

EU Enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe: A Social Constructivist Approach¹

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Introduction

For Central and East European (CEE) countries, the fall of communism represented the biggest event in their recent history. For most of them, entering the European Union (EU) represented the most important political project of the last two decades. On the other side, the 2004 and 2007 admissions radically changed the shape of EU, raising, all of a sudden, the number of its members from 15 to 27. Can this process be explained only by rational decisions of political leaders? Is liberal intergovernmentalism enough to account for the process of EU enlargement towards former communist states in the East?

This paper suggests that, among the factors which contributed to the EU decision to enlarge, an important one is the value-based identity of the Community. The EU commitment to

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democracy and human rights, also called the European liberal identity, creates expectations and restrictions for the behavior of both Member States and its internal institutions. They can use this liberal identity in order to promote their own interests or because they genuinely adheres to it. The paper seeks to offer support for the idea that these factors not only intervened in the enlargement process towards CEE countries, but they are at work in the ongoing process of enlargement towards Western Balkans.

The first chapter of the paper will sum up the latest developments in International Relations and EU studies with a special attention paid to the liberal intergovernmentalist theory developed by Andrew Moravcsik and constructivists attempts to build a response to it. In the next chapter, the EU enlargement to CEE will be scrutinized by using mainly Schimmelfennig's argument of that the promoters of the process has successfully used rhetorical action in order to convince the opponents and to achieve the institutional decision of opening the EU towards the East. In the second part, the same pattern will be applied in order to assess current process of European integration of the Western Balkans. A special case in the process is Serbia, due to at least two peculiar issues the country is confronting: the full compliance with ICJ and the unresolved dispute concerning Kosovo status.

1. Explaining the EU process of integration: International Relations and EU studies

There is a well known constructivist critique of the presumed incapacity of neo-realists to account for change in the international system. Usually these critiques are directed either against the 'static' description of the international system in the theoretical framework developed by Walz, or against the repeated failures of neo-realists to predict important developments in international politics. As for the process of European integration, neo-realist theorists have minimized its relevance or have looked on it as a temporary arrangement between European nation-states seeking to secure or to target strategic objectives, a sophisticated arena for intergovernmental negotiations.

Moreover, from the same perspective, national governments will always be the only key players in the process, and none of the functions they have delegated to the European supranational level would prevent them from following their own national agenda.

Consequently, it is even more difficult to analyze the EU as a single international player; from a realist perspective, the only situations in which the EU speaks with a single voice and acts accordingly are those in which it happens that all its members have the same interests (or have negotiated a bargain for other interests that they have considered more important). There is a long list of examples one can provide in order to illustrate this idea. The most striking example of what happens when the EU states cannot reach consensus is probably the schism between those states sustaining and those opposing the war in Iraq in 2003.

Though existing as different fields of studies, International Relations and Integration studies have evolved together and are communicating with each other in a fruitful manner.² As Pollack has showed in a classic description of the state of the art in the field of European integration studies, the whole neofunctionalism - intergovernmentalism debate has been replaced by a new one, opposing rationalists and constructivists and therefore reflecting the latest development in IR.³ Andrew Moravcsik developed liberal intergovernmentalism starting from the idea that the “big decisions” on integration are the result of a series of negotiations and bargaining processes, first at a domestic level and then inside the European arena.⁴

In other words, the choice of international institutions is dependent upon the formation of national preferences *inside the states* and the distribution of power during bargaining *among states*. While this approach was originally designed to explain the decision of “deepening” integration, it is reasonable to assume that the same pattern of analysis should work to explain “widening” of the EU, since “deepening” and “widening” are both features of the process of European integration. Indeed, liberal intergovernmentalism should explain the enlargement of the EU towards former communist countries in the Central and Eastern Europe by taking into account the national preferences of the Member States favoring such a decision and the power to negotiate held by the “drivers” of enlargement leading to a favorable decision at the European level.

² Ben Rosamond, *Theories of European integration* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

³ Mark A. Pollack, “Theorizing the European Union: International Organization, Domestic Polity, or Experiment in New Governance?,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 8, no. 1 (6, 2005): 357-398.

⁴ Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe. Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht*, Cornell studies in political economy (Ithaca (N.Y.): Cornell University Press, 1998), <http://www.babord.univ-bordeaux.fr/ipac20/ipac.jsp?uri=full=3100001~!444739~!2&profile=scdbx2..>

2. *EU enlargement to CEE: interests, values and rhetorical action*

The claim made by Schimmelfennig in 2001 in his study on liberal norms and Eastern enlargement is that EU decision for enlargement does not fit the rationalist framework previously described and “cannot be explained as the result of egoistic cost-benefit calculations and patterns of state preferences and power”.⁵ It is useful to follow Schimmelfennig’s main idea in order to develop a similar argument for the case of Serbia. First of all, at the nation state level, Schimmelfennig seeks to identify the factors explaining the preference of the Member States, or, in other words, the factors responsible for the identification of states as “drivers” or “brakemen” of enlargement. Then, another division is made inside the list of “drivers”: a group supporting a “limited” enlargement opposes other countries promoting an “inclusive” one. For example, Austria and Germany fit in the first category because they would have been direct beneficiaries in a case of a quick integration of a short list of Central European countries. In the same time and following another way of reasoning, Britain supposedly calculated that a large wave of enlargement will prevent future “deepening” of integration and thus became a supporter of an “inclusive” enlargement. However, the picture resulting from this constellation of positions is more important than the reasons behind them, being these economic opportunities, strategic options or geopolitical interests: a puzzle of equal forces in which “drivers” among the member states cannot shift the balance in their favor.

The incapacity to explain the outcome of enlargement on the sole basis of the egoistic preferences of the Member States and their power of bargaining during the negotiation process requires another type of explanation. Schimmelfennig argues that the “missing link” towards the institutional outcome of enlargement can be identified by using another approach, sociological institutionalism or social constructivism. From this perspective, an international institution or organization is more than a conglomerate of interests, since it has its own goals and procedures; more than that, the interests and preferences of actors are not “given” and fixed, but subjects of change during the socialization process the organization provides for.⁶ Back to the enlargement

⁵ Frank Schimmelfennig, “The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union,” *International Organization* 55, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 49.

⁶ Robert O. Keohane, “International Institutions: Two Approaches,” *International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (December 1, 1988): 379-396.

process, Schimmelfennig identifies as a real advantage for the “drivers” the fact that the EU is a community of values, namely an organization whose identity is based mainly on the commitment to democracy and human rights. Due to the right of every European state to apply for membership (Art. 237, EEC Treaty), once the Central and East European states have proved to respect the rule of law and human rights, they were entitled to request membership. Briefly, the supporters of enlargement legitimized their position by resorting to liberal norms of the Community. By *rhetorical action*, defined as “the strategic use of norm-based arguments in one’s self-interest”⁷, they succeeded in imposing their agenda of enlargement on the EU level.

Given this conclusion, one can rightfully question the peculiarity of the social constructivist approach, since the actors may use and manipulate liberal norms as one resource among others in a confrontation fueled and driven by the interests and forces highlighted by intergovernmentalists. The answer is that there are certain limits of manipulating social values and norms, because actors do care about their consistency and cannot act chaotically. In other words, a state which used a value-based argument in a supposedly instrumental manner will find extremely difficult not to have the same position in another situation in which the same values are used by other states for their own interests. That was actually the case of the enlargement policy during the 1990s. Regardless the initial instrumental use, or genuine belief in the liberal identity of the Community, the discourse based on this rhetoric started to function as a force on its own and the EU as a whole has been increasingly shaped by its logic.

3. Prospects for Western Balkans: the role of EU liberal identity

The process of identity formation of an international organization requires a long period of time. In the case of the EU, it has started with the first Treaties establishing the initial European Communities and has remained, ever since, a work-in-progress, as the debate over the Preamble of the Treaty establishing a Constitution demonstrated. The core liberal norms characterizing the EU identity were engraved by its founding fathers from the very beginning and have been, with minor variations, the same up to the Treaty of Lisbon: democracy and the rule of law, on the one hand, and human rights, including the rights of minorities.

⁷ Schimmelfennig, “The Community Trap,” 63.

As Fierke and Wiener convincingly showed⁸, the reinforced European Community's liberal identity played a significant role not only during the Cold War, by helping dissidents of the Communist regimes and eroding the credibility of the Communist bloc, but also in the aftermath of the fall of the Iron Curtain. Using the terms introduced at the end of the previous section, one can say that during the Cold War Western states have employed liberal values in the *rhetorical action* performed towards the countries on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Consequently, after 1989, the promise of reuniting Europe under the same ideals of freedom and democracy had to be fulfilled once the Central and East European countries have embraced the same liberal values. It is this *self-entrapping* of the EU that actually allowed the "drivers" to entrap the "brakemen" during negotiating of the enlargement decision. However, the description of EU enlargement process as driven only by interests and rhetorical actions underestimates the importance of genuine commitments to liberal values and ideas. For instance, European Parliament has proved to be a constant promoter of value-based behavior of the EU in its external actions. Furthermore, the "freezing" of the EC-Greece Association agreement in response to the 21 April 1967 *coup d'état* and starting of the accession negotiations after the restoration of democracy in Greece have been good examples for CEE countries of the real commitment of EU to liberal values.⁹ Still, for this paper it is more important the efficiency of using value-based discourses than the real commitment of their authors.

As announced in the beginning of this paper, the focus of this part will move from past to future enlargement and from Central and Eastern Europe to Western Balkans, with Serbia as the main country under scrutiny. Therefore, the main question is whether one can expect to see the scenario of Central and Eastern Europe enlargement repeating in the case of Western Balkans. What role did the liberal identity play in bringing Western Balkans inside the EU up to present time and what role will it play in future decisions?

The starting point in the new EU-Western Balkans relations was the Summit of Thessaloniki in June 2003. The final Declaration¹⁰ contains the main guidelines on which the strategy for the region is based: from the commitment to the liberal values – democracy, the rule

⁸ K. M. Fierke and Antje Wiener, "Constructing institutional interests: EU - and NATO - enlargement," *Journal of European Public Policy* 6, no. 5 (1999): 99.

⁹ Dan Lazea, "European Union's External Relations: From the Principle of Non-Intervention to Political Conditionality," in *New Europe College Yearbook 2009-2010* (Bucharest: NEC, forthcoming).

¹⁰ "EU-Western Balkans Summit, Thessaloniki Declaration," June 16, 2003, <http://www.stabilitypact.org/reg-conf/030621-thessaloniki/declaration.asp>.

of law, respect for human and minority rights – to the recognition of the European perspective of the countries in the region, and through the framework provided by the Stabilization and Association Process. Since then, all of the above mentioned states have made several important steps in the process as mentioned several documents of the EU.¹¹ The main documents monitoring the road of Western Balkan states toward EU are the Progress Reports that the European Commission issued each year for each country. The first two sub-chapters of the so-called ‘Political criteria’ chapter are dedicated to the progress of democracy and the rule of law and of human rights and the protection of minorities, and they follow the same structure of the reports already used by the EU when monitoring the CEE countries. Now the reports have a third sub-chapter, entitled “Regional issues and international obligations”, which is specific to Western Balkans due to the recent past and the wars in the 1990s. The democratization process and the achievements of the countries in the region have been consistently documented not only by European Commission reports, but also by other international agencies and structures. Freedom House reports interestingly improved their ratings over time, although in the first years after 2003 Thessaloniki Summit the progress was described as low and uneven.¹²

Currently Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Montenegro are recognized as candidate countries, while Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia are also potential candidates, an important status guaranteeing a European perspective. More than that, they all have finalized the Interim Agreement which is, actually, a very important step towards the future integration of their economies, besides immediate economic benefits for the countries in the region. In the case of Serbia, the recent Visa liberalization program was, also, a very important step, a “historic moment” in the words of EU Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner Jacques Barrot¹³, although the main effects of the liberalization have been more psychological so far.¹⁴ There are, as well, hopes the completion of the ratification process of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) for the two remaining states of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. In the case of Serbia, the hopes are fueled by recent ratification the European Parliament of SAA

¹¹ “Communication from the Commission - The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidating stability and raising prosperity COM/2006/0027 final,” <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0027:FIN:EN:HTML>.

¹² “Study: Slow and Uneven Progress in Balkan Democratization. Press Release,” *Freedom House*, April 26, 2006, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=70&release=45>.

¹³ “Serbs set for visa-free EU travel,” *BBC*, July 15, 2009, sec. Europe, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8151518.stm>.

¹⁴ “Schengen Effect Mainly Psychological for Serbians,” *Balkan Insight*, October 23, 2010, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/schengen-effect-mainly-psychological>.

in January 2011 by “an overwhelming majority of 90%”, as expressed by the Serbian Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, Bozidar Djelic.¹⁵ Although not guaranteeing rapid accession, as the case of Turkey has proved, EU considers SAA as a catalyst for reforms in candidate countries and its implementation an essential step towards eventual integration.¹⁶

Situation of the Western Balkans concerning the prospect of EU membership
March 2011

<i>Country</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Interim Agreement</i>	<i>SAA</i>	<i>Application for membership</i>
Croatia	Candidate	1.03.2002	1.02.2005	21.02.2003
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Candidate	1.06.2001	1.04.2004	22.03.2004
Montenegro	Candidate	1.01.2008	1.05.2009	15.12.2008
Albania	Potential candidate	1.12.2006	1.04.2009	28.04.2009
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Potential candidate	1.07.2008	(2011)	(2011)
Serbia ¹⁷	Potential candidate	1.02.2010	(2011-2012)	22.12.2009

Is this enough to expect a smooth path of Serbia, together with the other Western Balkans countries, towards EU integration, with a provisional date accession around 2017? The remaining part of the paper will outline the main challenges for Serbia in the next few years

¹⁵ “Serbia welcomes EP ratification of SAA,” *SETimes.com*, January 20, 2011, http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2011/01/20/feature-01.

¹⁶ “EUROPA - Press Releases - Commission welcomes Council's decision to start the ratification process of the Stabilisation and Association agreement with Serbia,” June 14, 2010, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/731&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>.

¹⁷ It is outside the scope of the current paper to discuss the special case of Kosovo, under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/99. However, it will appear in relation with Serbia’s accession and as a problem Serbia has to face during future accession negotiation.

using the previous described analysis of the main actors in the process and their possible engagement in rhetorical actions. As mentioned in previous part, for the current argument it is irrelevant if an actor genuinely adheres to certain values or tries to mask its self-interest under rhetorically norm-based arguments.

During the last enlargement process towards CEE countries, a key moment was the *political decision* to enlarge; from then on each further step looked like a logical follow-up to this decision and difficult to oppose.¹⁸ Still, it is unclear when actually that decision was made. Or, even more complicated, it is possible to think of the enlargement not as a result of a unique decision but as a process shaped by of a series of important decisions: from the European Council meeting in Copenhagen in 1993, through the European Council meeting in Luxembourg in December 1997 to the European Council meeting in Helsinki in December 1999 where the final list of countries was established.¹⁹

Similarly, for the Western Balkans the starting point can be considered the European Council summit in Thessaloniki in 2003. Indeed, looking from outside the Balkans, the 2003 framework offered them a robust European perspective. For countries like the Republic of Moldova the best offer available is to “share everything with the Union but institutions” through European Neighborhood Policy²⁰ a situation they are trying to escape in order to obtain an unambiguous path towards EU membership.²¹ Therefore, by comparison, the potential candidate status that Western Balkans countries have gained after Thessaloniki Summit represents an explicit promise for their accession to EU and it proved to be enough powerful to drive them (so far, in the case of Serbia) through political and economic reforms.²²

¹⁸ Schimmelfennig, “The Community Trap,” 75.

¹⁹ “When did negotiations begin on the enlargement of the EU in 2004?,” *EU Information Centre, Denmark*, August 12, 2005, http://www.eu-oplysningen.dk/euo_en/spsv/all/15/?print=1.

²⁰ “EUROPA - Press Releases - Romano Prodi President of the European Commission A Wider Europe - A Proximity Policy as the key to stability "Peace, Security And Stability International Dialogue and the Role of the EU" Sixth ECSA-World Conference. Jean Monnet Project. Brussels,” December 5, 2002, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/02/619&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>.

²¹ “Chisinaul isi doreste ca viitorul Acord politic cu UE sa prevada perspective clare de aderare,” *Unimedia Moldova*, November 7, 2009, <http://unimedia.md/?mod=news&id=14333>.

²² Frank Schimmelfennig and Hanno Scholtz, “EU Democracy Promotion in the European Neighbourhood,” *European Union Politics* 9, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 187 -215.

4. EU and Serbia: looking to the future or back to the past?

Beyond geographical proximity of CEE and Western Balkans, everybody seems to agree that the differences between the two groups of states require specific approaches. The peculiarity and, at the same time, the main difficulty in the Western Balkans case is the problem of confronting the wounds of the war during the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. “To come to terms with the past” is an expression which in reality has a lot of ramifications: from addressing refugees’ situation to assuming responsibilities and from capturing war crimes indictees to guaranteeing ethnic minority rights inside the borders resulted from the past confrontation.

In the following, the remaining part of the paper will try only to exemplify how various actors in the process could use value related arguments in connection with two specific issues, namely the cooperation with ICTY and the Kosovo issue. By doing so, important factors of the ongoing process of Serbia – EU relations are not tackled, as for example the rise of anti-European political forces in Serbia and the development of the internal political scene.

4.1 The cooperation of Serbia with ICTY

Despite the good premises opened by 2003 Thessaloniki Summit the relations between Serbia and EU since then featured not only successes but also failures and stops. The blocking of Interim Agreement by the Netherlands in 2008 resembled the “freezing” of EC-Greece Agreement in late 1960s for the use of value-based arguments, namely the allegedly lack of “full cooperation” of Serbian authorities with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Despite the capture of Bosnian Serb ex-president Radovan Karadzic, the Netherlands insisted on the necessity of arresting the Bosnian Serb military commander Ratko Mladic for de-blocking the Agreement. In December 2009 the Netherlands agreed, with the words of a Dutch diplomat, “to unblock entry into force of the trade agreement following the views from the (U.N. war crimes tribunal) prosecutor”.²³ Although Ratko Mladic is charged with

²³ “Ministers clear obstacle blocking Serbia-EU talks,” *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*, December 8, 2009, <http://www.rnw.nl/international-justice/article/ministers-clear-obstacle-blocking-serbia-eu-talks>.

the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica where U.N. peacekeeping troops were mainly Dutch, it is difficult to explain the blocking of the Agreement in terms of national interest of the Netherlands.

This is actually one of the key enduring problems of Serbia which can negatively affect future accession negotiations. Until the capture of the two war crimes indictees still at large, Ratko Mladic and Goran Hadzic, the full cooperation of Serbia with ICTY could be used as an argument against Serbia at any time during accession process. As the Netherlands has already proved with the Interim Agreement, even in the last stage of the process a Member State could invoke this argument, due to unanimity rule required in such situations, and block the ratification of the accession treaty.

4.2 The Kosovo issue

Although usually regarded as a problem only in Serbia-EU relations, the final status of Kosovo is a problem *per se* for EU. It is difficult to understand how the EU could continue to be consistent on the Kosovo issue since there is no common position on the status of the province after the declaration of its independence. Some of the Member States immediately recognized the independence; others were persuaded to do so after some time, while a group of remaining five – Greece, Romania, Spain, Cyprus and Slovakia – is still firm on their initial position: no recognition whatsoever. The risk of speaking with too many voices increases with the numbers of actors involved in the process. Besides the individual positions of the Member States, representatives and members of institutions inside EU are expressing positions sometimes totally opposing one to each other as in the following two examples.

On the one hand, there are supporters of an approach which conditions any step of Serbia toward joining the EU by a previous recognition of the independence of Kosovo. This position was voiced in January 2011, among others, by EP rapporteur for Kosovo Ulrike Lunacek who has emphasized that “no country that does not recognize another country” will in the future be allowed to join the EU, because of the Cyprus precedent. It is not the aim of this article to make an argument on this, but making an argument the other way around is also possible, namely to use Kosovo as a precedent for requesting independence for the Turkish Republic of Northern

Cyprus.²⁴ In the same time, exactly the Cyprus precedent is used as an argument for both Serbia and the European states which are not willing to link the EU accession and Kosovo recognition. Because the recognition-accession linkage is not self-evident and cannot stand as an argument against Serbia, Lunacek performs a rhetorical action by the introduction of the other argument, the compliance with ICTY: “Serbia is hopeful of receiving candidate status on December of this year. This remains to be seen, because Serbia must also fulfill some other conditions, such as full cooperation with the Hague Tribunal”.²⁵

On the other hand and almost simultaneously with the statement expressed by MEP Ulrike Lunacek, Spanish Foreign Minister Trinidad Jimenez echoed the opposite view which disconnects recognition and accession to EU while maintaining the position of Spain of non-recognizing Kosovo’s independence²⁶. Even more important, he made it clear that the Spain remains firm on this issue²⁷ against the last year advisory opinion rendered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, which considered that adoption of the declaration of independence of 17 February 2008 did not violate any applicable rule of international law²⁸. In between the two positions, there are other countries which, like Poland²⁹ and Hungary³⁰, recognized the independence of Kosovo, but in the same time did not condition accession of Serbia into the EU by recognition of Kosovo’s independence.

At least until the issue of Kosovo is not solved inside EU and Member States are divided on the recognition of Kosovo’s independence, both “drivers” and “brakemen” of the enlargement can use moral-based arguments in favor of one of the parts. Since it is unclear the final result of

²⁴ “Kosovo: An Example for Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus?,” *The Journal of Turkish Weekly* (September 2, 2010), <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/106968/-jtw-interview-kosovo-an-example-for-turkish-republic-of-northern-cyprus.html>.

²⁵ “Recognize Kosovo, then join EU,” *B92*, January 19, 2011, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2011&mm=01&dd=19&nav_id=72218.

²⁶ “Spain supports for Serbia’s European Union bid,” *Spain Review*, January 14, 2011, <http://www.spainreview.net/index.php/2011/01/14/spain-supports-for-serbias-european-union-bid/>.

²⁷ “Spain reaffirms stance on Kosovo,” *B92*, January 12, 2011, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2011&mm=01&dd=13&nav_id=72088.

²⁸ International Court of Justice, “Press Release, Accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo Advisory Opinion” (July 22, 2010), <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/141/16012.pdf>.

²⁹ “Diplomatic Diary: Poland backs Serbia’s EU integration,” *World News*, November 9, 2010, <http://world-countries.net/archives/90710>.

³⁰ “Hungary supports Serbia’s EU integration, parliamentary committee head says,” *Politics.Hu*, January 17, 2010, <http://www.politics.hu/20100217/hungary-supports-serbias-eu-integration-parliamentary-committee-head-says>.

the process, rhetorical action can be used by all parties in the process to promote their own interest.

Concluding remarks

The current process of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans is a process which implies a variety of actors, political and non-political, beyond and above the level of nation-states. It is a complex phenomenon in which surprising factors can change the course of events. The current paper has focused on how value-based arguments and principles related to liberal identity of EU are mixed in the process by both Member States politicians and EU actors. However, a comprehensive picture of the process should include a map of strategic and economic interests and of EU Member States in the region. From an even broader perspective, International Relations scholars could claim that the map should include more than anything else the strategic and economic interests of great powers from outside EU. Indeed, the American foreign policy maintains an important power in shaping future development in the region although the US role has been decreasing once the EU assumed greater responsibilities especially after NATO military intervention in Kosovo in 1999. Furthermore, Chinese investments and Russian gas entered the attention of the Serbian politics and mass-media in a period in which the votes of the two countries can indefinitely block any recognition of Kosovo independence in the Security Council of UN. The analysis proposed in this paper seeks to contribute to this picture by stressing the importance of values and identity related arguments in the process of EU enlargement toward Western Balkans.*

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