EU member states; • Joint action of the Western Balkan countries has a greater chance of success – greater powers of persuasion; • Filling the geopolitical void; • Strengthening the EU and proving the credibility of its CFSP; • Expansion of the EU single market; • Improving transport connectivity and the EU's southern energy corridor; • Using the EU reform and following changes in the enlargement process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of credible membership perspective; • Geopolitical void in the EU's immediate vicinity; • Vulnerability to the influence of other regional powers in the Western Balkans; • Creation of weak states in the EU neighbourhood unable to fight organised crime and terrorism; • Fear that Western Balkan countries will bring their mutual conflicts with them into the EU; • Risk of the low level of environmental protection and unfavourable impact on climate change.

SLOVAKIA

Abstract

The leading EU integration strategy of Slovakia can be characterised as “catching up with the neighbours.” Thanks to the reform-oriented government’s policies, the image of Slovakia improved significantly after 1998 and the country started to be perceived as a reliable partner by its partners in the EU. In addition to developing intensive ties with the European Commission, the Slovak leadership also improved both the intensity and quality of its bilateral contacts with the EU Member States. The support of the other V4 countries also enabled Slovakia to bridge the integration gap.

Slovakia has always been an enthusiastic supporter of the EU’s enlargement policy. Besides advocating the EU membership of the Western Balkan countries, the most visible proof of Slovakia’s interest in the region has been reflected in the direct involvement of Slovak diplomats in EU institutions and activities. The importance of the Western Balkans’ EU perspective is also highlighted in the Programme of the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council.

As regards the recommended advocacy strategy for the Western Balkans, it should comprise regional, country-level and internal dimensions. At the regional level, the advocacy strategy should target the EU as a whole, whilst paying special attention to maintaining strategic relations with like-minded groups of EU countries, including the Visegrad Group. Individual Western Balkan countries should also develop and maintain intensive bilateral ties with EU institutions, as well as with EU Member States. Last but not least, WB countries should continue advocating EU membership among their own populations.

Key words: *Slovakia, European Union, accession process, Visegrad Group, Western Balkans, EU enlargement, advocacy strategy*

1. Introduction

In terms of EU membership, Slovakia has reached the highest possible level of integration. It successfully entered the Schengen zone and is no longer subject to any restrictions in terms of the free movement of its labour force and services.²²⁶ Slovakia is the only V4 country – and second post-communist country – that succeeded in adopting the single currency and becoming a member of the Eurozone. The adoption of the Euro not only brought Slovakia closer to the core of European integration, but framed the debate on the EU as well. It considers the maintenance of the single currency and internally cohesive single market its key priorities. Although Slovakia is positioned mostly as a policy implementer with respect to most EU policies (EU institutions and EMU, single market, and freedom, security, citizenship and justice), it has also played the role of policy initiator in some areas (e.g. energy). The latter also include the enlargement policy, where Slovakia has actively advocated the integration of the Western Balkan countries. It strongly supported Croatia’s accession, and together with its Visegrad partners, managed to create a coalition of like-minded countries supportive of the EU’s enlargement policy. On the other hand, the example of the current migration

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²²⁶ Neighbouring Austria and Germany were the last “old” EU Member States to remove such restrictions after the transition period ended in 2011.

crisis shows that Slovakia, together with the other V4 countries, has been perceived as a policy killer by some member states, especially with respect to the EU refugee redistribution mechanism. In addition to the issue of migration, the domestic political debate on EU-related issues has often boiled down to so-called distribution issues, such as the use of structural funds or the increased costs associated with Eurozone membership.

Slovakia's voice in the EU is naturally limited by its size. To overcome this disadvantage, Slovakia successfully used the Visegrad cooperation to pursue its national interests. Thanks to the Treaty of Nice, advantageous to smaller and medium-size Member States, Slovakia and the other Visegrad countries managed to have the same number of votes in the Council as France and Germany together. This specific position rendered the V4 a respected regional platform in the EU. Although the Lisbon Treaty changed this favourable position, the Visegrad Group has remained the most viable platform for pursuing regional interests and a basis for building coalitions in various areas.

Despite all the difficulties arising from the recent developments in the EU (e.g. financial crisis, migration crisis), Slovakia's EU membership still enjoys quite high, albeit declining, popular support. The still quite high support for EU membership, however, contradicts the Slovak population's low interest in European affairs, which is also demonstrated by its low turnout at the European Parliament elections. The turnout at the 2014 EP elections was the lowest in the entire EU, reaching a mere 13 percent.

Slovakia's political and economic transformation differed from the transition paths of its neighbours. The same is true for the process of its accession to the European Union (and NATO). The country started the transition from an authoritarian regime to democracy and from a centrally planned to a market economy as a part of Czechoslovakia. After obtaining its independence, Slovakia also had to cope with the state-building process. The starting position of the Slovak Republic was significantly less favourable than that of its Czech counterpart – Slovakia was not only half the size and economically less developed, but also practically unknown among EU leaders, not to mention the EU public. Slovakia is also ethnically diverse – actually it was and still is the most ethnically heterogeneous country in the Visegrad Central Europe. Although ethnic diversity is usually perceived as an asset, ethnic heterogeneity was perceived as a disadvantage in 1993, amidst the wars in the former Yugoslavia and instabilities in the former Soviet bloc. In addition, the government of the then Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, which was in power until 1998, was pursuing an undemocratic political style resulting in Slovakia's isolation. The country was lagging behind its Central European neighbours in the European integration process. Slovakia's accession to the OECD was postponed in 1996 and Slovakia was not invited to join NATO together with its Visegrad neighbours in 1999. Although Slovakia signed the Association Agreement with the EU already in 1993 and became a candidate country in 1997, it was not part of the group of countries with which the EU started the accession negotiations in 1997.²²⁷ Vladimír Mečiar's style of policy making was also one of the chief reasons why Visegrad cooperation was suspended in the period 1994-1998.

The so-called catching up period started immediately after the parliamentary elections in 1998. The elections, accompanied by a high degree of civic activism, resulted in the change of government. The broad left-right coalition of democratic parties led by Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda started implementing the necessary reforms and speeded up the EU integration process. Slovakia was the first country in East Central Europe to adopt a flat tax system. This decision, together with the implementation of other relevant reforms, made it one of the most interesting destinations for foreign direct investments (FDIs). Slovakia also ranked high among the most reformist countries in the world. Nevertheless, some of the reforms, especially the tax, pension and

²²⁷ *Hodnotiaca správa o 10 rokoch členstva SR v EÚ*, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, 2014, p. 6, https://lt.justice.gov.sk/Attachment/Vlastn%C3%BD%20materi%C3%A1l_doc.pdf?instEID=-1&attEID=63482&docEID=354065&matEID=7083&langEID=1&tStamp=20140313140259117.

healthcare reforms either underwent significant changes or were at least partially abolished. The flat tax was abolished, while the second pillar of the pension system has been continuously marginalised. The health care reform has remained incomplete, while some of its already implemented parts were abolished, like the priority appointment fees. An extensive reform of the public administration launched in 2001 has also been implemented only partially, while the recently launched reform of the public administration goes, to a certain extent, against the 2001 reform, since it supports centralisation.²²⁸ Nevertheless, only a few years after the US Secretary of State called Slovakia “the black hole in Europe,” the country succeeded in being qualified as a “reform tiger”.

From the economic point of view, the decade of EU membership was a clear success. As regards the convergence towards the EU average, Slovakia performed better than its Visegrad neighbours and made genuine leaps in just several years. The Slovak GDP per capita in purchasing power standards increased from 57% of the EU average in 2004 to 75 % in 2012.²²⁹ The percentage would probably have been higher had the 2008 economic crisis not hit Slovakia so hard. On the other hand, Slovakia has been unable to use all the allocated EU funds and there is a risk that relatively significant shares of funding will be lost. Huge regional disparities, as well as unemployment, remain a problem ten years after EU accession.

Slovakia managed to catch up with its Visegrad neighbours in EU accession. Although it did not start the accession negotiations until 2009, thanks to the so-called regatta principle, it not only managed to catch up with the other countries in the number of concluded negotiation chapters, but to overpass them as well. Accession negotiations were successfully concluded at the Copenhagen Council Summit in December 2002. In result, Slovakia joined the EU together with the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and other six countries in May 2004.²³⁰ Although it was not possible for Slovakia to join NATO together with its Visegrad neighbours in 1999, the V4 countries contributed significantly to Slovakia’s accession to this organisation in 2004 by sharing with it their experiences and know-how.

Catching up, notably with the EU political and economic mainstream, has remained Slovakia’s most important strategy in the post-accession stage. The country’s EU policy can therefore be considered as a follow-on imperative of its accession policy. Slovakia has relied heavily on its experience from the pre-accession stage, particularly in its institutional dealings with the EU.²³¹

2. The Role of the Western Balkans in Slovakia’s Foreign Policy

The Western Balkans were among the main Slovak foreign policy priorities even before it acceded to the EU. Although Slovakia does not border with any of the Western Balkan countries, it perceives itself as close to them. The reasons for this perception can be summarised as follows:

- Intensive ties with ex-Yugoslav countries in the past;
- Existence of the Slovak ethnic minority in Serbia and Croatia;

²²⁸ See also Strážay, Tomáš, “Ten Years of Membership in the European Union – Slovakia,” in: *European Integration of the Western Balkans: Can the Visegrad Countries Serve as Role Models*, Research Forum of the European Movement in Serbia, Belgrade, 2015, <http://www.emins.org/uploads/useruploads/forum-it/02-PA-V4Studija.pdf>.

²²⁹ *Hodnotiaca správa o 10 rokoch členstva SR v EÚ...*, op. cit, p. 10.

²³⁰ Figeľ, Ján and Adamiš, Miroslav, *Slovensko na ceste do Európskej únie, kapitoly a súvislosti*, Výskumné centrum SFPA, Úrad vlády SR, Centrum pre európsku politiku, Bratislava, 2003, pp. 9-21.

²³¹ See also Malová, Darina, Bilčík, Vladimír, *Us and them: Slovakia’s preference formation in the EU*, Department of Political Science, Philosophical Faculty, Comenius University, Bratislava, 2008, https://staryweb.fphil.uniba.sk/fileadmin/user_upload/editors/kpol/APVV/Preference_formation_in_the_EU_and_Slovakia.pdf.

- Possibility to share with the region Slovak experiences and know-how acquired during the transformation, state-building and integration processes;
- Interest in participating in post-war reconstruction, and, subsequently, in developing intensive economic links and increasing investments in the region.

In the pre-EU accession period, Slovak diplomacy had played a specific role in the stabilisation of the Western Balkans through the engagement of Eduard Kukan, who was named special envoy of the UN Secretary General for the Balkans. The gained experience – Kukan had kept his position throughout all the armed conflicts in the region – was utilised after Slovakia joined the EU. Non-government actors also played an important role in bringing the Western Balkans into the focus of Slovakia's foreign policy. Soon after the democratic breakthrough in 1989, various Slovak NGOs started to develop ties with their counterparts in Croatia and Serbia in order to share their experience and strategies. The assistance included election and media monitoring, voter mobilisation, pre- and post-election debates, as well as civic and political coalition building.²³² NGO leaders also inspired the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs to launch the so-called Bratislava Process (with the participation of the East-West Institute). In addition to providing the floor for meetings and joint actions with the representatives of pro-democratic and pro-European movements in Serbia, the Bratislava Process also aimed at legitimising these stakeholders in the eyes of the international community.²³³ The Bratislava Process undoubtedly contributed to the democratic changes in Serbia, but its value added was that it led to more intensive cooperation among various non-government organisations, also resulting in joint projects.

EU accession further strengthened Slovakia's focus on the Western Balkans. Just after it joined the EU and NATO, Slovakia identified two key territorial foreign policy priorities: Eastern Europe (notably Ukraine) and the Western Balkans. In 2003, the then Prime Minister, Mikuláš Dzurinda, openly declared that “Slovakia has the ambition of becoming an advocate of Ukraine and countries of the Western Balkans in the EU and NATO and helping them pursue reforms and the development of a civil society”.²³⁴ Slovakia's post accession priorities were also identified by a group of foreign policy experts – the main focus was also on the neighbouring regions of East and South East Europe²³⁵, as well as in Slovakia's mid-term foreign policy strategy.²³⁶ Since both priorities were in line with EU and NATO policies, Slovakia was convinced that it could contribute to their better implementation together with the other EU Member States, especially those in the Visegrad Group. On the other hand, Slovakia anticipated that NATO and EU policies towards the Western Balkans (and Ukraine) could contribute to the enforcement of its national interests vis-à-vis these countries. In the area of foreign policy, Slovakia, therefore, understood its membership in both the EU and NATO as an opportunity, as well as a responsibility.

Despite the fact that Slovakia has performed as a reliable policy implementer rather than driver in the field of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Bratislava has always been an enthusiastic supporter of the EU perspective of the Western Balkan countries. Most of its activities have been implemented either at the bilateral, regional (V4) or extended regional (V4+) levels. Apart from advocating the EU membership of the Western Balkan countries, the most visible proof of Slovakia's interest in the region has been demonstrated by the direct involvement of Slovak diplomats in EU institutions and activities. In 2006, Miroslav Lajčák

²³² See for example Patrova, Tsveta, *From Democracy to Geopolitics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014.

²³³ *Ibid.* p. 114.

²³⁴ “Appearance of Prime Minister of Slovak Republic Mikuláš Dzurinda,” in: Peter Brezáni (ed.), *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy 2003*, Research Centre of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava 2004, pp. 11-17, <http://www.sfpa.sk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Y2003.pdf>.

²³⁵ Duleba, Alexander, and Lukáč, Pavol (eds.), *Foreign Policy after NATO and EU Accession. Starting Points and Strategies*, Research Centre of Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava, 2004. It is a book printed back in 2004.

²³⁶ *Strednodobá stratégia zahraničnej politiky Slovenskej republiky do roku 2015*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, 2004, <https://www.mzv.sk/documents/10182/621946/strategia+ZP+SR.pdf>.

became an envoy of the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy charged with the Montenegro independence referendum process. Another Slovak diplomat, František Lipka, became the head of the referendum commission. In 2007, Lajčák was appointed the High Representative and EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while, in 2010, he became the EEAS Managing Director for Russia, Eastern Neighbourhood and Western Balkans. Also, after winning a seat in the European Parliament in 2009, Eduard Kukan became a Rapporteur for the Western Balkans in the EP. EU policies in this area have also been shaped, albeit to a lesser degree, by the members of the Committee of the Regions (e.g. the former Mayor of Košice, František Knapík, became the Rapporteur of this Committee drafting an opinion on the European perspective of the Western Balkans, while European Economic and Social Committee /EESC/ member Patrik Zoltvány was the Rapporteur for EU-BiH Relations and Transport Policy in the Western Balkans).²³⁷ However, the number of Slovaks in the EEAS is generally quite low and there is no any Slovak diplomat holding the post of ambassador.

The importance of the Western Balkans for Slovakia is also reflected in the growing number of its embassies in the region. As opposed to the first year of its EU membership (2004), when Slovakia had only two embassies in the region – in Belgrade and Zagreb – it now has embassies in all Western Balkans countries, with the exception of Kosovo.²³⁸

After it joined the OECD, and in connection with its accession to the EU, Slovakia was urged to establish its own official development assistance. A specific mechanism – the Bratislava-Belgrade Fund (BBF) was established to manage projects targeting Serbia and Montenegro. Later, in 2007, the BBF was merged in the *Official Development Aid of the Slovak Republic (ODA)*. Although most of Slovakia's development aid went to Serbia, other WB countries became important recipients of Slovakia's aid as well.

The importance of the enlargement policy in general – and the European perspective of the Western Balkans in particular - have also been emphasised by the national Programme of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union (July – December 2016). According to the Programme, the Presidency “will seek to maintain the momentum of the accession process and achieve concrete progress in the candidate countries”.²³⁹

3. Slovakia's (Undefined) Integration Strategy

The leading integration strategy of Slovakia can be characterised as “catching up with the neighbours”. The years of Slovakia's increasing international isolation (1994-98), its exclusion from the first wave of NATO enlargement, as well as from the so-called Luxembourg group of the five best prepared candidates, prompted extremely intensive efforts to bridge the gap between Slovakia and its closest neighbours, i.e. the Visegrad countries. The image of a reform-oriented country, which Slovakia acquired thanks to the policy of the new

²³⁷ Strážay, Tomáš, “Ten Years of Membership in the European Union – Slovakia,” in: *European Integration of the Western Balkans: Can the Visegrad Countries Serve as Role Models*, Research Forum of the European Movement in Serbia, Belgrade, 2015, <http://www.emins.org/uploads/useruploads/forum-it/02-PA-V4Studija.pdf>.

²³⁸ Slovakia does not recognise Kosovo's independence, wherefore it only has a representative office in Pristina. See also Mateusz Gniazdowski, Tomáš Strážay, “Visegrad Cooperation on Bosnia and Herzegovina: Challenges and Opportunities,” in: Marta Szpala (ed.), *Paradoxes of Stabilisation. Bosnia and Herzegovina from the Perspective of Central Europe*, Centre of Eastern Studies, Warsaw, 2016, pp. 139-157. http://www.academia.edu/23074885/Visegrad_Cooperation_on_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina_Challenges_and_Opportunities_In_Paradoxes_of_Stabilisation_Bosnia_and_Herzegovina_from_the_Perspective_of_Central_Europe. Ed. M. Szpala. Warsaw Centre for Eastern Studies 2016 p. 139-157.

²³⁹ Programme of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 July – 31 December 2016, <http://www.eu2016.sk/data/documents/presidency-programme-eng-final5.pdf>.

democratic government, also helped Slovak political leaders convince their counterparts in the EU that their EU accession ambitions were serious. However, Slovakia did not implement any other clearly defined advocacy strategy on its path to the EU.

The new government of Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, which came to power after the 1998 parliamentary elections, invested major efforts in refuelling momentum in the process of preparing for EU accession. The government established intensive cooperation with the European Commission, especially through the European Commission-Slovakia High Level Working Group. The Working Group was created by the EC as a unique tool, with the aim of fostering Slovakia's efforts. It was chaired jointly by a representative of the European Commission and the State Secretary of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Group consulted on several specific political, economic and legal issues.²⁴⁰

Besides developing intensive ties with the European Commission, the Slovak leadership also improved both the intensity and quality of bilateral contacts with all EU Member States. Despite these efforts, however, the EU was not ready to admit Slovakia to the Luxembourg group. The reason could have lain in fears of institutional instability connected with the fragility of Slovakia's broad democratic coalition consisting of a wide range of political parties and movements. The change in position only came after the European Commission published its 1999 Regular Report on Slovakia's Progress towards Accession to the EU, in which it appreciated Slovakia's reforms and recommended the opening of accession talks.²⁴¹ The EU negotiating framework significantly increased Slovakia's possibility of acceding to the EU together with the other Visegrad countries.

Significant support for Slovakia's aspirations to join the EU came from the other Visegrad countries. At their summit in Bratislava in the spring of 1999, the four Prime Ministers reaffirmed the goal of the integration of the Visegrad Group as a whole in the European Union and of Slovakia's accession to NATO.²⁴² A similar statement was issued by the Presidents of the Visegrad countries shortly before the EU Helsinki Summit.²⁴³ The four countries also started cooperating on the technical aspects of the accession process, especially at the level of Chief Negotiators. The important political leaders of the EU Member States, including the French Prime Minister, started recognising the Visegrad Group as an increasingly important platform for regional cooperation. Joint meetings were also held with the German Chancellor and the British Prime Minister.

Apart from support extended by important European stakeholders, another incentive for Slovak and other V4 leaders came from the Treaty of Nice, which stated that accession treaties with applicant states should be signed by "1 January 2004 at the latest".²⁴⁴

Slovakia had an opportunity to participate in two initiatives of major relevance to the EU and its future before it achieved its ultimate foreign policy goal - EU membership. The first was the Convention on the Future of the European Union, led by former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. The major added value of the Convention was that it offered the delegates of the candidate countries, including Slovakia, equal political

²⁴⁰ One of the concrete outcomes of the Group's work was Slovakia's pledge to shut down two blocks of nuclear reactors, part of the nuclear power plant located in Jaslovské Bohunice. See Vladimír Bilčík, "Can Slovakia Catch Up?" *DUPI Working Paper*, No. 1, 2001, http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/slovakia_Bilcik_SK%20catch%20up%202000.pdf.

²⁴¹ "1999 Regular Report from the Commission on Slovakia's Progress towards Accession," Brussels, 13 October 1999, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/1999/slovakia_en.pdf.

²⁴² "Joint Statement on the Occasion of the Meeting of Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Countries," Bratislava, 14 May 1999.

²⁴³ "TATRA Statement after the Meeting of Presidents of the Czech Republic, Republic of Hungary, the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Poland," Gerlachov in the High Tatras, Slovakia, 3 December 1999.

²⁴⁴ See the Treaty of Nice Protocol on the enlargement of the European Union, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12001C/PRO/01&from=EN>.

representation. The second was the Inter-Governmental Conference, which succeeded the Convention in 2003 and provided for the full-fledged participation of both old and new Member States. Both platforms provided Slovakia with an opportunity to present its positions on the future functioning of the EU and to reinforce its ties with the European institutions (especially the Commission) and representatives of the EU Member States.²⁴⁵ It is also worth mentioning that its positions were carefully prepared, but not so intensively discussed.²⁴⁶ One of the most important “internal” results of these processes was the establishment of the National Convention on the European Union in Slovakia - a unique discussion platform set up with a view to discussing EU policies and developing recommendations and involving all parts of Slovak society.²⁴⁷ The new tool, targeting experts in various fields, provided the government with the opportunity to strengthen its negotiating position vis-à-vis the EU. Another added value of the Convention was the joint participation of government and non-government experts in the working groups, which also demonstrated the government’s openness to cooperation with the non-government sector.

As already noted, the Slovak government was successful in developing intensive ties with the EU, as well as with particular Member States. However, it was less successful in terms of communication with its own citizens. Since the polls showed that the majority of Slovakia’s citizens supported EU membership, the low turnout at the pre-accession referendum (52.15%) came as a surprise. The weak pre-referendum campaign, with inadequately selected and targeted communication messages, together with a general aversion towards referenda, were mentioned as the two major reasons for this result.²⁴⁸

To sum up, catching up with the Visegrad neighbours was the leitmotif of the pre-accession stage. Thanks to the policy of the reform-oriented government, Slovakia’s image improved significantly and the country started to be perceived as a reliable partner by its partners in the EU. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland also helped Slovakia move from isolation to integration, both in the EU and NATO. The support of the other V4 countries, together with the rising reputation of the V4 in the eyes of the important European decision makers, enabled Slovakia to bridge the integration gap. Specific attention was paid to the improvement of cooperation with the European Commission (through the High Level Working Group) and intensification of ties with EU Member States, especially during the first years after the democratic breakthrough.²⁴⁹

Slovakia’s strengths and weaknesses in the European integration process, as well as its opportunities and threats, are summarised in the Annex 1.

The process of Slovakia’s accession to the EU is well described in the book by former Chief Negotiator Ján Figel’ and his Deputy Miroslav Adamiš. In addition to the overall assessment of the negotiating process, the book analyses progress in each of the 29 negotiation chapters thoroughly. Another added value is the identification of the most relevant stakeholders participating in the negotiating process (Figure 1).²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ The Slovak Republic had the role of observer in the EU institutions from the moment it signed the Treaty of Accession on 16 April 2003 until it acceded to the EU on 1 May 2004.

²⁴⁶ Korčok, Ivan., “The Slovak Republic and the Intergovernmental Conference of the European Union,” Bilčík, Vladimír, “Institutionalisation of Integration Policy,” Zsapka, P., “Analysis of Standpoints and Outcomes of the Slovak Republic at the Intergovernmental Conference,” in: *Yearbook of the Foreign Policy of the Slovak Republic 2003*, Research Centre of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava, 2004, <http://www.sfpa.sk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Y2003.pdf>.

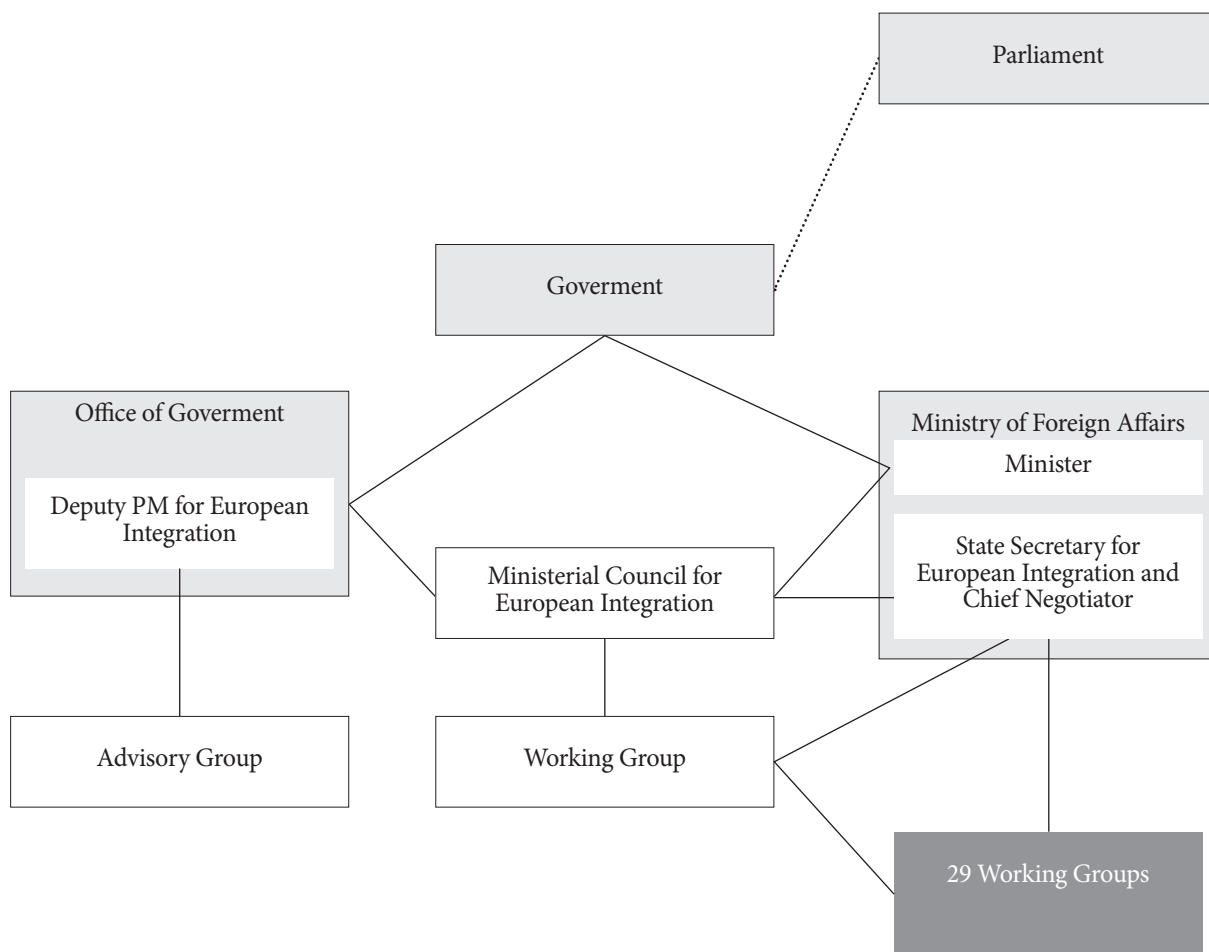
²⁴⁷ For more details see the original webpage of the National Convention on the European Union, <http://www.eurokonvent.sk/defaulten.aspx?lang=en>.

²⁴⁸ See, for example, Velšic, Marián, “Nízka účasť na referende o vstupe SR do EÚ – príčiny a súvislosti,” *Listy SFPA*, May-June 2003.

²⁴⁹ See, for instance, Marton, Imrich, “The EU Constitution: Discussion in the Slovak Republic,” in: *Yearbook of the Foreign Policy of the Slovak Republic 2004*, Research Centre of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava, 2005.

²⁵⁰ Figel’, Ján, and Adamiš, Miroslav, *Slovensko na ceste...*, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

Figure 1: Coordination of the EU Integration Process in Slovakia



4. The Added Value of the Visegrad Group

Slovakia benefited significantly from its membership in the Visegrad Group. Although the V4 is a loosely institutionalised initiative, it provides the participating countries with the possibility of pursuing their national interests at both the regional and the broader European levels. Slovakia, as the smallest V4 country, has taken the advantage of having the other three V4 countries as its closest collaborators in the EU; the fact that the other V4 countries helped it a lot in the pre-accession stage should not be forgotten either. Although the V4 countries have not always spoken in one voice, the Visegrad Group proved to be a successful regional initiative in the European Union. Soon after their accession to the EU, the V4 countries went on to identify new priorities and goals, support for the Western Balkan countries’ integration ambitions being one of them. The V4 managed to improve coordination at the EU level and serve as the “core” for broader initiatives in fields such as energy, climate, transport, spatial planning and cohesion policies. It can also be argued that all three post-accession Slovak V4 Presidencies have been rated as successful.

The European Union offers Visegrad countries an important instrument to advocate their own, as well as regional priorities and policies.²⁵¹ Strengthening coordination mechanisms within the framework of the V4 formula at the European level is a fact, although the V4 countries do not always agree on all areas. Although the V4 countries are crucial coalition partners on many issues related to the EU agenda, the fact is that Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia are parts of different orbits of European integration. Together with specific differences in policy preferences, this has undermined V4 policy coherence to an extent. One of the biggest challenges the V4 faces regards the possibility of transferring its best practices to the neighbouring regions of Eastern and South East Europe, as well as of extending them adequate political support. As far as the Western Balkan countries are concerned, the V4 countries can not only “lecture them” but also provide them concrete information about the problematic issues the V4 countries faced on their way to EU accession so that the Western Balkan states can avoid making the same mistakes. Three out of four V4 countries have listed the Western Balkans as a priority region to which they will extend their development aid.²⁵² The economic dimension is also worth mentioning – the developing markets of the Western Balkan countries and their ongoing privatisation processes provide the V4 and Slovakia with the opportunity to play a more active role in the region. Last but not least, cultural, historical and, to a large extent, also linguistic similarities render the V4 a natural advocate of the Western Balkan countries aspiring for EU membership.²⁵³

Generally, the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans can cooperate at the following three levels: political, institutional and procedural (in terms of know-how sharing), as well as at the sectoral level.²⁵⁴ Political cooperation plays the most important role from the point of view of a Western Balkan advocacy strategy. Support for the integration of the Western Balkans is embodied in a number of Visegrad Group documents, including the Kroměříž and Bratislava Declarations, Presidency programmes and ministerial statements.²⁵⁵ Regular autumn summits of the V4 Foreign Ministers and their WB counterparts have been taking place since 2009, when the Hungarian V4 Presidency introduced this informal procedure. It is also worth mentioning that the representatives of the European Commission have been taking part in these summits²⁵⁶, wherefore the adopted messages have directly been reaching the EU level. The meetings of the political directors and heads of analytical departments are also worth highlighting. The added value of the meetings in the V4+Western Balkans format is that they enable thorough discussions of political issues, while taking into consideration the status quo of the integration process. Political cooperation with Croatia plays also an important role, especially after this country joined the EU. No other Western Balkan country can join the EU without Croatia’s support, wherefore maintaining good bilateral relations with it is a precondition for the successful completion of the accession negotiations. The V4 countries, as the advocates of Western Balkan countries and close partners of Croatia, can serve as moderators in case of any bilateral problems that might occur in relations between

²⁵¹ Slovakia cooperated actively with the V4 and other net beneficiary countries during the preparation of the 2014-2020 EU budget; the V4 platform was also used to stress the idea of unrestricted free movement of workers, as well as during the process of joining the Schengen zone.

²⁵² In this regard Poland is an exception – none of the Western Balkans countries is on the list of priority recipients of the Polish Development Assistance. *Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme 2012 – 2015*, <http://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl>.

²⁵³ See also *European Integration of the Western Balkans: Can the Visegrad Countries Serve as Role Models*, Research Forum of the European Movement in Serbia, Belgrade, 2015, <http://www.emins.org/uploads/useruploads/forum-it/02-PA-V4Studija.pdf>.

²⁵⁴ See also Strážay, Tomáš, “Visegrad Four and the Western Balkans: A Group Perspective,” *Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* Vol. 21, No. 4, 2012.

²⁵⁵ For example: *The Bratislava Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Visegrad Group*, Bratislava, 15 February 2011, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/2011/the-bratislava>.

²⁵⁶ See, for example, *Visegrad Group Joint Statement on the Western Balkans*, Prague, 13 November 2015, http://www.mzv.cz/tirana/en/development_cooperation/the_visegrad_group_joint_statement_on.html.

Croatia and specific WB countries, notably Serbia. Another channel to pursue the joint advocacy strategy might be to publish articles by V4 Foreign Ministers or other officials both in the influential EU and WB newspapers. The joint article authored by the V4 Foreign Ministers that was published extensively in the WB print media in December 2015 can be a good start.²⁵⁷

Sectoral cooperation between the V4 and WB countries has only indirect, albeit important impact on the advocacy strategy. Strengthening administrative capacity, especially in areas related to the most difficult chapters, undoubtedly influences the negotiating process, as does the transfer of know-how in different sectors. On the other hand, institutional and procedural know-how sharing can boost the solidity and viability of regional cooperation within the Western Balkans. Visegrad cooperation has already become an inspiration for developing serious regional projects in the Western Balkans - the extension of Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) to the region in 2006 is an illustration of a successful model. A more recent example is the establishment of the so-called Western Balkan Fund, based in Tirana.²⁵⁸

5. Concluding Remarks

This chapter is divided into two parts – the first part summarises the lessons learned during Slovakia’s EU accession process and the second looks forward and comments the advocacy strategy/strategies of the individual Western Balkan countries and the region on the whole.

5.1. Lessons Learned (Slovakia’s Experience)

Slovakia’s example shows that it is possible to accede to the European Union without a clearly defined communication and/or advocacy strategy. The leading slogan used in the pre-accession period was “catching up” with the country’s more advanced neighbours. This strategy proved to be successful – Slovakia succeeded in joining the EU together with its Visegrad neighbours.

Slovakia’s success did not come automatically. Huge energy and political will devoted to reform and strengthening administrative capacity were prerequisite for the successful conclusion of the accession negotiations. The “drive” Slovakia had in terms of reform processes was appreciated by Brussels, as well as the “old” EU Member States. Slovakia managed to convince its EU counterparts that it was a responsible and reliable partner that could bring value added to the EU (especially in terms of unorthodox solutions and positive energy).

The atmosphere at home was genuinely conducive to EU membership. All the major political stakeholders united in their will to join the EU; EU membership became an absolute priority. Popular support for accession was also quite high, enabling the government to “sell” its (sometimes painful) reforms to the general population.

Finally, the general mood in the EU 15 was also very much in favour of enlargement. The enlargement process was perceived as a significant step forward in the process of unifying Europe and all Member State governments harboured a positive attitude towards the big enlargement wave.

²⁵⁷ V4 Ministers in Joint Article: *We Offer You Our Helping Hand on the EU Path*, Prague, November 11, 2015, <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2015/v4-ministers-in-joint>.

²⁵⁸ The Foreign Ministers of the V4 and six Balkan states signed the *Agreement on the Establishment of the Western Balkans Fund in Tirana*, in Prague on 16 November 2015, <http://www.puneteshime.gov.al/en/press-office/news/agreement-on-the-establishment-in-tirana-of-western-balkans-fund>.

5.2. *The Way Forward (Western Balkan Advocacy Strategy/Strategies)*

The strengths and opportunities of the Western Balkan region, as well as weaknesses and threats to the enlargement process are summarised in the Annex 2. Specific recommendations for the Visegrad and Western Balkan countries are outlined in the final part of this study.

Generally speaking, the advocacy strategy recommended for the Western Balkans should comprise (at least) three different but interconnected dimensions: regional, country-level and internal.

At the regional (Western Balkan) level, the advocacy strategy should target the EU as a whole, whilst making use of all the relevant stakeholders and instruments of regional cooperation. Special attention should be paid to maintaining strategic relations with like-minded groups of EU countries, among which the Visegrad Group will continue to play an exceptional role. The V4 is highly likely to maintain its position as the most vociferous advocate of the WB's accession ambitions and remain the core of the informal "Friends of Enlargement" group.

At the level of the individual countries, intensive bilateral contacts with EU institutions, especially with the Commission, play an instrumental role in the process of coming closer to the EU. The European Commission is responsible for the annual progress reports that serve as important sources of information for EU members, wherefore it is advisable to develop adequate modes of communication and cooperation with it.

Bilateral contacts with EU Member States are of crucial importance as well. Support for the enlargement policy is far from being as high as it was during the 2004 enlargement round, wherefore the development of proper communication strategies taking into account the particularities of individual EU Member States is of major relevance. Particular attention should be paid to relations with Croatia – as a former Yugoslav republic and neighbour of three of the six WB countries, Croatia occupies a very specific position in the EU. And, since no other Western Balkan country can join the EU without Croatia's consent, maintaining good neighbourly relations with Zagreb is prerequisite for their EU integration.

Last but not least, the internal dimension of the advocacy strategy should not be forgotten. WB countries should continue advocating EU membership among their own populations. The importance of this advocacy aspect is continuously increasing, given the recent fall in support to EU enlargement in the WB countries.

6. Recommendations

6.1. *To the Visegrad Group and V4 Countries*

- Continue acting as an advocate of the EU enlargement process at the EU level, employing both the V4 and V4+ formats,
- Make maximum use of the existing tools of cooperation, such as the annual summits of V4+WB Foreign Ministers,
- Assist WB countries in strengthening their administrative capacity through existing instruments of cooperation (twinning projects, expert trainings, and discussion fora, including National and Regional Conventions on the European Union),
- Consider the establishment of a permanent V4+WB expert working group on EU integration,
- Continue publishing in EU media pro-enlargement articles written jointly by V4 representatives,
- Support the intensification of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans in terms of procedural know-how transfer, with specific focus on the recently established Western Balkan Fund,

- Intensify dialogue with Croatia and explore possibilities for a joint advocacy strategy,
- Consider adopting countermeasures against Russian propaganda in the region, in cooperation with Western Balkan partners.

6.2. To the Western Balkan Countries

- Intensify bilateral dialogue and cooperation with EU institutions,
- Develop adequate relations with individual EU Member States,
- Develop internal communication strategies to increase public support for EU integration,
- Use the mediating role of the V4 in communication with EU Member States least enthusiastic about enlargement,
- Pursue existing and develop new initiatives aimed at strengthening regional cooperation,
- Resolve bilateral disputes through dialogue and avoid resorting to unilateral measures in dealing with bilateral problems.

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Annex 1

Slovakia - SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic start of the accession process • Creation of a stable government, with the inclusion of the Hungarian minority party SMK • Fast implementation of strategic reforms • Fast economic growth, including increase in FDIs • Strong involvement in regional structures (V4) • Solidarity and support of (Visegrad) neighbours • Broad political consensus on the European integration issue • High popular support for EU accession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young state, with limited statehood experience • Ethnic heterogeneity leading to divisions along ethnic lines • Negative reputation arising from authoritarian rule (1994-98) • Delayed start of the accession process • Unsynchronised transformation and integration paths with the (Visegrad) neighbours
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favourable moment for EU accession – EU was willing to accept new members • Communication of advantages of EU membership to all parts of the population • Accession to the EU with other Visegrad partners • Slovakia’s transition and integration path as an inspiration for other EU aspirant countries • Contribution to EU’s cultural and linguistic diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragility and insufficient functioning of democratic institutions • Insufficient administrative capacity • Deteriorating bilateral relations with neighbours (Hungary) • Lack of domestic political consensus on important EU policies • Passivity in EU institutions/policies • Disappointment of a significant share of the population in EU membership – EU accession had been seen as a “panacea” for all problems

Annex 2

The Western Balkans - SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most advanced region in the European integration process • Clear European perspective • Improving regional cooperation • Cultural, ethnic and religious diversity • New markets for EU products and investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political and economic instability • Unfinished reforms • High corruption levels • Decreasing support for EU integration • Open issues with neighbours • Lack of solidarity
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accession of the WB countries will prove that the enlargement policy works and that the EU remains an attractive integration model • Enlargement of the area of stability and prosperity • Significant step towards the unification of Europe • WB countries as role models for other countries aiming to join the EU • Contribution to cultural diversity (in light of the “unity in diversity” slogan) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising political and economic instability • Insufficient implementation of important reforms • Lack of political consensus • Inter-ethnic tensions • Deterioration of bilateral relations with neighbours • Not enough partners/advocates in the EU

THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Abstract

This text analyses present-day political support to the accession of the Western Balkan region (WB) to the EU from the perspective of the Czech Republic. The paper focuses on the current strategy of the Czech Republic to maintain support to the WB's integration goals on the domestic and the European agenda. It describes the positions of individual stakeholders and their joint strategy in order to reach maximum synergy.

Lastly, the paper also deals with the V4's regional approach to the WB involving also other EU member states.

Key words: *enlargement, the Western Balkans, the Visegrad Group, advocacy, attitudes of political parties, the Czech Republic.*

1. Introduction

The will for the EU's further enlargement to the Balkan countries declared at the 2000 Zagreb Summit was reaffirmed again at the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit.²⁶⁰ The EU enlargement policy was praised as a success story by both sides – as the most successful aspect of EU's foreign policy and the most comprehensive transformation path of the candidate countries. It has been generally recognised that such a policy contributed to peace and stability, inspired reforms and consolidated common principles of democracy, as well as market economy, in the candidate countries in Central and East Europe (CEE).

The democratic changes and introduction of functional market economies like in the CEE region have not been completed in the Western Balkan (WB) countries, with the exception of Croatia, which joined the EU in the 2014. The EU lost its attractiveness of a normative power among non-members in the past decade. Judging by the past decade, CEE countries can serve as an example of successful transformation and implementation of EU norms. They have simultaneously been important partners and supporters of the WB countries in their goal to become full members of the EU. In this regard, it has to be mentioned that CEE countries are perceived by both the EU and WB as important partners that successfully passed through the accession process and alignment with the EU.

Despite the positive role that CEE countries play, one has to consider the fact that the atmosphere has changed. The EU enlargement strategy, which was enforced through conditionality and rewards developed in detail in case of the 2004 “Big Bang”, has been applied, with considerable modifications, also in the case of the WB – whilst taking into account the post-conflict context, as well as the worse economic conditions than in the CEE countries at the time of their accession. In other words, the EU's enlargement policy towards the region has been implemented in the context of divided states, failed institutions, mounting political corruption, and weak checks and balances characterising the post-communist Balkans.²⁶¹ Nevertheless, the CEE and WB countries still share the interest of further EU enlargement as well as social and political experiences of transforming from former communist regimes to EU democracies.

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²⁶⁰ More on the Thessaloniki Summit at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/misc/76291.pdf

²⁶¹ <http://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/Publication-EU-Enlargement-and-Regional-Cooperation.pdf>

The aim of the paper is to look at the current context of support to the WB's EU membership from the perspective of the Central European region, with emphasis on the Czech Republic. How can the Czech Republic advocate the EU's enlargement to the Western Balkans and what role can it play in sharing the above mentioned lessons learned during its break away from its communist past in order to implement a policy supporting the WB?

The paper begins with an overview of the overall political and institutional context in the Czech Republic for supporting the WB countries' EU membership. It goes on to discuss the issue of searching for the shared interest of the Czech political parties in actively supporting the WB countries' aspirations to join the EU. It then deals with the EU political context regarding the enlargement policy, and ends by discussing the V4's coordinated approach to the WB.

2. EU Context

The EU's current enlargement policy is defined by two important features. Firstly, the current revival of political dialogue, which started at the WB6 Berlin Summit launching the Berlin Process in 2014, followed by the Vienna Summit in 2015 and the Paris Summit in 2016, is driven by the individual Member States rather than the European Commission (EC). Secondly, as EC President J. C. Juncker mentioned when he took office in 2014, no new countries will join the EU in the foreseeable future after Croatia's accession of Croatia in 2014. In this context, the focus of the current enlargement process should be on regional cooperation in the WB, as well as on searching for well-nurtured bilateral relations with the individual EU Member States. Despite this context, the general framework of assistance should focus on the following dimensions:

- Establishment of the rule of law and democratic political systems in all WB states;
- Pursuit of the market-oriented economic reform agendas;
- Development and strengthening of regional frameworks for cooperation.

These basic elements of strengthening cooperation between the EU and WB countries have to arise from the individual states' political commitment to become EU members. For this to happen, the integration process has to be accompanied by deeper regional cooperation. This is based on the assumption that the individual countries are already cooperating in many areas, such as justice and home affairs – e.g. rule of law regional cooperation initiatives and or economic and social development initiatives.²⁶² The countries in the region have already proven that they can cooperate on specific issues in these areas and that they have recognised the need to take part in sectoral cooperation projects and frameworks. Following this neo-functionalist argumentation, cooperation on low profile issues will give rise to demand for cooperation on high level issues. However, the region has to generally share the commitment to step up its adoption of the positive aspects of EU integration and support/facilitate stakeholders willing to establish functioning regional cooperation.

In this context, the V4 countries can serve as a good example for the WB of how regional cooperation has been used to achieve shared political and economic objectives in the past 25 years. Their shared commitments can be defined as follows:

- Declared political commitment to join the EU;
- Identified policy areas for fostering regional cooperation based on cultural and social similarities;
- Provision of external assistance to individual countries both by the EU and the V4 regional structure.

²⁶² <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/10067.pdf>

Despite the mentioned shared characteristics, the integration of individual WB states differs with respect to one very basic condition – the countries are unable to translate EU norms and policies into practice. This is not a new element in the context of the WB countries. One can define three main symptoms: ethnic grievances, weak states, and clientelistic networks and political corruption. On the one hand, this has to be seen in the context of the 2004 enlargement process and compared with the current political context that can be qualified by the EU's lack of interest in admitting WB countries in its fold. On the other hand, the political, social, and economic resolve of the political elites in each WB country to speed up the required reforms has been waning. Despite the current situation, cooperation between the V4 and WB countries can entail more than just cooperation based on shared historical experiences. Namely, they can better formulate the WB's common interest to join the EU as a first step needed in identifying domestic and external advocacy goals.

Nevertheless, evaluation of the recent development of the WB-EU relations regarding the migrant crisis that broke out in 2015 evidently shows that the common policy has not created any new room for political dialogue. Firstly, individual WB countries (namely Kosovo, Serbia and BiH) have experienced significant emigration of their own citizens, exceeding the migration wave from North Africa and Middle East (10% of all registered asylum seekers in the EU in the 2015 were nationals of Kosovo and Albania).²⁶³ Therefore, there was a need to find solutions to this situation first; and again, by the individual Member States rather than the EU.²⁶⁴ Secondly, the recent closure of the so-called Balkan migrant route in March 2016 demonstrated preference for bilateral solutions, hand in hand with the creation of a regional multilateral forum instead EU wide approach. This is the case despite the fact that Serbia and Macedonia took part at several high level meetings in the EU.²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the EU failed to provide any significant political support to the WB countries. From the other perspective, the WB countries missed the opportunity to create a new communication channel based on shared political issues. There are several indicators that migration crisis management relied on V4's and Austria's informal support to Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) to come up with radical solution such as building a fence along the Greek-Macedonian border to stop the flow. At the same time, neither Serbia nor FYROM participated in the appropriate extent in the EU high level meetings on the migration crisis. There are two possible explanations: the WB's lacked the ability to make use of the window of opportunity arising from the WB citizens' participations in the migration crisis, and the EU's extremely weak awareness of its role of main partner of the non-EU countries – instead, countries like Germany assumed the leading role in finding solutions. The V4 countries have also failed in this context inasmuch as they have been unable to adequately influence EU assistance to Macedonia and Serbia in the EU context, e.g. by involving both countries in the European high level meetings from the outbreak of the refugee crisis.²⁶⁶

3. Support of the Czech Republic

Analysis of the Czech Republic's support to the WB countries achieving their EU accession goal reveals it is extended via two main channels: political and institutional. Each channel has its own specific features subject to change over time. Both dimensions will be elaborated in detail to set a proper context of the Czech Republic's support to the WB countries. One has to bear in mind the fact that the political dimension creates the context

²⁶³ See: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/6887997/3-18062015-CP-EN.pdf/4457b050-26f9-4cf1-bf27-9ffb73ff8c7b> and <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7105334/3-10122015-AP-EN.pdf/04886524-58f2-40e9-995d-d97520e62a0e>

²⁶⁴ See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-serbia-idUSKCN0PC1KT20150702>

²⁶⁵ See: <http://www.brusselstimes.com/eu-affairs/3965/eu-summit-on-western-balkans-overshadowed-by-migration-tragedy>

²⁶⁶ See: <http://www.europeum.org/en/articles/detail/170/the-time-for-action-is-now-results-of-the-meeting-on-the-western-balkans-migration-route>

in which state institutions act and develop their policies. It also needs to be mentioned that representatives of both the Czech political parties and state institutions have their WB relations agenda, as corroborated during the interviews conducted within this research.

3.1. Political Dimension

Perusal of the election manifestos of all parliamentary parties since 2004 demonstrates an evident decline in mentions of support to further EU enlargement generally and to the WB countries specifically. The most relevant political parties today (2016) perceive their support as follows:

3.1.1. ČSSD (Czech Social Democratic Party)

The leading party in the government in office since 2013 recently split into the conservative and liberal wings. The conservative wing stresses conservative values such as national history, sovereignty, Slavic brotherhood ties and shows understanding for Russia's international activities when it comes to conceptualising identity. This wing stresses the need for nurturing cooperation with the WB based on Slavic ties rather than on spreading Western democratic norms and values. This part of ČSSD is also less capable of pushing the interest of the WB's accession to the EU at the European level. The conservative wing's power climaxed in 2010 when it expressed readiness to support immigration from South East Europe to the Czech Republic. The conservative wing has numerous supporters among the party's regional leaders as well as the public in general.

The liberal wing aims to foster communication with EU institutions, especially their colleagues in Germany and Austria. However, although this wing, which currently has the upper hand in the party, has the wherewithal to advocate EU membership of the WB countries, its interest in the WB is quite low and unlikely to prompt it to any additional activity in foreseeable future. The party's 2013 election manifesto does not contain any specific references either to the WB or to enlargement as a priority policy.

3.1.2. ODS (Civic Democratic Party)

This centre-right conservative party was the leading force supporting the Czech Republic's EU membership in the past decade. The party, however, started focusing on the rhetorical question of the Czech Republic regaining its lost national sovereignty in 2009. In its view, the EU has always been based on the common economic benefits of its members, wherefore this dimension, rather than the social and political ones, has to be developed further. The party has lost its supporters since 2006 (from 33% in the 2006 general elections to 7.6 % in the 2013 general elections). The decline in popular support has coincided with the party's stress on anti-EU rhetoric. Despite this fact, the party has several MPs advocating the Czech Republic's assistance to the WB countries. Their efforts steep from their personal experience with the transition period and their willingness to share their knowledge. The party still recognises the WB region as an EU enlargement priority in its post-2004 election manifestos, despite its doubts about a more integrated EU. Its prevailing position in this respect is that emphasis should put only on the economic dimension of European integration.

3.1.3. ANO 2011 (Alliance of Unsatisfied Citizens 2011)

ANO was founded in 2011 by Czech billionaire Andrej Babiš in response to the unsatisfactory political and economic developments in the Czech Republic. The movement is part of the centre-left coalition led by ČSSD. ANO has declared its support for EU integration, but has called for decreasing the VAT in the EU and de facto opposes the tax harmonisation policy. In reality, EU and foreign policy are on the margins of the party's interest given its long term interest in a more integrated EU. The party has no clear profile when it comes to the EU enlargement policy and remains silent on this topic at the national level. Likewise, it lacks interest in

the WB region. ANO's position is a sign of declining awareness of EU enlargement in Czech politics since even the second biggest political party does not pay any significant attention to one of the key dimensions of the EU's foreign policy.

3.1.4. TOP 09 (Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09)

This liberal - conservative party was founded in 2009 after it split from the Christian Democrats due to long-lasting tensions between the conservative and more liberal wings. The party advocates both further EU enlargement and the Czech Republic's deeper integration in the EU. In this regard, support to EU enlargement is perceived as part and parcel of general support to further EU integration. The 2010 and 2013 election manifestoes stress the need for the integration of the WB in the EU as a way to promote human rights in the foreign policy of both the EU and the Czech Republic. The party fosters communication channels both at the EU level and in the WB region to ensure the presence of this topic on the EU agenda despite all the difficulties.

3.1.5. KDU-ČSL (Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party)

This party promotes conservative values supporting (traditional) families and family life, morality based on Christian values, individuality and responsibility. The party is currently the strongest supporter of EU integration in the governing coalition. The key party figures are affiliated with the European Peoples' Party (EPP) and supportive of further EU enlargement. The party's election manifestoes over the past decades show that the element of EU enlargement was still present as part of its EU policy. Similarly to TOP 09, the party understands the WB region as a natural space of European culture and deems that links with it should be strengthened. At the personal level, the party supports the development of this kind of regional ties that can spill over to the national and sub national levels.

3.1.6. Other Political Parties

Apart from the above mentioned political parties, there are nationalistic parties such as Úsvit or the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy, KSČM) that are opposed to the idea of the European integration as such. Furthermore, they pay no attention to the fact that the WB region will be left on the margins of European and regional interests. Although representatives of these parties do not express their views publicly, they have frequently discussed the increase in Russia's role in the WB due to historical ties, as well as because of Kosovo's disputed status. Nevertheless, neither party plays a significant role in formulating the Czech Republic's priorities regarding the WB.

The Czech policy towards the WB has been undermined by the low interest of individual MPs responsible for shaping that policy. There is a parliamentary group for South and East Europe in the Czech Parliament. Despite this fact, MPs belonging to this group have not demonstrated any deeper interest in assisting WB countries in their accession bids although the chairpersons of both the Foreign Affairs and the European Affairs Committees represent parties supporting the EU membership of the WB countries.

A review of the past decade shows that political interest for the EU's enlargement has plunged since 2004. The ebbing interest is reflected in the fact that only a very limited number of party members identify the need for extending any assistance to the WB countries in the integration process. This situation may result in the insufficient dissemination of interest in enlargement to the EU level. Therefore, the main scope of activities aimed at keeping the enlargement agenda on the table remains in the hands of various institutions and ministers. As per the political dimension, support for the WB countries' accession to the EU needs to target specific policies rather than boil down to general declarations of support at the national level.

3.2. Context of the Czech Republic's Support to the WB

The context in which Czech policy is shaped has to take into account the current level of historic, cultural or economic interests spurring or diminishing the Czech Republic's support to the WB countries. First of all, interest in the WB region is a matter of generational approach: a major share of left wing parties do not share the interest in the WB based on support to EU enlargement. Quite the contrary, they perceive the region as a common space of pan-Slavic culture and history. Therefore, their main interest is in Serbia, Montenegro and FYROM, and they tend to neglect Albania and Kosovo. Despite this fact, the following aspects of relations between the Czech Republic and the WB can be identified:

- Shared communist legacy followed by the period of economic transition. In this sense, the V4 region assumed the role of mentor, sharing with the WB region the lessons it learned during the EU accession process. In the view of the representatives of both the political parties and the state institutions, this element is very strong when it comes to justifying Czech assistance to the WB. It reflects their awareness of the position of the Czech Republic, which is significantly advanced compared with that of the WB. This is the mainly the case of the centre-right political parties that perceive the WB in the context of European integration rather than pan-Slavic ties.
- Cultural proximity: these ties depend on the level of ethnic diversity both in the V4 region and the WB. This aspect helps channel initial cooperation, but has significantly less impact on political or business cooperation, levels of investment or joint ventures. These similarities, however, help establish initial ties in order to enhance the transfer of know-how at, for example, the municipal level. Such contacts depend only on the good will of both sides and have been already extensively used in some individual cases (such as the city twinning programme).
- Boosting trade as a spill-over of the integration process: despite proclaimed political support based on cultural similarities, trade remains very limited – only 1% of Czech exports go to Serbia.²⁶⁷ In addition to this, no Czech companies made any significant investments in the region in the past years. The Czech energy concern ČEZ recently withdrew its investments from Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina and no Czech billionaire made any investments in the region in the past five years.²⁶⁸ Despite the fact that the Czech Development Agency (CDA) supports projects implemented by private companies in Kosovo, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the overall economic results are below the relevant threshold. CDA supports projects such as those on waste management in Serbia and Kosovo.²⁶⁹ As a follow up of these projects, companies often continue their work on the projects implemented by the municipalities. Economic cooperation is less attractive to private companies since Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are not members of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

3.3. Boosting Cooperation at the Ministerial Level

The role of the V4 states has increased with the Berlin Process and increased German foreign policy interest in the Western Balkans. Notably, the communication links between Germany and V4 states *vis a vis* the WB countries have involved searching for new partners in the region and using the already established ties. This has immediately boosted political cooperation between Germany and the V4 given the migrant crisis

²⁶⁷ <http://www.businessinfo.cz/cs/clanky/perspektivni-obory-pro-vyvoz-do-srbska-653.html>

²⁶⁸ <http://www.motejlek.com/definitivni-rozlucka-cez-v-bosne-a-hercegovine-s-prodlouzenou-arbitrazi-o-padesat-milionu-eur>

²⁶⁹ <http://www.czda.cz/cra/projekty/srbsko/zavedeni-udrzitelneho-systemu-zasobovani-pitnou-vodou-municipality-bela-crkva-srbsko.htm>

that broke out in 2015. The need to pursue three different layers of cooperation (on site micro cooperation, bilateral cooperation with individual countries, as well as macro regional cooperation on issues such as the migrant crisis) led the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to develop a new policy approach/strategy in 2016.²⁷⁰ The new strategy aims at coordinating inter-ministerial cooperation to support on site projects and boosting the practical dimension of cooperation. This also means slightly lesser emphasis on the political dimension, boiling down to the MFA's declarative support.

The second significant element of the new strategy involves the coordination of the V4 policy towards the WB in order to establish functioning cooperation – the model of cooperation among regions, for example. This framework also corresponds to German foreign policy objectives of boosting cooperation, such as its support for transport projects in the Western Balkans leading to increased cross border exchange.²⁷¹

3.4. Lessons Learned from the Integration Process

Three points can be identified when evaluating the biggest success stories: strengthening the rule of law and compliance with European norms; managing regional and national public administrative reforms; and ability to develop regional cooperation both at the local and national levels.

Since the Czech EU integration debate after the Copenhagen criteria were set in 1993 was dominated by economic arguments, emphasis was put on elements needed for a stable economic environment. As mentioned above, simultaneously with the both de facto and de jure strengthening of the institutions, the Czech Republic's economic integration occurred without significant state interventions. The listed three points proved the achievement of the integration goal at several levels. First, the government and parliament were committed to the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*, as well as to the enforcement of these norms. Second, the administrative and self-government reforms secured the effective implementation of the subsidiarity principle as one of basic elements of the EU's normative order. Third, although the V4 aimed at acting within the regional framework, each country followed its own trajectory. Therefore, accession to the EU was not just a political, but mainly a social process. In this context, the success stories should point out enforcement of norms instead of their mere adoption.

4. V4 Strategy to Support WB EU Accession Goals

Each WB country should take as its key political modus operandi the fact that the success of the integration process hinges on political reforms, followed by social transformation. This is by definition the task for the national stakeholders and its fulfilment depends on the extent to which they share the commitment to European integration.

The role of V4 countries should be to facilitate and effectively share their/good practices with the WB, whilst targeting decision makers at the local level. In particular, the need for coordinated integration support at the micro and macro levels has to be emphasised. In view of the low efficiency of the WB public administrations at the national level, cross-border as well as regional levels of exchanging good practices have to be boosted by use of tools other than political ones – e.g. support to trade within a regional framework or increase in transport connectivity. Use of this framework might help overcome the existing animosities between individual WB countries.

²⁷⁰ The Strategy was adopted by the Czech MFA in June 2016.

²⁷¹ More on the 2015/2016 Czech Presidency of V4 at: <http://www.europeum.org/data/articles/think-visegrad-midterm-review.pdf>

Recommendations for the Advocacy Strategy

- Focus on the developing local and regional ties via various partnership programmes to expand the number of decision makers (e.g. representatives of political parties) knowledgeable about WB reality and politics. To this end, increase low profile funding programmes to boost transfer of the Czech Republic's know-how to the WB.
- Raise awareness about know-how transfers at the local level, mainly municipalities, and through regional cooperation frameworks in the CEE region.
- Provide practical assistance to the implementation of reforms required by the integration process: starting the learning process by first effectively implementing regionally funded programmes (such as long-term exchange of experts) at the local rather than at the national level.
- Facilitate exports of goods and services from the WB to the EU market, providing extensive assistance to the WB agricultural sector in implementing EU norms in order to boost trade.
- Significantly increase funding programmes for infrastructure projects such as motorways, railways, energy transmission lines, as well as other strategic infrastructure and do not allow the creation of a political vacuum for investments from China, the Arab countries, or Russia. In other words, keep the idea of enlargement on the EU agenda through real infrastructure deals to increase both intra- and extra-regional connectivity.
- Support the creation of regional in addition to national EU accession related policies in the Western Balkans involving the V4 region and individual WB states.

Annex

Western Balkan 6 – SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing security of WB and CEE region • Investment opportunities • Cultural proximity with the EU • Tourist industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of political will to boost political cooperation • Lack of strong public support to accession • Low effectiveness of the WB public administrations • Unwillingness to change political status quo • Unclear foreign policy priorities
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical experience of cooperation with individual EU countries • Long-term experience in integration processes • Stabilisation of the WB region on the whole • Political stabilisation will be accompanied by a boost in trade • Proof that EU integration is a success story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU's low support to enlargement in the upcoming decade • WB political leaders' preference for short- rather than long-term goals • Presentation of social tensions as ethnic ones in individual countries • Low effectiveness of the public administrations accompanied by corruption at all levels • Drain of well-educated individuals from the WB region • Misconceptions about the rights and obligations arising from EU accession

List of Acronyms

BCSDN	Balkan Civil Society Development Network
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
CARDS	Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation
CDRSEE	Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe
CEI	Central European Initiative
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CoE	Council of Europe
COSAP	Conference of the European Integration Parliamentary Committees of States participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process
COSME	the EU Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)
COWEB	Working Party on the Western Balkans Region
CPESSEC	Centre of Public Employment Services of Southeast European Countries
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG	Directorate-General
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ECOFIN	Economic and Financial Affairs Council
ECS	Energy Community Secretariat
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ENIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region
EP	European Parliament
ERI SEE	Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe
ERP	Economic Reform Program
e-SEE	Electronic South Eastern Europe Initiative
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EUROPOL	European Police Office

EUROSTAT	European Statistical Office
EUSAIR	European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FES	Friedrich Ebert Foundation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GIZ ORF	GIZ Open Regional Funds
HBS	Heinrich Boll Foundation
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank)
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organization
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
KAS	Konrad Adenauer Foundation
MARRI	Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative
NALAS	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NIPAC	National IPA Coordinator
NKEU	National Convent for European Union
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RAI	Regional Anticorruption Initiative
REC	Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe
ReSPA	Regional School of Public Administration
SEE	South East Europe
SEE 2020	South East Europe 2020 Strategy: Jobs and Prosperity in a European Perspective
SEECCL	South East European Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning
SEECPP	South-East European Cooperation Process
SEEHN	South-Eastern Europe Health Network

SEEIC	South East Europe Investment Committee
SEELS	South East European Law School Network
SEETO	South East Europe Transport Observatory
SELEC	Southeast European Law Enforcement Center
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SWG RRD	Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe
SWP	Strategic Work Program
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport network
The FYROM	The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	Western Balkans
WBIF	Western Balkans Investment Framework
WISE	Western Balkans Research and Innovation Centre
WTO	World Trade Organization

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