

# The Perspectives of the Western Balkan Countries on the Further Eastward Enlargement of the EU

**Niuton MULLETI, PhD**

Acting Head of the Department of Law & Lecturer in International Relations at  
the Department of Political Science and International Relations

EPOKA University, Tirana, Albania

21 April 2023, DSG, UNISA



# Outline

1. EU Enlargement Policy towards the Western Balkans (WB)
2. European Neighbourhood Policy
3. WB and further Eastward Enlargement of the EU
4. Main reflections

# EU Enlargement Policy towards the WB

- Difficulties encountered by the EU in emerging as a fully-fledged global foreign and security actor.
- Nevertheless, enlargement is considered to have been one of the most successful areas of EU's external action.
- It is only in the WB that the EU has employed a **typical structural foreign policy** by devoting a large amount of resources to the transformation of the political, economic and social conditions in the region based on the:
  - *de-escalation and de-securitisation of tensions through substantial support and pressure;*
  - *anchoring of these countries into a firm EU accession path.*

# EU Enlargement Policy towards the WB

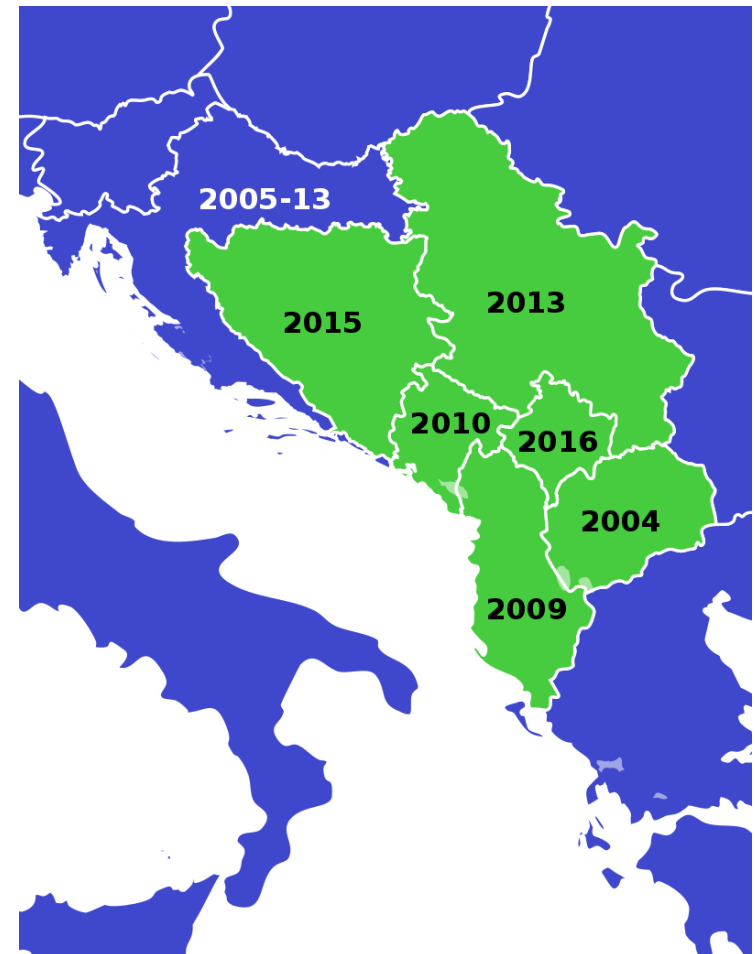
- All WB countries have been provided with a EU accession perspective in the 2003 Thessaloniki summit
- All WB countries have been included in the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) and have signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU.
- All WB countries have been included in the visa liberalisation process since 2009. Kosovo will be the last country to benefit from visa-free travel in the Schengen area as of January 01, 2024.
- Besides its enlargement policy, the EU has maintained a strong presence in several WB countries through its civilian and military mission in the **framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)**.

# EU Enlargement Policy towards the WB

- **Military CSDP missions in the WB:**
  - *Operation Concordia (FYROM, 2003)*
  - *EUFOR Althea (BiH, 2004-ongoing)*
- **Civilian CSDP missions in the WB:**
  - *EUPM (BiH, 2003-07)*
  - *Operation Proxima (FYROM, 2003-05)*
  - *EUPAT (FYROM, 2005-06)*
  - *EULEX Kosovo (Kosovo, 2008-ongoing)*

# EU Enlargement Policy towards the WB

Date of entry into force of the  
Stabilisation and Association  
Agreements with WB countries



# EU Enlargement Policy towards the WB

- Enlargement process of EU: **Conditionality-driven** in order to meet the **Copenhagen accession criteria**.
- Effectiveness of conditionality rests on:
  - *Credibility of the EU ‘anchor’;*
  - *Commitment of the national political class to conduct the necessary reforms.*

# EU Enlargement Policy towards the WB

- **Europeanisation as:**

Processes of construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies (Radaelli).

- For candidate countries: ***top-down approach***



# EU Enlargement Policy towards the WB

## Enlargement fatigue due to:

- Problems encountered after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007;
- Effects of the 2008-2009 global financial crisis accompanied by the eurozone crisis in 2010-2011
- 2015-2016 migrant crisis accompanied by the rising influence of populist, nationalist and hard-right political parties in many EU countries;
- Brexit;
- COVID-19 pandemic.

# EU Enlargement Policy towards the WB

- Current status regarding EU accession
- *Albania and North Macedonia formally started accession negotiations in July 2022.*
- *Bosnia and Herzegovina also became a candidate country in December 2022.*
- *Kosovo submitted its application to become an EU member in December 2022.*



# European Neighbourhood Policy

- The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) applies to Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.
- It aims to strengthen the prosperity, stability and security of all.
- It is based on democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and is a bilateral policy between the EU and each partner country, with regional cooperation initiatives: the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the Union for the Mediterranean.

# European Neighbourhood Policy

## WESTERN BALKANS AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP (EAP)



Source: Author's own compilation

**DGAP**

# Further Eastward Enlargement of the EU

- In the wake of the war of aggression of Russia against Ukraine in February 2022, in December 2022, the EU decided to grant candidate country status to Ukraine and Moldova.
- EU leaders were careful to stress that the accession process of these two countries will be a merit-based one.

# Further Eastward Enlargement of the EU



# Main reflections

- The speedy granting of the candidate country status to Ukraine and Moldova brought again into attention the **geostrategic** and **geopolitical** features of EU enlargement.
- Increased prospects for a **new momentum** in the EU accession process of WB countries.
- EU enlargement emerged as a new front in the **geopolitical struggle and competition** between the West and Russia (in Ukraine, Moldova and most probably also Georgia) besides NATO enlargement.

# Thank you for your kind attention!

*Any questions?*

**[nmulleti@epoka.edu.al](mailto:nmulleti@epoka.edu.al)**