



# **EU integration and party politics in the Balkans**

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## **The EPC's Programme on European Politics and Institutions**

*With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the new focus of this programme is on adapting the EU's institutional architecture to take account of the changed set-up and on bringing the EU closer to its citizens.*

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# Table of Contents

<i>About the authors</i> .....	v
<i>List of tables</i> .....	vii
<i>Foreword</i> .....	ix
<i>Executive summary</i> .....	xi
<i>Abbreviations</i> .....	xiii
1. Introduction.....	1
<i>by Corina Stratulat</i>	
2. Croatia's party system - From Tuđmanism to EU membership .....	13
<i>by Andrew Konitzer</i>	
3. European integration and party politics in Montenegro .....	31
<i>by Marko Sošić and Jovana Marović</i>	
4. The European question in Serbia's party politics .....	47
<i>by Igor Bandović and Marko Vujačić</i>	
5. The EU in Macedonian party politics - Consolidating and dividing .....	69
<i>by Simonida Kacarska</i>	
6. Albanian political parties, inter-party relations and the EU .....	83
<i>by Odeta Barbullushi</i>	
7. The limits of the EU's transformative power in Bosnia-Herzegovina – Implications for party politics .....	95
<i>by Bodo Weber</i>	
8. Conclusions.....	107
<i>by Corina Stratulat</i>	



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## *List of tables*

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2.1	Key dates in Croatia's integration effort	17
2.2	Post-2000 coalition governments in Croatia	18
2.3	Support for Croatia's accession to the EU (2000-2011)	22
3.1	The Montenegrin governments since 1991	32
3.2	Voter turnout in Montenegrin elections since the 1990s	33
3.3	Composition of current Montenegrin parliament	34
3.4	Public support for EU integration in Montenegro	36
3.5	Public trust in political parties in Montenegro (2009-2013)	42
4.1	Serbia's milestones on the EU path	50
4.2	Presidents, Prime Ministers and coalition governments in Serbia	51
4.3	Public support for Serbia's membership in the European Union	62
5.1	Governing coalitions	72
5.2	Ethnic differences in support for Euro-Atlantic integration	81
6.1	Results of Albanian parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2013	89
6.2	Public support for EU membership in Albania	93





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## Foreword

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The results of the European Parliament's elections of May 2014 were another reminder of the importance of political parties as a lynchpin between citizens, and their representative institutions and governments. They were also yet another ringing bell of the growing distance between the former and the latter. There is a somewhat bitter irony in the EU's history: it has been a unique international example of external anchor and promoter of domestic democratisation processes, yet seems incapable of fostering healthy democratic practices and attachments within. It has become commonplace to claim that enlargement has been the most successful EU policy, also thanks to its transformative impact on democratising countries. Yet it is also in these countries which recently benefited from the EU's transformational pull – and not just in the tired European democracies – that discontent or lack of interest in European politics has become apparent, with record low turnout for elections and backlashes in various countries, while in many member states, old and new, 'anti-' parties are on the rise.

At its heart, the trouble with democracy is the underlying question of this collected volume. The way in which it develops this question is particularly enlightening for readers interested in political parties, democracy and its weaknesses, EU enlargement, populism, and the Balkan countries. Drawing from the history of democracy and democratisation, and from experiences in Central and Eastern Europe through the accession process and membership since 2004, this paper examines the development of political parties and dynamics in the Balkan states. The thoroughly researched and well-argued chapters draw out the postwar and state-building specificities of the region, while identifying similarities with the rest of Europe as a whole, and with the accession process of the Central and Eastern European states. In doing so, it sheds light on key issues pertaining to the current accession process, arguing that the EU policy should address more overtly the role of political parties as key protagonists of historical change.

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## *Executive summary*

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Democracy has become the *lingua franca* of the European Union's enlargement to the Balkans. The notions of free and fair elections, robust rule of law, effective public administration, healthy civil society, and free media are by now the distinctive features of that vocabulary, which has expanded with every previous round of EU widening. Yet for all the eloquence of democratic words exchanged for more than a decade by the Union and the countries of the region, the eloquence of democratic action in the Balkans still seems inadequate.

Throughout the region, popularly elected leaders consistently fail to meet the democratic standards set by the EU and, more importantly, they fall short of their voters' expectations. Distrust in representative institutions and disengagement from political life runs dramatically high among the people of the Balkan countries, and this generalised sense of dissatisfaction is starting to breed cynicism also towards the idea of a better future inside the Union.

But if Balkan governments are the common source of disappointment both for the EU and the electorates in the region, and if political parties are not mere appendages but the very backbone of democratic government, to what extent is the Union's democratic agenda in the Balkans concerned with the condition of political parties?

The five country case studies included in this paper suggest that the issue of political party development and interaction in the Balkans is not systematically addressed by the democratic conditionality for accession. The EU meddles in inter-party relations and party links to society in the aspiring countries of the region but it does so mostly in reaction to specific problems, largely indirectly through the interpretation of conditions by domestic actors, and not always with long-term positive consequences.

Whether it pits insiders against outsiders in a party system, whether it makes or breaks governing coalitions, and whether it fosters the (de)politicisation of policymaking, this study shows that the interplay between EU integration and national politics in the region is both consequential for the quality of Balkan democracies, as well as reminiscent of the Western and Central and Eastern European experience.

To guarantee lasting peace and the sustainability of the democratic transformation in the Balkans, the EU should get interested in party politics in the Balkans. The European Commission should devise and treat well thought through standards of democratic performance of political parties and party systems as any other formal accession requirements. More attention and support should also be given to boosting political party activism and citizen's engagement with political life in the Balkan countries.

Given the similar ways in which the EU integration process impacts political party dynamics in the member states and the aspiring Balkan countries, investing in finding solutions to common worrying trends – such as the party-society gap or political party monopolies – is a sensible course of action not only for the sake of the Balkan polities but also for the future of European democracy.



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## Abbreviations

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BH	Bosniak Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CSOs	Civil society organisations
DOS	Democratic Opposition of Serbia
DPA	Democratic Party of Albanians
DPA	Dayton Peace Agreement
DPS	Democratic Party of Socialists
DF	Democratic Front
DS	Democratic Party
DSS	Democratic Party of Serbia
DUI	Democratic Union of Integration
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission
EUPM	European Union Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina
Fidesz	Hungarian Federation of Young Democrats
FKGP	Hungarian Smallholders' Party
FYROM	former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GSS	Civic Alliance of Serbia
HDZ	Croatian Democratic Union
HDZ BiH	Croatian Democratic Community
HLAD	High Level Accession Dialogue
HNS	Croatian People's Party
HSL	Croatian Social Liberal Party
HSP	Croatian Party of Rights
HSS	Croatian Peasant Party
HZDS	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
IDS	Istrian Democratic Party
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MP	member of parliament
MEP	member of the European parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCEI	National Council for EU Integration
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NLA	National Liberation Front
NOVA	New Serb Democracy
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFA	Ohrid Framework Agreement
OHR	Office of the High Representative
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

OSFA	Open Society Foundation for Albania
PDP	Party for Democratic Prosperity
PIC	Peace Implementation Council
PzP	Movement for Changes
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RLI	Rule of Law Index
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SAP	Stabilisation and Association Process
SCG	Union of Serbia and Montenegro
SDA	Party of Democratic Action
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SDP BiH	Social Democratic Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina
SDS	Serbian Democratic Party
SDSM	Socialist Democratic Union of Macedonia
SDSS	Independent Democratic Serb Party
SIGMA	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
SNSD	Alliance of Independent Social Democrats
SNP	Socialist People's Party
SNS	Serbian Progressive Party
SP	Stability Pact
SPO	Serbian Renewal Movement
SPS	Socialist Party of Serbia
SR	Republika Srpska
SRS	Serbian Radical Party
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
URS	United Regions of Serbia
VMRO-DPMNE	Internal Democratic Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity

# INTRODUCTION

BY CORINA STRATULAT

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1.1	EU integration, democracy and party politics	2
1.2	The Balkans in comparative perspective	4
1.3	Lessons from the 'West' and 'East'	7

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Imagine a situation in which a referendum is organised in an autonomous republic – let us call it Crimea – on the right of self-determination among its citizens, and that turnout is 83% and the result 97% in support of one of the options put to vote. The apparent democratic credentials of such a mass plebiscite, giving clear expression to the seemingly resolute will of the people, would *per se* be hard to write off. But suppose that the referendum was invoked by a parliament set up at gunpoint and run by a party that won a whole of 4% in the latest general elections; that the campaign was a shameless propaganda by a puppet local government which cracked down on any type of opposition; and that the vote took place under foreign occupation of most of Crimea's territory and strategic facilities. In that case, the smokescreen of legitimacy for the exercise would surely be shattered, exposing blatant abuse of first-order democratic tools and basic freedoms.

Crimea is arguably an extreme example in what is otherwise an increasingly common phenomenon, especially among Third Wave democracies: multiparty elections as well as other institutional arrangements “for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide”<sup>1</sup> are made use of by phony democratic leaders in order to wrap in the mantle of legitimacy restrictions on rights and liberties, the rule of law or the separation of state powers. In other words, democracy might have become “the only game in town”<sup>2</sup> in many places around the globe but there is pronounced variation in the way it is ‘played’ in practice, with many countries flaunting the ‘democracy’ label while pursuing goals incompatible with that badge of honour. Precisely for that reason, Fareed Zakaria insists that “[a]s we approach the next century, our task is to make democracy safe for the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Zakaria's message rings particularly true for the European Union, which ever since the fall of communism in the early 1990s has assumed a key role in supporting, such as via (pre-)/accession strategies, the democratic transitions of its immediate neighbours, including the current EU-hopeful

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<sup>1</sup> Schumpeter, Joseph A. (1947), *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> Linz, Juan J. and Stepan, Alfred (1996), *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and post-communist Europe*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, p. 5, based on a phrase from Giuseppe de Palma.

<sup>3</sup> Zakaria, Fareed (1997), “The rise of illiberal democracy”, *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 76, Number 6, pp. 22-43, quote from p. 43.

countries in the Balkans.<sup>4</sup> By making the promise of membership strictly conditional upon the adoption of a broad array of norms, practices and far-reaching reforms, the EU is said to have found the most effective means of projecting democracy beyond its borders.<sup>5</sup> And so, still today, the EU dangles the ‘carrot’ of accession in the hope of completing the democratic transformation and modernisation of politics, institutions and economies in the latest aspiring countries, which come from the Balkan region.

But does enlargement and democratisation necessarily go hand in hand? What kind of democracy does the EU promote and seek to consolidate in the Balkans? Has the introduction of free and fair elections produced a government *for* the people in the region? To what extent is the Union concerned with political party development and party system dynamics in the Balkans? How has the EU defined the standards of behaviour for elected regimes in the Balkan countries to judge the democratic quality of their political systems? Which issues and lessons learned have inspired the EU’s approach to the democratisation of the region? And will these suffice to ensure that the Balkan countries do not fall back on their democratic achievements or undermine the Union from within, once they become member states?

## 1.1 EU INTEGRATION, DEMOCRACY AND PARTY POLITICS

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The model of democracy promotion through integration was developed in preparation for the EU’s expansion towards the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries and defines now also the Union’s engagement with the Balkan aspirants. However, already in the case of the 2004 and 2007 rounds of enlargement, the effects of the integration process on the CEE democratic transitions proved complex – and not unequivocally positive.

The externally driven and non-negotiable conditionality for EU accession strengthened central executives (as the main interlocutors of the European Commission) at the expense of national parliaments, and stifled debate over competing reform options in the CEE countries. As a result, people lost trust in their political leaders – perceived as corrupt and self-interested – and developed increasingly contentious appreciations about the process of European integration, which seemed to allow voters to “change governments far more easily than [...] policies.”<sup>6</sup> Hence the paradox: while enlargement led to the development of CEE democratic institutions, it simultaneously weakened a central tenet of democratic societies – the ability of voters to influence how they are governed – rocking the concept of political representation to its very core.

The growing incapacity of political parties to give voice to their electorates has not only reduced the ability of parties to engage the ordinary citizen with conventional party politics but it has also exposed parties to the constant challenge of legitimising their governance and of handling populist outbidding. The democratic backlash<sup>7</sup> witnessed in countries like Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Romania shortly after their EU entry was to a large extent fuelled by this technocratic ascendance and consensual politics of the integration period, and offered clues

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<sup>4</sup> That includes: Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and, before 1 July 2013, when it acceded to the EU, also Croatia.

<sup>5</sup> Dimitrova, Antoaneta and Pridham, Geoffrey (2004), “International actors and democracy promotion in Central and Eastern Europe: the integration model and its limits”, *Democratization*, Volume 11, Number 5, pp. 91-112. See also, Lavenex, Sandra and Schimmelfennig, Frank (2011), “EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: from leverage to governance?”, *Democratization*, Volume 18, Number 4, pp. 885-909.

<sup>6</sup> Krastev, Ivan (2002), “The Balkans: democracy without choices”, *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 13, Number 3, pp. 39-53.

<sup>7</sup> See the 2007 special edition, “Is East-Central Europe Backsliding?”, of the *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 18, Number 4, which is dedicated to this topic.



about the ways in which the EU's democratic transformation of the region had been merely skin-deep and even reversible.

To be sure, elsewhere in the EU, among the long-standing democracies of the member states, similar trends are also ever more obvious. As Mair puts it, “[n]ever in the history of postwar Europe have governments and their political leaders – at the national level – been held in such low regard.”<sup>8</sup> And since much of what governments do nowadays is linked to ‘Europe’ (that is, negotiating, transposing and implementing EU decisions), mobilisation against political elites often takes on a Eurosceptic hue. This feeds into the already unprecedentedly negative public opinion about the process and products of European integration revealed, for instance, by Eurobarometer polls. But it contributes also to the growing popularity in many different member states of political parties with a strong populist and Eurosceptic rhetoric, demonstrated most recently by the success of the “anti” parties in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament.

The fact that Euroscepticism and cynicism about politics are related shows how the interplay between the EU and national political arenas can have knock-on effects on democracy and the future of the European project. If, according to Schattschneider, “political parties created democracy and [...] modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties”<sup>9</sup>, then the view that national politicians are failing in their representative role prompts a rethink of what democracy entails. Likewise, if the EU and national levels of governance are by now difficult to separate and closely tied up with one another – both in the member states and the aspiring countries – then deficiencies in the functioning of European democracies cannot be understood unless they are seen in the context of wider problems with the Union's integration strategies.

The Balkan countries supply an ideal testing ground for the EU's approach to democratisation, and, more specifically, to political parties as markers of democratic government. For as long as a democratic *acquis* is still lacking inside the Union, the political conditionality to which all the applicant countries in the region are subjected provides the clearest definition available of what ‘Europe’ understands by democracy. And the condition of political parties – as shaped by the integration process and the dynamics of the domestic party system – supplies the best possible evidence of the nature of specific political regimes in the Balkan countries.<sup>10</sup>

Already the signs throughout the region are not exactly heartening: dramatically low levels of trust in political parties and other national democratic institutions; a gradual popular withdrawal from conventional politics (such as falling electoral participation, depleted party membership rates and scarce party-related activism); a subtle concentration of political power in a few hands and away from any viable political alternative/opposition; and a sharp polarisation among the main political actors. Moreover, if such trends seem by now at home in the Balkans it may not be so much in spite but precisely because of the European integration process, which has exported them from the Union to the region. Much like in the EU, this could herald the onset of the crisis of representation in the Balkans, with its immediate fall-outs: a widening gap between citizens and their political leaders as well as a surge in rhetorical and actual political protest by frustrated citizens and populist parties.

But at least any potential procedural or conceptual shortcomings identified in the EU's democratisation efforts still stand a chance to be remedied in the case of the Balkans, given that the Union's leverage is unlikely to vanish until these countries become fully-fledged members. And the manner and extent to

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<sup>8</sup> Mair, Peter (2006), “Polity-scepticism, party failings and the challenge to European democracy”, Uhlenbeck Lecture 24, Wassenaar: Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study.

<sup>9</sup> Schattschneider, Elmer Eric (1942), *Party government: American government in action*, New York: Rinehart and Co., p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* See also, Ladrech, Robert (2001), “Europeanisation and political parties: towards a framework for analysis”, *Working Paper No. 7*, Keele European Parties Research Unit (KEPRU); Sitter (2002), *op. cit.*

which the EU integration agenda finds expression in different national contexts and alters the parameters of party politics in the Balkans can offer insights into the ability and willingness of the countries in the region to undertake sustainable democratic reforms and bring a positive contribution to the European project, post-accession.

## 1.2 THE BALKANS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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With some ten difficult years down the road of wholesale economic, political and societal transformation – precipitated by the aim to join the EU – the Balkan countries have their own story to tell about the “domestication of Europe”<sup>11</sup>, as seen through the prism of their national political parties and party systems. The next chapters of this paper will cover in some detail the experience of six countries in the region, namely: Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Albania, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This is not to suggest that the Balkan narrative on European integration would be qualitatively different from that in the member states or the CEE countries. If anything, there are reasons to expect that political life in relation to the EU should be broadly comparable, and so considerations that were found relevant in Western and East-Central Europe are expected to apply also in the Balkans. This comparative framework is deemed suitable especially given that Balkan political parties are not unlike their EU counterparts in terms of the basic goals that induce their behaviour: maximising votes, gaining office and shaping policy.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, across these regions, political parties remain the main agents of the EU, as well as the protagonists of the integration project both in Brussels (where they negotiate or vote on policies in their capacity of national representatives) and at ‘home’ (where they prepare the membership bid and/or implement EU policies/decisions in government or opposition).

Clearly, a number of elements in the ‘strategic environment’ of the Balkan political parties set the region apart. For instance, the Balkans might share with Central and Eastern Europe the experience of democratic regime-building and consolidation, while in the West, European integration arrived only after the full democratisation of most countries, when, for example, party systems were fairly well-established.<sup>13</sup> However, the need to rebuild postwar institutions and societies, and to resolve complex statehood issues, gives a unique character to the democratisation of the Balkans. This could make the Balkan aspirants worse equipped than their CEE predecessors to deal with the conditionality for accession. But it might also provide Balkan political entrepreneurs with opportunities to put a novel spin on EU integration, engaging in new debates and policy areas, and advocating issues hitherto underrepresented or absent in the politics of the member states/CEE countries.

Moreover, the ‘hurdle’ of accession for the Balkan countries – especially the political dimension of the conditionality – has become far greater, making their access into the European ‘club’ progressively more difficult to secure. As in previous rounds of enlargement, the essence of the political conditions is

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<sup>11</sup> Wallace, Helen (1999), “Whose Europe is it anyway? The 1998 Stein Rokkan lecture”, *European Journal of Political Research*, Volume 35, Number 3, pp. 287-306.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Batory, Agnes (2002), “Attitudes to Europe: a comparative politics approach to the issue of European Union membership in Hungarian party politics”, PhD Thesis, Centre of International Studies, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Sitter Nick (2002), “Opposing Europe: Euroscepticism, opposition, and party competition”, Opposing Europe Research Network, *Working Paper No. 9*, Sussex European Institute, both of whom draw on Downs, Anthony (1957), *An economic theory of democracy*, New York: Harper and Row; and Sartori, Giovanni (1976), *Parties and party systems: a framework for analysis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>13</sup> Henderson, Karen (2002), “Exceptionalism or convergence? Euroscepticism and party systems in Central and Eastern Europe”, Paper presented to ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Turin, p. 4.

captured in the Copenhagen criteria<sup>14</sup>, which require any aspirant country to achieve stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities. However, in practice, this has acquired a very precise and detailed meaning for the Balkans.

In 2011, a novel and more rigorous approach was proposed by the European Commission<sup>15</sup>, and endorsed by the Council, building mostly on lessons from the Union's eastward expansions. In a nutshell, aspiring countries must now get a head start on rule of law reforms, develop a solid track record of results and adopt inclusive democratic processes (accommodating parliaments, civil society and other relevant stakeholders) to support their national European integration effort.

The EU's increased focus on 'good governance' criteria (such as maintenance of rule of law, independent judiciary, efficient public administration, the fight against organised crime and corruption, civil society development, and media freedom) was visible already during Croatia's accession. Yet the new strategy was for the first time reflected in a formal manner in the framework adopted in June 2012 for negotiations with Montenegro, which foresees that Chapter 23 (on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and Chapter 24 (on Justice, Freedom and Security) are opened in the early stages of the talks and closed only at the very end of the process. The same approach was then fully integrated in the EU's negotiations with Serbia, which kicked-off in January 2014, and will continue to be observed in all future accession talks with the remaining countries in the Balkans. Moreover, the heavy weight of rule of law issues can be felt now also before the actual negotiations, as was amply demonstrated, for example, by the key priorities set out in past years with a view to allowing Montenegro and Albania to advance on their respective EU paths.<sup>16</sup>

Equally important, the method for applying this enhanced political conditionality has become more exacting, by tying any steps forward more strictly to implementation. New mechanisms were introduced, for instance: opening, intermediary, equilibrium, and closing benchmarks; safeguard clauses to extend monitoring; more routine procedures to suspend negotiations; early screening processes; and the requirement for countries to demonstrate that they are actually able to put into effect the policies adopted.

By October 2013, in its latest enlargement strategy, the Commission's motto read: "fundamentals first", making direct reference to the fact that "[d]emocracy is more than the conduct of free and fair elections. It is about strong, accountable institutions and participatory processes"<sup>17</sup> that can secure the rule of law principle on which the EU is founded. The importance of strengthening national parliaments, public administrations, courts, and enforcement agencies, as well as of fostering a culture of consensus across parties and the wider society were firmly anchored at the top of the Union's 'to-do' list for the Balkans.

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<sup>14</sup> These were formulated by the European Council in 1992 and also demand of any EU aspirant country a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive and market forces in the EU, as well as the ability to assume and implement into domestic legislation the obligations of membership, that is the *acquis communautaire*. The EU's capacity to absorb new members while maintaining the momentum of integration is further mentioned as an important consideration.

<sup>15</sup> *Enlargement strategy and main challenges 2011-2012*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, COM(2011) 666 final, Brussels, 12 October 2011.

<sup>16</sup> For example, in December 2011, the European Council indicated that Montenegro will receive the green light to open accession talks with the EU if it produces results in the fight against corruption and organised crime and in October 2012, the Commission recommended that Albania be granted candidate status if it adopts key measures in the areas of judicial and public administration reform and if it revises its parliamentary rules of procedures.

<sup>17</sup> *Enlargement strategy and main challenges 2013-2014*, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, COM(2013) 700 final, Brussels, 16 October 2013, quotes from pp. 2, 8.

To help the countries of the region meet these ambitious democratic targets, the EU has set forth pre-accession packages<sup>18</sup> and works closely with European agencies like the Europol, Eurojust and Frontex, as well as with international organisations such as the Council of Europe (including the Venice Commission), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (OECD/SIGMA). In addition, the transnational links established between major Balkan political parties and European parties/party groups in the European Parliament seek to assist party development and ideological structuring in the region.

Furthermore, in response to security concerns and enduring war legacies in the Balkans, the Union has devised unparalleled and politically-sensitive conditions to be fulfilled by the countries of the region before accession, when the EU has learned that its leverage was most robust. Chief among those are the requirement of full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), regional cooperation and reconciliation, the resolution of bi-lateral standoffs (such as between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia over the name issue) or of statehood (most notably for Serbia and Kosovo), and refugee return.

And apart from the fact that the bar for accession has been raised high for the Balkan aspirants, the member states also seem to favour now a much more hands-on approach to the process than in previous rounds. Compared to the past, the frequency of instances in which the member states interfere to block or delay decisions in the Council appears to have increased, including in relation to early milestones on the EU track (for instance, granting candidate status to a country). Moreover, especially in the context of the ongoing crisis, such incursions often tend to be motivated by domestic politics in the member states rather than by assessments of the situation in the region according to the European Commission.<sup>19</sup> This tendency to depart from agreed standards and procedures bestows an unpredictable and protracted nature on the current enlargement and could generate frustration, and nurture friction and opposition on the part of domestic actors in the Balkans, possibly more so than was the case for the CEE countries.

Undoubtedly, differences exist also within the Balkan region as a whole, if one distinguishes for instance, between countries: small or big (such as Montenegro versus Serbia), ethnically diverse or homogeneous (like Bosnia-Herzegovina versus Albania), Catholic or Orthodox or Muslim (for instance, Croatia versus Serbia versus Albanians throughout the region), with a harsher or milder communist past (that is, Albania versus the ex-Yugoslav republics), with or without war legacies (such as Croatia/Serbia/Bosnia-Herzegovina versus Albania/Montenegro/the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and with agreed or contested borders (for example, Montenegro versus Serbia-Kosovo). Such dissimilarities could translate in each case into catalysts or tall obstacles for the region's common task of democratic consolidation and EU accession.

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<sup>18</sup> Including, for instance, substantial financial commitments made under its Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) – which between 2007-2013 provided over 30 million euro to capacity building of national parliamentary assemblies, ombudsmen and national audit institutions, and almost 190 million euro to support civil society organisations – and which was launched for a second time (IPA II) in 2014, with funds of 11.7 billion earmarked *inter alia* for the consolidation of democratic institutions and the development of the civil society sector.

<sup>19</sup> Rosa, Balfour and Corina, Stratulat (2013), “Between engagement and cold feet: ten years of the EU in the Western Balkans”, in Prifti, Eviola (ed.), *The European future of the Western Balkans: Thessaloniki @ 10*, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Study, pp. 19-25. See also, Hillion, Christophe (2010), “The creeping nationalisation of the enlargement process”, *SIEPS Paper*, Stockholm: November. The EPC is currently running a project that investigates the nature and potential implications of member states’ interference in the process of EU enlargement to the Balkans.

Moreover, the Balkan countries are at different stages of integration with the EU, ranging from the frontrunner Croatia, which has completed the accession negotiations in 2011 and became the 28<sup>th</sup> member state on 1 July 2013, to Kosovo<sup>20</sup>, which is now starting to institutionalise relations with the EU but has the membership prospects derailed by its unresolved statehood. In-between are Montenegro, which began its accession talks with the EU in 2012, and Serbia, which started negotiations in January 2014; the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), which was granted candidate status in 2005 but has not yet opened its EU talks; Albania, which only just became a candidate country in June 2014; and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU but is still not in a position to apply for membership.

By the same token, the Balkan countries differ with regard to how well they function in democratic terms. According to the *Freedom House* (2012), Croatia, Serbia, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Montenegro are 'semi-consolidated democracies', Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina are 'transitional governments' or 'hybrid regimes', and Kosovo is a 'semi-consolidated authoritarian regime'. Likewise, the *Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index* (2012) indicates that only Croatia and Serbia qualify as 'democracies in consolidation', whereas the other Balkan countries may be collectively described as 'defective democracies': they hold relatively free elections but do not adequately ensure political and civil rights or the effective separation of state powers.<sup>21</sup> Finally, while formal democracy (verified by the adoption of civil and political rights) is more or less in place throughout the region (with Croatia, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ahead of Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina), effective democracy (certified by a robust rule of law to enforce existing constitutional rules and procedures) is still deficient, to various extents across the different Balkan countries.<sup>22</sup>

Diversity – both in terms of European integration and democratisation – might have implications for the scope and degree of EU impact in individual countries, as the section below explains. Overall, however, these elements of divergence do not cancel out the possibility of attempting to compare across the region, as well as across the West, Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, in order to see whether and how the experiences of individual Balkan countries fit with each other and in the wider EU context. Adopting a broadly comparative perspective might also help to settle the issue of 'Balkan particularism' and to reveal negative trends or examples of best practice in the EU's approach to democratic conditionality. The final chapter of this paper returns to these ideas with some concrete answers and recommendations.

### 1.3 LESSONS FROM THE 'WEST' AND 'EAST'

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What is known about the interplay between national party politics and European integration is based on the experience of 'old' and 'young' member states, on which the bulk of the literature has focused. The intention here is not to provide an exhaustive review of the findings on the topic but rather to lay out four general observations documented and verified in previous analyses of Western and Central and Eastern European countries about the manner in which European integration is mediated by and affects national parties/party systems. These broad-brush arguments will be

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<sup>20</sup> Under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

<sup>21</sup> Rosa, Balfour and Stratulat, Corina (2013), "Democratising the Western Balkans: where does the region stand?" in Prifti (2013), *op. cit.*, pp. 27-33, especially pp. 28-30. See also, Diamond, Larry (2002), "Thinking about hybrid regimes", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 13, Number 2, pp. 21-35; O'Donnell, Guillermo (2004), "Why rule of law matters", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 15, Number 1, pp. 5-19, and Merkel, Wolfgang (2004), "Embedded and effective democracies", *Democratization*, Volume 11, Number 5, pp. 33-58.

<sup>22</sup> See Rosa Balfour and Stratulat, Corina (2009), "The democratic transformation of the Balkans", *EPC Issue Paper*, No. 66, Brussels: European Policy Centre, especially pp. 5-6.

discussed in the subsequent chapters for each of the Balkan countries included in this paper. They are simply meant to offer a common starting line for the analysis, without excluding the possibility that some of these might not be pertinent, while other new factors/aspects could emerge relevant in the Balkan context. The final chapter will bring together the conclusions of all the case studies covered, and reflect on them by reference to the experience of their EU neighbours.

1. *Research suggests that a party's position in the political system has a strong bearing on its European attitude in that mainstream political parties may have fewer incentives to politicise EU integration than parties at the periphery.*<sup>23</sup>

On the one hand, this suggests that political parties holding or seeking executive power tend to “play down the differences between them on [the European] dimension”<sup>24</sup> and to “collude”<sup>25</sup> on ‘Europe’ by adopting a broad, technocratic pro-EU position, which is rarely emphasised in electoral competition. If picked up in election campaigns, ‘Europe’ is usually debated as a ‘valence issue’: parties agree that it is a matter of shared interest and argue over whom is most competent to represent it. This argument does not preclude opposition to further integration or to specific policy areas/developments, when there is a sense that ‘national interest’ might be at odds with the EU.<sup>26</sup> In such cases, Euroscepticism is likely to be the product of the dynamics between government and opposition.<sup>27</sup>

Because of the integration-related tasks that parties perform in office and the need to endorse and campaign for compromises brokered with the EU, governing parties are generally more constrained in their ability to articulate concerns with regard to European issues than parties in opposition. Conversely, the desire to make inroads into the competition for power and to increase policy influence in Brussels can actually encourage opposition parties to embrace Eurosceptic views or, in the aspirant countries, to criticise the government for its excessive/inadequate efforts to meet the conditionality for accession.

Indeed, while ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ Eurosceptic parties<sup>28</sup> are represented in the parliamentary arena of many member states, principled hostility towards the EU is very rare among parties in office. Exceptions include the presence in governing alliances of parties like the Freedom Party in Austria (1999-2002), Lega Nord in Italy (1994-1996, 2001-2005, 2005-2006, 2008-2011), the Party of Freedom in the Netherlands (2010-2012<sup>29</sup>), or the Peasants’ Party in Poland (2005-2007, of which between 2006-2007 in coalition with the radical Samoobrona and the deeply-conservative League of Polish Families, both anti-EU). The Conservative Party in the UK is then an altogether outlier to most known trends.

<sup>23</sup> Taggart, Paul and Szczerbiak, Aleks (2000), “Opposing Europe: party systems and opposition to the Union, the Euro and Europeanisation”, *Working Paper*, No. 36, Sussex European Institute.

<sup>24</sup> Hix, Simon (1999), *The political system of the European Union*, London: Macmillan, p. 162.

<sup>25</sup> Bartolini, Stefano (1999), “Political representation in loosely bounded territories: between Europe and the nation state”, Conference Paper EUR/17, Conference “Multi-level party systems: Europeanisation and the reshaping of national political representation”, Florence: European University Institute, 12/1999, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> Taggart, Paul and Szczerbiak, Aleks (2002), “The party politics of Euroscepticism in EU member and candidate states”, *Opposing Europe Research Network, Working Paper*, No. 6, Sussex European Institute, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Sitter, Nick (2001), “The politics of opposition and European integration in Scandinavia: is Euroscepticism a government-opposition dynamic?”, *West European Politics*, Volume 24, Number 4, pp. 22-39.

<sup>28</sup> According to the definition of Taggart, Paul (1998), “A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems”, *European Journal of Political Research*, Volume 33, Number 3, pp. 363-388, ‘soft’ entails qualified criticism of European integration either on grounds of particular national concerns or for particular policy reasons, while ‘hard’ involves the outright rejection of the EU.

<sup>29</sup> Agreed to support but did not have any ministers in the minority government of Prime Minister Mark Rutte, which included also the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy and the Christian Democratic Appeal party.

The same goes for the former aspirant countries of Central and Eastern Europe where Eurosceptic parties were almost invariably ‘soft’ EU antagonists and mainly so in opposition rather than government. The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) is essentially the only (or at least the most notorious) overtly Eurosceptic party which held office in the CEE countries during integration (1992-1994, 1994-1998, and 2006-2010). And the HZDS fell from grace exactly because of its anti-EU rhetoric and actions. In fact, the articulation of Eurosceptic sentiment or just “sitting on the fence”<sup>30</sup> did not bode well for many of the CEE ‘core’ parties during accession, which, as a result, lost power (for instance, the Hungarian Federation of Young Democrats (Fidesz) in 2002, the Romanian Social Democratic Party in 1996 or the Czech Civic Democratic Party in 1998).<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, political parties on the fringes of the party system – that is, with little/no prospects of entering government, usually small and extremist (in left-right terms) – may be considerably more inclined to embrace a critical EU stance than their large and moderate counterparts. Their peripheral status means that European integration/membership is a secondary issue to them, which they cannot actually influence but can at least appropriate in order to strengthen their claim as alternatives to the political mainstream and maybe even gain some visibility in the process without fears of damaging their long-term electoral fortunes. In so doing, the politicisation of the EU becomes entangled with other facets of these parties’ ideologies, tactics and protest vocabulary. As such, opposition to ‘Europe’ serves merely as a “potential touchstone of domestic dissent” or “an appendage to a more general systemic critique”.<sup>32</sup>

“Protest-based Euroscepticism seems to be the most pervasive type of EU party opposition”<sup>33</sup>, taken up, for instance, by neo-fascist, agrarian, radical populist, communist, and (ultra)nationalistic parties in both Western European and CEE countries. However, the fact that parties resorting to this strategy have usually failed to secure executive power<sup>34</sup> could entail that the adoption of Eurosceptic views is the very cause of their position on the flanks of the political system.

*2. But European integration/membership is not just a battlefield between insiders and outsiders in a political system. National parties also respond to the ‘European question’ under competitive pressures arising from inter-party relations.*<sup>35</sup>

In this line of argumentation, strategic considerations related to the search for office and/or coalition partners may prompt parties at the core as well as those at the periphery to adopt particular policies or change their EU attitudes for partisan advantage. More specifically, parties’ efforts to win votes or office is expected to compel them to formulate policies, including on ‘Europe’, that are acceptable and appealing to potential coalition partners. Whether this reflects into a toning down, abandoning or strengthening of a ‘hard’ Eurosceptic stance depends on the adversary’s strategy and success, to which political parties need to continually adjust to in multiparty systems. Here, the question is not so much if a party is indeed ‘(un)coalitionable’ (by whatever standards) but rather if the other actors – that is, domestic political parties and the EU – perceive it as such, and what the respective party is willing to do in order to boost its “coalition potential”<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> That is, declaring a desire to join the EU while behaving in a manner which makes it impossible. According to Henderson, Karen (2001), “Euroscepticism or Europhobia: opposition attitudes to the EU in the Slovak Republic”, Opposing Europe Research Network, *Working Paper*, No. 5, Sussex European Institute, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, Paul G. (2005), “EU enlargement and party systems in Central Europe”, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Volume 21, Number 2, pp. 171-199.

<sup>32</sup> Taggart (1998), *op. cit.*, quotes from p. 372 and 384, respectively.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 372.

<sup>34</sup> Bielasiaik, Jack (2004), “Party systems and EU accession: Euroscepticism in East Europe”, Conference on public opinion about the EU in post-communist Eastern Europe, Indiana University, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> Batory (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 59 and Sitter (2002), *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Sartori (1976), *op. cit.*

The EU *acquis* or conditionality for accession does not explicitly refer to political parties. However, the EU's principles of democracy and respect for the rule of law, human rights and minorities included in Article 6 of the Treaty on the European Union for the member states and in the Copenhagen criteria for the aspirant countries can be interpreted as being incompatible with the participation of extremist parties in government. This was seen, for example, in the decision of the EU to freeze in 2000 bilateral political contacts with Austria in response to the inclusion in government of Jörg Haider's Freedom Party or to deny in 1997 candidate status to Slovakia due to the presence in office of Vladimír Mečiar's HZDS.<sup>37</sup>

Anticipated disapproval from the EU, and fears that this could delay the goal of membership, had an impact on coalition-building also in other CEE countries by making some otherwise 'useful' parties (to the purpose of building government majorities) off-limits. These include, for instance, the Justice Party in Hungary, the Self-Defence Party in Poland and the Greater Romania Party in Romania. It also persuaded parties like the Hungarian Independent Smallholders' Party (FKGP), at the margins of its system, to shift its position on the EU before the 1998 elections by moderating its Eurosceptic instincts so as to gain the trust and partnership of Fidesz.<sup>38</sup> And the reverse also seems to be true given that the FKGP's drift back towards the fringes of the party system after its time in office with Fidesz was accompanied by a re-strengthening of the party's Eurosceptic discourse (which drove both allies and voters away from it at the 2002 Hungarian elections). Clearly, not all such attempts to pull off a pro-EU transformation can be successful: for example, the EU remained incredulous to the last-minute change of heart on 'Europe' espoused either by the Greater Romania Party in 2000 or the Hungarian Justice Party in 2002, both of which continued to be side-lined also by their national political colleagues.

*3. While parties' EU attitudes might be mitigated by proximity to power and inter-party relations, they do not seem to be a function of strategic choices meant to reflect or attract the European views of electorates.*

This builds on two assumptions. First, that in democratic electoral competition, public opinion matters for political parties. Not that parties would be "empty vessels into which issue positions are poured in response to electoral or constituency pressures."<sup>39</sup> People often take clues from their political parties, especially if they need to substitute their unawareness on matters put up for decision (like those related to the European Union). However, in trying to gain their support and then represent and act on behalf of voters, political parties cannot just lead but must also follow/accommodate people's interests and preferences.

Second, it assumes that the public holds well-developed views on foreign policy, including EU integration/membership. Studies reveal that people's European attitudes are associated with variables like age, education and income levels, in the sense that younger, more educated and wealthier people are inclined towards positive EU stances.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, in the CEE context, it was found that people's feelings towards regime change, by extrapolating from past to present conditions and to what the future may bring, strongly influence their views on 'Europe'.<sup>41</sup> For instance, the better the domestic

<sup>37</sup> Field, Heather (2001), "Awkward states: EU enlargement in Slovakia, Croatia, and Serbia", *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, Volume 1, Number 1, pp. 123-146.

<sup>38</sup> Batory (2002), *op. cit.*, pp. 211-216.

<sup>39</sup> Marks, Gary and and Wilson, Carole J. (2000), "The past in the present: a cleavage theory of party response to European integration", *British Journal of Political Science*, Volume 30, Number 3, pp. 433-459, quote from p. 434.

<sup>40</sup> Gabel, Matthew J. and Palmer, Harvey D. (1995), "Understanding variation in public support for European integration", *European Journal of Political Research*, Volume 27, Number 1, pp. 3-19.

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, Evans, Geoffrey and Whitefield, Stephen (1993), "Identifying the bases of party competition in Eastern Europe", *British Journal of Political Science*, Number 23, pp. 531-532; Mishler, William and Rose, Richard (1998),



system is perceived to work when compared to the previous communist rule, the less likely that people will enthuse about EU accession. In contrast, the greater the national benefits of EU membership are expected to be, particularly when post-communist governments' performance is negatively evaluated, the more favourable people stand to be towards European integration.

In reality, throughout the EU, there are cases where parties endorse(d) (further) integration in countries with largely Eurosceptic public opinion (such as Slovenia, Finland and Lithuania) and, *vice versa*, where parties oppose(d) the EU in countries with overwhelmingly pro-European electorates (like Romania and Slovakia). The misfit between popular levels of Euroscepticism and support for Eurosceptic parties has actually been identified as significant both in the member states and the former CEE aspirant countries.<sup>42</sup> And this disjunction concerns not just 'hard' but also the more common form of 'soft' Euroscepticism.

Thus, European citizens do not seem to vent their frustration with the EU by supporting Eurosceptic parties. This offers little incentives to political parties to embrace a more hostile attitude towards 'Europe', as well as little indication about how people will vote when asked specifically about EU issues, as demonstrated by the results of the various referenda on EU treaties or accession.

The fact that the European stances of people and their political elites are not in sync has been explained primarily by reference to the low salience of EU issues domestically. While very plausible, the low salience answer could nevertheless obscure a more fundamental reason, which has to do with the very nature of the integration process. The EU – through its conditionality in the aspiring countries and the *acquis* in the member states – creates an environment in which national political parties find it ever more challenging to impose their stances or deviate markedly from the *status quo* in their policy options.<sup>43</sup> This “hollows out”<sup>44</sup> decision making and signals the onset of democracy without choices<sup>45</sup>, leading to a situation in which citizens evacuate the zone of engagement with the traditional world of party politics, where they once interacted with and felt loyalty to political parties.

4. *Last but not least, in the aspiring countries, the European attitudes of elites and publics can be accounted for by the time-scale until EU entry: countries with more immediate prospects of accession were found to be more critical towards the Union/membership than the ones on a slower track of integration.*<sup>46</sup>

The logic here is that the more countries advance towards the EU, the more they become aware of the specific costs and obligations of the membership goal, and so, progressively, the broad aspiration of joining the Union is transformed into a series of concrete political issues and debates related to the conditions of accession and the nature of integration.

Looking at the CEE countries, during the first half of the 1990s, the vague notion of 'returning to Europe' amounted to a grand, national project that united both people and politicians in the region. Initially, the dominant mood in favour of membership “verged on the willing acceptance of

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“Negative and positive party identification in post-communist countries”, *Electoral Studies*, Volume 17, Number 2, pp. 217-234; and Henderson (2001), *op. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001; 2002), *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Hix, Simon and Raunio, Tapio (2001), “Backbenchers learn to fight back: European integration and parliamentary government”, in Goetz, Klaus and Hix, Simon (2001) (eds.), *Europeanised politics? European integration and national political systems*, London: Frank Cass, p. 147.

<sup>44</sup> Mair, Peter (2000), “The limited impact of Europe on national party systems”, *West European Politics*, Volume 23, pp. 27-51, especially pp. 48, 49.

<sup>45</sup> Krastev, Ivan (2002), *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002), *op. cit.*

inevitability”<sup>47</sup>. However, as the process of integration got underway, the seeds of dissatisfaction began to sprout vigorously. For instance, the intrusiveness of the EU gave way to suspicions about threats to countries’ freshly reclaimed sovereignty and independence from communism. Also, certain membership conditions, relevant to particular social or professional groups, like the treatment of agriculture, the sale of land to foreigners, or minority entitlements, began to expose concerns and to reign into the EU fervour of the early transition years.<sup>48</sup>

However, the expression of anti-EU sentiments in the CEE countries tended “to manifest itself in terms of scepticism and the moderation of pro-Europeanism rather than outright opposition.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, although parties officially pro-EU started over time to incorporate Eurosceptic arguments in their political discourse, the emergence of single-issue, anti-EU parties was largely evaded in the region<sup>50</sup>. Apart perhaps from the League of Polish Families, which entered the *Sejm* in 2001, building its electoral success on an explicitly Eurosceptic political agenda.

The European sentiment in the CEE countries can be said to have followed a “U”-curve trajectory. From high and positive emotions in the early 1990s, it went through a slump during negotiations, and then picked up again right before accession. Even some parties which would have normally raised inflexible concerns about ‘Europe’ sought a more temperate niche for their reactions to the EU in the period immediately leading to EU entry. This does not mean that they suddenly liked the integration project better, but rather that they put their reservations on hold (temporarily) in order to align with the collective focus on completing accession. As the experience of countries like the Czech Republic, Hungary or Poland demonstrates, these ‘supressed’ feelings of Euroscepticism found their way back into the domestic politics once the aim of membership became a *fait accompli*.

To what extent do any of these four main observations hold true also in the Balkan context? In what ways, if any, is the Balkan experience different? What are the effects of the EU conditionality on party politics and the consolidation of democracy in the region? Are there any blind spots in the EU’s approach to democratic party politics in the Balkans? And with what potential future implications for an enlarged Union, or the health of democracy in these specific countries?

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<sup>47</sup> Lewis (2005), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Rohrschneider, Robert and Whitefield, Stephen (2004), “Support for foreign ownership and integration in Eastern Europe: economic interests, ideological commitments, and democratic contexts”, *Comparative Political Studies*, Volume 37, Number 3, pp. 313-339.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis (2005), *op. cit.*, pp. 173, 174.

<sup>50</sup> Mair (2000), *op. cit.*, p. 30, reaches the same conclusion for the EU-15.

# CROATIA'S PARTY SYSTEM – FROM TUĐMANISM TO EU MEMBERSHIP

BY ANDREW KONITZER

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2.1	The issues: EU's conditionality and Croatia	14
2.2	The actors: party characteristics	17
	2.2.1 The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)	19
	2.2.2 The Social Democratic Party (SDP)	20
	2.2.3 Other relevant parties	20
2.3	Party and public attitudes towards the EU	21
2.4	Post-1999 party politics through the prism of elections and EU conditionality	23
	2.4.1 2000-2003: a stalled 'second transition'	23
	2.4.2 2003-2007: a recast HDZ takes change	24
	2.4.3 The HDZ stumbles	25
2.5	Croatia enters the EU	27

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The past 13 years of Croatian party system development witnessed considerable upheaval, as key political actors struggled with the legacies of the 1990s wars that accompanied the collapse of Yugoslavia and reshaped themselves into 'European' parties. As a result of the long shadow cast by the recent past, but also because of the European Union's determination to avoid repeating problems that arose in the course of Bulgaria and Romania's 2007 accessions, Croatia's integration effort proved to be a hard row to hoe. Given these challenges, the country's EU entry on 1 July 2013 is certainly a significant accomplishment and a source of national pride.

Nonetheless, accession was taxing for the Croatian polity: building and maintaining consensus amongst all major political parties in the country regarding the desirability of the EU membership goal went hand in hand with increasing popular Euroscepticism, generating a so-called "hollowing out" or "depoliticisation"<sup>51</sup> of domestic politics. On the eve of Croatia's entry into the Union, the mood amongst Croatian citizens was one of fatigue, disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the country's existing political establishment, as well as with the EU – which seemed so troubled that many began to question whether membership had been worth the hassle.

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<sup>51</sup> Mair, Peter (2000), "The limited impact of Europe on national party systems", *West European Politics*, Volume 23, Number 27, pp. 27-51; Grzymala-Busse, Anna and Innes, Abby (2003), "Great expectations: the EU and domestic political competition in East Central Europe", *East European Politics and Society*, Volume 17, Number 1, pp. 64-73; Mair, Peter (2007), "Political opposition and the European Union", *Government and Opposition*, Volume 42, Number 1, pp. 1-17.

With Croatia now inside the ‘club’, economists recognise that membership might accrue immediate economic benefits in terms of increased European funding. However, few of them expect instant returns from the country’s access to the broader EU market, with some even predicting short-term costs from Croatia’s exit from the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and from the loss of valuable tourism as visitors from countries like Russia and Turkey will now need to seek out visas.

Last but not least, the rhetoric of the new leadership in the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), along with recent neo-fascist discourse tendencies, raise concerns about a return to values and practices that characterised the regime of Franjo Tuđman in the 1990s.

Through an exploration of key aspects of the period from the end of the Tuđman era in 2000 to the present, this chapter demonstrates that the EU’s conditionality, along with the implied threat of an external veto on certain government combinations, had a clear role in shaping the nature of the Croatian political party system – particularly due to its effects on the policy transformation of one key actor, the Croatian Democratic Union. The paper also highlights potential negative effects of the achievement of a cross-party system consensus in terms of the above-mentioned depoliticisation of domestic politics as represented by the fact that one of Europe’s most Eurosceptic societies is no longer home to even a single Eurosceptic party. It also briefly addresses the possible dangers that the largely instrumental popular support for the EU presents at a time when the EU’s ability to deliver on its promises has stopped being taken at face value.

## 2.1 THE ISSUES: EU’S CONDITIONALITY AND CROATIA

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Few observers of Croatian politics would deny the strong impact of the European Union on the country’s post-independence development. From the very beginning of Croatia’s existence as an independent state in 1991, Croatian President Franjo Tuđman and other key political and intellectual figures considered Croatia to be a European state.<sup>52</sup> Neither Tuđman’s Croatian Democratic Union (the ruling party from 1991-1999 and again from 2003-2011) nor any other major political party in the country positioned itself in purely ideological terms as Euro-rejectionist<sup>53</sup>. The mainstream national discourse, as expressed by most of Croatian politicians, defined the country as a European – rather than Balkan – state. This not only served to distinguish Croats from the negative stereotypes associated with the label ‘Balkan’, but it also helped to differentiate Croats from their more ‘Balkan’ antagonists, the Serbs.<sup>54</sup>

However, the EU’s decision to turn issues such as the normalisation of relations with Croatia’s neighbours, refugee return and the full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) into conditions for membership, placed traditionally conservative parties, like the HDZ and the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP), in a position where their policies created obstacles to closer ties with the EU. Such requirements threatened the key bases of the HDZ’s support (that is, veterans and other individuals affected by the war) and the very symbolic value of Croatia’s Homeland War<sup>55</sup> that was such an important component of the party’s popular appeal. In

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<sup>52</sup> Jović, Dejan (2006), “Croatia and the European Union: a long-delayed journey”, *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Volume 8, Number 1, pp. 85-103.

<sup>53</sup> Term coined as the failure to support either the ideas underlying the process of European integration or the EU by Kopecky, Piotr and Mudde, Cass (2002), “The two sides of Euroscepticism: party positions on European integration in East Central Europe”, *European Union Politics*, Volume 3, Number 3, pp. 297-326.

<sup>54</sup> See Razsa, Maple and Lindstrom, Nicole (2004), “Balkans is beautiful: Balkanism in the political discourse of Tuđman’s Croatia”, *East European Politics and Societies*, Volume 18, Number 4, pp. 628-650.

<sup>55</sup> “Homeland War” (*Domovinski Rat*) is the Croatian name for the combat operations between 1991 and 1995 related to Croatia’s bid for independence and subsequent conflict with Serbian separatists.

response, Tuđman became increasingly critical of ‘Europe’, accusing it of abandoning Croatia to Yugoslavia and trying to punish the state – even push it into a new type of Yugoslavia through its efforts to promote regional cooperation.<sup>56</sup> The regime’s handling of these legacies became the major initial stumbling block on Croatia’s path towards the EU.

The normalisation of relations with regional neighbours and respect for Bosnia’s sovereignty is an ongoing effort, but one that has been reasonably successful. Croatia’s active meddling in the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was never very popular and post-Tuđman governments had little trouble rejecting such policies. Today, there are hardly any major political players actively interfering in a meaningful way in the affairs of neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina. Other than that, Croatia’s relations with Serbia and Slovenia remain a work in progress. Relations with Slovenia have been complicated by a territorial dispute over the Bay of Piran, and more recently by a cross-border banking spat.<sup>57</sup> The Bay of Piran controversy actually resulted in the freezing of EU negotiations for six months in 2009 before a compromise was reached. Nonetheless, pragmatic interests continued to win the day in relations with Slovenia – especially once disagreements threatened Croatia’s progress towards EU membership.

Given the history between the two, relations between Serbia and Croatia remain difficult, but significant progress was made in the normalisation of relations between the two countries during the 2000s. In 2012, Croatian President Ivo Josipović and former Serbian President Boris Tadić received European Medals of Tolerance recognising their *rapprochement* efforts made during their terms in office.<sup>58</sup> The election in 2012 of a former Serbian Radical Party Vice-President, Tomislav Nikolić (now President of the Serbian Progressive Party), as Serbian President, and the return to power of Slobodan Milošević’s now reformed Socialist Party of Serbia (under Ivica Dačić), as well as the acquittal of two Croatian generals (Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markac), who oversaw military operations which ended in the exodus of 180-200,000 Serbs from Croatia, have once again strained relations.<sup>59</sup> Competing genocide cases, lingering in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) are also a major point of contention.<sup>60</sup> Still factors such as the EU aspirations of both Serbia and Croatia, a realisation that small markets and societies require greater cross-border integration on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and the sheer conflict weariness of societies following the strife of the 1990s continue to push leaders in both countries to seek out compromises on even the most sensitive issues.<sup>61</sup> Here again, pragmatism, rather than historical legacies, seems to be the dominant consideration in intra-regional relations.

The refugee issue proved to be more complicated. Hostilities from 1991-1997 resulted in the displacement of 950,000 Croatian inhabitants, 550,000 of whom were Croatian citizens of mostly Croatian nationality and 400,000 Serbs.<sup>62</sup> During and after the two military operations that ended

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<sup>56</sup> Jović (2006), *op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> The Ljubljanska Banka dispute had lasted for 20 years and was settled at the beginning of April 2013.

<sup>58</sup> “Tadiću i Josipoviću uručene medalje”, *B92*, 16 October 2012.

<sup>59</sup> The acquittal of Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač, tried for an operation that resulted in this large exodus of Serbs yielded a wave of celebrations in Croatia and some demonstrations in Serbia. However, the visit of the Croatian Premier Zoran Milanović to Serbia in January 2012, where he met with the Serbian Socialist Party leader and current Premier, Ivica Dačić, as well as with the Serbian Progressive Party leader and Serbian President, Tomislav Nikolić, seemed to indicate a return to formally normal relations between the two countries (*B92*, 16 January 2012).

<sup>60</sup> On 2 July 1999, Croatia filed a suit in the International Court of Justice against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia claiming that the state committed acts of genocide on its territory during the Homeland War. With the transformation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into the Union of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG) in 2003, and the subsequent dissolution of the SCG in 2006, the Republic of Serbia became the successor state in this suit. On 4 January 2010, the Republic of Serbia sued the Republic of Croatia in ICJ for acts of genocide committed against Serbs during the first half of the 1990s.

<sup>61</sup> “Put Srbije i Hrvatske prema Evropskim Zvezdama,” *Izazovi Evropskih Integracija*, 10, 2010. “Dobro došli u Jugosferu, ona je već odavno tu,” *Jutarnji List*, 1 August 2010.

<sup>62</sup> UNHCR (2011), “Minority return to Croatia – Study of an open process”.

with the self-proclaimed Serb Republic of Krajina, an estimated 250,000 Serbs left Croatia. The return of these refugees became a major issue that divided Croatia's political elite and threatened to delay the country on its EU track. While the two governments led by the leader of the Social Democratic Party, Ivica Račan (during the period from 2000-2003), were rhetorically supportive, concrete action to facilitate refugee return was slow. The HDZ's comeback to power under Ivo Sanader in 2003 marked an important change in the refugee return story.

Largely in an effort to accelerate Croatia's EU accession process and to improve the HDZ's reputation in Brussels, Sanader included the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS) in the new government. The SDSS entered the coalition with the formerly Tuđmanist HDZ precisely on the condition that the new government would make greater progress with regard to the return of refugees.<sup>63</sup> Thereafter, the HDZ-led governing alliance continued the work started under the Račan governments and by 2005, some 19,256 of the 19,280 private homes seized from Serbian refugees had been given back to their owners.<sup>64</sup> At present, while one cannot say that the refugee return issue has been 'solved' (many refugees simply claimed property while not 'returning', and returning refugees face continued economic and social hardships), and consecutive European Commission reports since 2005 have kept asking for further progress, the EU appears to be sufficiently satisfied with the Croatian efforts on this topic given that the issue no longer features prominently in EU-Croatia relations.

But of the three postwar legacies adopted by the EU as political conditions for Croatia, cooperation with the ICTY proved to be the most challenging. With ICTY compliance increasingly linked to progress towards EU membership, party attitudes towards the Tribunal became a litmus test for whether a party was considered to be sufficiently 'pro-EU' by the European Union and individual member states. While Tuđman had initially supported the establishment of the ICTY in the hope that the Tribunal would focus on prosecuting Serbs, his attitude quickly changed when it became clear that the ICTY intended to also put on trial Croatian generals and important government figures, including Tuđman himself.<sup>65</sup> Thus, cooperation with the Tribunal for most of the 1990s was spotty at best. Fifteen Bosnian Croat suspects were extradited and a law on cooperation with the ICTY was passed only with difficulty.<sup>66</sup>

After 2000, the EU's insistence on cooperation with the Hague Tribunal during the Social Democratic party (SDP)-led coalition arguably made things very difficult for a pro-EU government struggling against hard economic times, a strong domestic opposition movement and the high expectations amongst its supporters for a quick entry into the Union. Statements by EU officials indicated that progress on Croatia's application for membership would be delayed if indictees were not extradited. Following a warning to the government by Denis MacShane of the British Foreign Office Minister for Europe, Britain and the Netherlands helped with the ratification of Croatia's Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). Still, as Peskin and others argue, the ICTY prosecutor Carla Del Ponte and EU member states seemed reluctant to impose concrete sanctions on the struggling Račan governments. The result was both weak compliance with the ICTY and slow progress towards membership.

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<sup>63</sup> Commenting on the coalition, the SDSS Party President, Vojislav Stanimirović, stated that "The SDSS did not form a coalition with the HDZ. The relationship of the two parties was rather an interest-based agreement; our support for the government is aimed at strengthening its position in order to speed up the processes of accession to the European Union." Djuric, Ivana (2010), "The postwar repatriation of Serb minority internally displaced persons and refugees in Croatia – Between discrimination and political settlement", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Volume 62, Number 10, pp. 1639-1660.

<sup>64</sup> UNHCR (2011), *op. cit.*

<sup>65</sup> Peskin, Victor (2008), *International justice in Rwanda and the Balkans: virtual trials and the struggle for state cooperation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>66</sup> Lamont, Christopher K. (2010), "Defiance or strategic compliance? The post-Tuđman Croatian Democratic Union and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Volume 62, Number 10, pp. 1683-1705.

Following the HDZ's return to government under Sanader, cooperation with the ICTY actually improved. With the EU's decision on Croatia's candidacy looming, and having already dismissed hard-line elements in the HDZ during the period from 2000-2003, Sanader immediately took a more compliant stance and followed through with meaningful progress on arrests and extraditions during the period between 2003 and 2007. Difficulties, however, remained. The continued failure to arrest Ante Gotovina resulted in the suspension of EU membership negotiations in March 2005 and their resumption in October 2005 following a positive assessment by Del Ponte. Soon after, Gotovina was arrested in the Canary Islands in December 2005, thus closing the 'arrest and extradition' phase of Croatia's ICTY-cooperation saga.

The HDZ's policy changes regarding the ICTY condition, Serbian refugees return and the capture of Croatia's remaining war-criminal suspects under the post-2003 HDZ government satisfied the EU's political requirements and shifted the main focus of conditionality towards the more technocratic matter of closing chapters for eventual EU membership. Here the focus of EU-Croatia negotiations centred on other major challenges like corruption, judicial system reform and the liberalisation of an economy still heavily dependent on state subsidies.<sup>67</sup> While perhaps less spectacular than the more public battles surrounding the war-legacy conditions, this stage in Croatia's accession process presented its own challenges within the context of the political and economic transformations characteristic of a recently independent state. In terms of critical 'good governance' reforms, Croatia was arguably held to a higher standard than previous candidate states, largely as a result of the EU's experience with the cases of Bulgaria and Romania.

**Table 2.1: Key dates in Croatia's EU integration effort**

Date	Event	Government
29 October 2001	Croatia signs Stabilisation and Association Agreement	SDP, HSLs
21 February 2003	Membership application submitted	SDP, Other
18 June 2004	Croatia receives candidate status	HDZ, DC
20 December 2004	European Council sets date for start of accession negotiations	
1 February 2005	Stabilisation and Association Agreement comes into force	
16 March 2005	Negotiations postponed due to non-cooperation with ICTY (Gotovina)	
5 October 2005	Accession negotiations begin	
23 March 2009	Talks called off due to Bay of Piran border dispute with Slovenia	HDZ, HSS, HSLs, HSU, minorities
11 September 2009	Talks resume following agreement with Slovenia	
9 December 2011	Croatia signs EU Accession Treaty	
22 January 2012	Croatian referendum for EU accession passes	SDP, HNS, IDS-DDI, HSU
1 July 2013	Croatia enters the EU	

## 2.2 THE ACTORS: PARTY CHARACTERISTICS

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At the time of the 2011 Parliamentary elections there were 116 parties officially registered in Croatia.<sup>68</sup> However, a much smaller portion of these have established and maintained a major electoral presence on the political scene. The two parties that have consistently enjoyed the most electoral support in the past two decades are the HDZ and the SDP.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, the debates surrounding the fate of Croatia's shipbuilding industry in Radosavljević, Zoran, "Croatia shipyards face an uncertain future", *New York Times*, 6 May 2008.

<sup>68</sup> "Mala zemlja sa 116 političkih stranaka", *Nacional*, 1 November 2011.

**Table 2.2: Post-2000 coalition governments in Croatia**

Period (years)	President	Prime Minister	Parliamentary majority
2000-2002	Stipe Mesić	Ivica Račan	SDP in coalition
2002-2003	Stipe Mesić	Ivica Račan	SDP in coalition
2003-2007	Stipe Mesić	Ivo Sanader	HDZ
2007-2011	Stipe Mesić, Ivo Josipović	Ivo Sanader, Jadranka Kosor	HDZ
2011-present	Ivo Josipović	Milanović	Kukuriku

While the strife of the 1990s and the disruption created by the simultaneous demise of socialism and the Yugoslav state contributed to a substantial reordering of social relations, Croatia has been marked by a relatively stable structure of societal and political interests, particularly in the last decade. According to Zakošek<sup>69</sup>, Croatian political life is organised along three main cleavages: centre-periphery relations, traditionalism versus modernism and state redistribution versus the market.

The centre-periphery cleavage is represented in such issues as the devolution of political authority to localities and sub-regions, but also in relations with members of other ethnic groups (now minorities), particularly the Serbs. Hence, Zakošek places both the ‘right of return’ of Serb refugees and questions about administrative and fiscal decentralisation into this category. The traditionalism versus modernism cleavage manifests itself in attitudes towards issues like the role of the Catholic Church in society, family structures, perceptions of Croatian identity, and attitudes towards key historical developments. Discussions of Croatian politics and society frequently mention a ‘black’ versus ‘red’ schism that denotes a conflict between traditional conservative elements (ranging from moderate conservatives to extremists such as the fascist Ustaše) of World War II and left-wing ‘progressive’ elements (from European-style social democracy to orthodox communists).<sup>70</sup> This separation, while overlapping with the state versus market distribution cleavage discussed next, also falls firmly within the traditionalism versus modernism divide and is evident in debates regarding the commemoration of places like Jasenovac (a World War II concentration camp where Serbs, Gypsies and Croatian opponents of the regime were persecuted) or Blieburg (the location of a massacre of both Ustaša fugitives and accompanying refugees fleeing Tito’s advancing partisans at the end of the World War II). Finally, the state-distribution versus market cleavage focuses on the role of the state in the economy and society. This manifests itself in debates about the role of the state dating back to as early as the pre-communist era, but which came into much sharper focus with the rise and fall of Yugoslav communism and the attempt to establish new economic and social structures.

Placement of major political parties along these cleavages was subject to some fluctuation during Croatia’s post-1991 history but has arguably become more stable over time. To take just a few major examples, parties such as the Croatian Democratic Union, the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) and the Croatian Party of Rights fall on the traditional side of the traditionalism versus modernism divide, while parties like the Social Democratic Party, the Croatian People’s Party (HNS) and the Istrian Democratic Party (IDS) reside in the modernism camp. In terms of centre-periphery relations, parties such as the Independent Democratic Serbian Party (SDSS) and the IDS advocate pro-decentralisation policies based on ethnic and regional identities, while the HNS and, to a lesser extent, the SDP support more decentralised control for reasons of ideology and administrative efficiency. Parties such as the HDZ and the HSP traditionally promote more centralisation, both as a reflection of specific attitudes about administration and as a means to uphold a strong, traditional Croatian national identity. The state distribution versus market cleavage has only recently become more

<sup>69</sup> Zakošek, Nenad (1998), “Ideološki Rascjepi I Stranačke Preferencije Hrvatskih Birača” in Zakošek, Ivan, Šiber, Mirjana and Kasapović, Nenad (eds.), *Birači I Demokracija*, Zagreb: Alinea.

<sup>70</sup> Pavlaković, Vjeran (2008), *Red stars, black shirts: symbols, commemorations and contested histories of World War Two in Croatia*, Seattle: University of Washington.



clearly defined. At one point, the HDZ was a strong advocate of state support for veterans and the elderly, and also pursued redistributive policies to offset the negative effects of the war. Frequently this made their socio-economic policies difficult to distinguish from the ostensibly more left-leaning SDP. However, the HDZ gradually took over policies commonly associated with European Christian Democratic parties (that is, emphasising market mechanisms), while the SDP staked out a clearer policy of state intervention to counter the negative effects of market competition. Other parties, such as the IDS and the HNS have maintained a rather strong pro-market orientation throughout.

Until 2003, Croatian parties' stances on certain domestic issues or their placement along various cleavages were linked to their stance on the EU and its policies<sup>71</sup> with the more nationalist HDZ and the HSP falling into the Eurosceptic camp due to their positions on the issues of ICTY cooperation, refugee return and neighbourly relations. This correlation began to deteriorate following the policy and rhetorical change undertaken by the HDZ in 2001-2003. Still the party's conservative stance on social issues has occasionally put it somewhat at odds, if not in direct conflict, with certain policies promoted by the European Union, particularly regarding gender (including reproductive rights) and minority issues, as well as the separation between the church and state.

### 2.2.1 The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)

As the party of Franjo Tuđman, who is widely seen as the father of independent Croatia, the right-of-centre HDZ (2012 membership: 210,000)<sup>72</sup> continues to be a major force in Croatian politics. The party was initially established as a broad national movement and, even after becoming a political party in 1990 it retained the quality of an umbrella organisation, encompassing a broad range of generally centre-right ideological stances. In its 20+ years of existence, the party underwent a number of transformations. In the 1990s, it was often characterised as a nationalistic and conservative-populist political entity. For the first half of the 1990s, the ruling party was largely focused on the war of independence against the Yugoslav National Army (1991-1992) and Serbian separatists (1991-1995).<sup>73</sup> The war, and Croatia's success in stemming territorial losses and eventually seizing land commensurate to its pre-1991 republican borders, mobilised the population in support of Tuđman and the HDZ, and also served as 'cover' for certain negative tendencies within the party. However, once major military operations ended in 1995, the HDZ's authoritarianism, corruption and clientelism became increasingly salient.<sup>74</sup> As a result, the Western international community started to be ever more dissatisfied with the regime and its domestic support began to decline.

As the self-proclaimed guardian of veterans' organisations and the 'liberator' of independent Croatia, the HDZ initially took a firm stance against the EU's request for the country to arrest and extradite to

<sup>71</sup> Marks, Gary and Wilson, Carole J. (2000), "The past in the present: a cleavage theory of party response to European integration", *British Journal of Political Science*, Volume 30, pp. 433-459; Taggart, Paul and Szczerbak, Aleks (2004), "Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe", *European Journal of Political Research*, Volume 43, Number 1, pp. 1-27.

<sup>72</sup> Hidra.hr.

<sup>73</sup> From 1991-1995 roughly 1/3 of the territory claimed by the new Croatian state was under the control of Yugoslav or Serbian forces. In the summer of 1995, Croatian forces launched two military operations (Storm and Flash), which resulted in the destruction of the breakaway Serb region and sparked an exodus of much of Croatia's Serbian population. There are no precise figures for the numbers of Serbs who fled, although cited figures estimate 150,000 and 200,000 people were displaced. In terms of general population changes, the 1991 census in Yugoslavia indicated that Serbs constituted 12.2% of the population on the territory of Croatia. In the 2001 census, only 4.5% of respondents were Serbs. (see Fisher, Sharon (2005), "Croatia's rocky road towards the European Union", *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*).

<sup>74</sup> Vrcan, Srđan B.B. (1999), "Izbori 1995 i 1997 – Od vladavine uz isfabricirani pristanak većine ka vladavini bez pristanka većine" in Vrcan, Srđan B.B., Lalić, Dražan, Kunac, Suzana, Bulat, Nenad, Štrelcov, Damir (eds.), *Pakiranje vlasti: Izbori u Hrvatskoj 1995 i 1997*, Zagreb: Alinea; Kasapović, Mirjana (2001), *Hrvatska politika, 1990.-2000.: izbori, strank i parlament u Hrvatskoj*, Zagreb, Fakultet političkih znanosti Sveučilišta u Zagrebu; Goati, Vladimir (2007), *Političke partije i partijski sistemi*, Podgorica, Centar za monitoring – CEMI.

The Hague Croatian war-criminal indictees. Furthermore, the party's proclamations regarding the return of Serbian refugees ranged from indifferent to hostile. Finally, the party maintained strong ties with the Croatian community in Bosnia-Herzegovina and was suspected at times of undermining the post-Dayton independence of the country. As indicated above, these factors frequently earned the HDZ an 'anti-EU' label, despite its insistence that Croatia was a European (as opposed to 'Balkan') country.

In terms of the state, the economy and broader social policies, the HDZ gradually underwent a transformation from broad-based populism, with promises of state intervention to assist the veterans, elderly and other groups effected by the war, to a stance more focused on decreasing state intervention that is closer to its declared right-of-centre Christian democratic marker. While the party still emphasises support for the elderly and veterans, it now places more of the onus for economic growth on capital and free-market mechanisms. The HDZ also stresses traditional family structures as a guarantee of social stability and maintains strong ties with the Catholic Church and its social policies.<sup>75</sup> Finally, with regard to the centre-periphery cleavage described above, the HDZ has generally opposed decentralisation efforts in nearly any form and has promoted policies oriented towards maintaining a strong, traditional Croatian identity.

### **2.2.2 The Social Democratic Party (SDP)**

As the HDZ's strongest rival, the SDP (2004 membership: 25,000)<sup>76</sup> represents the 'red' side of Croatian politics. The party was established by the social democratic faction of the Croatian communist party in November 1990 and maintained a social democratic stance throughout its existence. While certainly never opposing the idea of Croatian independence, the party was widely viewed as less nationalistic than the HDZ, and it frequently endorsed, at least rhetorically, cooperation with the international community in instances where the HDZ saw such collaboration as a threat to Croatia's national interests (such as with regard to the ICTY, refugee return and the normalisation of relations with neighbouring states). Overall, the SPD has also built for itself a reputation of being the more democratic and modern of the two parties, particularly as the HDZ's more nationalistic, authoritarian and clientelistic profile became apparent in the second half of the 1990s. The SPD enjoyed increasing rhetorical and even organisational support from the United States, and to a lesser extent also from European actors.<sup>77</sup> In keeping with its ideological label, this social democratic party stresses the need for state intervention to address negative aspects of the market economy, worker protection and a strong social-safety net. The party advocates traditional families as a basis for social stability, and it is often critical of what it perceives as an overbearing role of the church in society.

### **2.2.3 Other relevant parties**

Smaller parties occupying specific niches (often situated around the political centre) within the political system by representing specific regional interests also play an important role in Croatian politics – particularly as coalition partners for the two major parties. These include the economically and socially liberal HNS (2012 membership: 42,700), the socially conservative but state interventionist (particularly with regard to agrarian issues) Croatian Peasant Party (HSS, 2010 membership: 50,000) and the radically nationalist-conservative HSP (2012 membership: 17,710).<sup>78</sup> The HSP has moderated itself significantly over the past decade adopting a pro-EU stance and

<sup>75</sup> Dolenc, Danijela (2009), "Demokratizacija stranačkog sustava u Hrvatskoj: Ponuda i potražnja javnih politika" in *Stranke i javne politike: Izbori u Hrvatskoj 2007*, Politička misao.

<sup>76</sup> Hidra.hr., latest available figures. Membership is likely to be larger today.

<sup>77</sup> According to Bunce, Valerie J. and Wolchik, Sharon L. (2011), *Defeating authoritarian leaders in post-communist countries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>78</sup> Hidra.hr.

drawing supporters that some research suggests are less radical than those of the HDZ.<sup>79</sup> Finally, it should be noted that a Serbian minority party has become relevant in post-2000 politics where, partly in response to EU pressure, it has been included in several governmental coalitions (including, perhaps surprisingly, the HDZ governments of 2003 and 2007).<sup>80</sup> This party advocates for the social, economic and cultural interests of the Serb minority in Croatia.

### 2.3 PARTY AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU

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An interesting aspect of the Croatia's relationship with the EU is the lack of synchrony between the European attitudes of the political elites and those of citizens. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, party sentiment towards the EU was split. The SDP took an emphatically pro-EU stance accepting both the idea of EU membership and, at least rhetorically, most of the Union's conditions. The HDZ, on the other hand, while still not posing as a Euro-rejectionist organisation, nonetheless resisted EU requirements such as full cooperation with the ICTY and refugee return, at least until 2002-2003. During this period of elite discord, public attitudes (Table 2.3 below) towards 'Europe' were overwhelmingly favourable. The HDZ's change of policy in 2002-2003 on the EU conditions shifted the elite discourse from its conflicted state to one of consensus, in favour of compliance. However, at nearly the same time, public opinion took a sharply negative turn, becoming more antagonistic with regard to the European question. Analysts have provided several reasons for this sudden decline in popular support for the EU, including resentment about the arrest and extradition of Croatian war-crime suspects or a transition from irrational 'Europhoria' to a clearer understanding of the true costs and benefits of membership.<sup>81</sup>

Changes in polling agencies and their measures make it virtually impossible to trace longitudinally the Croatian public's attitudes towards the EU from 2000 to present. However, one can get a good sense of the general trends by piecing together two series of surveys, one collected from 2000-2005 and another from 2006-2011. As can be seen in the table below, data reveals consistently positive public sentiments towards the European Union between 2000 and 2003, with support for membership fluctuating between 72% and 80%.

However, these levels plunged in 2004 to slightly over 51.1%, and public opposition shot up to 38.7%. Beginning with 2006-2007, the percentage of those saying that they would vote for EU membership in a referendum ranged between a high of 55% (July 2007) and a low of 43% (December 2008).<sup>82</sup> Unsurprisingly, dips in support for the EU after 2004 frequently preceded or followed setbacks in the country's accession process, as was the case at the suspension of accession negotiations due to the failure to arrest Ante Gotovina (March 2005) or at the impasse surrounding the Gulf of Piran dispute with Slovenia (March 2009). While anecdotal evidence suggests a good deal of popular concern regarding Croatia's entering a EU in crisis, support for accession has actually not declined against the backdrop of the challenges facing Greece or other member states. This could partially be explained

<sup>79</sup> Longo, Matthew (2006), "The HDZ's embattled mandate: divergent leadership, divided electorate", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Volume 53, Number 3; Kasapović (2004), *op. cit.*

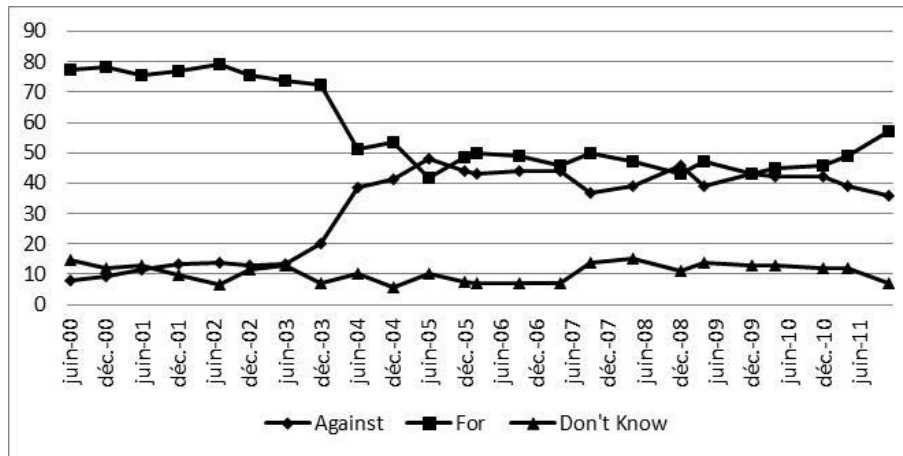
<sup>80</sup> During coalition negotiations, Doris Pack reportedly warned Sanader about the dangers of including the HSP in a future government, and suggested instead that the Serbian Independent Democratic Party (SDSS) become part of the coalition as a sign of good will. Stipičić-Niseteo, Lada (2003), "Doris Pack upozorila Sanadera da Vladu ne sastavlja s HSP-om", *Vjesnik*, 27 November 2003.

<sup>81</sup> A 2011 poll indicates that only 12% of Croatian respondents felt that they were "well" or "very well" informed about the EU (Bagić, Dragan (2011), *Stavovi hrvatskih građana prema priključenju Europskoj uniji*, Zagreb, Filozofski fakultet Zagreb). This is in part the result of the largely elite-centred nature of the EU accession process (noted also in the case of previous aspiring countries) and of the failure of political elites to mount effective public information campaigns in the earlier stages of Croatia's EU integration path.

<sup>82</sup> Eurobarometer/IPSOS.

by the imminent prospect of membership but also by certain critical events such as the acquittal of Ante Gotovina.<sup>83</sup>

**Table 2.3: Support for Croatia’s accession to the EU (2000-2011)**



Expectations about the impacts of EU membership are rather ambivalent. In a survey carried out in July 2011, 36% of respondents thought that Croatia would gain more than it lost from joining the EU, while 21% felt that they personally would benefit more than they would be affected. In terms of specific expectations from accession, the vast majority of people expressed hope that Croatia’s EU entry would lead to an increased respect for rules and regulations (69%), environmental protection (62%), higher quality education (59%), less public sector corruption (56%), more employment opportunities (55%), and administrative efficiency (52%). At the same time, significant pluralities expected a drop in living standards (42%) and a worsening of conditions for agriculture and manufacturing (32%). 67% of those surveyed also anticipated an increase in the cost of consumer goods and 50% said they feared an influx of foreign goods would wipe out Croatian production. Thus, on the threshold of EU membership, Croatians seemed to envision improvements in governance and public services but to be anxious about the potential economic costs of accession.<sup>84</sup>

Croatia’s EU referendum and the first elections to the European Parliament continued the trend of hesitant public opinion. After the government abolished turnout thresholds for all referenda (which some suspected was a safeguard for low turnout in an eventual popular vote on the EU), and despite warnings that a ‘No’ vote would “cost us 1.6 billion euro”<sup>85</sup>, only 44% of Croatians participated to deliver a 66% ‘Yes’ in favour of EU membership. Turnout in the first EP elections (held in Croatia on 14 April 2013) was a dismal 20.74%, the third lowest in the history of European elections (after Slovakia’s in 2004 & 2009, and Lithuania’s in 2009) and far behind any participation levels recorded in past Croatian national electoral polls. Observers attributed this low turnout to a lack of popular knowledge about the European Union, a weak electoral campaign and a dwindling public enthusiasm for the EU.<sup>86</sup>

Nonetheless, the decline in people’s support for ‘Europe’ has apparently had little impact on the determination of Croatia’s political elite to comply with the membership conditionality. Specialists

<sup>83</sup> While the ICTY and the EU are separate institutions, their linkage through conditionality made them interchangeable in the eyes of many Croatians. The acquittal of Gotovina, thus, was seen as a vindication for Croatia and a sign that Croatia could keep its national symbols/myths while still joining the EU.

<sup>84</sup> Ipsos Puls Public Affairs, “Stavovi hrvatskih građana prema priključenju Europskoj uniji”, released 2 September 2011.

<sup>85</sup> Josipa, Ban, “‘Ne’ na referendumu stajat će nas 1.6 milijardi eura”, *Poslovni dnevnik*, 4 January 2012.

<sup>86</sup> Petrovic, Selena and Remikovic, Drazen, “Election turnout points to Croatia’s EU information campaign”, *SETime.com*, 18 April 2013; “Croatia’s first European elections marked by low turnout”, *Euractiv.com*, 16 April 2013.

have explained this discrepancy as a combination of elite confidence that cooperation is good for the country and elite belief that accession would expand their personal employment and economic opportunities inside the EU.<sup>87</sup> A careful analysis of survey data points to another potential justification. Support for the EU prior to 2003 was unequivocal – strong enough to influence the policies of office-seeking parties that understood compliance as a safe bet on a pro-EU electorate. The sharp drop that followed the establishment of a pro-EU party consensus yielded a new structure of public attitudes that, while not as pro-accession as before, was still not sufficiently anti-EU to warrant a change in policy by political parties, which were already heavily invested in ensuring a successful integration. Yet another possible explanation is that the bulk of Croatia’s Eurosceptic citizens are also HDZ supporters and they seem to continue to stick with their party even when economic conditions worsen and irrespective of its policies.<sup>88</sup>

## **2.4 POST-1999 CROATIAN PARTY POLITICS THROUGH THE PRISM OF ELECTIONS AND EU CONDITIONALITY**

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### **2.4.1 2000-2003: a stalled ‘second transition’**

The HDZ dominated the Croatian party scene throughout the 1990s. Initially the party capitalised on its linkage with President Tuđman and its symbolic status as the party that ruled over the country’s bid for independence. However, with military operations in Croatia ending in 1995, the HDZ began to steadily rely on clientelism and semi-authoritarian tactics to maintain political control.<sup>89</sup> Right before the 1999-2000 elections, a number of different factors conspired to remove the HDZ’s power grip over most of the major political institutions in the country.

First, Croatia’s economy had failed to recover strongly from the damage incurred by the war, the breakup of the web of Yugoslav economic networks and the transition from the socialist economic system. This was exacerbated by the increasing international isolation of Croatia due to the policies of Tuđman’s regime but also by the support of international actors, particularly the USA, offered to the HDZ’s opponents.<sup>90</sup> Thanks to this external assistance, the chronically divided opposition (specifically the SDP and the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSL)) managed to mount a united campaign. Last but certainly not least, the death of Tuđman in 1999 ‘robbed’ the party of its most popular political figure and of the ‘glue’ that had maintained over the years different political factions and personal interests together in the HDZ. The party’s reign ended in a disorganised political campaign, internal struggles and growing fears of complete disintegration.

However, having realised its decade-long dream of toppling the HDZ, the SDP and its coalition partners quickly faced a number of complex challenges that ultimately doomed this governing alliance to one term in office. First, the country’s economic problems proved quite difficult to solve and it was only in the last year of the SDP-led coalition that promised improvements and rising GDP-levels started to become obvious to the Croatian citizens. In addition, the coalition came under strong pressure from Western actors to cooperate (including on the political conditionality related to

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<sup>87</sup> Ashbrook, John (2010), “Croatia, Euroscepticism and the identity politics of EU enlargement”, *Problem of Post Communism*, Volume 57, Number 3.

<sup>88</sup> The stronger loyalty of the HDZ’s electorate is frequently cited as an explanation of the fact that the HDZ has ruled the country for roughly 16 out of its 22 years of independence, economic fluctuations and sometimes erratic changes in the party’s platforms apparently having little bearing on the party’s success at the polls. On the contrary, the SDP’s voters tend to demobilise when their party is in power and economic conditions deteriorate.

<sup>89</sup> Kasapović (2001), *op. cit.*

<sup>90</sup> Bunce and Wolchik (2011), *op. cit.*, detailed how the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) were instrumental in facilitating cooperation between the opposition and supporting election monitoring and other organisations.

war-time legacies) in exchange for aid packages and the EU membership perspective. A lack of cohesion within the coalition itself only added to the difficulties. After weathering a split in the government in 2002, the reconstituted alliance survived to the end of its four-year term but was defeated by a revived and repackaged HDZ in the 2003 elections.

The makeover of the HDZ was a major story in itself and one that clearly demonstrates the impact that the EU can have on the identity of a political party. During the 2000-2003 period, the HDZ under its then new President, Ivo Sanader, underwent a complex internal transformation and re-emerged as a pro-EU party willing to comply with the membership conditions. Sanader, initially chosen as a placeholder between different ‘warring’ factions in the party, proved to be a pragmatic independent actor who placed the party’s goal of returning to office above any other principles, such as the party’s hard-line stance on issues like the extradition of war-crime suspects and the facilitation of refugee returns<sup>91</sup>. Carefully cultivating the favour of the EU in order to eliminate the threat of an external veto on its participation in future governments, the HDZ capitalised on the difficulties of the SDP-led coalition and seized back power in 2003.<sup>92</sup>

However, in the process of defeating or co-opting hard-line right-wing elements of the party and its supporting social organisations, Sanader not only watered down and somewhat muddled the party’s platform, but also contributed a new chapter to the already rich legacy of patronage and corruption within the party’s ranks. The HDZ that arose was more compliant with the EU conditionality on cooperation with the ICTY and on the refugee return issue, but the party was neither more transparent nor less corrupt – at least not until the anti-corruption efforts of its successor – the Kosor government.<sup>93</sup>

#### **2.4.2 2003-2007: a recast HDZ takes charge**

Under the HDZ, the next four years witnessed continued improvements in Croatia’s economic situation, as well as significant country advances towards EU membership. The repackaged HDZ continued to arrest and extradite Croatian fugitives to The Hague – a process that culminated with the capture of Ante Gotovina in 2005. Making reference to President Nixon’s 1972 trip to China, Petković argues that “Only the HDZ with its strong capital of legitimacy brought by its establishing of the Croatian state could extradite generals without significant political opposition from the side of the radical right in the

<sup>91</sup> Konitzer, Andrew (2011), “Speaking European: conditionality, public attitudes and pro-European party rhetoric in the Western Balkans”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Volume 63, Number 10, pp. 1853-1888.

<sup>92</sup> An external veto refers to efforts by external actors to somehow shape domestic outcomes by the approval or disapproval of political parties, leaders or policies. By 2003, the potential power of international actors to shape election outcomes was well known. External actors had made it known in public statements and by other means (including their support for the opposition) that they would prefer not to work with an unreformed HDZ. Not only did such statements send a signal to (at that time) predominantly pro-EU voters, but it also warned potential coalition partners to stay away from certain parties if they wished to work with the EU and other foreign actors. The end of the 2003 elections proved this point for the reformed HDZ. When considering political allies, the party was explicitly warned by the President of the Council for Southeastern Europe in the European Parliament, Doris Pack, the European Commission Spokesperson, Reijko Kemppinen, and various “anonymous European sources” in the media about the inadvisability of forming a coalition with the right-wing HSP. The Sanader eventually decided against joining forces with the HSP. See Konitzer (2011), *op. cit.*

<sup>93</sup> Due to changes in methodology, data sources and the number of countries surveyed, cross-temporal comparisons of Transparency International’s well-known Corruption Perceptions Index are quite problematic. Nonetheless, some data will provide an illustration of Croatia’s place in the ranking. Over the 2001-2011 period, Croatia’s score on a scale from 0 (most corrupt) to 10 (least corrupt) varied from 3.4 to 4.1. This generally placed it among countries like Bulgaria, Brazil, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Columbia. According to the latest report from Transparency International that uses a new scale from 0 (most corrupt) to 100 (most corruption free), Croatia received a score of 46 that puts it well below the EU average of 63.6. Yet this score was the highest among all Balkan states (including Bulgaria, Romania and Greece) and most likely reflected the impact of anti-corruption steps taken in recent years.

country.”<sup>94</sup> Sanader also took further steps to facilitate the return of Serbian refugees, earning a positive assessment by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the EU. The Union rewarded Croatia’s efforts in all of these areas by granting the country candidate status in 2004, and by starting negotiations with it in 2005.

These successes, in combination with the fact that the opposition parties continued to be divided, contributed to another, albeit narrower, victory of the HDZ in the 2007 elections. With all major parties committed to the EU membership goal, the question of the desirability of joining the Union played little role in the campaign – especially when compared to the salience of the issue in the 2000 and 2003 elections. Consequently, the EU also no longer stood as a veto player in the elections or in the coalition-formation process at the time of the 2007 vote. In some respects, the vote was a ‘non-campaign’: having battled over EU issues in the 2000 and 2003, the main political actors competed in 2007 on purely symbolic issues or quibbled over which party was more competent to bring Croatia over the EU threshold.

### 2.4.3 The HDZ stumbles

Between 2007 and 2011, the HDZ’s political fortunes took a decisively negative turn. 2008 marked the end of a period of economic growth that had helped secure the HDZ’s victory in 2007. This coincided with a deceleration of the accession process, whereby Croatia’s negotiations were suspended for 6 months in 2009 due to an unsettled border dispute with Slovenia. While the first problem could be laid at the feet of the global economic crisis, the second was of more local origins. Aside from the difficulties that the glitch with Ljubljana posed to Zagreb, the block served also to highlight the risk of enlargement falling hostage to bi-lateral issues raised by existing member states – a point that has not gone unnoticed in Croatia’s neighbouring Serbia.

In addition, during the summer of 2009, Ivo Sanader suddenly announced his resignation as Prime Minister. After essentially handpicking his successor – the long-time ally and protégé, Jadranka Kosor – Sanader disappeared from the political scene only to make an unexpected and brazen attempt to regain the helm of the party in January 2010. In a *coup de théâtre*, Kosor impeded Sanader’s return and expelled him from the HDZ.<sup>95</sup> Subsequently, Sanader fled Croatia after coming under investigation for corruption. He was arrested in Austria and later extradited to Croatia where he faced trial and received a ten-year prison sentence.

Against the background of Sanader’s demise, Kosor led the HDZ-coalition government to the end of its parliamentary mandate and into the 2011 elections. The events surrounding the Sanader’s prosecutions, as well as other high-profile corruption cases, are still the subject of much debate. Clearly, pressure to meet EU’s conditions for good governance played a role in the Kosor governments’ efforts to tackle corruption. However, questions remain as to whether this constituted a long-term systemic change or simply a cosmetic manoeuvre by a deeply corrupted government and ruling political party.

Interestingly, the 2011 elections occurred under circumstances that were in some ways similar to those which led to the HDZ’s defeat in 2000. Croatia’s economic prospects were worsening with three years of consecutive economic decline and the opposition parties united to contend the elections. Largely out of desperation, the HDZ turned to old symbols of continuity with the Tuđman regime that had brought independence to Croatia in the 1990s, raising old fears about the spectre of

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<sup>94</sup> Petković, Krešimir (2009), “Simbolička nasuprot referencijskoj politici: Neuspjeh javnih politika na parlamentarnim izborima 2007”, *Stranke i javne politike: Izbori u Hrvatskoj 2007*, Politička misao, p. 62.

<sup>95</sup> Šarić, Mladenka (2010), “Kosor: Sanader je šest mjeseci pokušavao preuzeti stranku”, *Večernji List*.

a return to communism and even to the former Yugoslavia.<sup>96</sup> The HDZ pointed out that it was the party that had done the most to bring Croatia closer to the EU and that it had recently overseen several high-profile anti-corruption arrests.<sup>97</sup>

The competing Kukuriku coalition<sup>98</sup> responded by calling attention to the fact that almost all the indicted individuals in the government's anti-corruption 'crusade' were HDZ officials. In a key development, which likely broke any remaining hope for the HDZ's return to power, on 27 October 2011, the State attorney announced that the HDZ itself was under investigation for holding secret funds to finance previous election campaigns.<sup>99</sup> In the end, the Kukuriku coalition's victory resulted perhaps more from the spectacular collapse of its opponent than from any exceptional credentials of the alliance *per se*. Similar to the previous SDP-led government in 2003, this most recent coalition took office with daunting economic problems and serious questions as to whether it had the unity, professionalism, popular support, and policies to deal with some of Croatia's most pressing problems.<sup>100</sup>

As an important epilogue to the 2011 elections, intra-party elections were held for the new HDZ leadership in spring. Acting President and party 'moderate', Jadranka Kosor, failed to even make the run off.<sup>101</sup> In an intriguing turn in the party's post-Tuđman development, the newly elected party President, Tomislav Karamarko, spoke frequently of the need to revisit the values of Tuđman and to end the pattern of "de-Tuđmanisation" that has characterised the party for the past 13 years. He accused the incumbent government of "changing Croatia's world view", "attacking the Church, all our traditional values", and creating an "accidental" and "absurd" state by defaming the Homeland War and the leaders who fought it (that is, Tuđman).<sup>102</sup> In another indication of a shift to pre-Sanader dogmas, Karamarko spoke of the party paying more attention to youth and veterans, saying that "Veterans will always be in the centre of attention."<sup>103</sup>

What these statements mean for Croatia's policies under a potential future HDZ government is not clear. Frequently, opposition parties in the region and elsewhere resort to more confrontational rhetoric as a means to stake out a clearer position against the government, only to significantly soften their stance after taking office. Furthermore, surveys indicate that Karamarko is a rather unpopular political figure, even amongst HDZ voters (47%), suggesting that his discourse about de-Tuđmanisation is not yet finding strong resonance even in the party of Franjo Tuđman. Still, as of May 2013, the HDZ's overall rating converges on that of the increasingly unpopular SDP-led Kukuriku government. In addition, results of 2013 local elections suggest that the HDZ has consolidated once again and is ready to move beyond the damage caused by the corruption affairs and the 2011 election debacle.<sup>104</sup> Given these developments, perhaps both Croatia and the EU will see a Karamarko-led HDZ government as soon as the next general elections.

<sup>96</sup> One of the more bizarre manifestations of this strategy was a rumour that, in the event of its victory, the Kukuriku coalition would re-open the infamous Yugoslav-era political prison on *Goli Otok*. This was a clear example of the 'red' versus 'black' schism in Croatian politics, with the 'black' conservative forces of the HDZ threatening a return to 'red' communism after the SDP's victory (the strongest party in the Kukuriku coalition). See Antić, Miljenko (2012), "The parliamentary elections in Croatia, December 2011", *Electoral Studies*, Volume 31, pp. 613-639

<sup>97</sup> These included the arrest and sentencing of former Deputy Prime Minister, Damir Polančec (HDZ), and of the former Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader (HDZ).

<sup>98</sup> The Kukuriku coalition included the Social Democratic Party of Croatia, the Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats, the Istrian Democratic Assembly, and the Croatian Party of Pensioners

<sup>99</sup> Antić (2012), *op. cit.*

<sup>100</sup> Šoštarić, Maja (2011), "Challenges loom for Croatia's new 'Kukuriku' coalition government", *Balkan Analysis*, Volume 23.

<sup>101</sup> In a continuation of the HDZ leadership's past practices of dealing with internal opposition, Jadranka Kosor was purged from the party on 18 April 2013.

<sup>102</sup> "Karamarko: the HDZ must stop change of Croatia's world view", *daily.tportal.hr*, 6 January 2013.

<sup>103</sup> "Karamarko says the HDZ wants 'changes and unity'", *daily.tportal.hr*, 21 May 2012.

<sup>104</sup> "HDZ se konsolidirao, Milanović izgubio izbore", *Deutsch Welle*, 20 May 2013.



## 2.5 CROATIA ENTERS THE EU

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The Croatian case speaks to a number of theoretical and policy-related issues of relevance to accession processes in existing and future member states. First, the important case of the HDZ's 2000-2003 transformation once again demonstrates that a combination of pro-EU public opinion (at least in the early stages of integration), relatively rigid conditionality and the threat of external vetoes on certain political actors can provide the incentives for Eurosceptic parties to adopt more compliant policies. Had the transformation of the HDZ under Sanader not taken place, it is highly unlikely that Croatia would be a member state today.

In a less clear manner, conditionality seems to have yielded some gains in terms of better governance and a better functioning legal system. While actors like Kosor may have pursued anti-corruption campaigns for the merely instrumental purpose of pushing Croatia over the EU threshold, the fact is that major political actors in Croatia did eventually face trials for misusing the state. The key question, however, is whether these reforms will be sustainable and whether the prosecutions that have taken place have not been just a happy coincidence of political scores and justice. During his premiership, Ivo Sanader had alienated nearly every actor on the Croatian political scene. Thus, one is left to speculate as to whether the scales of justice, calibrated through the EU conditionality, finally tipped against him or whether they were helped by the weight of political enemies from nearly all the major political parties in the country.

Finally, the Croatian case adds to the growing concern about the depoliticising effects of a very instrumentally-rational EU integration process. The entire approach of treating pre-accession domestic politics as a race to membership has hindered the development of party politics and political competition over relevant domestic issues – in other words, it has contributed to removing debate about the EU from the Croatian polity. Over the past 13 years, the question of EU membership ('what does the EU want from this policy?') has been linked to almost every issue stunting the development of policy stances based upon the ideology and interests of parties and their supporters. With the question of EU membership now removed from the political equation, parties must find new means to mobilise voters and new bases to formulate and justify their policies. In the meanwhile, Croatian politics continues to be defined by events that took place during the World War II – a potentially dangerous prospect in a region with no shortage of historical memory.

And what of Croatia's post-accession prospects? Looking ahead to the country's EU membership one should begin by recognising that Croatia has clearly made some major strides in terms of establishing a political and economic system of a functioning state in a relatively short period of time and under less than ideal conditions. However Croatia's path has not been without costs. As indicated in surveys and media reports, Croats are distrustful of their political system and increasingly alienated and unenthusiastic about their country's European future. Against the backdrop of an EU in crisis, such conditions provide a rather inauspicious start for the Union's newest member state.

There is little reason to expect that noticeable improvements in the post-accession economic situation will produce a marked change in these ambivalent EU attitudes of the Croatian citizens. Public debt is high, many dislocations created by the post-1991 economic transformation remain in effect, and the economy has yet to recover from the impacts of the 2008 global crisis.<sup>105</sup> A recent

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<sup>105</sup> In August 2012, Croatia registered a 2.1% drop in the second quarter of 2012. According to a recent IMF report, "Real GDP growth per capita averaged 4.1 percent over 2000–2008. While this looks relatively sound, this performance is significantly weaker than some of its emerging Europe peers with similar (Estonia, Slovak Republic) and even higher (Czech Republic or Slovenia) initial GDP per capita. The growth differential is even larger in the crisis and post-crisis

report indicates that Croatia entered the EU with an adjusted GDP per capita which is 61% of the EU's average. This places it ahead of member states like Bulgaria and Romania but the country clearly joins as one of the weaker economies in the Union. Furthermore, unemployment in November 2012 stood at 17.3% – a figure that puts Croatia behind only Greece (26.8% in October) and Spain (26.6% in November) and just ahead of Portugal (16.3%).<sup>106</sup> In December 2012, Standard and Poor's downgraded Croatia's credit rating to junk status.<sup>107</sup> In the short term, few economic specialists expect that Croatia's EU accession will have a marked positive impact on these negative indicators.

In fact, Croatia's entrance into the EU will likely produce more immediate costs than benefits in terms of loss in competitiveness and new visa barriers. By joining the European Union's free trade zone, Croatia will effectively leave CEFTA that encompasses countries that have recently been Croatia's strongest trading partners. In response, a number of major Croatian enterprises have already relocated to CEFTA countries at some cost to Croatian jobs. Furthermore, new visa restrictions will fall on countries that have recently accounted for a large number of tourists to the region.<sup>108</sup> This could leave a deep mark on income in a country whose economy is substantially dependent on the tourist industry.

The prospects of continued lack of trust and support for the European Union also raises concerns about the fading of Euro-enthusiasm within the Croatian party system – particularly in the case of the HDZ. It is too early to find any concrete evidence of a substantive move back to the values and beliefs of Tuđman in the rhetoric of incumbent HDZ President, Karamarko, but a worsening economic situation and disillusionment with the EU could provide a rational basis for such a shift. Moreover, persistent apprehension about the continuing strength of extremist elements in the country as a whole (recently brought to the fore by fascist songs and chants of 'Kill the Serbs' at a recent Croatian-Serbian football match and pro-fascist references by Croatian football players) strengthen concerns that the achievements made in cultivating good relations with neighbouring countries and minorities remain fragile and subject to reversals in the event that the unfolding reality of Croatia's EU membership falls substantially short of expectations.<sup>109</sup>

The case of Croatia reminds us of the complex and sometimes ambivalent nature of the accession process, and highlights areas where the model of a purely rule-based vetting process that draws on the popular will of newly democratic polities fails to materialise. If the EU is to continue its expansion to the Balkans, what steps might be taken to better align the ideal of conditionality with a considerably messier reality? At least three policy recommendations seem in order:

First, the EU should invest more in sustained efforts to directly inform citizens about enlargement along with the anticipated benefits and costs of membership. Leaving this process largely to national parties allows politicians to manipulate the EU membership question for their own political gains and also seems to lessen the overall quality of the information that trickles down to people. This increases public apathy and the general sense that the European Union (integration) is primarily an elite-driven project. EU offices in potential candidate and member states should have the capacity and incentives to develop wider-reaching informational campaigns that involve audiences beyond

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period where Croatia underperformed most of its middle-income and CEEC peers." (IMF Report, *Republic of Croatia: selected issues*, 12 November 2012).

<sup>106</sup> Eurostat figures.

<sup>107</sup> Balazs, Penz and Kuzmanovic, Jasmina, "Croatia debt rating cut to junk by S&P", *Bloomberg.com*, 14 December 2012.

<sup>108</sup> In 2012, roughly 200,000 Russian tourists visited Croatia. The bulk of these will now need visas once Croatia enters the EU. Turkish tourists will also need visas. Tagirov, Tatjana, "Kraj dugog putovanja", *Vreme*, 27 June 2013.

<sup>109</sup> "Croatia beat Serbia in acrimonious football game", *BBC News Europe*, 22 March 2013; "Šimunić skandirao 'za dom spremni': Nisam ništa krivo napravio", *Večernji list*, 20 November 2013.

the more educated and wealthier parts of society (which are already likely to support membership) to build deeper and more broad-based EU support.

Second, European officials must maintain principles over political expediency. The EU membership project will be most effective in inducing lasting reforms if conditionality is truly conditional. In other words, progress towards membership must be contingent on the implementation of substantial, long-term reforms responding to clearly defined and consistent requirements. As was the case with previous candidates, specific moments in the Croatian-EU relationship were marked by questionable decisions to accept rhetoric over action or to quickly remove barriers to progress at the first sign of improved compliance (for instance, the ready acceptance of Carla del Ponte's full cooperation with the ICTY assessment prior to Gotovina's actual arrest, and the quick embrace of Sanader and the reformed HDZ following the 2003 elections). While there are perhaps good reasons to provide incremental incentives to promote continued compliance, an over-reliance on such strategies sends the message to domestic and international stakeholders that conditionality is as much about political bargaining as it is about substantive compliance with clearly defined rules. In a region characterised by low trust in political institutions, any relaxation of conditionality to meet political goals is sure to be capitalised upon by Eurosceptic elements.

Finally, as the enlargement process continues into the Balkans, the EU must focus on developing a new, post-crisis message for potential member states. One remarkable feature of the Croatian accession was the extent to which it was accompanied by scepticism regarding the future of the European Union. The fact that the EU is in crisis is no secret to any of the aspirant countries. Yet EU officials continue to promote the benefits of EU membership using the reasoning from a time when the Union held out a much brighter future for new members. Today, the examples of Greece and other smaller, less-developed EU member states present a much grimmer alternative narrative regarding the costs and benefits of integration. Lacking a realistic post-crisis membership narrative, the EU may find it more difficult to extract the type of concessions from EU-hopeful countries than it was able to demand from aspiring members during the 1990s and 2000s. The rather diffuse and vague sense of a semi-utopian EU future ('growth', 'order', 'travel', 'opportunity', etc.) must be replaced with more concrete assessments and articulations of the real benefits of EU accession in light of the economic difficulties being experienced by existing member states, right on the border of the Balkan region.



# EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND PARTY POLITICS IN MONTENEGRO

BY MARKO SOŠIĆ AND JOVANA MAROVIĆ

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3.1	The Montenegrin party system	31
3.2	The role of the EU in Montenegro's referendum on independence	33
3.3	Who is who in the Montenegrin parliament?	34
3.4	Party attitudes towards the EU	36
3.5	Parliament as the place of party consensus on EU integration	37
3.6	The EU conditionality and its impact on party politics	38
	3.6.1 Hopes for 'Sanaderisation'	40
	3.6.2 EU and the 'recording affair'	42
3.7	A new phase of European integration	43
3.8	Concluding remarks	44

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Polarisation is a key characteristic of the Montenegrin society. Divisions in terms of statehood, ethnicity, religion, and even language are very much alive in contemporary Montenegro. But if there is one issue that unites the public and political parties alike in the country, it is Montenegro's aspiration to membership in the European Union. Joining the EU is perceived as a question of national interest and of no alternative, with Montenegro's political parties competing mainly on who is more committed to the EU agenda and more competent in bringing about the country's swift European integration.

## 3.1 THE MONTENEGRIN PARTY SYSTEM

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The development of political pluralism in Montenegro can be divided into three periods. The first (1990-1996) corresponds to the formal establishment of a multiparty system after the so-called 'anti-bureaucracy' revolution<sup>110</sup> and includes the formation of the main political forces in the country. The second (1997-2006) starts with the ruling political elites breaking away from the influence of Serbia's Slobodan Milošević and is marked by the struggle between the main political parties over the state's union with Serbia. The third period (2006 to present) begins with Montenegro's independence and is defined by the country's quest for EU membership.

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<sup>110</sup> Since the end of World War II until 1991, Montenegro was one of the six constituent federal units of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In 1989, the political elites of the ruling Communist party were replaced by younger successors from the same party. See Darmanović, Srđan (2006), "Montenegro – New independent state in the Balkans" in *Referendum in Montenegro*, Podgorica: Centre for Monitoring.

In many regards, Montenegro can be considered a textbook example of a “dominant-party system”<sup>111</sup>, which is not to say that it is a one-party system. Various parties do compete for office in Montenegro in regular and popular elections but a single major party – the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) – dominates the political arena and has enjoyed power uninterruptedly since 1991 (see Table 3.1), although occasionally in coalition with smaller parties.

**Table 3.1: The Montenegrin governments since 1991**

Year of elections	Prime Minister	Party
1991	Milo Đokanović	League of Communists (later renamed DPS)
1992	Milo Đokanović	DPS
1996	Milo Đokanović	DPS
1998	Filip Vujanović	DPS
2001	Filip Vujanović	DPS
2002	Milo Đokanović	DPS
2006	Željko Šturanović	DPS
2009	Milo Đokanović/Igor Lukšić	DPS
2012	Milo Đokanović	DPS

Party factionalism – a key characteristic of dominant-party systems – is not an issue at present in Montenegro. However, the main opposition party – the Socialist People’s Party (SNP) – is in fact a splinter from the ruling DPS. The SNP broke off and established itself as a separate party in 1997 over disagreements with the DPS about Montenegro’s policy towards Milošević, being opposed to the bid for independence from Serbia.

The lack of power alternation in Montenegro has blurred the distinction between the state, and the dominant ruling party’s “long-standing dominance has become self-perpetuating, as the party controls all state institutions.”<sup>112</sup> In particular, the country’s public administration has become heavily politicised and staffed with people who are either sympathisers or members of the DPS. The number of jobs in public administration makes up for one-third of all occupied positions in Montenegro.<sup>113</sup> With the state as the largest employer, and the ruling party in office for over two decades, the promise of jobs in the public sector has become an important tool through which the ruling party can “exert pressure in the pre-election period by offering or threatening job security in exchange for loyalty in the elections, [...] while promising various permits, business licenses and patronage positions during elections.”<sup>114</sup>

The success of the DPS has gone hand in hand with the weakness of the opposition parties, which have proven unable over the years to rise above political infighting and secure a big share of the Montenegrin votes.

The real opposition in Montenegro has arguably stemmed from the vibrant community of NGOs and media in the country, which keep a close and critical eye on the government’s policies/work. It is also from the ranks of civil society that some of the Montenegrin political parties developed (such as the Movement for Changes and the Positive Montenegro), albeit they all ended up losing ‘stamina’ as soon as they became parliamentary actors.

<sup>111</sup> See Heywood, Andrew (2002), *Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 3rd edition, especially p. 262.

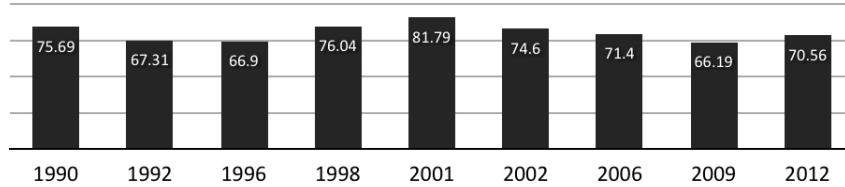
<sup>112</sup> Freedom House report on Montenegro (2012).

<sup>113</sup> Data from the Ministry of Finance’s document “Economic and fiscal programme for Montenegro 2010-2013”, p. 21, available at: <http://www.mf.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=67795&rType=2>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>114</sup> Freedom House report on Montenegro (2012).

The Montenegrins are quite interested in elections, with average turnout shown in Table 3.2 well above 66% in each of the nine parliamentary contests held since the introduction of the multiparty system in 1991.

**Table 3.2: Voter turnout in Montenegrin elections since the 1990s**



However, the fact that the government has never been replaced has impacted on the behaviour of the Montenegrin voters, who have arguably come to fear change and to repeatedly opt for the same, ‘familiar’ governmental party. This voting trend might also be related to people’s perceived lack of freedom of expression. Data from the *Balkan Monitor* opinion poll<sup>115</sup> indicate that as many as 64% of the respondents are concerned about clearly stating their political opinions. This figure is higher than anywhere else in the Balkan region and is counter-intuitive given Montenegro’s advanced stage of integration with the European Union.

### **3.2 THE ROLE OF THE EU IN MONTENEGRO’S REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE**

The beginning of Montenegro’s EU integration journey can be traced back to the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, which confirmed the European perspective of the region and stated that the future of the Balkan countries was within the Union.<sup>116</sup> However, the EU’s influence on domestic politics and political parties in Montenegro started to ‘bite’ during the country’s preparations for the referendum on independence from Serbia, which took place in 2006.

The Constitutional Charter of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro included a provision that a potential referendum on independence of one of the constituent states would be held according to recognised international and European standards. Based on this stipulation, it was possible for the EU to intervene in the organisation of Montenegro’s referendum on independence from Serbia, and to act as mediator between the two sides in the process.

The EU’s role was not negligible: it laid out the rules for the conduct of the referendum, established a winning threshold of 55% of the vote, and appointed Javier Solana – the EU’s High Representative at the time – as the Head of the Referendum Commission. The EU was also crucial in enabling dialogue between the Montenegrin political parties in the pro-independence and unionist blocks. The two camps were initially unable to find common ground but eventually managed to agree on all conditions as set out by the EU.

Come referendum day, little more than 55% of the Montenegrin people voted in favour of independence and there was no shortage of accusations of violations from the side of the unionists against the pro-independence block. This caused a standstill in the Referendum Commission – consisting of equal numbers of unionist and pro-independence members – which was overcome only when the EU-sponsored Head of the Commission used his stipulated ‘golden vote’ to overrule the opposition’s objections and validate the referendum results.

<sup>115</sup> Available at: <http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/index.php/dashboard>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

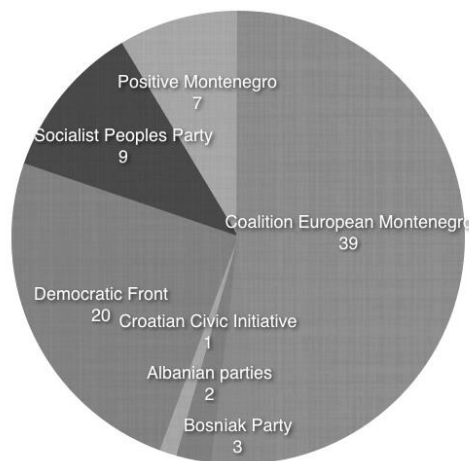
<sup>116</sup> See [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_PRES-03-163\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-03-163_en.htm), last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

The experience of the Montenegrin referendum on independence is a clear example of how the EU can act as a catalyst for cross-party cooperation and political dialogue, helping a country to solve a divisive issue in the spirit of peace and compromise.<sup>117</sup>

### 3.3 WHO IS WHO IN THE MONTENEGRIN PARLIAMENT?

The incumbent coalition – the Coalition for European Montenegro – comprises the Democratic Party of Socialists, the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Party<sup>118</sup>, and has won 39 out of the 81 parliamentary seats in the most recent general elections of October 2012. Together with the Bosniak Party and the Croatian Civic Initiative, this coalition formed the government, with Milo Đukanović serving his sixth mandate as Prime Minister.

**Table 3.3: Composition of current Montenegrin parliament**



**The Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS)** has been dominating the political scene in Montenegro for almost two and a half decades. It is the successor of the Montenegrin branch of the Yugoslav Communist League and has adopted its current name in 1991. Since then, the DPS has governed Montenegro (after 1997, in coalition with much smaller political partners). In 1997, the DPS made a radical turn by severing the country’s close ties with Serbia and Slobodan Milošević. As a result, various party officials broke rank and went on to establish the Socialist People’s Party.

**The Social Democratic Party (SDP)** was formed in 1993 from the unification of various groups and movements which opposed both the war in Yugoslavia and Montenegro’s pursuit of independence from Serbia.<sup>119</sup> After the 2012 general elections, the SDP secured eight seats in the parliament, and since 1998, it has been part of every government in coalition with the DPS. The party has tended to act as a sort of ‘opposition from within the government’, defying the DPS on occasion, such as on

<sup>117</sup> See Komar, Olivera and Vujović, Zlatko (2007), “Europeanisation of national political parties and party systems: case study of Montenegro”, *Politics in Central Europe*, Volume 3, Number 1 and 2, Department of Politics and International Relations, Pilsen: University of West Bohemia, pp. 51-70.

<sup>118</sup> The Liberal Party of Montenegro gained the status of parliamentary party at the 2012 elections as part of the Coalition for European Montenegro. The party has one seat in the current parliament.

<sup>119</sup> Although the DPS and the SDP are coalition partners at the national level, the SDP is often acting on its own in municipal elections, clashing at present with the DPS in the capital Podgorica’s local parliament, by repeatedly opposing the DPS’s mayor and asking for his resignation.



capital projects and certain privatisations of public resources.<sup>120</sup> The SDP excels at establishing links with European and international associations.<sup>121</sup>

The main opposition parties in Montenegro are the Socialist People's Party, the Democratic Front and the Positive Montenegro.

**The Socialist People's Party (SNP)** is the main opposition party in the country, born out of the rift in the Democratic Party of Socialists in 1997, brought together those in the DPS who opposed Đukanović and his shift away from Milošević. It was the strongest opposition party until the 2012 elections (when the Democratic Front surpassed it), and led the unionist movement in the 2006 quest for independence. Its defeat in the referendum prompted internal reform and a change of leadership in the SNP. From an essentially anti-system party, after failing to win in the referendum and in a number of subsequent elections, the SNP started to look for a new political identity in the promotion of European values.<sup>122</sup> Recently, the SNP has been losing support<sup>123</sup> due to the migration of some of its members to the newly formed Democratic Front<sup>124</sup>, as well as due to being increasingly perceived as potentially interested in allying with the DPS if its partnership with the SDP were to collapse.

**The Democratic Front (DF)** is a new political entity in Montenegro, formed at the 2012 parliamentary elections. It is broadly defined as an alliance of "free people, political and societal subjects gathered around the idea of democratic change in Montenegro."<sup>125</sup> The DF is the marriage between two political parties with considerable experience in the Montenegrin parliament – that is, the New Serb Democracy and the Movement for Changes – joined also by independent Montenegrin intellectuals and smaller political entities.

**The Movement for Changes (PzP)**, one of the constituent parts of the Democratic Front, was established in 2006, after it had initially functioned as a non-governmental organisation – the Group for Changes. Since its 2006 electoral breakthrough<sup>126</sup> into politics, the PzP's support has been dwindling, not least due to the fact that the party strayed progressively further away from its core voters and antagonised some of its initial electorate with an increasingly conservative ideological profile. The PzP played a crucial role in the adoption of the 2007 Constitution of Montenegro, siding with the ruling coalition and voting for the adoption of the Constitution, notwithstanding its opposition status.

**The New Serb Democracy (NOVA)** was formed in 2009 as the merger between various smaller parties of pro-Serb and unionist affiliation. NOVA is the most vocal opponent to Montenegro's integration into NATO and most electorally successful among the pro-Serbian opposition voters.

**The Positive Montenegro** is a newly formed parliamentary party, established only a couple of months before the most recent general elections in October 2012. It is a centre-left political party,

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<sup>120</sup> Recently, the SDP has been distancing itself from the DPS in opposition to several important issues such as the rebalancing of the national budget in July 2013, boycotting the 2013 presidential elections and opposing the DPS presidential candidate, Filip Vujanović.

<sup>121</sup> For example, the SDP is a member of the Socialist International and of the Party of European Socialists (PES), with its leader, Ranko Krivokapić, recently elected as President of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Parliamentary Assembly.

<sup>122</sup> See Komar, Olivera and Vujović, Zlatko (2007), *op. cit.*

<sup>123</sup> From 16 seats won in the 2009 parliamentary elections, its support has dropped to 9 MPs at the 2012 elections.

<sup>124</sup> A fraction of SNP, headed by its former leader, Predrag Bulatović, decided to leave SNP and join the Democratic Front after negotiations between the Democratic Front and the SNP about forming a coalition failed.

<sup>125</sup> See <http://www.demokraskifront.me/index.php/2012-08-25-20-12-52/zadatak-demokraskog-fronta>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>126</sup> The party secured 11 seats in its first parliamentary elections of 2006 but in the 2009 electoral contest it won only 5. As part of the Democratic Front in the 2012 elections, the PzP preserved its 5 seats in the parliament.

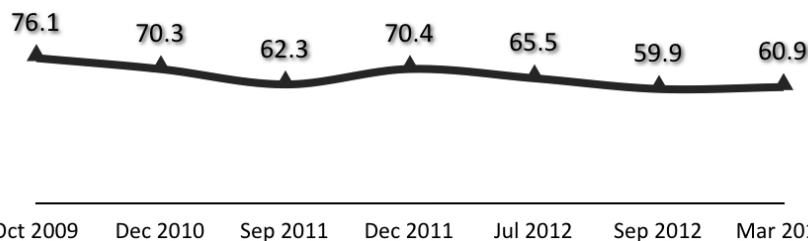
led by the former NGO activist, Darko Pajović. In the 2012 parliamentary elections it won seven seats in the Montenegrin parliament, and fared equally well in the subsequent local elections, in several municipalities.

### 3.4 PARTY ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU

The process of European integration finds widespread support in Montenegro, both among the public and political parties. All Montenegrin parties, without exception, back the country’s ambition to join the EU. There are not even extra-parliamentary actors in Montenegro that would express Eurosceptic sentiments. All the parliamentary parties have, since the 2006 referendum, amended their political programmes, clearly underlining the strategic goal of EU membership in their platforms.

No political party in Montenegro wants to be perceived as obstructing the country’s progress towards EU membership. In addition, the European attitudes of the Montenegrin politicians mirror those of the electorate in the country. Citizens’ support for EU integration has been significant and stable over the years (see Table 3.4). However, a recent survey shows that public support is based neither on realistic assessments of what EU membership brings nor on knowledge about the EU itself.<sup>127</sup> Still, voters’ positive attitudes towards the Union/integration have allowed the Montenegrin political leaders to push forward with the EU agenda and (at times with difficult) Brussels-demanded reforms.

**Table 3.4: Public support for EU integration in Montenegro**



Source: CEDEM public opinion polls (2009-2013), [www.cedem.me](http://www.cedem.me)

To be sure, different political parties have distinct interpretations of what success on the EU track entails. The ruling coalition tends to emphasise the positive assessments of Montenegro made by EU officials, such as the European Commission in its Annual Progress Reports on the candidate and potential candidate countries for EU membership. The DPS and the SDP often try to put a positive spin on the language of the Brussels’ executive and to book Montenegro’s successes on the integration path as their own, especially at elections time.<sup>128</sup> Conversely, the opposition parties generally focus on the problems highlighted in the Progress Reports, calling on the government to deliver results and to ensure the implementation of the adopted legislation.<sup>129</sup> In effect, the opposition’s critique seeks to cast doubt on the government’s commitment to the goal of EU accession. By picking holes in the government’s integration efforts, the opposition parties portray

<sup>127</sup> Eurobarometer, “Public opinion in the EU – autumn 2013”, answers to questions QA16 examining the basic knowledge about the EU and its functioning, cumulative results of the Montenegrins citizens that were surveyed are among the five lowest out of all the 34 countries and territories surveyed.

<sup>128</sup> See Đukanović’s speech at the Sixth Congress of the DPS, in 2011, available at: <http://www.dps.me/vijesti/306-milokongresgovor>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>129</sup> For instance, Predrag Bulatović (MP, Democratic Front) was quoted saying in February 2013: “The government of Montenegro and the DPS are unwilling to fight against organised crime and corruption. Therefore, Montenegro will have problems during the accession negotiations with the European Union in this field.” See <http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/bulatovic-krupnih-riba-ima-medu-ministrama-clanak-113348>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

themselves as the only actors willing and capable to carry out the needed reforms and to bring the country over the EU threshold.

#### Reactions to the European Commission's 2012 Progress Report on Montenegro:

<i>The report indicates that progress was made in the previous period</i>	<i>The report is a serious alarm that the government must be changed</i>
representative of ruling coalition	representative of opposition

Source: <http://balkans.aliazeera.net/vijesti/reakcije-na-izvjestaj-ek-u-crnoj-gori>

### 3.5 PARLIAMENT AS THE PLACE OF PARTY CONSENSUS ON EU INTEGRATION

The parliament is the place where this widespread party consensus on Montenegro's EU integration has been forged.

In June 2005 – a turbulent period on the eve of the country's independence referendum – while the opposition was boycotting the parliament, several major NGOs<sup>130</sup> made the proposal that all political parties should draft a declaration on the country's goal of EU accession. The Montenegrin parties complied, as none of them wanted to be seen as anti-European and have others hold it against them in the campaign for the referendum on independence. By working together, the country's political parties managed to adopt, almost unanimously, a document that clearly stated:<sup>131</sup>

...[the] strategic interest of the citizens of Montenegro is progress in the European integration process, to which the parliament of Montenegro will give full support and necessary impetus.<sup>132</sup>

When it comes to the parliament's institutional role in the process of EU integration, its activities have been formally chaired by the opposition. The first special body established to monitor and contribute to the government's membership efforts was the National Council for EU Integration (NCEI). This was led by representatives of the opposition but failed short of expectations for many reasons, ranging from political insufficiencies and an inadequate composition, to a general inactivity and small number of meetings, lack of initiative, poor leadership, and unresolved issues regarding its limited staff capacities.<sup>133</sup>

In 2012, the Rules of Procedure of the parliament were amended in an attempt to strengthen the assembly's role in the process of EU integration in preparation for the start of Montenegro's accession negotiations. The NCEI was abolished and replaced with a new parliamentary Committee for EU Integration. Although the Rules of Procedure do not regulate who chairs this committee, consensus was reached between the political parties that a representative of the opposition should be at its

<sup>130</sup> The NGOs in question were the European Movement in Montenegro, Centre for the Development of NGOs, Centre for Democracy and Human Rights, Centre for Civic Education, Group for Changes, and the Centre for Monitoring.

<sup>131</sup> For more on the history of this declaration, see the website of the European Movement in Montenegro, available at: [http://www.emim.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=425&Itemid=78&lang=en](http://www.emim.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=425&Itemid=78&lang=en), last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>132</sup> Article 1, Declaration on accession to the EU, June 2005.

<sup>133</sup> See "The parliament of Montenegro and the process of European integration – Just watching or taking part?", *Institute Alternativa*, 2011, available at: <http://institut-alternativa.org/skupstina-crne-gore-u-procesu-evropskih-integracija-posmatrac-ili-aktivni-ucjesnik/?lang=en>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

helm.<sup>134</sup> The competencies of this committee are set very broadly and its true effect is yet to be seen as the process of negotiations intensifies.

In December 2013, the parliament adopted a resolution on European integration.<sup>135</sup> Its main goal is to define more closely the role of the Montenegrin parliament (especially of its Committee on European integration) in the country's accession process, as well as the assembly's relation with the government during the EU negotiations. The resolution effectively widens the scope of the Committee's competencies, brings additional obligations for the government and clarifies some procedural issues in the parliament's dealings with negotiating positions for the chapters of the *acquis*. Opposition MPs had the main role in drafting the resolution, which they saw as a way of widening their channels of influence in the accession process through the parliament.

While Montenegro's goal of EU integration enjoys widespread support, the same cannot be said about the country's aspiration to join NATO. Euro-Atlantic integration is a highly divisive issue in the Montenegrin society, bringing back painful memories of the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. The incumbent ruling coalition – the DPS-SDP, Movement for Changes, Positive Montenegro, and minority parties – are in favour of Montenegro's NATO membership in their political programmes, while the SNP<sup>136</sup> and NOVA<sup>137</sup> oppose it. Public backing for the country's NATO membership is also quite low,<sup>138</sup> especially when compared to support for the EU. Pro-Serb political parties are adamant about the need to solve the issue of NATO integration via referendum.

The attempts of the governing coalition to couple Montenegro's EU aspirations with the quest for NATO membership and to portray them as complementary processes have so far proven futile. In September 2008, the government proposed a resolution on the need to accelerate the European and Euro-Atlantic integration. It was adopted, but solely with the votes of the MPs from the ruling coalition, while the opposition marked their ballots against it. With growing expectations that Montenegro will be invited to join NATO at the 2014 UK Summit,<sup>139</sup> the impact of this issue on the political parties in Montenegro is likely to intensify in the near future, perhaps to a greater extent than the EU accession issue has done so far.

### 3.6 THE EU CONDITIONALITY AND ITS IMPACT ON PARTY POLITICS

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Some of the thorniest conditions for the opening of Montenegro's accession negotiations with the EU in June 2012 were the request to harmonise the electoral legislation with the 2007

<sup>134</sup> The first and current Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for EU Integration is an MP from the Democratic Front, Slaven Radunović.

<sup>135</sup> "Resolution on the manner, quality and dynamics of the process of Montenegro's integration into European Union" ([http://www.skupstina.me/~skupcg/skupstina/cms/site\\_data/DOC25/ZAKONI%20I%20ZVJESTAJI/366/366\\_0.PDF](http://www.skupstina.me/~skupcg/skupstina/cms/site_data/DOC25/ZAKONI%20I%20ZVJESTAJI/366/366_0.PDF), last accessed on: 30 December 2013).

<sup>136</sup> The SNP believes that the Partnership for Peace is a sufficient framework for Montenegro's involvement in international security organisations, initiatives and missions (<http://www.snp.co.me/strana.asp?kat=1&id=6157>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013).

<sup>137</sup> See <http://www.nova.org.me/node/20>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>138</sup> The latest CEDEM polls (March 2013) show that 52% of citizens are against NATO membership, 31% are in favour, while 17% hold no opinion. See <http://www.cedem.me/sr/programi/istraivanja-javnog-mnjenja/politiko-javno-mnjenje.html>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>139</sup> See, for example, the statement of the Montenegro's Ambassador to the United States, Srđan Darmanović, "There are chances Montenegro will be invited to join the EU", *Pobjeda*, 20 January 2014 or the Speaker of the Parliament's call for an urgent session of the Council for Security and Defence to plan the intensifying the NATO integration activities ahead of the NATO September summit ("Urgent: Krivokapić asks for a meeting of the Council for Security and Defence", *Vijesti*, 21 January 2014).

Constitution<sup>140</sup>, as well as to adopt amendments to the Constitution in order to strengthen the independence of the judiciary. Both of these issues were politically sensitive and required a two-thirds parliamentary majority to pass.

The absolute-majority threshold needed for making changes to the electoral legislation opened space for political ‘blackmailing’ among the main Montenegrin parties insofar as the opposition began to demand concessions on largely unrelated policy areas from the government in exchange for their support on the European agenda. This is how the question of the country’s official language came to the fore, with the pro-Serbian parties setting ultimatums on the ruling coalition to recognise Serbian in education and formal use. This ‘game’ dragged on for years, with the deadlines set for the harmonisation of the electoral legislation with the Constitution being breached as many as seven times.

The EU kept its ground and tried to exert pressure on the country by making any advances towards EU membership strictly conditional upon the adoption by Montenegro of the outstanding election laws. As pointed out by the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle, the aligning of the electoral legislation to the Constitution was “one of the conditions to be met by Montenegro in view of opening EU accession negotiations”.<sup>141</sup>

The electoral law was eventually adopted in August 2011, once the government agreed to compromise with the opposition on the language issue as a means of securing the latter’s cooperation. Two months later, the Commission recommended the opening of accession talks with Montenegro. In the words of Commissioner Füle:

The consensus among political parties and within Montenegrin society on EU integration is a huge asset for Montenegro’s EU course. We encourage all sides to continue demonstrating statesmanship and responsibility on all issues related to Montenegro’s efforts to fulfil the key priorities.<sup>142</sup>

An opportunity to test this consensus arose soon thereafter in relation to the adoption of constitutional amendments aimed at strengthening the judiciary. These changes to the Constitution were part of the commitment made by Montenegro when joining the Council of Europe in 2007<sup>143</sup> but they were also requested by the European Commission in order for Montenegro to be able to make progress on Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security). As the deadlines for completing the task approached, the ruling coalition began to accuse the opposition of endangering the EU prospects of Montenegro by hesitating to offer support for their proposals.

In July 2013, the parliament adopted a series of laws<sup>144</sup> designed to enhance the independence of the judiciary, in particular by reducing political influence on the appointment of prosecutors and judges through more transparent and merit-based procedures, and by increasing the majority thresholds where the parliament is involved. This time around, the opposition refrained from linking these

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<sup>140</sup> The key issue being how to implement in practice the Constitutional right of minorities to a proportionate representation in the national parliament and local assemblies.

<sup>141</sup> Statement by Füle from 21 August 2011, available at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release MEMO-11-562\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-562_en.htm), last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>142</sup> “Commissioner Füle encourages adoption of the Election Law by the parliament of Montenegro”, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release MEMO-11-562\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-562_en.htm), last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>143</sup> It was also a key requirement made in 2012 by the Council of Europe Assembly in its Resolution 1890 on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Montenegro.

<sup>144</sup> Thanks to the support of the ruling coalition, the Social People’s Party and the Positive Montenegro, with the 19 MPs of the Democratic Front voting against them.

EU-related amendments to other issues, and party consensus was found through consultations and concessions with all relevant stakeholders. The outcome was warmly welcomed in Brussels.<sup>145</sup>

One of the rare occasions in which members of the ruling coalition protested to a request from Brussels was the decriminalisation of libel. As part of a wider reform of its criminal code, Montenegro fully decriminalised libel and insult, which became matters of civil litigation. However, smaller coalition partners, like the SDP, continued to voice opposition to this manoeuvre, arguing that “Europe cannot ask us to do something that it has not done itself”<sup>146</sup>. Yet this objection did not go further than rhetoric, and the decriminalisation of libel was adopted by Montenegro in June 2011.

### 3.6.1 Hopes for ‘Sanaderisation’

The fight against corruption and organised crime has been the major bone of contention in Montenegro’s process of EU integration. In December 2012, the EU member states in the Council delayed the decision to open accession talks with Montenegro, asking the country to produce concrete results and demonstrate a solid track record in its efforts to deal with corruption and organised crime. Moreover, for the first time ever, the Europol was asked by the Council to prepare a report on the situation of organised crime in Montenegro<sup>147</sup>, which would complement the Commission’s screening reports on Chapters 23 and 24.<sup>148</sup> These issues have also inspired the Commission’s new approach to accession negotiations, whereby the most difficult areas of reform (such as those related to Chapters 23 and 24) need to be tackled now in the early stages of the talks and concluded only at the very end of the process. Montenegro is the first country to experience this methodology, and the other Balkan EU aspirants will have to follow suit.

In its most recent 2013 Progress Report on Montenegro, the European Commission warned that:

Corruption remains prevalent in many areas and continues to be a serious problem. (...) Increased efforts are needed to establish a credible track record of investigation, prosecution and conviction in corruption cases, including high-level cases. (...) Additional efforts are needed in the fight against organised crime. (...) A track record of proactive investigations and final convictions in other organised crime areas has yet to be established, including confiscation of criminal assets.<sup>149</sup>

The opposition parties do not question the goal of EU integration but try to play down the role of the government in getting Montenegro this far in the process. They claim that accolades to the executive are misplaced, and that the main reason why Montenegro received the status of candidate country and the green light for the start of accession negotiations has to do with the situation in the EU and the Balkans, in general.<sup>150</sup> According to them, Brussels perceives Montenegro as a good example of EU aspirant country in the region because it does not have any unresolved issues that endanger security in the Balkans. In addition, they claim that this allows the Union to permit that Montenegro

<sup>145</sup> Statement of the European Commission on the day of the adoption of these amendments available at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-13-735\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-735_en.htm), last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>146</sup> The then MP of the SDP, Raško Konjević, in a session of the parliament on 8 June 2013, available at: <http://www.portalanalitika.me/politika/vijesti/28804-skuptina-zavrena-rasprava-o-dekriminalizaciji-klevete-.html>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>147</sup> “Europol’s report is a result of bargaining among EU member states that shared different views regarding Montenegro’s progress before unanimously deciding to open negotiations. For example, the Swedish Foreign Minister, Carl Bildt, has openly stated that his country might block Montenegro’s advance towards the EU if it does not get strong guarantees that reforms are closely monitored”. See Milosevic, Milena and Armakolas, Ioannis (2012), “Montenegro’s EU membership: tough talks ahead”, Eliamep.

<sup>148</sup> Council Conclusions on Montenegro, 26 June 2012.

<sup>149</sup> Montenegro 2013 Progress Report, 16 October 2013.

<sup>150</sup> Programme of the Democratic Front, available at: <http://www.demokratskifront.me/index.php/program>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

should formally advance on its integration path as a means of motivating other EU-hopefuls in the region to conduct much-needed reforms, as well as in order to showcase the country as a success-story of enlargement policy.

Furthermore, the opposition calls into question the sincerity of the commitment made by the ruling coalition to the reform process required for integration, arguing that genuine progress would effectively impinge on the interests of the incumbent political elites. More specifically, if Montenegro was to establish a solid track record in fighting corruption and organised crime – as the EU requires – the opposition parties claim that their counterparts in government would have to ‘shoot themselves in the foot’ by going after their own corrupt officials. The opposition is therefore convinced that the successful negotiations of Montenegro with the EU on Chapters 23 and 24 would entail the creation of conditions for a so-called ‘Sanaderisation’<sup>151</sup> campaign in the country.

In October 2011, the opposition and some leading newspapers started to publicly accuse the DPS and Đukanović of Euroscepticism and dishonesty in their devotion to the goal of accession. These allegations were reinforced by rumours that Đukanović was retreating from the EU integration path or at least slowing down with reforms because of the financial crisis in the Eurozone, but also out of fear of ‘Sanaderisation’. In an interview to the state-owned daily *Pobjeda*, Đukanović was heard saying that the “EU has internal problems and the pace of EU integration of Montenegro does not depend only on Montenegro but the situation in the EU itself.”<sup>152</sup> He then went on to argue that Montenegro should turn to internal issues and, irrespective of the EU’s conduct, undertake reforms on its own. For many, this was interpreted as an intention to backtrack on the country’s membership aspiration.

In December 2010, four days after Montenegro was given the candidate status, Đukanović resigned his position as Prime Minister, having earlier announced that he would do so if the EU allowed Montenegro to advance its membership bid.<sup>153</sup> Igor Lukšić, later Minister of Finance, replaced him and took office until the 2012 parliamentary elections. In the meantime, Đukanović maintained the presidency of the DPS. According to the opposition, Đukanović’s withdrawal from the state position in December 2010 was made under pressure from Brussels, as a pre-condition implied by the EU leaders in order for Montenegro to obtain the candidate status. As the leader of the Movement for Changes, Nebojša Medojević, put it:

It is a logical sequence of events in the region. The European Union has a ‘package’ for the Balkans. Part of this ‘package’ is the arrest of the former Croatian Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader, a report on the criminal activities of the Kosovo Prime Minister, Hashim Thaci, and the resignation of Milo Đukanović.<sup>154</sup>

Thus, when Đukanović was reinstated as Prime Minister after the 2012 parliamentary elections, the opposition expected that this would slow down the process of reforms, and that EU officials and member states will be vocal in criticising Đukanović’s return. However, these hopes were dashed: Đukanović’s comeback to premiership in December 2012 was in fact welcomed by the leaders of the

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<sup>151</sup> ‘Sanaderisation’ is a term coined after the Prime Minister of Croatia, Ivo Sanader, who has been indicted on several corruption charges and, in November 2012, sentenced to ten years in prison.

<sup>152</sup> “DPS will not make sacrifices for anyone”, daily *Pobjeda*, 13 July 2011.

<sup>153</sup> Đukanović resigned with the explanation that, after twenty years in public office, he had grown tired of the responsibility it entails and that he needed to step away in order for the institutions of Montenegro to start developing more vigorously. However, he kept his role as leader of the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists, maintaining a firm influence on the decision-making processes in the country, even though formally not holding public office.

<sup>154</sup> *B92*, [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2010&mm=12&dd=21&nav\\_category=167&nav\\_id=480901](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2010&mm=12&dd=21&nav_category=167&nav_id=480901), last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

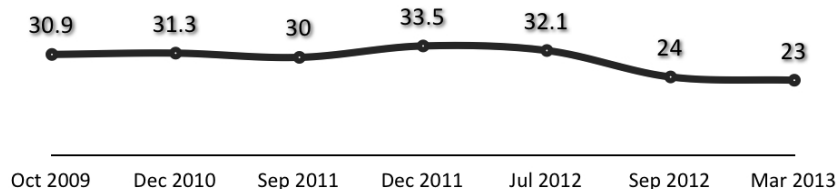
Balkan region, but also by European officials<sup>155</sup>, and he kept the EU integration at the top of the country’s political agenda.

### 3.6.2 EU and the ‘recording affair’

On the eve of the 2013 presidential elections, the ruling DPS came under intense pressure from the opposition, media and the EU because of the so-called ‘recording affair’. This scandal concerned the alleged misuse of public funds for party political purposes by DPS officials. It broke out after the opposition daily newspaper *Dan* published in February 2012 transcripts of leaked audio recordings in which DPS party officials can be heard allegedly discussing about the use of state resources, such as the allocation of jobs according to party affiliation ahead of the last year’s parliamentary elections.

Since then, EU officials have repeatedly made statements<sup>156</sup> asking the Montenegrin authorities to investigate the matter. Commissioner Füle firmly asserted that Montenegro had to “rebuild confidence in the separation of party and state, and that a legal and political action was needed to re-establish trust in state institutions.”<sup>157</sup>

**Table 3.5: Public trust in political parties in Montenegro**



Source: CEDEM public opinion polls (2009-2013), [www.cedem.me](http://www.cedem.me)

In response, the opposition proposed conducting a parliamentary inquiry in the affair, which was endorsed by a majority in the parliament. The inquiry committee was chaired by an opposition MP and heard statements given by several state and DPS officials, including Đukanović himself. They all denied the allegations that members of the ruling party benefited from favouritism. Ultimately, the inquiry committee could not agree on its conclusions and simply adopted a technical report of the investigation. While opposition MPs claimed that the allegations of misuse of public funds were confirmed, MPs from the DPS interpreted the report of the inquiry committee as showing that there was no evidence of such abuse and discrimination in employment along partisan lines.

The EU advised the Montenegrin authorities to continue the investigation on this issue, and the European Commission warned that “significant efforts need to be made to prevent the abuse of state resources for electoral campaigns.”<sup>158</sup> These and other EU reactions were used by the opposition to give weight to their claims against the ruling coalition, and in favour of the EU to push Montenegro towards ‘Sanaderisation’.

<sup>155</sup> For example, MEP Jelko Kacin congratulated Milo Đukanović and stated that he was “taking the most responsible position in the country at a time when Montenegro faces major economic challenges and reforms to be implemented within the framework of European integration.” See <http://www.pobjeda.me/2012/12/11/kacin-cestitao-dukanovicu-evropski-parlament-ostace-cvrst-oslonac-i-prijatelj-crne-gore/>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>156</sup> See, for example, Commissioner Füle’s statement, available at: <http://www.gov.me/en/News/129054/progress-on-these-issues-the-constitutional-amendments-the-investigation-of-the-Audio-Recordings-affair-the-follow-up-to-the-OSC.html> or the joint statement of the Fourth meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between the EU and Montenegro, available at: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/137621.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/137621.pdf), both links last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>157</sup> “Montenegro authorities to investigate leaked tapes”, *Settimes.com*.

<sup>158</sup> Montenegro 2013 Progress Report, *op. cit.*, p. 9.



### 3.7 A NEW PHASE OF INTEGRATION

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In June 2012, the European Council endorsed the Commission's assessment that Montenegro complied with the membership criteria and could start accession negotiations. However, in the case of Montenegro, it was decided that the membership talks would follow a different logic than before, which can best be described as an attempt to help the country 'swallow the biggest frog first'. In concrete terms, this means that issues related to the judiciary and fundamental rights (Chapter 23) and to justice, freedom and security (Chapter 24) will have to "be tackled early in the accession process and the corresponding chapters opened accordingly, based on action plans, as they require the establishment of convincing track records."<sup>159</sup> The Commission's new methodology builds on its experience with Croatia, which closed Chapters 23 and 24 right before finishing its negotiations with the EU, as well as with Bulgaria and Romania, which continue to face difficulties in these fields.

Thus, Montenegro is the first country to begin accession talks with the screening of Chapters 23 and 24. The new approach allows these complex areas of reform to be tackled early on in the process, with the intention to close them at the very end, as well as to focus on developing track records and interim benchmarks.<sup>160</sup> If progress on these chapters is lagging too far behind, the member states reserve the right to put the overall negotiation process on hold, thanks to a safeguard – 'equilibrium' – clause.<sup>161</sup>

One of the first important steps in this new stage of Montenegro's EU integration was the choice of the person who would lead the negotiations. This issue stirred controversy as opposition and civil society actors feared that party affiliation rather than competence will determine the choice. Andrija Pejović – career diplomat and non-affiliated politically – was appointed as EU Chief Negotiator after consultations between the then Prime Minister, Igor Lukšić, and all the political parties in the country.

The formal aspects of the negotiation process have been addressed in a swift manner. Working groups for all 33 negotiating chapters of the *acquis* have been established, explanatory and bilateral meetings held for all of them, and negotiations on two chapters (Chapter 25 on Science and research and Chapter 26 on Education and culture) have been already provisionally closed.

Negotiating groups were opened to civil society sector, with public calls published for interested NGOs to apply with their representatives. In the 33 negotiating groups that were formed, there are representatives of 34 civil society organisations, selected on the basis of the public invitation issued by the government.<sup>162</sup> This new modality of cooperation between the government and NGOs has not been without challenges, which have ranged from issues of funding for civil society representatives' participation in explanatory and bilateral meetings in Brussels to the regulation of the working groups'

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<sup>159</sup> *Enlargement strategy and main challenges 2011-2012*, European Commission, 12 October 2011, p. 23, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2011/package/strategy\\_paper\\_2011\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2011/package/strategy_paper_2011_en.pdf), last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>160</sup> *Montenegro: new demanding phase in EU process*, European Commission, MEMO/12/650, 6 September 2012, available at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-12-650\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-650_en.htm), last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>161</sup> The safeguard clause is formulated in point 25 of the EU's Negotiating Framework with Montenegro, stating that: "should progress under these chapters (23 and 24) significantly lag behind progress in the negotiations overall, and after having exhausted all other available measures, the Commission will on its own initiative or on the request of one third of the member states propose to withhold its recommendations to open and/or close other negotiating chapters, and adapt the associated preparatory work, as appropriate, until this imbalance is addressed." Document available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/st20002\\_05\\_mn\\_framedoc\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/st20002_05_mn_framedoc_en.pdf), last accessed on: 10 November 2013.

<sup>162</sup> Some NGOs have representatives in more than one negotiating group. Data from the government's "Semi-annual report on cooperation between the ministries and NGOs", October 2013, available only in Montenegrin at: <http://www.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=152482&rType=2>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

relation with the public.<sup>163</sup> However, so far such hurdles were dealt with in a constructive manner by both sides, which helped to enhance the participatory dimension of the negotiation process.<sup>164</sup>

The government has adopted negotiating positions and action plans for Chapters 23 and 24 in October 2013.<sup>165</sup> The parliament was included in the process as well. At the session of the parliamentary Committee for EU Integration which was closed to the public, the country's negotiating position for Chapter 24 was endorsed unanimously. The negotiating position for Chapter 23 was reviewed as well, and the opposition MPs had a proposal for amendment which was accepted by the government representatives, leading to its unanimous endorsement.<sup>166</sup>

In December 2013, at the Accession Conference with Montenegro at the Ministerial Level, the negotiations in Chapters 23 and 24 were opened, along with three other chapters (Chapter 5 on Public Procurement, Chapter 6 on Company Law and Chapter 20 on Enterprise and Industrial Policy).

Although Chapters 23 and 24 are given the most attention in this phase of the negotiations, initial assessment of compliance suggests that there are other, even more demanding, areas of reform ahead. For example, as stated in the 2013 Progress Report, Montenegro will have to invest major efforts in Chapter 27 on Environment and Climate Change, where the situation on the ground is utterly incompatible with the *acquis* and where the financial costs of adjustment are significant.

### 3.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

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Since the independence of Montenegro in 2006, the prospect of EU membership has had a great influence on the country's party system dynamics. The experience of the referendum on independence showed how important the EU was in building cross-party cooperation and political dialogue, and in helping the country to solve a divisive issue in the spirit of peace and compromise. Today, the goal of joining the EU enjoys widespread support in Montenegro, both among the public and political parties. Competitive pressures to preserve political relevance have encouraged some parties to moderate their discourses and to embrace the EU membership goal.

However, the European integration agenda is used by both sides of the political spectrum for their own strategic interest and in different ways. The ruling coalition generally tries to book all the successes on the EU path as 'their own', while at the same time downplaying EU's critical remarks towards the country. The opposition, on the other hand, tends to question the government's

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<sup>163</sup> The decision on establishing a structure for negotiating the accession of Montenegro stipulates that institutions fund respective members of the working groups. This provision has prevented members of the working groups from the NGO sector to attend explanatory and bilateral screenings (analytical reviews) in Brussels since their organisations did not have the necessary financial means to cover travel expenses. Their work was further made difficult because they have not been allowed to freely express their opinions about the course of the negotiations in public. Working Group's Rules of Procedure stipulate that only the Chief negotiator, the Negotiator for any particular chapter and the Head of the Working Group may publicly present views on the progress within the process.

<sup>164</sup> For more info see Jovana Marović (2013), "Civil society involvement in accession negotiations - Too much to ask?" in *Parliamentary Challenges in the EU Accession Process*, Institute for Democracy and Mediation, available at: [http://idmalbania.org/sites/default/files/publications/parliamentary\\_challenges\\_-\\_english-final.pdf](http://idmalbania.org/sites/default/files/publications/parliamentary_challenges_-_english-final.pdf), last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>165</sup> <http://www.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=145773&rType=2>, last accessed on: 30 December 2013.

<sup>166</sup> The European Commission has kept a firm grip on the process of drafting the Action Plans, issuing in May 2013 harsh criticism of the preliminary versions of these documents. The Commission's main concerns were that the part on anti-corruption efforts was too vague, deadlines for some measures being delayed as well as the action plans lacking the budget component (how much the implementation of certain measures would cost and how they would be funded, through donor support or from the national budget). Using the input of the Commission and of NGOs, the working group amended the action plans and prepared versions that were assessed as satisfactory in Brussels.

devotion to EU accession and to shine a bright spot on the less positive comments made by Brussels about the country's progress (or lack thereof). However, on several key EU-demanded reforms that required the consensus of the Montenegrin political parties, the two sides have eventually managed to put their differences aside and find a common language for the goal of pushing the country forward on the integration track.

The Montenegrin party system is still under the long shadow of one dominant party – the DPS – which has been in power for well over two decades. This has blurred the distinction between the state and government, has diminished the freedom of expression and has weakened the development of opposition parties. Along with other factors, it has fostered ramping corruption and organised crime in Montenegro, thereby preventing the consolidation of the rule of law.

In order to break the monopoly on power of the ruling DPS, the opposition is increasingly reaching out to the international community. They are trying to expose evidence of corruption and ties of the ruling coalition with organised crime, hoping that in this manner the elites would fall out of favour with the EU. This is why the Union's insistence on the resolution of the so-called 'recording affair' is perceived by the opposition as a 'helping hand' in discrediting the DPS. The opposition also hopes that progress on Chapters 23 and 24 will eventually lead to the demise of the DPS, who will be forced to purge its own lines, investigating and convicting people from its own ranks, in order to advance in the talks.

The EU's approach to accession negotiations in Montenegro, prioritising the chapters related to the rule of law and the fight against corruption and organised crime, sends a clear message about where the greatest obstacles for the country's EU integration are located. This approach must be maintained and progress should be closely monitored. The swift preparation and adoption of new legislation has so far helped Montenegro advance on its EU path. However, in the accession negotiations phase, it is crucial that the EU insists that Montenegro provides clear evidence of laws being implemented in practice so that the reform process can produce tangible results on the ground.

The only way for the opposition parties to participate in the country's process of EU integration is via the parliament. Opposition forces are formally leading the effort of the parliament in this regard by chairing several important committees. However, the parliament's input has so far been rather insignificant. It is still unclear whether new parliamentary structures – currently being developed – will change the situation and stimulate different results. The role of the opposition in the process of EU integration is proportionate to the level of knowledge and resources of their personnel, which is not an issue that tops the agenda of the donor community anymore. It might therefore, be beneficial if the EU found ways to provide programmes for building the capacity of political parties in the country and the Balkan region.

Last but not least, it is important that civil society organisations have the opportunity to be part of the country's integration effort and contribute to reforms. Pressure from the EU and civil society sector have succeeded in getting Montenegro to be the first country that includes NGOs as members of its negotiating groups. It is in the triangle of pressure coming from the EU, civil society (including NGOs and media) and the opposition forces that changes have happened so far in Montenegro and it is only in this manner that they are likely to occur also in the future. But apart from offering them financial support, the EU should keep civil society actors informed about the results of the negotiations and maintain transparency of the process, thus providing the sector with an important tool to act as 'champion of democracy' and a factor of positive change.



# THE EUROPEAN QUESTION IN SERBIA'S PARTY POLITICS

BY IGOR BANDOVIĆ AND MARKO VUJAČIĆ

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4.1	The emergence of political parties in Serbia	47
4.2	Serbian political parties and 'Europe'	49
4.2.1	Serbia's main challenges on the EU path	49
4.2.1.1	The dissolution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	50
4.2.1.2	Cooperation with the ICTY	51
4.2.1.3	The independence of Kosovo	53
4.2.2	Ideological profile and European attitudes of Serbian parties	54
4.2.3	Case studies: the Socialist Party of Serbia and the Socialist Progressive Party	59
3.2.3.1	The SPS: from hard-line nationalist to EU-advocate	59
3.2.3.2	The SNS: a new party 'cut from old cloth'	61
4.3	Serbian electorate and its' European attitudes	62
4.4	The EU and party competition in Serbia	64
4.5	Outlook and recommendations	67

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## 4.1 THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN SERBIA

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The multiparty system was formally introduced in Serbia in the 1990s, at a time of revolutionary changes in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and of profound political and economic crisis in the Yugoslav Federation.<sup>167</sup> The first pluralistic democratic elections in Serbia took place on 9 December 1990 and saw the former League of Communists of Serbia – renamed the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and led by Slobodan Milošević – take the majority of votes.<sup>168</sup> The political climate of the 1990s was characterised by repression, unfair electoral conditions and the almost complete absence of political freedoms.<sup>169</sup> Most of political parties in Serbia were nationalistic, and against the backdrop of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, endorsed the

<sup>167</sup> Politically, Serbia strived for the preservation of a strong central state in the Federation, while Croatia (later followed also by the other Yugoslav nations) envisioned the devolution of powers. These divergent nationalistic policies were compounded by the economic crisis of the 1980s, and eventually inspired the open Croatian and Slovenian calls for the breakup of Yugoslavia, or its transformation into a looser (confederate) union of independent states.

<sup>168</sup> The SPS won 194 of the 250 seats in the Serbian Parliament, and Slobodan Milošević became the President of Serbia.

<sup>169</sup> Many representatives of the political parties in opposition were bugged and under surveillance by the Secret Service. There were two attempts by the Secret Police – in October 1999 and the summer of 2000 – to assassinate the President of the Serbian Renewal Movement, Vuk Drašković.

position of the regime. This position rested on two pillars: (i) the right to self-determination in former Yugoslavia belongs to the people, not to the constituent republics; and (ii) the refusal to accept the administrative borders of constituent republics as the borders of independent countries. Understood this way, the right to self-determination was extended to Serbs living in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina<sup>170</sup>, and included their right to secede. In Milošević's own words: "Borders [...] are always dictated by the strong, they are never dictated by the weak. Therefore it is basic for us to be strong. We simply believe that the legitimate right and interest of the Serbian people is to live in one state."<sup>171</sup> The result was warfare, which enabled the vast mobilisation of populist and nationalistic sentiment and effectively disabled the formation of a genuine political alternative. The Serbian opposition parties were pushed to publicly stand behind the war rhetoric in order to avoid being depicted in the then government-controlled media as unpatriotic and disloyal.

In parallel with the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Serbia experienced major economic hardship. The breakup of the common Yugoslav market, plus the UN economic sanctions introduced in 1992<sup>172</sup> with embargos on imports and exports, caused a major decline in industrial production, the emergence of the shadow economy and black market for goods and services, followed by hyperinflation.<sup>173</sup>

Once the peace deal for Bosnia-Herzegovina<sup>174</sup> was concluded in 1995, the pro-democratic opposition in Serbia got the first real chance to engage in politics, and soon enough started to gain ground. The regime of Slobodan Milošević took the first blow in the combined federal and local elections of 1996, when the political parties in opposition – organised around the Zajedno coalition<sup>175</sup> – emerged triumphant in 14 out of Serbia's 19 largest cities, and in more than 30 Serbian towns and municipalities. Faced with electoral defeat, Slobodan Milošević and his close entourage began to exert pressure on the members of the local electoral commissions in voting posts and courts in order to get the 1996 election results annulled. Three months of daily public protests organised by the opposition parties and of massive pressure from the international community<sup>176</sup> eventually led to the acknowledgment of the victory of the Zajedno coalition.

At the same time as the pro-democratic forces began to govern major Serbian cities, independent media and alternative information sources started to grow in popularity. The leading opposition parties, most notably the Democratic Party (DS), switched on harsh criticism towards the country's

<sup>170</sup> According to the 1991 Census, there were 12.2% ethnic Serbs in Croatia and 31.2% ethnic Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

<sup>171</sup> Pešić, Vesna (1996), "Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis", *Peaceworks*, No. 8, Washington (DC): United States Institute of Peace, p. 20.

<sup>172</sup> UN SC Resolution 757 of 10 May 1992 prevented all imports to and exports from FR Yugoslavia, prohibited provision of any funds or financial resources, landed all commercial aircrafts and prohibited planes from taking off, landing or flying over the territory of FR Yugoslavia, suspended the country's participation in international sporting events, cultural, and stopped technical and scientific cooperation with it.

<sup>173</sup> Only in 1991, the industrial production fell over 20%; in 1993, the level of industrial production was 41,3% of the 1990 level. Between October 1993 and January 1994, the hyperinflation rate was 5x10<sup>15</sup>% monthly, which means that prices doubled each 16 hours.

<sup>174</sup> The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina, often referred to as the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement, available at: <http://bit.ly/9Bi1Rc>, last accessed on: 20 November 2013.

<sup>175</sup> The Zajedno Coalition ("Together Coalition") consisted of the nationalistic Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) under the leadership of Vuk Drašković, the largest opposition political party in Serbia in the early 1990s; the reformist Democratic Party (DS), initially led by Dragoljub Mićunović and from 1994 by Zoran Đinđić, moderate on national issues; and the Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS) led by Vesna Pešić; and a small yet influential social-liberal party made of former dissidents, anti-war activists and intellectuals.

<sup>176</sup> For instance, the report of the former Spanish Prime Minister, Felipe Gonzalez, concluded that there were "deficiencies (of a structural nature) in the electoral system that made it possible to falsify or circumvent the sovereign will of the citizens, problems in the administration of justice that are calling into doubt, in the eyes of the citizenry, the independent operation of the justice system, and obstacles confronting the independent media and serious difficulties standing in the way to free and fair access to the public media." As the findings of this report were rejected by Milošević's regime, the OSCE Observation Mission was invited to make a new assessment only to arrive at similar conclusions.

foreign policy of permanent confrontation with the West – that is, with the European Union and the USA. When the Kosovo crisis began to unfold during 1998, with Milošević’s violent and disproportionate crackdown on Kosovo’s separatist movement, the opposition openly blamed the regime for directly provoking NATO air strikes against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Yet, at that point, with the exception of the SPS led by Milošević, and the Yugoslav Left led by his spouse, Mirjana Marković, most Serbian political parties did not have any coherent policy proposals or fully-fledged political programmes.

In preparation for the following federal and local elections in September 2000, Milošević changed the Constitution of the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in order to allow the direct election of the federal President – a move which was baldly rejected by Montenegro, the 12 times smaller unit in the then two-member federation. In response, all major opposition parties – except the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) – formed a pre-electoral coalition, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS)<sup>177</sup>, and nominated Vojislav Koštunica, leader of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), as their joint presidential candidate. In this formula, the DOS and Koštunica emerged successful in the elections held on 24 September 2000, forcing Milošević to concede defeat.<sup>178</sup> The moment marked the end of Milošević’s regime after 12 years in power, and paved the way for Serbia to embark on the process of democratisation and EU integration.

The formative period of the Serbian multiparty system shows that the process of democratic transition in the country began in circumstances of major economic strain and of war. This situation inhibited the development of genuine political pluralism and defined party competition in terms of national interest, understood mainly as the desire to create a ‘greater state’, which would include all Serbs. It was only after the 1990s wars ended and the political ideology of Serbian nationalism effectively failed, that the pro-democratic political parties in the country found their voice and got the chance to move Serbia out of international isolation and towards the European Union.

## **4.2 SERBIAN POLITICAL PARTIES AND EUROPE**

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### **4.2.1 Serbia’s main challenges on the EU path**

The influence of the EU on party political dynamics in Serbia over the past 13 years has been substantial, and has progressively intensified as the country advanced on the EU track, approaching the start of accession negotiations. Three main challenges have dominated Serbia’s EU integration process. The first is related to the dissolution of its federal union with Montenegro, the second is the EU condition for the country’s full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the third is the unresolved statehood of Kosovo. The resolution of these three issues affected Serbian political parties’ attitudes towards the EU/membership, as well as the country’s ability to progress in the integration process.

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<sup>177</sup> The DOS consisted of 18 parties, unions and movements, including the political parties of the Hungarian and Bosniak/Muslim minorities. The most important of these were the DS, the DSS, and the GSS.

<sup>178</sup> After Milošević’s refusal to concede defeat in the first-round, the DOS called for mass demonstrations throughout Serbia, which were accompanied by a general strike in public companies. The protests culminated in Belgrade on 5 October 2000, when the demonstrators broke in and seized control of the Federal Assembly building and the national radio-television (Radio Television of Serbia). The police and army forces refused to follow Milošević’s orders to use violence against the protesters. On 6 October 2000, Slobodan Milošević, following a meeting with Koštunica, announced his resignation as President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

**Table 4.1: Serbia’s milestones on the EU path**

October 2003	First meeting of Enhanced Permanent Dialogue EU-Serbia
April 2005	Serbia receives positive Feasibility Study
10 October 2005	Negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) begin
3 May 2006	SAA talks called off due to insufficient cooperation with the ICTY
13 June 2007	EU-Serbia SAA negotiations resume
29 April 2008	Serbia, EU and member states sign the SAA; EU decides not to apply Interim Trade Agreement (ITA) and to halt SAA ratification until Serbia delivers on the full cooperation with the ICTY
1 January 2009	Serbia starts unilaterally the ITA application
7 December 2009	EU decides to start the ITA application
22 December 2009	Serbia submits the EU membership application
14 June 2010	EU decides to kick off the SAA ratification process
24 November 2010	Commission sends Questionnaire to Serbia
22 April 2011	Serbia submits the last set of answers to the Questionnaire to the Commission
12 October 2011	Commission recommends to the Council the granting of candidate status to Serbia
1 March 2012	European Council grants Serbia candidate status
22 April 2013	Commission recommends the beginning of accession negotiations with Serbia
28 June 2013	European Council decides to start EU accession talks with Serbia
1 September 2013	SAA comes into force
21 January 2014	Serbia opens EU accession negotiations

#### 4.2.1.1 The dissolution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Soon after the 2000 democratic change in Serbia, Montenegro submitted a proposal that entailed a redefinition of relations between the two republics insofar as it asked for the country’s independence but also for the preservation of strong political, socio-economic and cultural ties with Serbia. Keen on a federal solution, Serbia declined.<sup>179</sup> Similarly, fearing a new cycle of fragmentation in the Balkans, the EU decided not to support Montenegro’s ambitions. Instead Javier Solana, then High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, was sent to the region to mediate the process that would transform the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into a looser State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

From the beginning, the State Union was rather dysfunctional,<sup>180</sup> and despite the EU’s best efforts to make it work<sup>181</sup> it fell apart in 2006. The EU helped the pro-independence government and the pro-unionist opposition to agree on the terms of a secession referendum,<sup>182</sup> and 55.5% of the Montenegrin people voted on 21 May 2006 in favour of the breakaway solution. The parliament of Montenegro formally declared independence on 3 June 2006. In short, the dissolution of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro delayed the fulfilment of other equally important political criteria, and dragged the whole integration process for over five years. The involvement of the European

<sup>179</sup> Serbia submitted a counter-proposal, that is, the transformation of FR Yugoslavia into a looser federal union, which would preserve only basic federal functions (such as foreign affairs, defence and the protection of human rights).

<sup>180</sup> The two constituent states did not share a single market, currency or economic policies.

<sup>181</sup> To stimulate cooperation between Serbia and Montenegro, the EU resorted to the ‘carrot and stick’ approach: in return for the harmonisation of their two economic systems – needed in order to negotiate a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with them as a single entity – the EU promised to issue a positive Feasibility Study. After two years of cumbersome negotiations, the EU eventually abandoned this idea and offered a ‘twin-track’ approach, whereby Montenegro and Serbia were treated separately in the SAA process.

<sup>182</sup> Miroslav Lajčak, the EU’s envoy, brokered a deal between the government and the opposition: the pro-independence camp accepted a ‘supermajority’ of 55% plus one vote needed for the referendum to be declared valid; in return, the pro-unionist opposition agreed to participate in the plebiscite.



Union, and particularly of Solana, was not welcomed by many domestic political parties in Serbia, above-all by the hard-line nationalists in Milošević’s camp<sup>183</sup>.

#### 4.2.1.2 Cooperation with the ICTY

Serbia’s full cooperation with the ICTY became an important EU condition for the country to advance its membership bid. Initially, the ‘stick and carrot’ approach of the West (that is, offering Serbia financial support in exchange for cooperation on this issue) compelled the cabinets of Zoran Đinđić and Zoran Živković (see Table 4.2) to arrest and extradite several indicted persons to the ICTY, including Slobodan Milošević in 2001. Their compliance raised massive public consternation in Serbia, as it was considered a national humiliation to hand over to The Hague a former President, to be tried in another country, by a tribunal whose legitimacy was constantly challenged domestically for being biased against Serbs. For many political parties and the general public in the country, fulfilling this EU requirement was seen as an act of high treason and hard-line nationalistic political parties exploited this sentiment for political competitive advantage. In part, this had negative spillover effects on the levels of public support for Serbia’s EU integration, which started to dwindle over the years.

**Table 4.2: Presidents, Prime Ministers and coalition governments in Serbia**

Year	President	Prime Minister	Parliamentary coalition
2000	Milan Milutinović (SPS)	Interim Government	<i>Ad-hoc</i> majority
2001		Zoran Đinđić (DS)	DOS (*Coalition of DS, DSS, GSS, G17 Plus and 15 other political parties, movements and unions. **Without DSS from mid-2002)
2002	Nataša Mičić *acting (GSS)		
2003		Dragan Maršićanin *acting (DSS)	Vojislav Koštunica (DSS)
2004	Boris Tadić (DS)		
2005		Mirko Cvetković (DS)	DS, SPS, G17 Plus
2006	Mirko Cvetković (DS)		
2007		Mirko Cvetković (DS)	DS, SPS, G17 Plus
2008	Mirko Cvetković (DS)		
2009		Mirko Cvetković (DS)	DS, SPS, G17 Plus
2010	Mirko Cvetković (DS)		
2011		Mirko Cvetković (DS)	DS, SPS, G17 Plus
2012	Tomislav Nikolić (SNS)		

Political parties often changed their attitudes in regard to the issue of full cooperation with the ICTY. Their wavering largely depended on whether these parties were forming the government – and thus, under direct pressure from the international community – or if they were in the opposition, where domestically unpopular demands from the EU could be used against the government and for political gains. The ICTY issue was also instrumentalised as an indirect means to criticise the Union for adopting an unfair and unjust approach towards Serbia.

<sup>183</sup> The Serbian Radical Party demanded his arrest for crimes against humanity committed during the NATO strikes.

For instance, the DSS and its leader, Vojislav Koštunica, regarded cooperation with the ICTY as a non-priority issue in the period 2001-2003,<sup>184</sup> and often used it to attack the government of Zoran Đinđić. The DSS continuously sought to obstruct Serbia's compliance with this EU condition, invoking legal and constitutional barriers, which prohibited the extradition of Serbian nationals to foreign authorities. The party also demanded constitutional changes that would effectively delay extraditions for at least a couple of years. Officially, the DSS even left the coalition government in 2001 because of the arrest and extradition of Slobodan Milošević to the ICTY. In a public statement, Koštunica pointed out that the Milošević's extradition "cannot be regarded as a legal and constitutional act", but rather as "lawlessness" and as a "hasty and humiliating move that nobody in the international community asked for, at least not explicitly."<sup>185</sup>

However, once in government as Prime Minister, Koštunica's two cabinets adopted a different strategy, relying on the so-called "voluntary surrender" of the fugitives: "The voluntary surrender of the Hague indictees is the best solution for them and for the state as it allows for certain benefits for the accused persons. At the same time, the voluntary surrender is the best option for the state in light of its international obligations."<sup>186</sup> The case of the DSS and Koštunica clearly illustrates that holding office can have a moderating effect on the rhetoric and approach of a party vis-à-vis EU conditionality, swaying it into a more cooperative mood.

Similarly, Ivica Dačić's SPS came a long way over the years from the fierce opposition to extraditions in 2001: "No Yugoslav citizen should be extradited to The Hague Tribunal. The adoption of a law on extradition would be unconstitutional."<sup>187</sup> Already in 2004, when the party provided minority support for the first Koštunica cabinet, it partially changed its hard-line rhetoric on cooperation with the ICTY. Even if it continued to publicly denounce arrests and extraditions to The Hague, and threaten the withdrawal of support for the government, the SPS decided in time, to turn a blind eye to and go along with the issue of "voluntary surrender".

Then in 2008, while the SPS was in office, Dačić – as the Minister of Interior – positioned the cooperation with the ICTY within Serbia's international obligations: "Our state shows full readiness to cooperate with the Hague Tribunal, and the police is checking all the information on locations where the Hague indictees are supposedly hidden, based on the prosecutor's warrant. I think the voluntary surrenders are the best manner of cooperation with The Hague. Today, the whole Serbia is blackmailed because of Ratko Mladić... I think they should realise that." This statement reveals at least two important messages: first, responsibility is shifted from the government to the indicted persons, who are even subtly blamed for cowardice and lack of good will to sacrifice themselves for the better future of their nation. Second, the voluntary surrender of the fugitives is portrayed by that point in time as the best option, although the arrest and extradition of the accused is not ruled out (and would eventually take place in 2009 with Radovan Karadžić, and in 2011 with Ratko Mladić<sup>188</sup>).

Eventually, almost all Serbian political parties accepted the need to fulfil this EU requirement. Generally, their 'change of heart' was triggered by responsibilities associated with their active

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<sup>184</sup> Statement of Vojislav Koštunica, "The cooperation with the Hague is not a priority" from 2002, available at: <http://bit.ly/1eJVduD>, last accessed on: 15 January 2014.

<sup>185</sup> Statement of Vojislav Koštunica, available at: <http://bit.ly/1dzcDp9>, last accessed on: 15 January 2014.

<sup>186</sup> Statement of Vojislav Koštunica, "Voluntary surrender to The Hague is the best solution", available at: <http://bit.ly/1bfMRfm>, last accessed on: 15 January 2014.

<sup>187</sup> Statement of Ivica Dačić on the issue of cooperation with the ICTY, available at: <http://bit.ly/1cji7Vf>, last accessed on: 15 January 2014.

<sup>188</sup> Ratko Mladić is the former military leader of Bosnian Serbs, indicted for genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the laws and customs of war.

participation in government, where the pressure of the international community and the imperatives of the EU integration ambition felt stronger than on the benches of the opposition.

It is quite clear that the EU-membership incentive and the Union's unyielding position on the need of Serbia to cooperate with the ICTY were crucial in ensuring that the country fulfilled this condition and advanced towards the Union. Given that Serbia was dragging its feet, the country's integration process was halted twice. First, between May and June 2007, the Council suspended the negotiations with Serbia on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). Then, in April 2008, the Council made the ratification of the SAA with Serbia conditional upon the country's full cooperation with the ICTY.<sup>189</sup> This second blockade lasted until General Ratko Mladić was arrested in May 2011 and handed over to The Hague. The EU's tough line mounted vast pressure on the Serbian governments to deliver; they could either protect the fugitives on grounds of 'national pride and dignity' or cooperate and thus move their country forward on the EU path. Ultimately, the Serbian officials chose the latter option.

#### 4.2.1.3 *The independence of Kosovo*

Last but not least, Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia on 17 February 2008 added a new snag to the relationship between Belgrade and Brussels. While the EU as a whole could not formally make Serbia's membership application conditional upon the recognition of Kosovo, given that five EU member states do not recognise Kosovo themselves,<sup>190</sup> the normalisation of Belgrade-Pristina relations was gradually and directly linked to the two sides' progress towards the EU. The Commission and the EU's External Action Service (which facilitates the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue<sup>191</sup>) have been cooperating in devising a hard stance in this regard.

Thanks to progress in the EU-sponsored dialogue, Serbia was granted in March 2012 the candidate status for membership. In order to open accession negotiations with the EU, Serbia was asked to fully implement existing agreements with Kosovo, such as on Integrated Border Management, and to negotiate deals on energy and telecommunications. Serbia was also required to dismantle the so-called 'parallel structures' in Northern Kosovo – a term coined to denote the remaining Serbian institutions in the Kosovo municipalities with a majority of Serbian population. This condition targeted first and foremost the security apparatus and public administration still present in Kosovo, and directly financed by Serbia. Moreover, Serbia was encouraged to use its influence on the local Serbian population in Kosovo in order to persuade it to cooperate with the EU and NATO missions in Kosovo (that is, EULEX and KFOR respectively). Finally, Serbia was expected to demonstrate a visible willingness to reach a legally binding normalisation of relations with Kosovo, and to conclude an international treaty, similar to the one signed between the two Germanys during the Cold War era.

Overall, since the start of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, Serbia has been facing EU conditions that can be roughly divided into two categories. The first relate to the Kosovo issue, where the EU, and especially some of the member states (like Germany), directly link any future step towards membership to progress in the Belgrade-Pristina talks. The second refers to the wide range of reform measures that fall under the Copenhagen criteria. Formally, all conditions are important but the widespread impression is that the Kosovo issue tends to weigh heavier for the EU than any other considerations.

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<sup>189</sup> The "full cooperation" condition meant locating, arresting and extraditing all remaining fugitives (at that time Radovan Karadžić, Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić), or in a clear and verifiable way demonstrating to domestic and European public that the country did not withhold information about the location of the fugitives.

<sup>190</sup> Namely Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain.

<sup>191</sup> In total, there were 20 rounds in the EU-sponsored dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, held between March 2011 and January 2014. The talks focused initially on regional cooperation, the freedom of movement and the rule of law, but gradually expanded to more sensitive political issues like integrated border management, customs, internal affairs, etc.

Evidence for this emerges from the latest, 2013 European Commission Progress Report for Serbia, generally viewed as one of the most positive to date.<sup>192</sup> The report stresses that Serbia took significant steps towards “visible and sustainable improvement of relations with Kosovo”, leading to a number of “irreversible changes on the ground”<sup>193</sup>. At the same time, the Commission’s report notes that “Serbia is nowhere close to the fulfilment of the 1993 Copenhagen criteria, especially in regard to the existence of a functioning market economy”, and that the country has made “uneven progress in the adoption of EU’s *acquis*”.<sup>194</sup> Yet Serbia’s mediocre track record on reforms seemed to matter less than the country’s steps forward on the Kosovo issue when the Council decided in December 2013 to give it the green light for the start of EU accession negotiations.

The dialogue has certainly bridged some differences between Belgrade and Pristina but it has also worked to reinforce the impression in Serbia that the EU requires the country to fulfil an unprecedented condition, of the kind not experienced by any previous applicant state. As a result, Serbia’s quest for membership continues to be a highly politicised process, as well as a polarising topic in the society and political arena.

#### **4.2.2 Ideological profile and European attitudes of Serbian parties**

Since all major political parties, with the exception of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), now endorse the country’s European integration, their diffuse support for the EU can no longer serve as a mark of distinction. Nevertheless, their attitudes towards specific aspects related to the EU’s conditionality (such as the normalisation of relations with Kosovo, the cooperation with the ICTY, respect for human and minority rights, and regional cooperation), as well as the pace of the integration process, offer important clues about the character and agenda of different Serbian parties.

While the ‘divorce’ between Serbia and Montenegro and the requirement of full cooperation with the ICTY contributed to changes in the preferences and attitudes of Serbian political parties vis-à-vis the EU, the issue of the unresolved statehood of Kosovo brought the Belgrade-Brussels relationship to a breaking point.

In the 2008 general elections, it was precisely the issue of Serbia’s European integration that set apart the different competing political visions, and reduced people’s vote to a plebiscite on whether or not Serbia should aspire to join the Union. The landslide victory of the pro-EU camp under the leadership of Boris Tadić – openly backed by the EU – left little room for inward-looking, nationalistic and xenophobic policies. The reformed SPS led by Ivica Dačić became junior partner in the new government, while the major right-wing party – the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) – split over the issue of the ratification of the SAA.

At the helm of the pro-ratification faction, Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić, rebelled against top party members, controlled by the ICTY indictee Vojislav Šešelj, and went on to form a new right-wing party – the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). This marked one of the biggest changes in Serbian politics since the introduction of party pluralism in 1990. The split of the SRS into two factions and the formation of the SNS were a direct corollary of the EU integration process. While the minority faction in the SRS remained hard-line nationalistic, the majority of party members aligned with the reformist, pro-European wing. This strategy sought to enhance the appeal of the SNS to citizens that favoured EU membership and thus extend the party’s electoral support base. Moreover, the

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<sup>192</sup> Vujačić, Marko (2013), *Analysis of the European Commission’s Progress Report 2013 for Serbia*, Berlin: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, available at: <http://bit.ly/1dveAD4>, last accessed on: 15 January 2014.

<sup>193</sup> Serbia Progress Report for 2013, available at: <http://bit.ly/1bhDFXO>, last accessed on: 15 January 2014.

<sup>194</sup> Vujačić (2013), *op. cit.*

nationalistic background of the two leaders prevented major attrition of nationalistic voters. By 2013, this move seems to have paid off politically: not only did it boost the coalition potential of the SNS, making it a desirable ally to other parties, but it has also contributed to the consolidation of a pro-EU consensus among the elites in the country. The anti-EU bloc lost clout and became fragmented and increasingly irrelevant in political terms.

The general elections of May 2012 represented a tectonic movement in the Serbian political arena. The SNS emerged victorious with 2% ahead of its main opponent – the DS, and the SRS failed to secure even a single seat in the Serbian parliament. Although the results of the May 2012 general elections provided the ruling coalition, consisting of the DS and the SPS, enough votes to form a new government, the surprising defeat of Boris Tadić in the presidential race pushed the SPS to forge a coalition deal with the SNS, with Dačić serving as Prime Minister and Vučić as his deputy. In contrast to the situation of 2008, the EU did not support – directly or indirectly – any party during the election campaign, nor did it reveal any preferences regarding the composition of the government in the aftermath of the vote. In a meeting with the Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vuk Jeremić, Miroslav Lajčak, at the time Managing Director for Russia, Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans in the EU's External Action Service, said that it was not important for the EU whether the government would be formed by two major or several minor parties, as long as it continued to pursue European integration, especially the dialogue with Pristina and the implementation of already concluded agreements.<sup>195</sup>

At present, the main political parties in Serbia are the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), the United Regions of Serbia (URS)<sup>196</sup>, the Democratic Party (DS), the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) – all positioned with respect to three main lines of political conflict.

The first cleavage is historical and refers to the division of Serbian parties on the authoritarian-democratic axis, pitting the parties of the 'old regime' (that is, Milošević's regime) – the SPS, the SRS and the SNS – against the democratic parties of the 'post-Milošević era' – the DS, the DSS, the LDP, and the URS. Although this division has lost most of its political relevance, as the major parties of the 'old regime' reformed themselves, it still finds its way into the political jargon in an attempt to discredit one's political adversaries. The second divide is the liberal-conservative spectrum and the third is the classic left-right separation of parties in socio-economic terms. The ideological orientation of the main Serbian political parties ranges from politically liberal (the LDP) to conservative (the DSS), and from economically liberal (the LDP and the SNS) to social-democratic (the DS and the SPS). Some of the Serbian parties have applied for and successfully obtained membership in the European political families.<sup>197</sup>

Although a new party, the **Serbian Progressive Party** cannot be analysed without reference to its predecessor – the SRS – mainly because almost the entire membership and structure of the SRS changed allegiance and joined the SNS in 2008. At the level of rhetoric, the SNS and its leaders made considerable efforts to reform, distance themselves from their authoritarian past, and project an image of a pro-European, moderately nationalistic and conservative party. On the socio-economic

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<sup>195</sup> "Brussels does not want the SNS-DSS government", *B92.net news report*, available at: <http://bit.ly/1lmo2Pj>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>196</sup> Before the 2012 general elections, the URS was formed by the merger of former G17 Plus party and the number of small local and regional parties, in order to advocate for decentralisation. For more information see <http://bit.ly/gtTPL2>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>197</sup> Since 2005, the DSS and the URS are associate members of the European Peoples Party (EPP). In 2012, the DSS withdrew from the grouping. In 2006, the DS has been admitted as an associated member of the Party of European Socialists (PES). In 2008, the LDP became a member of the European Liberals, Democrats and Reformers (ELDR).

axis, the SNS sits on the economic right, advocating austerity policies, spending cuts and pro-market reforms aimed at the privatisation of public enterprises and the liberalisation of labour laws.

The **Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS)**, established by Milošević in 1990, is clearly still identified with the 'old regime'. Apart from the occasional nationalistic and populist slips of Dačić, the SPS begun in 2004 to lend support to the European integration of Serbia by offering parliamentary support to Koštunica's minority cabinet (albeit with certain reservations, like the refusal to support the extradition of indicted Serbs to the Hague Tribunal), and became fully committed to this goal since 2008 when he joined the government as Minister of Interior. While Dačić held several anti-nationalistic and liberal speeches, vehemently calling for Serbia to accept the reality in regard to Kosovo, his views remain largely conservative, and sometimes openly homophobic. In socio-economic terms, the party aspires to have a modern European-left profile, backing free education, healthcare and the protection of socially vulnerable groups in society (such as pensioners).

The **United Regions of Serbia (URS)**, which transformed itself from an expert group into a political party in 2004, has been led by vocal opponents to Milošević's regime. The party participated in virtually all post-Milošević governments to date, not least due to its lack of clear ideological orientation but also due to strong pressure from its members to access jobs associated with executive power, such as in administration and public companies. The URS maintained a rather vague position on politically sensitive issues – from Kosovo to the ICTY cooperation – but at all critical junctures it sided with the pro-EU camp and opposed nationalistic discourses. On economic policy, the party moved from a pro-market and pro-reformist stance in the early 2000s to a position that favours stronger state support for public and private enterprises, foreign direct investment and job openings.

The **Democratic Party (DS)** was the key party that contributed to the overthrow of Milošević and his regime. Until 2004 it was considered a reliable pro-European and pro-reformist party, with liberal and pragmatic political attitudes on key issues (for instance, the party elite and members seemed to acknowledge that Kosovo could not be restored as a province within Serbia), and with moderate socio-economic views about the importance of market reforms and privatisation that go hand in hand with the protection of vulnerable social groups (such as women, pensioners, the poor, and the unemployed). After 2004, under the leadership of Boris Tadić, the party drew slowly closer to a more conservative political pole, openly flirting with nationalism and taking the lead on the policy line that considered Kosovo as an integral part of Serbia. Since 2000, the party took on the European social democratic tradition to define its ideological colour.

The **Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)** was established in 2005 by the liberal members of the DS, who opposed the course of Boris Tadić on the Kosovo issue, and by the Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS). The LDP is the only liberal political option in Serbia, which has consistently advocated a pragmatic approach towards all unresolved national issues, that is, the acceptance of Kosovo's independence, the country's full cooperation with the ICTY, support for human and minority rights, and the like. The party is in favour of economic liberalism, promoting austerity policies and spending cuts, deregulation, the privatisation of public enterprises, and the liberalisation of labour laws.

The **Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS)** was set up in 1992 by the conservative and nationalistic members of the DS, under the leadership of Koštunica. The party played an important role in the overall efforts of the DOS to overthrow the regime of Milošević, as it was able to attract the nationalistic and conservative voters needed to defeat Milošević at the polls. The popularity of the DSS peaked during 2000/02, when Koštunica served as the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. As one of the dominant political figures from 2000 to 2008, Koštunica traded his moderate conservative pro-European credentials and openness to the full cooperation with the ICTY,

as well as its support for a pro-market and reformist economic agenda, for a hard-line conservative, ultra-nationalistic and anti-European profile. This transformation was directly influenced by the US/EU-sponsored process that led to the independence of Kosovo<sup>198</sup> – a notion that the DSS fervently rejects. Today, the DSS is the only political party in Serbia that advocates the severance of ties with the EU, the strengthening of relations with Russia and the suspension of negotiations with Kosovo Albanians. To that end, the DSS publicly embraces all nationalistic, openly pro-fascist and ultra-conservative clerical groups, gathered around the Serbian Orthodox Church.

In ideological terms, Serbian political parties do not strictly abide by their declared socio-economic and political affiliations. Their political preferences towards the EU tend to shift depending on the political cycle (that is, whether they are in power or opposition), on the proximity of EU accession (for instance, the state of relations with the EU and the overall membership conditionality), on regional circumstances (such as Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence), on historic legacies (for example, cooperation with the ICTY), or on the international context (most notable, the on-going economic crisis). However, their socio-economic and ideological background was never a significant or divisive factor regarding their attitudes on Serbia's EU integration. Pro-EU parties can be found at all points of the left-right axis.

Regarding the correlation between the issue of state sovereignty and the attitude towards the international community and/or the EU, these parties can also be split into ultra-nationalistic (conservative and isolationist), such as the DSS; moderately nationalistic, like the SNS or SPS; parties whose identity dimension is not a decisive factor, for instance the URS; and parties that advocate openness and for which the nationalistic agenda is either not important, like the LDP, or not sufficiently important, such as the DS.

The Serbian political parties that have been consistently in favour of Serbia's EU membership (that is the DS, the LDP and the URS) have provided value-based, as well as economic justifications for their support. In advocating EU integration, they have emphasised the geographic proximity, the system of values, common history and traditions, and the joint destiny of Serbia and the Union. In his address at the Churchill Symposium in Zurich, Switzerland, on 10 October 2002, Zoran Đinđić, the first democratic Prime Minister of Serbia (2001-2003), said:

The instability of the Balkans will have its consequences for Europe. The question is how to overcome the processes of defragmentation, the lack of cohesion and integration in this important region? The answer is similar to the one given in Europe in 1945. We need the grand idea, and grand vision, something that brings us forward, something more than business as usual, more than calculations, or economy... For most of the people it is about identity. It is about soul, not about the material, and I consider the idea of European integration as the grand idea – if it fails, the dark days will come in the Balkans... My message is this: of course the crucial positive impulses should come from the Balkan countries themselves, but we also need the positive energy from Europe. This energy cannot be reduced to material things; it must contain idealism and emotion.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Based on the 1999 UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (S/RES/1244 (1999), available at: <http://bit.ly/1eKtA4x>), the UN-facilitated Kosovo future status process begun in 2005, led by UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari. In February 2007 Ahtisaari delivered a draft status settlement proposal to Belgrade and Pristina, which included internationally supervised independence for Kosovo, combined with a wide autonomy for Serbian and other minorities. Serbia rejected the proposal while Kosovo authorities accepted it. The proposal also divided the six-member Contact Group: while Russia supported Serbia's defiant position, the US and the EU (Germany, France, Italy and the UK) backed the Ahtisaari's plan. Throughout 2007, continuous consultations of stakeholders failed to bring parties closer to a mutually acceptable solution. On 17 February 2008, the Assembly of Kosovo declared independence; the Serbian National Assembly proclaimed the move null and void the following day.

<sup>199</sup> Zoran Đinđić's speech at the Churchill Symposium, Zurich, Switzerland, 10 October 2002, available at: <http://bit.ly/1iUSfol>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

After receiving the news that Serbia was granted the candidate status, Boris Tadić, the President of Serbia at the time, issued the following statement:

Our country now has a guarantee that it is safe for foreign investments, which will allow for new investments, the increase of employment and more business opportunities for all our people... It is not just about the political process and integration. The candidacy status is an opportunity for our entrepreneurs, SMEs, for our agriculture which is our great trump card in the EU market.<sup>200</sup>

Conversely, the Serbian parties that have only recently embraced the idea of European integration (such as the SNS and the SPS) endorse Serbia's EU membership primarily for economic reasons. In his editorial published in the *Danas* daily on the occasion of the Europe Day 2013, the Vice-President of the government and the leader of the SNS wrote:

I am convinced that the change of our attitude towards Europe and the West... represents the creation of a more successful, modern and stronger Serbia; Serbia that can become a true leader in the region in the level of wages and pensions, economic growth, political stability,... We are lagging behind our closer neighbours in all respects, not to mention the European giants.<sup>201</sup>

The anti-EU parties in Serbia, the DSS and the SRS,<sup>202</sup> relate their Euroscepticism to the issue of Kosovo's independence and the implications of membership for Serbia's sovereignty. In his political testament, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party gave clear instructions to his party members with regard to 'Europe':

I demand that you continue to actively oppose globalism, in all of its accompanying forms, to strongly oppose all attempts leading to Serbia's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union because all of Serbia's traditional enemies are clustered there.<sup>203</sup>

The DSS has repeatedly changed its stance on the EU. Before 2000, the DSS fiercely criticised the Union's involvement in the Yugoslav wars. This situation temporarily changed during the anti-Milošević campaign effort, and imminently after the democratic change in the country. In the aftermath of the democratic transition, the DSS hesitantly decided to embrace EU integration as a strategic goal of Serbia. The policies of the two Koštunica cabinets led the country towards signing of the SAA. However, the party's dithering on the issue remained: the DSS repeatedly denounced the EU's involvement in the Serbia-Montenegro dissolution and its pressure on Serbia to cooperate with the ICTY. The EU's stance on Kosovo was the final nail in the coffin, as the DSS claimed that Serbia's membership in the EU entails the unacceptable loss of Kosovo:

It is the naked truth that at the end of the road, when the relations of Serbia and Kosovo as two countries are completely formalised, mutual recognition will follow... Only political neutrality will allow Serbia to protect its national interests and to prevent being accomplice in the abduction of Kosovo... The option of EU membership as a national goal should be put off the table. The EU membership is but an albatross around Serbia's neck.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Statement of Boris Tadić of 2 March 2012 on the occasion of Serbia's candidate status gain, available at: <http://ajb.me/1bX8xqo>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>201</sup> Vučić, Aleksandar, "Serbs must go to Europe", *Danas daily*, 8 May 2013, available at: <http://bit.ly/1dC49DU>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>202</sup> In the 2012 general elections, the SRS failed to reach the threshold of 5% to enter the Parliament.

<sup>203</sup> Vojislav Šešelj's political testament, available at: <http://bit.ly/1eBrqD8>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>204</sup> Interview with Vojislav Koštunica in *Večernje novosti*, 13 September 2012, available at: <http://bit.ly/OHas8K>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.



From 2008 onwards, the DSS finally settled on opposing Serbia's European integration. The party's concept of so-called political neutrality precludes Serbia's membership in the EU and proposes instead bilateral dealings with individual countries.

#### **4.2.3 Case studies: the Socialist Party of Serbia and the Serbian Progressive Party**

The major shifts that occurred on the Serbian party scene in the post-Milošević era were all closely linked to Serbia's EU membership ambitions. Their protagonists have been two key Serbian political parties that have reformed and embraced European integration: the SPS, which experienced internal transformation post 2004; and the SNS, a progressive wing of the hard-line nationalist SRS, controlled by the ICTY indictee Vojislav Šešelj, which broke away in 2008 from the SRS and established a new pro-'Europe' party.

##### *4.2.3.1 The Socialist Party of Serbia: from hard-line nationalist to EU advocate*

The SPS made several attempts to reform the party agenda in the post-Milošević era. The general direction of these reforms was twofold: it developed an internal critique of the party's authoritarian heritage and it sought to renew the party leadership. The pro-reform faction within the party, led by Ivica Dačić, prevailed during the Sixth Congress held in January 2003.

This party makeover was already visible between 2004-2007, when the SPS supported the minority government of Koštunica. The SPS silently backed the government's moves directed at the arrest and handing over to The Hague of those indicted by the ICTY, as well as its pro-European agenda. The change of leadership was finalised after the death of Milošević in March 2006. The Seventh Congress of the SPS was held in December 2006, and the delegates elected Dačić as the new party leader.

The Seventh Congress of the SPS also adopted modifications in the party programme, particularly with regard to the issue of European integration. The change sat in stark contrast with the party's 2002 platform, when the Socialists were still very critical of the EU and its role in Serbia:

The participation of European countries in the aggression, which is a manifestation of American imperialist strategy, has tarnished the face of the Old Continent. Blindly obeying the US administration, whose policy is a disgrace to the American people as well, Europe has become accomplice in the destruction of its own interests, as well as of universal civilisation values, such as freedom, equality, cultural heritage and humanism.<sup>205</sup>

The document leaves the issue of Serbia's future EU membership untouched. However, four years later, the 2006 party's manifesto begins to consider the possibility of a European future for Serbia, albeit under certain conditions:

The Socialist Party of Serbia [...] believes that Serbia must be committed to crossing the road of integration into the community of European nations and states, in a manner that will secure Serbia's vital national interests and facilitate its economic development. [...] The Socialists are against the unconditional domination of international law, which has not been ratified and approved by our parliament... This is why we do not recognise the Hague Tribunal, and cannot call it either a court or justice. [...] We are firmly against the cultural and spiritual degradation that our country is sinking into, accepting values coming from outside unconditionally and indiscriminately, in total disregard of our culture and tradition. [...] Based on the positions and

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<sup>205</sup> Party's programme: "A Contemporary Patriotic Party of the Left" ("Savremena patriotska partija levece"), chapter "Response to International Challenges" ("Odgovor na međunarodne izazove"), Belgrade, 13 June 2002.

principles set forth herein, the SPS is committed to European and other integrations, as well as to the process of accession to the European Union.<sup>206</sup>

The complete break with the 'old', EU-hostile rhetoric occurred in the SPS programme adopted at the Eighth Party Congress in December 2010. At that time, the SPS was already the indispensable part of the pro-European government steered by Tadić's DS. The 2010 programme signalled an even more radical ideological shift of the party on the European question:

Serbia's pro-European foreign policy is rooted in our country's close links with the member states and the nations of the European Union, with whom we share a history, civilisation, values, and traditions, as well as economic interests. The Socialists believe that Serbia should and could contribute to building a common European homeland and, accordingly, we fully support and endorse Serbia's accession negotiations with the European Union.<sup>207</sup>

The policies of the Serbian government – formed by the SPS with the SNS in 2012, and led by Dačić as Prime Minister – only confirm this 'U-turn' of the party on 'Europe'. Following the 2012 elections, the new Serbian government faced the challenge of striking the right balance between implementing all the agreements reached by Serbia in the framework of the EU-sponsored dialogue with Kosovo – all politically very sensitive – and simultaneously demonstrating that none of these measures represent a *de facto* recognition of Kosovo – in line with the official country's position on the matter. Unlike the previous government, dominated by Boris Tadić, which agreed to participate in the EU-mediated talks with Pristina, made considerable progress in reaching agreements and then failed to implement them, the new Serbian government can be said to have taken bold steps and to have actually delivered on the implementation of the EU's conditions.

For example, the Integrated Border Management agreement, which established borders and customs between Serbia and Kosovo, as well as the deal on telecommunications and energy, started to be put into actual practice. Moreover, the government began working with the Serbs in Northern Kosovo to overcome their opposition to cooperation with EULEX and KFOR. Furthermore, Serbia proved its commitment to the dialogue with Kosovo when it agreed to raise the profile of the talks from a technical level, conducted by second-tier diplomats, to that of Prime Ministers. This amounted to a full sense of political recognition by Serbia of the Kosovo government. Finally, the final rounds of the dialogue, held during March and April 2013, tackled the most sensitive issues for Serbia (that is, the integration into Kosovo institutions of the Serb-dominated North). This process culminated on 19 April 2013 with the signing of the "First agreement on principles governing the normalisation of relations"<sup>208</sup> between Serbia and Kosovo, complemented in May 2013 by a comprehensive implementation plan. This progress in Serbia-Kosovo relations was broadly perceived as historic.<sup>209</sup>

In conclusion, after eight years of continuous internal reform, the SPS had become a party devoted to the goal of Serbia's EU membership. Three groups of factors have contributed to this shift: (1) ideational: slow but gradual awareness of the mistakes of Milošević's authoritarian rule and its harsh consequences (even if the process of dealing with the past has not been fully completed in the SPS); (2) office aspirations: the party leadership sought to return to governing positions, offer its members the benefits of being in government and keep the organisation together. To this end, the SPS needed to soften the nationalistic rhetoric and formulate moderate, achievable and acceptable

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<sup>206</sup> Programme Declaration of the Seventh Congress of the SPS, 2006.

<sup>207</sup> Programme of the SPS, adopted at the Main Board meeting on 11 December 2010.

<sup>208</sup> See full text of the Agreement at <http://bit.ly/17Cb6fE>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>209</sup> See some of the reports: "Serbia and Kosovo reach landmark deal", available at: <http://bit.ly/XZQSNT>, "Serbia and Kosovo sign historic agreement", available at: <http://bit.ly/1aW3k4g>, "The deal between Serbia and Kosovo that changed history... or did it?", available at: <http://ind.pn/13xMTlu>, or "EU brokers historic Kosovo deal, door opens to Serbia accession" available at: <http://reut.rs/103R5d7>, all last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

party goals in order to make the party a desirable coalition partner to other Serbia political actors; (3) the spirit of time: despite setbacks, EU integration became over time the only game in town, while opposing Serbia's accession gradually assumed the character of political extremism. All political parties who opposed the EU membership goal increasingly fell out of favour with the electorate or began to be side-lined by their domestic counterparts. Thus, the SPS's transformation effectively amounted to a strategic adaptation of the party to new political realities for the purpose of survival.

#### 4.2.3.2 *The SNS: a new party 'cut from old cloth'*

The SNS was formed in 2008 when 21 MPs of the ultranationalist SRS<sup>210</sup> established a separate parliamentary group called Progressive Serbia, which began its independent activity in the Parliament. The SNS was officially established at the end of 2008, with Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić, the two most prominent political leaders of the SRS, becoming the President and Vice-President of the new party, respectively.

In its early days, and in stark contrast to the isolationist and ultranationalist SRS, the SNS opted for a moderate nationalistic and more flexible position in regard to Serbia's European integration ambitions and to Kosovo, but also closer relations with other great powers, including Russia, China, EU, and the US. Both Nikolić and Vučić have been keen on shedding their anti-EU image. However, their newfound European vocation was cautious and reserved, with occasional nationalistic outbursts reminding of their 'old' ways inside the SRS.

In the run up to the 2012 elections, the SNS increasingly strengthened its pro-European stance. Nikolić promised that if the SNS were to decide on where the country should go, it would opt for the direction of the EU, where the people could have a better life.<sup>211</sup> Then, at the height of the pre-election campaign in 2012,<sup>212</sup> the SNS's presidential candidate, Nikolić, vowed to "[...] do whatever it takes to join the EU within ten years."<sup>213</sup>

The fact that in previous election cycles (that is, 2004 and 2007), the SRS managed to secure the majority of parliamentary seats but failed to form or participate in the government has arguably contributed to the realisation in the party that something had to give. This impression only intensified after the major blow to the right-wing parties at the 2008 general elections, when Tadić and his coalition scored a landslide victory on the pro-EU ticket. In other words, the SNS arguably arrived at the conclusion that if it wanted to remain a relevant party in Serbian politics, it needed to abandon its ultra-nationalist gimmicks, such as on the Kosovo and the ICTY issues but also on the EU and European reforms, and to transform its image from the party of (former) warlords to an appealing and benevolent partner for the governmental parties. Thus, the adoption of a pro-EU stance was perhaps more the result of the need to attract as wide a public support as possible, rather than the outcome of a fundamental shift in the value system of the party leaders.

Still, from the moment the SNS rose to power, the political pledge of Aleksandar Vučić, who became the new party leader and the Vice-President of the government, was to change the corrupted party and political system in Serbia, in line with the EU's political conditionality. To that end, and after seizing control over all security services in the country, Vučić launched a major and compressive anti-

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<sup>210</sup> The Serbian Radical Party (SRS) was formed in 1991 as an ultranationalist party led by Vojislav Šešelj, who has been held in the ICTY's Detention Unit since 2003 under charges of crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war. During the war, the SRS organised its own paramilitary units and many of its members were subsequently indicted for war crimes. The SRS was among the main allies of Slobodan Milošević during his 12-year rule.

<sup>211</sup> See full statement by Tomislav Nikolić, available at: <http://bit.ly/1b2ws6A>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>212</sup> The elections of 6 May 2012 included general and local elections, as well as the first round of the presidential elections.

<sup>213</sup> See full statement by Tomislav Nikolić, *op. cit.*

corruption campaign in Serbia, often acting outside the state institutions. Some high profile cases, including that of the richest Serbian tycoon, Miroslav Mišković, arrested in December 2012 on corruption charges, brought Vučić immense popularity and the highest public approval ratings that any politician enjoyed over the past decade in the country. Moreover, the political views of Vučić with regard to the issues of Kosovo and European integration demonstrated much more flexibility than those of Nikolić, the former SNS leader and current President of Serbia.<sup>214</sup>

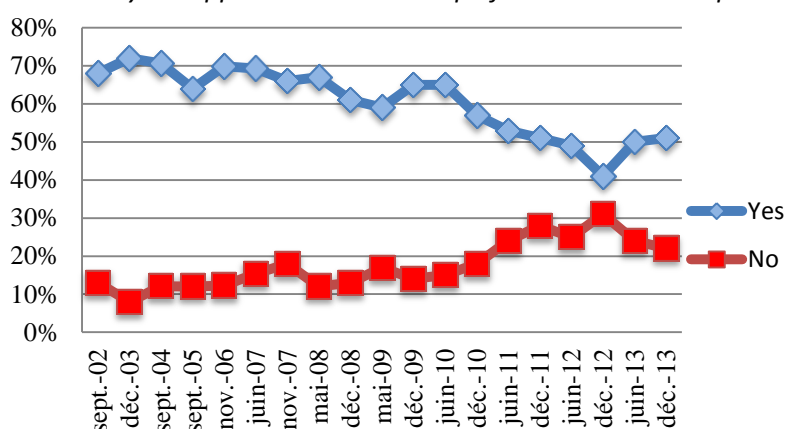
The SNS was the first Serbian party established as a result of the public polarisation over Serbia’s strategic political orientation towards the EU. The SNS and its leaders sought to distance themselves from the autistic, inward-looking and nationalistic approach to the resolution of the Kosovo problem and embraced EU reforms as the only realistic opportunity to fix Serbia’s broken political and economic system.

### 4.3 SERBIAN ELECTORATE AND ITS’ EUROPEAN ATTITUDES

The beginning of the Stabilisation and Association Process<sup>215</sup> for Serbia in the early 2000s, as elsewhere in the Balkans, raised public hopes for a ‘better and brighter future’. For the Serbian people at that time, the EU symbolised a peaceful and prosperous community of states, which was immensely appealing in a war-torn region irrespective of whether Serbia had any chances to join the EU then. However, the uncertainty of the EU accession goal became progressively more important for Serbia, as well as increasingly more politicised, especially during election campaigns. The tough line of the EU’s conditionality towards Serbia, and the slow progress made by the country in fulfilling the membership requirements, has stirred public frustration with the integration process and has led to a steady decline in popular support for the EU over the years (see Table 4.3). For the first time in 2012, in the context of the Belgrade-Pristina talks, public support for the ‘Europe’ fell below 50%.

**Table 4.3: Public support for Serbia’s membership in the European Union**

Question: “Do you support the membership of Serbia in the European Union?”



Source: Serbian European Integration Office

<sup>214</sup> This was evident from the diverging opinions on the Serbia-Kosovo talks issued by the President and government, as well as from the clear discrepancies in the approach proposed in the President’s platform and the official position of the government. The government even unofficially stated it would ignore Nikolić’s platform. See <http://bit.ly/TmAz8a>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>215</sup> The beginning of the more consolidated EU policy towards the Balkans is related to two European Union-Western Balkans summits. The first was held in Zagreb on 24 November 2000, and the second in Thessaloniki on 21 June 2003. In Zagreb, the heads of states and governments in the EU member states presented the Stabilisation and Association Process as a political and financial framework of cooperation with Balkan states. Establishing a system of mutual commitments and responsibilities, the SAP was meant to lead towards full EU membership.

For their part, Serbian politicians did not shy away from playing the ‘EU card’ to their advantage in order to blame Brussels for unpopular reform measures, but also for their other failures and political errors. At the same time, citizens have been inadequately informed about the EU integration process. Serbia has not yet made a clear cost/benefit analysis, nor has it presented to citizens the ways in which EU membership is likely to affect people’s everyday lives. Little or poor public awareness can unsurprisingly invite speculation, scepticism and even Europhobia.

Moreover, given that the EU struggles to demonstrate its transformative leverage in the region – such as in the thorny cases of Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina – coupled with the fact that Serbians feel the pressure over Kosovo but not yet the benefits of structural, EU-demanded reforms, does not help to improve people’s European attitudes. If anything, a large share of the public in Serbia believes that the country will never be accepted to join the Union, even if it fulfils all technical criteria. The long-drawn-out process of integration is thus depressing public support for EU/membership in Serbia.

In addition, the experience and perception of the impact of the democratic transition strongly influenced the party and wider political choices made by Serbian citizens. Namely, the division between transition ‘winners’<sup>216</sup> and ‘losers’<sup>217</sup> affected people’s political affiliations and preferences. The former have tended to support parties like the DS, the LDP and the URS, while the latter have traditionally backed parties such as the SNS or the SPS. The voters of the DSS draw from all social strata, largely irrespective of whether or how they have been affected by the transition process.<sup>218</sup>

According to a survey conducted in 2005, the greatest trust in the EU was revealed among young, highly educated and urban voters, while housewives, peasants and farmers, unqualified or semi-qualified workers expressed most Euroscepticism.<sup>219</sup>

When it comes to whether and how people’s EU attitudes relate to those of their elected politicians, the cases of the SPS and the DS are illustrative.

From a distinctive left-leaning party at the beginning of the 1990s, when the SPS changed its name and inherited the membership and infrastructure of the League of Communists of Serbia, by mid-1990s, the SPS transformed into a rural party dominated by peasants and farmers. By the end of 1990s, the SPS became focused on economically-inactive voters, predominantly pensioners and housewives. At the same time, the SPS became the party of the oldest, least educated and poorest citizens.<sup>220</sup>

If we cross-reference the data on the party support base with the official party politics towards Serbia’s EU membership after 2004, and especially in 2008 when the SPS fully embraced the European agenda, we can conclude that the preferences of the SPS voters and those of its leadership are clearly at odds. However, election results from 2004 onwards indicate that the party did not suffer because of this friction. Two reasons may be offered to explain such a phenomenon: one is that the party managed to expand its voter’s base, by attracting new supporters who favoured its

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<sup>216</sup> For example, those who managed to adjust to the market economy, gaining new skills, keeping or securing jobs in newly privatised or profitable companies, as well as in major public enterprises financed through the state budget, as well as the new entrepreneurial class of citizens, tycoons and individuals who used the loopholes in the system to accumulate wealth through purchases of sound businesses for moderate sums.

<sup>217</sup> For instance, people who lost their jobs or savings, who worked in companies that went bankrupt, who became dependent on social and healthcare services, or pensioners.

<sup>218</sup> Slavujević, Zoran (2006), “The change of the social base and social structure of the supporters of relevant political parties in Serbia” in Lutovac, Zoran (2006) (ed.), *Democracy in Political Parties in Serbia*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, pp. 203-207.

<sup>219</sup> See the results of the survey “Political divisions in Serbia – five years after” conducted by CESID in May 2005, taken from Komsic, Jovan (2007), “Political parties in Serbia and European values” in Lutovac (2007), *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>220</sup> Slavujević (2006), *op. cit.*

‘U-turn’ with regard to the EU. The other justification could be that the traditional SPS followers did not consider the party’s change in European attitudes as a decisive issue to warrant a ‘protest’ vote.

Unlike the SPS, throughout the 1990s, the DS targeted middle and upper-middle class citizens, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and city dwellers. After Boris Tadić seized party leadership at the end of 2003, the party endeavoured to expand its appeal also to less educated and more socially-vulnerable groups of the population. During his 2008 presidential campaign, Tadić focused on visiting smaller towns and municipalities, talking to housewives, disabled, pensioners, peasants, and so on.<sup>221</sup> However, for most of these voters – in their majority, transition ‘losers’ – the DS and its pro-EU stance smacked of elitism and was detached from their everyday reality. The kind of changes that Tadić proposed – like privatisation of state-owned factories – spoke to the people more about the threat of layoffs, decreased social and welfare entitlements and insecurity than about any specific advantages.

Compared to the cabinets of Đinđić, and to a lesser extent of Živković, both of whom advocated far-reaching pro-EU policies, the administration of Tadić embraced a less ambitious reform agenda, trying to avoid controversial measures. This helped the DS to vastly expand its support base but it also alienated those voters who wanted results and structural changes in line with the EU’s demands. Dissatisfied with the performance of Tadić’s government, many decided to cast blank votes in the 2012 elections. The blank-vote movement<sup>222</sup>, formed mainly by pro-European intellectuals, spoiled about 4.5% of the ballots but it is considered to have contributed significantly to the defeat of Tadić in the 2012 presidential race.

Both the SPS and the DS indicate the mismatch between the European views of the Serbian electorate and the stances of their politicians on the subject. In part, this could be related to the fact that the question of European integration is not among the top issues that affect the party preferences of voters. According to a 2012 survey on the major problems facing Serbia, 56% respondents answered that it was “unemployment”, followed by 7% who indicated “corruption”, 6% “salaries and the standard of living”, and 2% “poverty”. 2% of the respondents saw “problems with development of agriculture and rural areas” as the most important ones, along with 2% who opted for the “Kosovo problem”, and 1% who named “education”, “healthcare” and “interpersonal relations” respectively.<sup>223</sup>

#### 4.4 EU AND PARTY COMPETITION IN SERBIA

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At the 2008 elections, the main competing political parties – the DS headed by Boris Tadić and the SRS, at that time led by Tomislav Nikolić – managed to split public opinion on the issue of Serbia’s membership to the EU. The DS (part of the coalition “For the European Serbia – Boris Tadić”) campaigned for further EU integration, while the SRS mostly avoided the topic, or touched upon it in negative contexts, implying that the European Union sought to take Kosovo away from Serbia.

During the 2008 campaign, Javier Solana, in his capacity of EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, stated that the people of Serbia should use the elections as an opportunity to show they were in favour of European integration, as – according to him – there was no better way than through EU membership to secure the country’s future. Prompted by journalists to say whether a potential victory of the Serbian Radical Party would lead Serbia into political

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<sup>221</sup> See videos at <http://bit.ly/1bLd1UU>, <http://bit.ly/M37KP4>, last accessed on: 26 January 2014.

<sup>222</sup> See the articles and texts published on Pescanik.net portal, that inspired one of the liveliest debates in the 2012 elections, available at: <http://bit.ly/1o8mQ4z>, and the blog especially dedicated to the blank vote, available at: <http://bit.ly/1da39F8>, last accessed on: 26 January 2014.

<sup>223</sup> See more on the results of the survey at <http://bit.ly/1bhACi9>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

isolation, Solana asserted that such a scenario would be highly unfortunate: “I love Serbia very much, although it is prone to looking backward instead of forward [...] [w]e have to do everything in order to create the sense among the people in Serbia that we want them as close to us as possible. I want to go to sleep in the evening of 10 May with a peaceful conscience that we did all we could, and not to wake up on 12 May and realise that we could have done more... One of the things we could do, in spite of the difficulties we have, is to sign the SAA with Serbia.”<sup>224</sup>

Solana’s words were interpreted in the country as lending support to the coalition “For a European Serbia” and to Boris Tadić. In response to Solana’s declaration, the SRS issued a press release stating that such statement meant that Solana would “help and underpin with all means necessary those political forces in Serbia that support the dismemberment of the Serbian state... Those who are taking away Kosovo from Serbia today attempt to secure the election victory for those in Serbia who would recognise the independence of Kosovo and work on the further destruction of Serbia.”<sup>225</sup>

In addition to the heated campaign atmosphere, there was also a widely-shared feeling during the 2008 elections that the participation of parties from the opposition camp in the new government would not please much the EU, and might not bode well for the country’s European ambitions. The opposition parties did little to assuage people’s concerns on this issue, or to promote themselves as reliable partners through contacts with top EU officials.

In fact, the topic of Serbia’s European integration was generally not properly analysed or debated by the main political parties, either in terms of the progress made or outstanding challenges. Instead, ‘Europe’ was presented to voters as a rather symbolical and ideological aspiration, which citizens could either embrace or reject. For example, Tadić claimed that only his victory and the overall success of the coalition “For a European Serbia” could secure the country’s prospects but steered clear of listing concrete implications.

Serbia received candidate status in March 2012, during the mandate of the DS-led government, after the country successfully delivered in 2011 on the condition of full cooperation with the ICTY and signalled that it was ready to play a constructive role also in the EU-sponsored dialogue aimed at the normalisation relations with Kosovo. However, the DS failed to capitalise on this success in the campaign for the 2012 elections, and the SNS emerged victorious in the polls. Two main reasons can explain this outcome.

First, unlike in the 2008 campaign, the main opposition party – the SNS – abandoned the anti-EU discourse and entered the electoral race by expressing commitment to Serbia’s EU membership goal. For instance, Nikolić and Vučić set up numerous meetings with EU officials ahead of the elections, seeking to demonstrate their European credentials.<sup>226</sup> Second, with the question of whether or not Serbia should join the EU settled among all main political competitors, the focus of the campaign moved away from symbolic issues towards more ‘bread-and-butter’ concerns, like unemployment and the overall economic downturn,<sup>227</sup> or the pace of political and economic reforms.

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<sup>224</sup> The address of Javier Solana to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, on 8 April 2008, available at: <http://bit.ly/1ey2TP6>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>225</sup> SRS press release of 8 April 2008, available at: <http://bit.ly/1ey2TP6>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>226</sup> See some of the titles: “Tomislav Nikolić is not unwanted in Brussels”, *Telegraf*, 5 March 2012, available at: <http://bit.ly/lrw8Yd>, “Timislav Nikolić: I did not hear the request to recognise Kosovo in Brussels, Washington and London”, *NSPM portal*, 16 April 2012, available at <http://bit.ly/lhifjC>, or “Kacin: EU will accept the results of Serbian elections”, *RTV*, 29 April 2012, available at: <http://bit.ly/18FC62l>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>227</sup> Serbia was severely hit by the global economic crisis, experiencing a double-dip recession, the growth of unemployment and public debt, and high inflation rates. In 2009, the GDP contracted 3.5%, followed by GDP growth of 1% and 1.8% in 2010 and 2011 respectively, and the recession returned in 2012 with the GDP contraction of 0.5%. The unemployment

Looking back at Serbia's journey towards the European Union, and the efforts of the various Serbian governments in advancing on the path of integration, several trends become obvious. First, the main obstacles in the process of Serbia's accession to the EU were the condition of full cooperation with the ICTY and the Kosovo issue. Second, of all six Serbian governments in the post-Milošević era, only the one dominated by Boris Tadić (2008-2012) and the subsequent Nikolić government demonstrated genuine commitment to the European integration agenda. Both of Koštunica's governments (2004-2007 and 2007-2008) essentially gave up on the goal of Serbia's EU membership due to the political conditionality for accession. In addition, although the credit/merit for the country's strategic political re-orientation towards 'Europe' belongs to the governments led by the first democratic Prime Minister of Serbia, Zoran Đinđić, and his successor, Zoran Živković, their achievements in the Serbian *rapprochement* with the EU remained rather symbolic.

On the other hand, not even Boris Tadić's administration, rhetorically devoted to European integration, actually managed to deliver on its promises. He won both the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2008 on the pro-EU ticket. However, despite having a clear mandate to finalise the cooperation with the ICTY and to embark upon the resolution of the Kosovo issue, he proved unable to come through. As a result, he failed to convince the EU member states, most notably Germany and the Netherlands, that Serbia deserved to advance on its EU path.

The strategy of Tadić's administration on the Kosovo issue was to launch a major diplomatic action in order to prevent the international recognition of Kosovo's independence. In addition, Serbia managed to secure the majority support in the UN General Assembly for the resolution adopted in October 2008, which requested an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) with the question: "Is the unilateral declaration of independence by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo in accordance with international law?"<sup>228</sup> In July 2011, the ICJ gave its opinion, with 10 against 4 votes, stating that "the declaration of independence of the 17 February 2008 did not violate general international law", as the "general international law contains no applicable prohibition of declarations of independence"<sup>229</sup>. It was only after this unbinding opinion was issued that the Serbian government accepted to get on board with the EU-sponsored process aimed at the normalisation of relations with Kosovo.

Throughout 2008-2012, the hard-line conservative and nationalist opposition in the parliament (that is, the DSS and the SRS) repeatedly accused the government of betraying Serbia's national interests. At the other end of the political spectrum, the liberal opposition – the LDP – pointed out that the government pledged in the elections to advance Serbia's EU membership bid but in reality only hampered the process by wrestling with the issue of Kosovo, which had already been lost.<sup>230</sup>

Stuck between a rock and a hard place – to accelerate the EU integration process and thus to deliver on its election promises, while at the same time normalising relations with Kosovo against the letter and spirit of the 2006 Constitution<sup>231</sup> – the DS fell short of expectations. Trying to deliver on both fronts, the administration of Tadić could not live up to its 2008 campaign slogan which read "Both

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rate grew from 17.9% in 2009 to 25.9% in 2012. The public debt to GDP ratio grew from 38.2% in 2009 to over 60% in 2012. The inflation rate was high: 8.1% (2009), 6.2% (2010), 11.2% (2011), and 6.2% (2012).

<sup>228</sup> Full text of the Resolution 63/3 of the UN General Assembly, adopted on 8 October 2008, available at: <http://bit.ly/1j116HP>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>229</sup> Full text of the ICJ's advisory opinion, "Accordance with International Law of the unilateral Declaration of Independence in respect of Kosovo", 22 July 2010, available at: <http://bit.ly/d2NOqA>, last accessed on: 26 November 2013.

<sup>230</sup> Statement of Čedomir Jovanović, the LDP leader, "The politics 'Both Europe and Kosovo' is defeated", available at: <http://bit.ly/1bBya0w>, last accessed on: 15 January 2014.

<sup>231</sup> According to the Serbian Constitution adopted in 2006, Kosovo is defined as an integral part of Serbia. This provision effectively puts any government under pressure not to make any concessions with regards to Kosovo.



Europe and Kosovo". Combined with the challenges caused by the severe economic crisis, the government lost its voters, who no longer saw these national issues as priorities for the country.

With the EU's decision not to engage with or show any preference in the 2012 elections, or in the aftermath of the vote, and with all major parties apart from the DSS colliding on their avowed support for Serbia's EU membership, the strategic path of the country was for the first time in the history of Serbian elections an issue of controversy. Thus in 2012, the EU became the only game in town.

#### **4.5 OUTLOOK AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The EU and European integration will continue to affect party politics and party competition in Serbia. The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue is likely to continue irrespective of which parties will have parliamentary majority. The same applies to Serbia's EU accession talks: progress towards EU membership will depend on progress in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. Although the April Agreement with Kosovo marked a turning point for Serbia, its contents and implications remain uncertain. After concluding the agreement with Kosovo and gathering applause in Brussels, both the Prime Minister Dačić and the Deputy Prime Minister Vučić went to great lengths to water down the meaning of the deal to their domestic audiences. Officially, the government of Serbia still regards the agreement as status neutral, suggesting that nothing significant changed in regard to Serbia's position on Kosovo. In turn, this may affect the future party dynamics: it is not inconceivable that some parties may try to use and capitalise on the nationalistic and Eurosceptic sentiments as the Belgrade-Pristina relations still need to normalise.

Similarly, if the economic hardship of citizens continues, and if structural reforms demanded by the EU do not produce tangible results in the foreseeable future, chances that the government will resort to nationalism and populism can considerably increase, regardless of its ideological colour.

A clear sign of the renewal of commitments between EU and Serbia was the formal opening of accession talks in January 2014. The EU should thus strive to (1) preserve a positive momentum in Serbia's European integration and (2) depoliticise the accession process to the greatest possible extent by returning to the core of the enlargement approach – that is, structural reforms. The prevalence of the political issues in the EU's conditionality have already produced many detrimental effects: pushing much-needed reforms to the back; prolonging the integration process indefinitely; depressing political will and public support for the EU membership; increasing domestic tensions; undermining the legitimacy of the enlargement process in Serbia, but also in the EU member states. This order of priorities should now be reversed.



# THE EU IN MACEDONIAN PARTY POLITICS – CONSOLIDATING AND DIVIDING

BY SIMONIDA KACARSKA

5.1	The emergence of competitive politics	69
5.2	From the Ohrid Agreement to the name dispute	72
5.3	EU and party competition	76
	5.3.1 Political parties' responses to the Progress Reports and other EU assessments	76
	5.3.2 The EU as political mediator	78
5.4	The electorate and its European attitudes	80
5.5	Prospects amidst a <i>status quo</i>	81

In the context the Balkans' accession to the European Union, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia<sup>232</sup> has regressed in regional terms, from the position of frontrunner in 2004/2005 to that of laggard in 2014. Despite being the first Balkan country to sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU in early 2001, and the second after Croatia to receive candidate status in 2005, Skopje still awaits the start of accession talks. The European Commission's recommendation in 2009 to launch negotiations with the country has yet to be followed up by a Council decision – a situation which has kept the country in a limbo for the past five years. At the same time, since the early 2000s, the country's aspiration to join the Union has granted the EU – via its integration process and membership conditionality – the opportunity to become heavily involved in everyday political affairs. This twin development of stagnation and strong EU political interference has created a unique setting for the study of the EU's role in the party politics of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

## 5.1 THE EMERGENCE OF COMPETITIVE POLITICS

Competitive politics in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has evolved in the absence of any historical democratic tradition, and has been shaped by the communist past and the population's ethnic heterogeneity.<sup>233</sup> When it declared independence in 1991, the country had no strong social structures independent of the state, which could underpin the creation and maintenance of stable,

<sup>232</sup> The EPC has replaced the 'Republic of Macedonia' used originally by the author with 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' throughout this chapter.

<sup>233</sup> According to the most recent census, 64,18% of the population is ethnic Macedonian; 2% Albanian; 3,9% Turkish; 2,7% Roma; and 1,8% Serbian. See Census (2002), "Population, households and dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia", available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikaciji/knigaXIII.pdf>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

democratic political institutions.<sup>234</sup> Given this lack of democratic practice, the post-1990 political space was organised in accordance with two political divisions: ethnic diversity and the relationship with the former (socialist) Yugoslav system. Moreover, the ethnic cleavage aligns with other issues of salience like religion, languages and the rural-urban divide. As a result, two parallel blocks of political parties have developed in the country: one ethnic Macedonian<sup>235</sup> and another, ethnic Albanian.<sup>236</sup>

In the former block, the primary dividing line has been the attitude towards the former system. The two main actors in this camp have been the Socialist Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) and the Internal Democratic Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE). The SDSM, as the communist successor party, defines itself as a “modern, democratic, social democratic party rooted in traditional left-wing ideas”<sup>237</sup>, while the VMRO-DPMNE claims to be a party of Christian-Democratic orientation, “founded by a group of like-minded individuals in opposition to the communist regime.”<sup>238</sup> Despite the official self-identification of these two parties in conventional left-right ideological terms, their declared orientations have remained largely unrelated to their respective socio-economic policy choices since the country’s independence. For instance, the SDSM had the leading role in implementing the privatisation process, whereas the VMRO-DPMNE, after returning to power in 2006, has employed an extensive public spending programme and has been a stronger supporter of egalitarian principles.

According to interviews by the author, these parties’ stated ideological inclinations have primarily served the purpose of adopting a familiar ‘language’ that would facilitate communication with international organisations of which these parties are members.<sup>239</sup> The SDSM is member of the European Socialists Party and the Socialists International, while the VMRO-DPMNE participates in the work of the European Peoples Party and the International Democratic Union. In reality however, the space for competition has been narrowed because of the lack of traditional social divisions associated with the left-right spectrum, the primacy of the EU agenda, as well as regular assistance agreements between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and international financial institutions.<sup>240</sup>

In the Albanian block of parties, three parties have dominated the political space at different times since independence: the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) and the Democratic Union of Integration (DUI). Here, the positioning of parties on socio-economic issues is even more difficult to trace since the parties in this camp have focused almost exclusively on promoting the rights of the population segments they represent, and have essentially built their discourse on identity politics. It has also been argued that their programmes resemble much more declarations of movements than well-developed orientations of political parties.<sup>241</sup> As it is generally the case with ethnic minority parties in the post-communist world, the Albanian parties tend to compete at the extremities of the political spectrum, thereby establishing centrifugal tendencies in the system.<sup>242</sup> Thus, regardless of their programmatic orientation, these parties are predisposed to radicalisation and ethnic outbidding.

<sup>234</sup> Ivanov, Gjorgje (2001), “The power of the powerless: democracy and civil society in Macedonia” in Blunden, Margaret and Burke, Patrick (eds.), *Democratic reconstruction in the Balkans*, Centre for the Study of Democracy.

<sup>235</sup> Ethnic Macedonian is used in this paper to denote the majority population in the country.

<sup>236</sup> Apart from these two main blocks, there are also a number of parties representing the smaller ethnic groups in the country (that is, the Turks, Serbs, Roma, etc.), but these are of minor interest to this paper.

<sup>237</sup> For more on this party see its official website, available at: [www.sdsm.org.mk](http://www.sdsm.org.mk), last accessed on 30 July 2010.

<sup>238</sup> Official website of the party, available at: <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/english/who-we-are.htm>, last accessed on: 30 July 2010.

<sup>239</sup> Author’s interview with a SDSM member and former minister, 11 July 2005.

<sup>240</sup> A similar argument on the enlargement to Central and Easter Europe was made in Innes, Abby (2002), “Party competition in postcommunist Europe: the great electoral lottery”, *Comparative Politics*, Volume 35, Number 1, pp. 85-104.

<sup>241</sup> Sasajkovski, Slavejko (1999), *Parlamentarni Izbori 1998*, Skopje: Institute for Sociological, Judicial and Legal Research, p. 105.

<sup>242</sup> Author’s interview with university professor, 30 June 2005.

Post-2001 however, the discourse of the two main Albanian parties – the DPA and DUI – were built by reference to the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA). The OFA was signed in August 2001 and put an end to the internal conflict between the Macedonian security forces and the Albanian paramilitary forces, the National Liberation Army (NLA). The DUI, as NLA guerrilla, was directly involved in the conflict and thus holds the OFA in high regard. Conversely, given that during the conflict the DPA was part of a broad coalition government together with the SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE and PDP, the party plays down the importance of the conflict for Albanians in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>243</sup> Hence, while the DUI has been supportive of the Agreement, Menduh Thaçi, the leader of the DPA, as well as other notable party members, have declared it “dead” and have called for its revision.<sup>244</sup>

The ambiguous positioning of the political parties on the ideological spectrum has been accompanied by weak constituency links in the country. This is reflected in the high level of electoral volatility, which has been identified as problematic for the consolidation of the party system.<sup>245</sup> A recent study of political identities has concluded that “there is no clear or specific social profiling of the political parties, with the social background of the parties in most part strongly established in the ethnicity of the respondents.”<sup>246</sup> This finding corresponds to the failure of the parties to build an ideological base since their respective policies have on numerous occasions contrasted with their declared left-right orientation. It is generally argued that the voters of the SDSM have a more urban background, are better educated and enjoy a higher economic status than the supporters of the VMRO-DPMNE.<sup>247</sup> As a result of electoral volatility, as well as of the lack of a consistent ideological makeup, it is very difficult to establish a profile for the electorates of specific parties in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

However, the blurred ideological contours of the political parties in the country have proven somewhat of an advantage insofar as parties’ coalition-building capacity is concerned, allowing them to easily find and change allies in the pursuit of office. The parties mentioned so far have been the key political players through building inter-ethnic governmental coalitions and with three major turnovers of power since independence (see Table 5.1 below). Inter-ethnic coalitions have been an informal rule in the political landscape of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as all governments since independence have consisted of at least one party from each of the two – Macedonian and Albanian – blocks.<sup>248</sup>

<sup>243</sup> Taleski, Dane (2011), “Post-conflict legacies and the Ohrid Framework Agreement: discursive legitimization of political competition between Albanian parties in Macedonia” in Risteska, Marija and Daskalovski, Zhidas (eds.), *One decade after the Ohrid Framework Agreement: lessons (to be) learned from the Macedonian experience*, Skopje: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Center for Research and Policy Making, p. 184.

<sup>244</sup> “In the Albanian block there is dissatisfaction with the implementation of the Agreement”, *Radio Free Europe*, 13 August 2008, available at: <http://www.makdenes.org/content/article/1488342.html>, last accessed on: 7 March 2013; Bozinovska, Slagjana, “(Ab)-use of the Framework Agreement? [(Зло)употреба на Рамковниот Договор?]”, *Radio Free Europe*, 8 August 2009, available at: <http://www.makdenes.org/content/article/1795102.html>, last accessed on: 7 April 2013.

<sup>245</sup> Author’s interview with university professor, 30 June 2005.

<sup>246</sup> Hristova, Lidija (2012), “Political identities in the Republic of Macedonia”, *Conference Proceedings*, Skopje: Institute for Sociological and Political Juridical Research.

<sup>247</sup> Liotta, Peter H. and Jebb, Cindy R. (2002), “Cry, the imagined country: legitimacy and the fate of Macedonia”, *European Security*, Volume 11, Number 1, pp. 49-80.

<sup>248</sup> Many analysts consider this feature as one of the main reasons why the country managed to avoid the ethnic bloodshed witnessed in the rest of the Yugoslav federation.

**Table 5.1: Governing coalitions**

Period	Main partners in ruling coalition
2008-present	VMRO-DPMNE and DUI
2006-2008	VMRO-DPMNE and DPA
2002-2006	SDSM and DUI
mid-2001-2002	VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, DPA and PDP (national unity government during and in the immediate aftermath of the 2001 conflict)
1998-2001	VMRO-DPMNE and DPA
1994-1998	SDSM and PDP
1992-1994	SDSM and PDP
1991-1992	expert government

During its first year of democratic transition, the country was run by a multi-ethnic expert government that was succeeded by a coalition between the SDSM and PDP, which held office until 1998, when the first major turnover occurred. This alternation of power was historic because it put in place the first government that did not incorporate the communist successor party, the SDSM. In this sense, it was the first clear symbolic break with the past and an important step for the public practice with democracy, indicating that the former communist party could be voted out of office.<sup>249</sup> The second alternation of power, which happened in 2002, brought back the SDSM in coalition with the DUI, a newly established political party in 2001. Following the 2006 parliamentary elections, the VMRO-DPMNE entered office, first in coalition with the DPA and, since 2008 until the present, in alliance with the DUI. These political changes demonstrate that the parties have accepted the basic rules of the democratic game in addition to the rule of governing by inter-ethnic coalitions. Overall, there is no contestation of electoral mechanisms as such, and there are no political parties in the country which would envision that they could come to power in any other way except via elections.<sup>250</sup>

## **5.2 FROM THE OHRID AGREEMENT TO THE NAME DISPUTE**

The two main issues that have dominated Skopje’s quest for EU accession, and which have greatly impacted the party system, are related to inter-ethnic relations (regulated by the Ohrid Framework Agreement) and to bilateral disputes with the neighbours. The first has been incorporated in the EU conditionality through the stipulation of the implementation of the OFA<sup>251</sup> as a conditioning element for the country’s progress on the integration path. The Agreement was signed in August 2001 and put an end to the internal conflict between the Macedonian security forces and the Albanian paramilitary forces. The OFA was the result of extensive coordination across party lines, and of intense pressure from external actors such as the US, the EU, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The signatories of the Agreement were the main four political parties at the time,<sup>252</sup> as well as the appointed representatives of the EU and the US, acting as mediators and guarantors.<sup>253</sup> Whereas the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement was channelled through domestic institutions, the EU

<sup>249</sup> Author’s interview with member of VMRO-People’s party, 1 July 2005.

<sup>250</sup> Author’s interview with university professor and SDSM member, 11 July 2005.

<sup>251</sup> The Agreement established a form of power sharing within the system, instituting a minority veto, extending the use of the languages of the non-majority communities which represent over 20% of the population at the national and local level and the principle of adequate and equitable representation and decentralisation. Text of the Ohrid Framework Agreement available at: [www.siofa.gov.mk](http://www.siofa.gov.mk), last accessed on: 12 September 2009.

<sup>252</sup> Author’s interview with former Vice Prime Minister for EU Affairs, 23 December 2010.

<sup>253</sup> That is, the SDSM, the VMRO-DPMNE, the DPA, and the PDP.

<sup>253</sup> The Special Representative of the EU, Francois Leotard, and the US Special Envoy, James Perdue.

constantly provided external financial and expert support, while also exerting significant political pressure for its implementation.<sup>254</sup> In this manner, the EU meddled in the management of party relations through its role in inter-ethnic policies.

The implementation of the OFA in its various aspects has been monitored by the EU since 2002 in the different instruments<sup>255</sup> at the disposal to the European Institutions. Anecdotally, the role of the EU in this regard is captured by the popular maxim that “the road to Brussels leads through Ohrid”.<sup>256</sup> In these circumstances, the positioning of the political parties on the OFA has had implications for their stances in relation to the EU.

In the early period of the OFA implementation, in 2003, the then leaders of the VMRO-DPMNE and the DPA called for the partition of the country since they saw no possibility for multi-ethnic coexistence.<sup>257</sup> In April 2003, former Prime Minister, Ljubco Georgievski, and DPA president, Arben Djaferi, argued that there was no rationale in implementing the agreement when a multi-ethnic country like the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was not viable. The vehemence of this rhetoric and its direct challenge to an internationally-brokered peace agreement were almost unprecedented in the region.<sup>258</sup> Such forms of contestation also distanced these political parties from the EU, due to the Union’s support for the OFA as a condition for EU accession. Whereas both parties quickly abandoned this discourse, the DPA has continued to call for a revision of the OFA, though not contesting the objective of European integration as such.

Since 2005, when the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia became a candidate country, the EU has supported the OFA through its strategic documents. For example, the 2006 Accession Partnership contains a priority that requires the country to “ensure the effective implementation of the legislative framework adopted in accordance with the Framework Agreement”, and similar provisions are to be found also in the 2008 Partnership.<sup>259</sup> In fact, the implementation of the OFA requirement has in practice meant reaching inter-ethnic party consensus on policies under pressure from the EU.<sup>260</sup> This linkage drawn between the OFA’s implementation and the EU integration process has been largely evaluated as positive by different stakeholders in the country, not least since the goal of accession has traditionally enjoyed high support among the population. In other words, as Vachudova has argued, joining the EU has given the elites a common project that transcends ethnic divisions.<sup>261</sup> The indirect inclusion of the inter-ethnic dimension in the membership conditionality can be associated with the EU’s security and democratising agenda for the region, as a strategy meant to prevent that the Union imports unresolved conflicts within its borders.<sup>262</sup>

Bilateral disputes with neighbouring countries, including with members of the EU, are the second main aspect of the EU’s conditionality. The glitch has been the dispute with Greece over the country’s

<sup>254</sup> Author’s interview with former Vice Prime Minister for EU Affairs, Skopje, 23 December 2010.

<sup>255</sup> Reports on the implementation of the SAA, the Progress Report, the European Partnerships, as well as the SAA meetings.

<sup>256</sup> Solana, Javier (2004), “A European era”, article originally published in the daily newspaper *Dnevnik*, available at: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/articles/79030.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/articles/79030.pdf), last accessed on: 27 July 2013.

<sup>257</sup> Georgievski, Ljubco (2005), “Tezi za Spasuvanje na Makedonskata Nacija i Drzava” [Theses for salvation of the Macedonian nation and state], *Dnevnik*, 18 April 2003, available at: <http://www.dnevnik.com.mk/?pBroj=2130&stID=17187>, last accessed on: 20 June 2004.

<sup>258</sup> International Crisis Group (2003), “Macedonia: no room for complacency”, *Europe Report* No. 149, available at: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/>, last accessed on: 20 June 2004.

<sup>259</sup> Council Decision of 30 January 2006 on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the European Partnership with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and repealing Decision 2004/518/EC, Council of the European Union, 30 January 2006.

<sup>260</sup> Author’s interview with former Vice Prime Minister for EU Affairs, Skopje, 23 December 2010.

<sup>261</sup> Vachudova, Milada Anna (2005), “Promoting political change and economic revitalisation in the Western Balkans: the role of the European Union”, *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, Number II.

<sup>262</sup> The author has confirmed this through interviews with stakeholders.

constitutional name.<sup>263</sup> This matter has essentially blocked the ability of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to move forward in the integration process since 2009, when the Commission first proposed that the country starts accession negotiations. For the past five years, however, this recommendation was not followed up by a decision in the Council. The country's preparedness to begin the talks has been confirmed in every Progress Report published by the Brussels' executive since 2009 without a positive response from the Council. Commission representatives consider the issue as exogenous to the accession process but recognise that it impedes upon the regular functioning of conditionality.<sup>264</sup> At national level in Skopje, the name dispute is considered as an interference with the expected course of the conditionality, and this situation has been weakening the credibility of the membership perspective in the eyes of the people.

The connection established between the name issue and the ability of the country to advance towards EU (and NATO) membership has also complicated the parties' and public's positions on 'Europe'.<sup>265</sup> Formally, all political parties in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are highly supportive of European integration and none of the main parties has openly questioned the country's goal of EU accession.<sup>266</sup> The VMRO-DPMNE states in its 2006-2010 programme that "the EC Opinion (*avis*) issued on 9 November 2005 is the biggest part of the agenda and presents the foremost priority" of the country.<sup>267</sup> Thus, the objective of EU membership enjoys support across the political spectrum without any principled opposition from the 'core' political parties.

Yet, even if this party consensus on 'Europe' has not been challenged, the impasse of the country on the EU track on account of the name dispute has provoked criticism, especially from the VMRO-DPMNE, as governing party.<sup>268</sup> This has been the case since 2009, when the launch of accession talks was connected to the resolution of the name issue. Since then, Skopje has also been undergoing a large-scale transformation funded by the government which has only exacerbated the tensions between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Greek public and political elites. The project, officially titled "Skopje 2014", involves the construction of numerous buildings and monuments with historic and identity-building undertones, many of which are subject of discordance between former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and both Greece and Bulgaria. In addition, the project has sharply divided the population at home, among other reasons due to arguments that it favours the majority over other ethnic communities in the country.

At the same time, the negotiations on the name issue have taken place away from public domain and under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), through a mediator appointed by the UN secretary general.<sup>269</sup> Due to their confidentiality and the political sensitivities on the topic, it is difficult to draw

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<sup>263</sup> Greece objects to the constitutional name "Republic of Macedonia" and, as a result, the country joined the UN in 1993 under a provisional name "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". For almost two decades, both countries have been engaged in UN-mediated talks to find a solution. For more about the dispute see Karajkov, Risto (2008), "Facts on the Macedonian-Greek name dispute", *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso*.

<sup>264</sup> Author's interview with a European Commission official, Brussels, 15 November 2010.

<sup>265</sup> The situation in terms of Macedonia's admission in NATO is similar. Since the Bucharest NATO summit in 2008, Macedonia's EU membership depends on resolving the name issue.

<sup>266</sup> In their platforms for the 2011 parliamentary elections, all political parties except the DPA identified the issue of EU membership as a priority for Macedonia, see "NATO and EU in the electoral programmes", Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation, 2011, available at: <http://www.mcims.org.mk/images/docs/2011/eu-i-nato-vo-izbornite-programi.pdf>, last accessed on: 20 June 2012. The broad party support for EU membership also mirrors the traditionally high public support for EU accession in the country.

<sup>267</sup> VMRO-DPMNE "Electoral programme 2006-2010", available at: <http://vmro-dpmne.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/documents/programa2006-2010.pdf>, last accessed on: 28 September 2012.

<sup>268</sup> "The road to the EU and NATO has turned into real anguish", interview with Prime Minister Gruevski, *Dnevnik*, 10 January 2012, available at: <http://dnevnik.com.mk/?ItemID=C7A18EC97F0D55428C19F690CCDABD37>, last accessed on: 28 September 2012.

<sup>269</sup> The current mediator is Ambassador Matthew Nimetz.



precise conclusions with regard to the positions of the different political parties in the country on the issue. For example, on the recent proposal of the UN-mandated talks, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, responded that the government would inform the public once the negotiations were in a “serious phase”.<sup>270</sup> On the basis of public statements made by various officials, it can be noticed that the name issue has caused a further division within the Macedonian block of political parties, as well as between the Macedonian and Albanian camps. In this respect, the VMRO-DPMNE has held a staunch position, arguing in favour of holding a referendum if any change on the name of the country is decided.<sup>271</sup> This line has been difficult to reconcile with the need to reach a compromise solution for the purpose of EU accession. In 2011, in its electoral programme the SDSM also promised to consult the citizens via a referendum, should a compromise on the name issue be reached.<sup>272</sup> A year later, the SDSM announced that – after all – it would accept a name with a geographical reference, as long as it did not change the identity markers.<sup>273</sup>

However, these stances of the parties are neither fixed nor clear. In July 2013, the newly elected Vice President of the SDSM and former Vice-Prime Minister for EU affairs, Radmila Šekerinska, announced in an interview that when in government, the SDSM would find a way to start accession talks with the EU, without mentioning a potential referendum.<sup>274</sup>

In addition to opening a rift between the opposition and governing parties, the name issue has caused inter-ethnic party animosities, with the Albanian political leaders calling for a swift resolution of the problem. More recently, in a local newspaper column, Ali Ahmeti, the leader of the DUI, argued that “the moment has been reached [...] to remove any obstacle” for the country’s NATO membership, hinting that the Albanian community had been patient enough on this issue.<sup>275</sup>

The name dispute is not the only bilateral issue blocking the road to the EU. Since late 2012, the country’s relations with Bulgaria have also impinged on former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’s integration process. In fact, the Bulgarian government has accused “Macedonia of waging an anti-Bulgarian campaign and of replacing historical facts”.<sup>276</sup> Therefore, the Bulgarian government has “demanded the signing of a friendship and cooperation deal, joint government sessions as well as an agreement for joint celebrations of notable personalities and events in [...] common history.”<sup>277</sup> According to the conclusions of the General Affairs Council of December 2012, “in light of the overall importance of maintaining good neighbourly relations, the Council also notes the recent high-level contacts between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria, and looks forward to

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<sup>270</sup> “Gruevski does not comment Nimetz’s ideas” [Груевски не ги коментира идеите од Нимиц], *Radio Free Europe*, 10 April 2013, available at: <http://www.makdenes.org/archive/news/20130410/428/428.html?id=24953595>, last accessed on: 28 September 2012.

<sup>271</sup> “Gruevski: There will be a referendum if there is a solution to the name issue” [Груевски: Ќе има референдум ако има решение за името], *Plusinfo*, 15 April 2013, available at: <http://www.plusinfo.mk/vest/88762/Gruevski-Kje-ima-referendum-ako-ima-reshenie-za-imeto->, last accessed on: 17 April 2013.

<sup>272</sup> Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, “Electoral programme 2011 for your future”, available at: [http://www.zatvojataidnina.mk/upload/pdf/Programa\\_SDSM\\_2011.pdf](http://www.zatvojataidnina.mk/upload/pdf/Programa_SDSM_2011.pdf), last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

<sup>273</sup> Kotevski, Naum, “Many positions on the name, yet no consensus [Многу ставови за името, а консензус нема]”, *Utrinski vesnik*, 1 June 2012.

<sup>274</sup> Mitevska, Marija interview: “Šekerinska – We will find a way to start the EU accession negotiations”, *Radio Free Europe*, 7 July 2013, available at: <http://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/content/article/25038667.html>, last accessed on: 7 July 2013.

<sup>275</sup> Ahmeti, Ali, “Position: it is time for NATO [СТАВ Време е за НАТО]”, *Dnevnik*, 12 April 2013, available at: <http://dnevnik.mk/?ItemID=FF11B7986E7B2A45A6AD5D530C059021>, last accessed on: 7 July 2013.

<sup>276</sup> Marusic, Siniša Jakov, “Bulgaria and Greece block Macedonia’s EU talks”, *Balkan Investigative Reporting Network*, 12 December 2012, available at: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bulgaria-joins-greece-in-blocking-macedonia-s-eu-bid>, last accessed on: 7 July 2013.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

their translation into concrete actions and results.”<sup>278</sup> At present, the decision to open negotiations depends on progress in the dialogue priorities above-mentioned, as well on improvements with regard to good-neighbourly relations, as pointed by the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle.<sup>279</sup>

### 5.3 EU AND PARTY COMPETITION

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#### 5.3.1 Political parties' responses to the Progress Reports and other EU assessments

The EU has been a significant actor in the government-opposition relations, as well as in the formation of governments. Concerning the former, the EU has had a role in structuring the formal and informal government-opposition relationship in the country both at the level of discourse and on the ground, through the engagement of European representatives. EU officials' statements and formal documents have inspired the rhetoric of political parties both in government and opposition, especially since 2005, when the regular Progress Reports of the Commission on the Balkan countries were introduced.<sup>280</sup> The Commission's 2005 opinion on former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's membership application, as well as all following Progress Reports, have received considerable attention from the public because of the formal changes linked to the candidate status.<sup>281</sup> At the same time, the EU Progress Reports, unlike assessments from other international organisations, have been thoroughly discussed by the Prime Minister because of their perceived strategic importance for the country.<sup>282</sup>

Since the first Progress Report in 2005 (that is, the Analytical Report on former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's membership application), the country has seen one major turnover of power, in 2006, which can help to illustrate the way in which parties in government and opposition deal with the obligations of membership, and Brussels-demanded reforms. The candidate status which the country received in 2005 was interpreted by the SDSM, which was in office at the time, as recognition of the government's efforts.<sup>283</sup> However in 2006, after the turnover of power, the VMRO-DPMNE argued that the negative remarks in the 2006 Progress Report, and the “failure” of former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to obtain a date for the start of negotiations, were the result of the SDSM's inability to deal with the conditions set by the Union.<sup>284</sup> Radmila Šekerinska, the former Vice Prime Minister for European Affairs and a member of the SDSM, replied that the 2006 Progress Report was an adequate reflection of the situation in the country under the VMRO-DPME, thereby shifting the responsibility back to the government.<sup>285</sup> Overall, until 2009, the responses to the Progress Reports have been assessed as positive by the government and negative by the opposition.

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<sup>278</sup> *General Affairs Council Conclusions on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process*, Council of the European Union, 2012.

<sup>279</sup> Kuka, Zoran, “File hopes for success from Nimetz's proposal [Филе се надева на успех на предлогот на Нимиц]”, *Radio Free Europe*, 9 May 2013, available at: <http://www.makdenes.org/content/article/24981270.html>, last accessed on: 7 July 2013.

<sup>280</sup> Before 2005, the Commission reported on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Process and the Regional Approach. However, these reports were much less detailed and were used less in the political discourse.

<sup>281</sup> The author has confirmed this in interviews with stakeholders.

<sup>282</sup> Author's interview with OSCE representative, Skopje, 19 January 2011.

<sup>283</sup> Nikolovski, Zoran, “Macedonia is euphoric after the candidate status decision [Македонија еуфорична по одлуката на ЕУ за доделување на кандидатски статус]”, *Southeast European Times*, 19 December 2005.

<sup>284</sup> VMRO-DPMNE Press Release, “The old government did not fulfil the EU obligations [Старата влада не ги исполни обврските кон ЕУ]”, *Dnevnik*, 9 November 2006.

<sup>285</sup> Šekerinska, Radmila, “Reflection in a mirror [Одраз во огледало]”, *Dnevnik*, 8 November 2006.

A breakthrough occurred in 2009 with the Commission's recommendation for the country to begin accession talks and the reluctance of the European Council to support this recommendation. Since then, the start of negotiations has been directly related to the member states' approval in the Council, and the need to adopt a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue. In response, a shift towards hostility of the government in its reactions to the Progress Reports has become evident and reached a highpoint in 2011, when Prime Minister Gruevski evaluated the Commission's annual review as overly critical, and 'threatened' not to accept any report which did not contain the adjective 'Macedonian'.<sup>286</sup>

In an attempt to revive former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia accession process, the Commission devised in 2012 the so-called High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) as "a new opportunity to focus on a number of priorities".<sup>287</sup> The dialogue lays emphasis on the freedom of expression and media, rule of law, reform of the public administration, electoral reform, and the strengthening of the market economy, and it is organised, in practice, through high-level meetings between Commissioner Füle and Prime Minister Gruevski. Since the launch of the High Level Dialogue in 2012, in October the same year, the VMRO-DPMNE welcomed the Commission's Progress Report as the most positive ever.<sup>288</sup> But while the Commission's engagement via HLAD has been favourably assessed by the governing parties, the opposition has criticised it and accused the European Union of 'selective' attention and willingness to overlook democratic backlashes in the country.<sup>289</sup>

In addition to being the subject of conflicting interpretations by the government and opposition, the post-2009 impasse in the accession process has also been accompanied by intra-governmental disagreements over the reading of the Progress Reports and the country's responsibilities towards the EU. For example, the 2011 Report was assessed as positive and "reflecting our [the Macedonian] reality"<sup>290</sup> by Deputy Prime Minister, Teuta Arifi, a DUI member. In contrast, the Prime Minister Gruevski, who is President of the VMRO-DPMNE, considered the criticism in the Report as overstated, due to pressure from Greece on the Commission.<sup>291</sup> Similar divergent points of view within the government have persisted over the last several years. In mid-2013, the obligations from HLAD were subject to similar clashes between the Deputy Prime Minister for EU Affairs (a DUI member) and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs (an appointee of the VMRO-DPMNE). Whereas the former considered that the lack of progress with regard to opening negotiations was due to the name issue and the slow reform process in the country, the latter put forward solely the name issue as an obstacle to EU accession.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Statement by the Prime Minister Gruevski after receiving the Progress Report for 2011, available at: <http://vlada.mk/node/981?language=en-gb>; Marusic, Sinisa Jakov, "Macedonia protests over EU's omission of its name", *Balkan Insight*, 25 October 2011, available at: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-protests-against-omission-of-its-name>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

<sup>287</sup> Europa Press Release (2012), "Start of the High Level Accession Dialogue with the government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", *Europa Press Release*.

<sup>288</sup> VMRO-DPMNE press release, 12 October 2012, available at: <http://vmro-dpmne.org.mk/?p=16196>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

<sup>289</sup> "Macedonian opposition: EU ignores democratic backslide", *EurActiv*, 4 January 2013, available at: <http://www.euractiv.com/enlargement/macedonia-opposition-eu-turns-bl-news-516863>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

<sup>290</sup> Statement by the Deputy Prime Minister, Teuta Arifi, after the publication of the EC 2011 Progress Report (Macedonian Information Agency, 12 October 2011, Arifi: "The Report is positive, the negotiations are still conditioned with the resolution of the name dispute", available at: <http://www.mia.com.mk/default.aspx?vld=87573364&lld=1>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013).

<sup>291</sup> Statement by the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, after the publication of the EC 2011 Progress Report (Macedonian Information Agency, 12 October 2011, Gruevski: "Besides the blockage due to the name dispute, we are continuing with the reforms and the Euro-integration", available at: <http://www.mia.com.mk/default.aspx?vld=87554357&lld=1>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013).

<sup>292</sup> Mitevska, Marija, "Macedonia once more without a set date", *Radio Free Europe*, 27 June 2013, available at: <http://www.makdenes.org/content/article/25029948.html>, last accessed on: 5 July 2013).

### 5.3.2 The EU as political mediator

Apart from impacting how inter-party debate and discourse has been framed in the country, the EU has also played a significant role in influencing and at times, directly managing party relations. In fact, the rapport between political parties in the country has become part of the conditionality through the incorporation of a priority on “political dialogue” in the European/Accession Partnerships. For example, the 2008 European Partnership demands *inter alia* “the promotion of constructive and inclusive dialogue, particularly in areas which require consensus between all political parties, in the framework of democratic institutions”.<sup>293</sup> In part, this condition was set due to the fact that in the 2004-2007 period at least one of the major parties in the country boycotted the work of the Parliament at one point or another.<sup>294</sup> The lack of “political dialogue” between 2005 and 2008 also motivated the Commission’s decision to delay the recommendation on the start of negotiations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>295</sup> This is underlined in the 2008 Progress Report on the country, where it clearly states that “significant further efforts are required to advance the political dialogue”.<sup>296</sup>

EU’s engagement with inter-party relations in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is also evident in the aftermath of the 2006 parliamentary elections. Following the 2006 vote, the VMRO-DPMNE entered a coalition with its ‘traditional’ coalition partner, the DPA, which only came second among all parties in the Albanian block. The DUI – as the party with most votes in the Albanian block – interpreted this choice as disregard for the will of the Albanian community.<sup>297</sup> In the midst of the negotiations, the EU Head of Delegation and Special Representative of the Council, Erwan Fouerre, stated that “it would be logical if the government consisted of the parties that won the most votes” [that is, the VMRO-DPMNE and the DUI].<sup>298</sup> At national level, this statement was read by the media and part of the political elite as an attempt by the EU to influence the formation of the government coalition, mostly with respect to the party representing the Albanian community. A former Vice-Prime Minister for EU affairs singled out this event as an example of “direct interference from the EU” and a disruption on the part of the EU of internal political dynamics in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>299</sup>

A similar example is the meddling of the Union in resolving the parliamentary boycott by the DUI in 2007.<sup>300</sup> The DUI, as the biggest Albanian party, blocked the work of the Parliament because laws that

<sup>293</sup> Council decision of 12 February 2008 on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with Croatia and repealing Decision 2006/145/EC, Council of the European Union, 12 February 2008.

<sup>294</sup> In the period 2005-2007, one of the two major parties of the Albanian community with representatives in the parliament (that is, the Democratic Party of the Albanians and Democratic Union for Integration) was not participating in the work of this body.

<sup>295</sup> At the national level, however, the notion of “political dialogue” was criticised by domestic experts, who argued that Macedonia needed instead “dialogue on policies”, see Risteska, Marija, “Political dialogue or policy dialogue? [Политички дијалог или дијалог на политики?]”, *Dnevnik*, 17 September 2010, available at: <http://www.dnevnik.com.mk/default.asp?ItemID=4E9C0FBC920980438E524E781459F63F>, last accessed on: 8 February 2012.

<sup>296</sup> *The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2008 – Progress Report*, Commission of the European Communities, 2008.

<sup>297</sup> Nikolovski, Zoran, “Macedonia got a new government: DUI started to use militant rhetoric [Македонија доби нова влада, ДУИ почна да користи милитантна реторика]”, *Southeast European Times*, 28 August 2006, available at: <http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/mk/features/setimes/features/2006/08/28/feature-02>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

<sup>298</sup> “Media mirror – Parliamentary elections 2006 [Медиумско огледало – Парламентарни избори 2006]”, September 2006, available at: [http://nvoinfocentar.org.mk/event\\_document.asp?key=56](http://nvoinfocentar.org.mk/event_document.asp?key=56), last accessed on: 20 October 2012.

<sup>299</sup> Author’s interview with former Vice Prime Minister for EU Affairs, Skopje, 25 December 2010.

<sup>300</sup> DUI, as the biggest Albanian party, boycotted the work of the Parliament because laws that required the support of the non-majority votes were passed without its support (as the votes of the DPA in the coalition government and the other non-majority MPs were sufficient. See also Markovic, Nenad, Ilievski, Zoran, Damjanovski, Ivan and Bozinovski, Vladimir (2011), “The role of the European Union in the democratic consolidation and ethnic conflict management in the Republic of Macedonia”, Regional Research Promotion Programme Western Balkans, available at: <http://rrpp->

required the support of the non-majority votes were passed without its support (as the votes of the DPA in the coalition government and the other non-majority MPs were sufficient for that purpose). The crisis was resolved with the signing of the so-called May Agreement, which was reached under strong pressure from the EU, exercised both through the ambassadors of the member states as well as via the EU Head of Delegation and Special Representative of the Council, Foeurre.<sup>301</sup>

Then, since the end of 2012, Commissioner Füle has been engaged in a political crisis in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia following a parliamentary boycott of the SDSM, in opposition. This stalemate was the result of a clash with the government over the adoption of the 2013 budget which escalated to the point of removal of opposition MPs from the parliamentary hall in December 2012. The opposition MPs were thrown out after lengthy budget debates and after having submitted more than 1000 amendments to the draft budget as delaying tactics. The crisis culminated on 24 December when the SDSM MPs “engaged in a strategy of blocking the session by surrounding the parliament’s speaker seat and not allowing him to chair”, after which they were forced out of the hall.<sup>302</sup>

With the SDSM boycotting the parliament and refusing to participate in the local elections scheduled for March 2013, an EU ‘troika’ consisting of Commissioner Füle, MEP Richard Howitt (rapporteur on Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and the former EP President, Jirzi Buzek, intervened to mediate the dispute between the two political parties.<sup>303</sup> An agreement to participate in the elections was eventually reached in this format in early March 2013. However, the terms of the deal were subject to different interpretations by the opposition and government, regarding a promise for early parliamentary elections.<sup>304</sup>

After the elections, on a visit in mid-April 2013, Commissioner Füle directly pointed to the relationship between the political actors as a key obstacle to EU accession. He noted that “the politicians created the crisis and have the responsibility to overcome its effects by implementing the agreement, which they had still not done so, at least not fully.”<sup>305</sup> The remaining element of this agreement concerned the setting up of an inquiry committee to investigate the events of 24 December. The committee was eventually established in June 2013, half a year after the incident, due to the inability of the two sides to reach consensus on its president, who later resigned just two months after the appointment.

Overall, these examples illustrate that the EU has engaged substantially at the level of inter-party relations in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia both within and between the respective ethnically defined blocks of political parties. Whereas EU’s interference originally prompted by the

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[westernbalkans.net/dms/downloads/Library/Research-Results/Macedonia/European-Union-in-the-democratic-consolidation/European%20Union%20in%20the%20democratic%20consolidation.pdf](http://westernbalkans.net/dms/downloads/Library/Research-Results/Macedonia/European-Union-in-the-democratic-consolidation/European%20Union%20in%20the%20democratic%20consolidation.pdf), last accessed on: 7 April 2012.

<sup>301</sup> The Agreement is not publicly available, but its main points are summarised in the following newspaper article, “VMRO-DPMNE and DUI hide the Agreement [ВМРО-ДПМНЕ и ДУИ го затсриваат договорот]”, *Dnevnik*, 30 May 2007, available at: <http://www.dnevnik.com.mk/?itemID=C13A64D422158841A5A52709A2C06E08&arc=1>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

<sup>302</sup> The exact events are still subject to different interpretation. For a summary, see Karajkov, Risto, “Macedonian political crisis: opposition to run in local elections”, *Observatorio Balcani e Caucaso*, 14 March 2013, available at: <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Macedonia/Macedonian-political-crisis-opposition-to-run-in-local-elections-132074>, last accessed on: 10 June 2013.

<sup>303</sup> “An Agreement for solving the crisis has been reached – The opposition is coming back to the parliament [Постигнат договор за излез од кризата – опозицијата се враќа во Собрание]”, *Dnevnik*, 1 March 2013, available at: <http://dnevnik.com.mk/?itemID=845599F9009C8B408019A7204FE59CED&arc=1>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

<sup>304</sup> Blaževska, Katerina, “The election compromise lost in translation!? [Изборниот компромис изгубен во преводот!?!]”, *Deutsche Welle*, 2 March 2013 available at: <http://dw.de/p/17p6w>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

<sup>305</sup> Mladenovska, Pelagija, “Füle – The Eurointegration should not be a hostage to the political battle [Филе - Евроинтеграциите да не бидат заложник на политичката борба]”, *Radio Free Europe*, 11 April 2013, available at: <http://www.makdenes.org/content/article/24952587.html>, last accessed on: 5 May 2013.

inter-ethnic negotiations in relation to the OFA, the Union has subsequently become a ‘broker’ also in intra-block negotiations and various other political crises in the country.

#### 5.4 THE ELECTORATE AND ITS EUROPEAN ATTITUDES

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Opinion polls show that in the last decade since 2002, the traditionally high level of public support for EU membership has been slightly declining in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. According to the national polling institute and the polls of the International Republican Institute, which are also monitored and used by the Secretariat for European Affairs in the government, the peak of public enthusiasm for EU integration was recorded at the time when the country received candidate status, that is, at the end of 2005 (91.9%). Since then, the Commission’s yearly recommendations for the start of negotiations, as well as the repeated postponement of a decision regarding the opening of accession talks, has impacted people’s support for ‘Europe’. Thus in November 2012, according to the same polls, there was a drop in public opinion on EU membership to 84%, due to the prolongation of the candidacy period without starting accession negotiations and because of the impasse on the name issue.<sup>306</sup>

While public support for membership is still steady, trust in the EU has been declining. In 2010, 53% of the population surveyed expressed confidence in the EU, whereas 37% did not.<sup>307</sup> In the following year, the percentage doubting the Union increased by 10 percent, as 47% expressed distrust.<sup>308</sup> This is the first poll of this kind where a majority of the population is sceptical of the EU. These figures have been commonly explained in relation to the experience of the previous enlargement which showed that support for membership declines as a country advances on its accession path. At the same time, the delay in the launching of negotiations is also likely to have contributed to this trend, even if we cannot yet speak of officially and hard-core Eurosceptic political parties and electorates.

The name dispute has also complicated people’s attitudes towards the EU, as the public is sharply divided both on ethnic and political bases (see Table 5.2 below). The name dispute is more important for ethnic Macedonians and affiliates of the VMRO-DPMNE, while the Euro-Atlantic integration ambition is essential for most of the ethnic Albanians and supporters of the SDSM.<sup>309</sup> In other words, in the Macedonian block, the VMRO’s voters seem less willing to make a compromise on the name issue than the electorate of the SDSM, which instead appears to prioritise the country’s European integration over any other name-related considerations. Conversely, all politicians, in power or opposition, have promised to put to referendum whatever name is eventually agreed upon. Uncertainty over the result of such a popular vote has given rise to the perception among the pro-EU/NATO Albanian community that the interests of the Albanians have been tramped over by the Macedonian majority.<sup>310</sup> A local survey has shown the differing perceptions of Macedonians and Albanians of the reasons behind the stagnation of the country on the EU track: while the majority of ethnic Macedonians consider that the EU does not care much about the country’s integration, Albanians consider that the government is not trying hard enough to fulfil the criteria for accession.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Secretariat for European Affairs, “Public opinion polls” <http://www.sep.gov.mk/portal/mak/default.asp?id=10>.

<sup>307</sup> Public Opinion in the European Union, Eurobarometer 74, Autumn 2010, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb74/eb74\\_public\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb74/eb74_public_en.pdf), last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

<sup>308</sup> Public Opinion in the European Union, Standard Eurobarometer 76, Autumn 2011, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb76/eb76\\_agreport\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb76/eb76_agreport_en.pdf), last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

<sup>309</sup> Klekovski, Sašo (2011), *Macedonia name dispute (Public views in Macedonia)*, Skopje: Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis.

<sup>310</sup> Stojancov, Srgjan, “The pressures for the resolution of the name issue increase”, *Radio Free Europe*, 24 April 2009, available at: <http://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/articleprintview/1615174.html>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013.

<sup>311</sup> Kržalovski, Aleksandar (2012), *Together for the Euro-Atlantic perspective – Divided in the perception of the dedication [Заедно за евроатлантската перспектива-поделени во перцепцијата за посветеноста]*, Skopje: Macedonian

**Table 5.2: Ethnic differences in support for Euro-Atlantic integration**

Question: "If you had to choose, would you choose NATO/EU integration or keeping the constitutional name?"<sup>312</sup>

View	Total	Ethnic Macedonian	Ethnic Albanian	VMRO-DPMNE	SDSM	DUI	DPA	No party affiliation
EU and NATO are more important even if there is no compromise	40,5 %	35,0 %	53,2 %	30,5 %	40,6 %	54,3 %	63,8 %	39,3 %
Keeping the name even if there is stand-still in the Euro-Atlantic integration	39,6 %	43,6 %	31,1 %	51,5 %	34,7 %	34,0 %	27,7 %	38,3 %
I do not agree with any of the statements	16,1 %	17,6 %	11,6 %	15,0 %	17,8 %	8,5 %	4,3 %	18,4 %
I don't know/No answer	3,9 %	3,9 %	4,1 %	3,0 %	6,9 %	3,2 %	4,3 %	4,0 %
Total	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %

Source: Klekovski, Sašo (2011), "Macedonia name dispute (Public views in Macedonia)", Skopje: Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis.

## 5.5 PROSPECTS AMIDST A STATUS QUO

This paper has presented various ways in which the EU and its institutions have interacted with and shaped the political landscape in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia through the policy of conditionality. It has examined how the EU requirements have been instrumentalised by political parties in the country for strategic purposes, and the manner in which the Union has influenced government formation and government-opposition relations. The prospects of these interactions hinge on two major developments. First, whether the EU institutions, particularly the European Commission, will continue the hands-on approach in inter-ethnic and inter-party relations in the country, and second, how the name issue will evolve.

Regarding the former, the engagement of the Commission in managing the relationship between and within the two major party blocks is questionable in terms of its long-term implications for the country's democratisation process. This has become a topic of discussions both in the EU and at the national level. A high-ranking official in the Commission pointed out that "the view of the Commission in general is that we should not perpetuate this policy. In relation to political criteria, a state must be sovereign. We have no business in deciding on directions".<sup>313</sup> As the current Commission's mandate runs until the end of October 2014, developments thereafter also depend on the involvement in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of whoever will become the new Commissioner for Enlargement.

The dilemma regarding the role of the Commission is increasingly present at the national level as well. A former Vice Prime Minister for EU affairs in the country stressed that "Macedonia has reached a point where the EU needs to take its 'hands' off the 'saddle'. The elites need to reach an agreement by themselves, instead of trying to communicate through an external actor."<sup>314</sup> Recent events from late 2012 and early 2013, however, demonstrate continued involvement of the EU officials in the managing of inter-party relations. This practice, while having its own merits and keeping the country on the road to the EU, has also reinforced the expectation on the side of national political elites that the Union will step in for the purpose of reaching difficult decisions. In

Center for International Cooperation, Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis, available at:

[http://www.idscs.org.mk/images/publikacii/zaedno\\_za\\_evroatlantskata%20perspektiva\\_podeleni\\_za\\_posvetenosta.pdf](http://www.idscs.org.mk/images/publikacii/zaedno_za_evroatlantskata%20perspektiva_podeleni_za_posvetenosta.pdf)

last accessed on: 1 March 2013.

<sup>312</sup> Klekovski, Sašo (2011), *Macedonia name dispute (Public views in Macedonia)*, Skopje: Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis.

<sup>313</sup> Author's interview with European Commission official, Brussels, 15 November 2010.

<sup>314</sup> Author's interview with former Vice Prime Minister for EU Affairs, Skopje, 25 December 2010.

this context, the EU institutions and member states should continue to insist on the need for effective functioning of democratic institutions, and support political dialogue between the various political actors on the EU agenda.

The name dispute has been a major factor in shaping the relationship between former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and its political parties with the EU. Even though European institutions do not have a formal role in the negotiations on the name issue, which is held under the auspices of the UN, the dispute has been of primary importance for the country's integration process. Without a major breakthrough, which seems rather unlikely, this will continue to be the case. In early 2013, a proposal from the UN-mandated negotiator, Matthew Nimetz, was leaked to the public revolving around the name of Upper Republic of Macedonia.<sup>315</sup> However at present, there is no visible solution in sight and the name issue continues to stand in the way of the start of accession negotiations. Thus, the EU and its member states need to engage in terms of facilitating the resolution of the name issue both in former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece for the purpose of overcoming this deadlock in the former's accession process.

Lastly, despite the attempts to revive the accession process through the HLAD, the recent omission of former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia from the agenda of the June 2013 European Council indicates the *status quo* is probably going to continue. This forecast is worrying because it could perpetuate the falling trust in the EU and the gap in attitudes between the two largest ethnic communities in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Growing distrust in the EU has not yet given rise to a significant political party that would oppose the country's EU membership goal. Still, further delays in the country's path towards the Union are likely to widen the already visible gap between the ethnic Macedonian and Albanian citizens in the country, fuelling nationalistic tactics and a sense of transformation 'fatigue'. In response, the Commission should come up with policy proposals to keep the accession momentum alive,<sup>316</sup> fuelling the EU-related reform processes and shedding light on the tangible benefits of the process, which are currently not particularly visible to the people.

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<sup>315</sup> This proposal that circled in the media in Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, however, was not confirmed by officials. See Jovanovski, Borjan, "NOVA uncovers what is contained in Nimetz's proposal [НОВА открива што содржи предлогот на Нимиц]", *Nova TV*, 15 April 2013, available at: <http://novatv.mk/index.php?navig=8&cat=2&vest=2639>, last accessed on: 25 September 2013.

<sup>316</sup> Ideally by starting the negotiations or an early screening. Innovative proposals of parallel negotiations for EU accession and the name issue have been recommended by the European Stability Initiative, albeit without much success so far. See Knaus, Gerald, "A Proposal for breaking the Macedonian deadlock: a matter of trust", 12 June 2010, available at: <http://www.esiweb.org/rumeliobserver/2010/06/17/a-proposal-for-breaking-the-macedonian-deadlock-the-issue-of-trust/>, last accessed on: 5 March 2013.



# ALBANIAN POLITICAL PARTIES, INTER-PARTY RELATIONS AND THE EU

BY ODETA BARBULLUSHI

6.1	EU and national political parties: a theoretical perspective	85
6.2	Domestic party politics as an obstacle to Albania's EU integration	86
6.3	The main political parties in Albania	87
6.4	The impact of European integration on party politics in Albania	90
6.5	Conclusions and recommendations	93

Albanian post-communist politics have been defined by the fierce competition between two political parties: the Albanian Socialist Party (SP), leading the incumbent governing coalition, and the Albanian Democratic Party (DP), the main opposition party in the country. The goal of European integration has been a programmatic pillar for both these parties, and increasingly so ever since the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between the EU and Albania in 2006. However, despite the centrality of the objective of EU accession in parties' political platforms and discourses, the Union has had only a limited impact on Albanian party behaviour and inter-party relations.

This chapter focuses on the influence that the EU conditionality for membership has had on the interaction between the Albanian parties in government and opposition, as well as on the political and public attitudes towards the Union in the country. The overarching aim is to determine whether the subject of European integration provides a fertile ground for party competition and if the EU impacts the rules for democratic party government, in terms of rhetoric and practice. More specifically, the chapter investigates: (1) the relationship between the position of a the Albanian parties within their national political system and their stances on European integration; (2) the link between 'Europe' and inter-party dynamics in the country, with specific reference to the emergence of strong pro-European or EU-sceptical party sentiment; and (3) the connection between the European stances of parties and electorates in Albania.

The country has generally dragged its feet in complying with the political conditions for EU accession, most notably the Copenhagen Criteria of fair and free elections and maintenance of the rule of law. Since 2009, when Albania submitted its application for EU membership, the European Commission's recommendations have repeatedly stressed the lack of 'political dialogue' and party consensus on demanded reforms as the major hurdle on Albania's integration path.<sup>317</sup> In contrast to its regional

<sup>317</sup> *Commission Staff Working Paper: Albania 2011 Progress Report*, European Commission, 2011, p. 5, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2011/package/al\\_rapport\\_2011\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2011/package/al_rapport_2011_en.pdf), last accessed on: 16

neighbours, the country has not been hampered by the experience of ethnic divisions or unresolved statehood issues. Yet the lack of compromise across political party lines has slowed down Albania all the same in its journey towards the EU.

In 2011, the Brussels executive issued a list of 12 key priorities for Albania to meet before it could advance its membership bid. Many of these targeted areas of democratisation of the state, including the proper functioning of the parliament, reform of the electoral code, maintenance of an independent judiciary, tangible results in the fight against organised crime and corruption, and respect for human rights.<sup>318</sup> Seven of these 12 conditions have already been ticked off and, in October 2012, the Commission recommended that the European Council grants candidate status to Albania, provided that the country fulfils pending reforms in the field of judiciary and public administration, and revises the parliamentary rules of procedures.

Political parties play a key role in the process of EU integration and democratisation in Albania. For one, they are carriers of regional, political and social identities in the country. This means that being 'Democrat' or 'Socialist' becomes a significant identity marker that mirrors very specific cleavages in the country, beyond the mere ideological tenets upheld by each of the main political parties. In addition, the Albanian parties are widely perceived as the biggest national employers. Once in power, they fill in the public administration with their own party supporters and activists.<sup>319</sup> This practice is a deep-entrenched symptom of the Albanian transition, which has been characterised by a deep politicisation of public institutions.<sup>320</sup> Political parties also matter in Albania's integration effort because the Union often holds them responsible for the lack of progress made by the country on the European reform agenda.<sup>321</sup> Their role is all the more important for the quality of democracy in Albania given the absence of a consolidated civil society sector,<sup>322</sup> or of societal neutral brokers<sup>323</sup> in the country's transition.

Albanian citizens also blame their political leaders for the delays in the country's EU integration. According to a 2012 national survey of the Albanian Institute of International Studies, 40% of the respondents recognised problems in the Albanian politics, the country's economy and with the conduct of free and fair elections as particularly debilitating for Albania's pursuit of EU

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November 2013. For a comparison between the Commissions' Progress Reports in 2010 and 2011, see European Movement for Albania (2011), "12 key priorities for Albania: where do we stand?", *Policy Brief*, p. 2, available at: <http://www.em-al.org/skedaret/1360663619-EMA%20Policy%20Brief%20-%2012%20Key%20Priorities%20EN.pdf>, last accessed on: 12 January 2014.

<sup>318</sup> *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – Commission Opinion on Albania's application for membership of the European Union*, SEC(2010) 1335, COM(2010) 680, Brussels, 9 November 2010, pp. 11-12.

<sup>319</sup> See Elbasani, Arolda (2008), "EU enlargement and state institutions after communism – Reforming public administration in Albania", *L'Europe en Formation*, Volume 3, Number 4, pp. 119-134, especially p. 128.

<sup>320</sup> See also, Jano, Dorian (2008), "On parties and party system in Albania: what implications for democracy", in Karacsony, Gergely and Smuk, Peter (2008) (eds.), *Central European case studies*, Gyor: Universitas-Gyor, Volume 2, pp. 85-103, p. 95, available at: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1154507](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1154507), last accessed on: 20 December 2013.

<sup>321</sup> The European Commission stated in its 2009 Progress Report for Albania, "Overall, progress can be noted on the conduct of parliamentary elections which were considered as meeting most international standards. The timely adoption of the Electoral Code and preparation of improved voters' lists, largely meets this key European partnership priority. However, due to the elections, the political dialogue between political parties deteriorated and this delayed progress on key reform areas". The 2011 Progress Report for Albania then remarks, "Electoral Reform is blocked by the political stalemate and lack of political dialogue between the main parties", p. 5. See also European Movement for Albania (2011), *op. cit.*, especially pp. 4-5.

<sup>322</sup> Chiodi, Luisa (2012), "Mass migration, student protests and the intelligentsia *popullore* in the Albanian transition to democracy", *Osservatorio Balcano e Caucaso, Cosmos Working Paper 2012/2*, pp. 21-24.

<sup>323</sup> For an elaboration of the concept of 'neutral brokers', see Hanson, Joanna (2013), "A practitioner's perspective: post conflict civil society development in the Balkans" in Bojicic-Dzelilovic, Vesna, Kostovicova, Denisa and Ker-Lindsay, James (eds.), *Civil society and transition in the Western Balkans*, Palgrave Macmillan.

membership.<sup>324</sup> In addition, the same study revealed that 42.3% of those surveyed identified their government and 20.1% their domestic political parties as the decisive actors in the integration process, capable of influencing the pace and direction of change in the country.

With regard to formal institutions and legal adjustments, the literature argues that Albania excels in the adoption of EU legislation, rules and norms but, when it comes to the implementation and internalisation of these laws, the country displays low absorption capacity, as well as limited political will for democratic action.<sup>325</sup> It is not so much that weak institutions have produced inept elites and an imperfect democratic system. Quite the opposite: the Albanian political parties and elites have been largely responsible for shaping national institutions according to their electoral needs and objectives.<sup>326</sup> These goals have often been a far cry from the concepts of ‘public good’ and ‘public interest’.

## 6.1 EU AND NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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European integration features prominently in most of the Albanian parties’ political platforms and public statements. Indeed, the goal of EU membership remains one of the key programmatic tenets and in many respects, has provided the Albanian politicians with a common objective and unifying narrative. However, the precise impact of European integration on party behaviour or inter-party relations is rather difficult to assess.

The manner and extent to which ‘Europe’ “hits home”<sup>327</sup> can be discussed either on the basis of Europeanisation and democratisation studies, or a combination of both. The literature posits that Europeanisation occurs when “the EU becomes a cognitive and normative frame, and provides orientation to the logics of meaning and action. There is a process of change, either in response to EU pressure or as usage of Europe.”<sup>328</sup> In this line of argumentation, several conditions have to be met in order for the EU to influence an aspiring country: (1) the *costs of adaptation* as a function of the misfit between EU requirements and domestic conditions; (2) the *external push* of the EU to comply with its requirements; (3) the *capacity and willingness* of the respective country to respond to the EU’s pressure for adaptation; and (4) the *power* of the applicant country to resist the EU’s pressure for adaptation.<sup>329</sup> Put differently, for the membership conditionality to work effectively, the EU needs to exert pressure on national elites, and in turn, domestic politicians must perceive the entire process of adaptation as beneficial, or at least not too costly, and to follow it. The will of the political elites to change and the capacity of the state (institutions) to absorb EU norms, rules and values are crucial for a successful European integration process.

Applying this theory to the Balkan political parties comes against some challenges. Firstly, for Europeanisation to take place, a strong level of socialisation with EU policy is necessary, which requires a country to be either a member state, or at least, engaged in the accession negotiations. Albania has only just received candidate status, as recently as this June, and therefore still does not fit any of these categories. Secondly, Europeanisation is at the same time an independent and a

<sup>324</sup> Rakipi, Albert (2012) (ed.), *The European perspective of Albania: realities and perceptions*, Tirana: Albanian Institute of International Studies, p. 38.

<sup>325</sup> See Elbasani (2008), *op. cit.*, and Elbasani, Arolda (2004), “Albania in transition – Manipulation or appropriation of international norms”, *South East European Politics*, Volume 5, Number 1, pp. 24-44.

<sup>326</sup> Jano, Dorian (2008), *op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>327</sup> Börzel, Tanja and Risse, Thomas (2000), “When Europe hits home: Europeanisation and domestic change”, *European integration online papers*, Volume 4, Issue 15.

<sup>328</sup> Radaelli, Claudio M. (2004), “Europeanisation: solution or problem”, *European Integration Online Papers*, Volume 8, Number 16, quote from p. 12, available at: <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2004-016a.htm>, last accessed on: 6 March 2005.

<sup>329</sup> Borzel, Tanja A. (2010), “The transformative power of Europe reloaded: the limits of external Europeanisation”, *KFG Working Paper*, No. 11, p. 11.

dependent variable: it is produced by the interplay between the EU pressure and domestic variables, as well as by the process of socialisation and interaction among local actors and the EU. Hence, both the EU pressure and the results it affects are not exactly quantifiable, as many factors can interfere with the dynamics between the domestic actors and the EU.

A distinction can be made between structural and ideational types of EU impact on party politics. Whereas the former refers to changes such as the creation of new political parties and amendments to party organisation, party competition, party positioning and party appeals, the latter concerns a broad and largely discursive understanding of Europeanisation, which entails the promotion of norms, practices and structures of meaning, which are incorporated into the domestic logic.<sup>330</sup> To be sure, the difference between these two kinds of impact is largely analytical, as both are always present to some degree. Nevertheless, one can argue that whilst the direct impact is easier to measure and evaluate, the indirect impact of the EU on domestic political parties is rather elusive.

For the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Houghton devised the concept of the EU as ‘boundary keeper’ in order to capture the indirect impact of integration.<sup>331</sup> This idea addresses the ‘line-drawing’ ability of the EU in relation to domestic actors: although the Union does not directly influence party competition and party positioning, it does impact party appeals and rhetoric insofar as it puts certain party practices at odds with the ‘normality of politics’. In other words, the EU sets the boundary between what qualifies as acceptable or unacceptable political behaviour, making particular party rhetorical and programmatic choices off limits. This, in combination with the structural vulnerability and economic dependency of the Central and Eastern European states on the EU is said to have triggered strong adaptive pressure on domestic political parties in the 2004 and 2007 enlargement rounds.

## **6.2 DOMESTIC POLITICS AS AN OBSTACLE TO ALBANIA’S EU INTEGRATION**

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Albanian political elites have repeatedly demonstrated a low level of law-abiding behaviour, which is crucial for an effective rule of law and substantive democracy.<sup>332</sup> In addition, inter-party relations have been characterised by generalised distrust and zero-sum logic. This means that Albanian political parties, especially the party leading the government or the governing coalition, as well as the party in opposition, have blatantly shown a tendency to put individual or party interest(s) ahead of any other considerations related to the EU accession process.

The two major political parties – the Albanian Socialist Party (SP) and the Democratic Party (DP) – have essentially shaped the political landscape of post-communist Albania. The SP is a continuation of the former Albanian Party of Labour, and took the current name in 1991. The DP was founded in 1991 and is the main opposition party in Albania. Until the most recent general elections of June 2013, these two parties and their coalitions made up the majority of parliamentary seats in all post-communist legislatures. Given this quasi two-party system, the relations between the Socialists and Democrats have largely determined the political dynamic and the pace of democratisation in the country.

Over the years, both the SP and the DP have demonstrated unwillingness to compromise for the sake of moving the country forward on key reforms demanded by the EU, such as the reform of the electoral system, parliamentary procedures, public administration, and the judiciary. One particularly thorny

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<sup>330</sup> Houghton, Tim (2014), “Money, margins and the motors of politics: the EU and the development of party politics in Central and Eastern Europe”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Volume 52, Volume 1, pp. 71-87, especially p. 73.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>332</sup> See Balfour, Rosa and Stratulat, Corina (2011), “The democratic transformation of the Balkans”, *EPC Issue Paper*, No.66. Brussels: European Policy Centre, p. 5.

issue has been the organisation of democratic elections in line with European and international standards, and the recognition of electoral results by the losing party. As direct fallout, vote-mongering, and parliamentary boycott by the runner-up party, followed by political stalemate, have become permanent fixtures of the political life in Albania. With the exception of the first multi-party elections in 1992 and the most recent vote of 2013, all other electoral contests in Albania have been described as partially free and fair. Even the 2009 elections, when the EU noted marked progress, were still highly politicised with regard to specific aspects of the process, such as the vote counting.<sup>333</sup>

Disagreements over the outcome of the 2009 general elections prompted the Socialists to boycott the parliament and led to a political deadlock that lasted until November 2011. During that period, the SP refused to vote on three laws tied to Albania's chances of receiving candidate status, including the reform of the judiciary, public administration and parliamentary statute. This triggered harsh political bickering and mutual accusations, with each of the two parties complaining that the other one was blocking Albania's EU path. The former Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, suggested that parliamentary politics should be completely circumvented by popular action when he called for a referendum on the adoption of these three 'integration laws'<sup>334</sup>. The acts were eventually adopted on 30 May 2013, in anticipation of the June 2013 parliamentary elections.

It was only under pressure from the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Štefan Füle, that the two Albanian political parties ultimately resumed political dialogue within the parliament in 2011.<sup>335</sup> However, the enduring stalemate of that period had already diverted valuable attention from much-needed EU reforms in the country<sup>336</sup>, and undermined the legitimacy of the President of the Republic and the General Prosecutor, as both were accused by the Democrats-led governing coalition of having ignored the opposition's protests and of having attempted a *coup d'état*.<sup>337</sup>

### 6.3 THE MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES IN ALBANIA

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The structural and ideational impact of the EU on party politics can also be assessed in light of the organisation of the Albanian parties and their ideological positioning, especially by reference to the country's communist past.<sup>338</sup>

Regarding the structural element, a strong identification with the leader of the party remains a hallmark of post-communist Albanian parties, and, in general, of Albanian politics. Practices of exclusion apply both internally, to 'silence' opposition within the party, as well as externally, to control political rivals. The fact that the Albanian political stage is dominated by the SP and the DP only adds to the enduring split of the political debate in two clearly-cut, diametrically-opposed positions as embodied by these two main parties, taking turns in government and opposition.

<sup>333</sup> *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Commission Opinion on Albania's application for membership of the European Union*, European Commission, 2000, p. 6, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2010/package/al\\_opinion\\_2010\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/al_opinion_2010_en.pdf), last accessed on: 21 November 2013. On 21 January 2011, anti-government protests led to the death of four demonstrators, amplifying the climate of distrust between the government and the opposition. Moreover, on 8 May, the contested results of the local elections in Tirana further fuelled polarisation between the ruling majority and the opposition.

<sup>334</sup> *Gazeta Shqip*, "Berisha: Referendum per tre ligjet e integritetit", 27 January 2013.

<sup>335</sup> See Stratulat, Corina and Vurmo, Gjergji (2012), "Opportunity knocks: can the EU help Albania to help itself?", *EPC Policy Brief*, Brussels: European Policy Centre.

<sup>336</sup> European Commission (2011), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>337</sup> See "Berisha: Me 21 janar kishin planifikuar te me benin rreshtore", *Gazeta Panorama*, 21 January 2012, available at: [www.panorama.com.al/2012/01/21/berisha-me-21-janar-kishin-planifikuar-te-me-benin-rreshtore/](http://www.panorama.com.al/2012/01/21/berisha-me-21-janar-kishin-planifikuar-te-me-benin-rreshtore/), last accessed on: 18 November 2013.

<sup>338</sup> Haughton (2014), *op. cit.*, p. 73.

Furthermore, internal political authoritarianism – that is, the arbitrary practice of the party leader and his entourage to circumvent party statutes or merit-based mechanisms when electing the party leadership – give a distinct flavour to the development of Albanian political parties.<sup>339</sup>

As for the programmatic cleavages, the communist past has structured the political debate in the country for most of the first two decades of the democratic transition. The three key narratives of the **Democratic Party** throughout the nineties and well into the 2000s were: (1) the fervent commitment to anti-communism; (2) market liberalisation, which meant ‘shock therapy’ and the opening up of the country towards the West; as well as (3) the nationalistic objective of “uniting all the Albanians in the Balkans”<sup>340</sup>. However, the DP-led governments between 1992 and 1996 considered nationalism as largely complementary to the goals of liberalisation, modernisation and overall integration of Albania into Euro-Atlantic structures. As such, it never succeeded in articulating a political project, which would advocate national unification or nationalist protectionism. Still, the nationalistic rhetoric was often used – and continues to be used – as an option ‘of last resort’ through which Albanian political elites, particularly centre-right politicians, respond to the EU (as happened when the Council did not grant candidate status to Albania in 2013) or try to boost their electoral fortunes (as the former DP Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, tried to do, albeit to no avail, between 2011-2013)<sup>341</sup>.

The **Socialist Party** – the descendent of the former Albanian Labour Party – also sought in the early nineties to build its profile in terms of liberalisation and orientation towards the EU. However, it simultaneously retained some past ideological precepts, including a broad commitment to regional and pan-Balkan peace and democracy, and the interpretation of some key historical narratives as part of the leftist legacy, such as the National Liberation War and modernisation/industrialisation of the country during the communist regime. In contrast to the Democrats during the early post-communist period, the Socialists made European integration and regional cooperation a building block of their ideology.<sup>342</sup> Yet rather than reflecting a genuine ideological affinity of the party, the adoption of the EU membership goal could be sooner linked to the fact that the Socialists came to power in 1997 at a time when Albania was dependent on European funds to address its institutional and economic collapse caused by the pyramid schemes implosion.

From 2009 onwards, the quasi two-party system began to falter due to the growing prominence and electoral success of the **Socialist Movement for Integration** (SMI). The SMI was founded in 2005 by the former SP member, Ilir Meta, as a result of an inter-party schism between Meta and the then-leader of the Socialist Party and Prime Minister, Fatos Nano. Although the SMI’s ideological and membership basis leaned left, the SMI persisted in its non-ideological nature and stressed the technical and economic nature of the European integration process. It also sought to present itself as a ‘third way’-option vis-à-vis the two major parties in the country.

In the 2009 parliamentary elections, the SMI won four seats in the Albanian parliament and joined the centre-right coalition government. In 2013, it shifted loyalties and entered in a pre-electoral alliance – ‘Coalition for Re-birth’ – with the Socialist Party. In the current parliament, the SMI gained 16 seats and its Chairman, Ilir Meta, holds the position of speaker of the parliament. The programme of the SMI stresses the social character of the European Union. In its 2013 electoral platform, the

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<sup>339</sup> Jano (2008), *op.cit.*

<sup>340</sup> Barbullushi, Odeta (2010), “The politics of ‘Euro-Atlantic orientation’: political identities, interests and Albanian foreign policy 1992-2007”, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. See also Biberaj, Elez (1999), *Albania in transition – The rocky road to Democracy*, Oxford: Westview Press, p. 230.

<sup>341</sup> See Bieber, Florian, “No news from Albania”, *Wordpress*, 20 January 2014, available at:

[www.fbieber.wordpress.com/2013/07/07/no-news-from-albania/](http://www.fbieber.wordpress.com/2013/07/07/no-news-from-albania/), last accessed on: 12 January 2014.

<sup>342</sup> See Barbullushi (2010), *op. cit.*

party stated that a new definition of ‘Europe’ must refer first and foremost to education, employment and health.<sup>343</sup> The SMI supports the European model of social welfare and puts a premium on social solidarity as a core value of the EU.<sup>344</sup>

**Table 6.1: Results of Albanian parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2013**

Party	Seats won 2009	Seats won 2013	% of votes 2009	% of votes 2013
Socialist Party (SP)	65	65	45.39%	41.28%
Democratic Party (DP)	68	50	44.65%	30.52%
Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI)	4	16	7.41%	10.46%

Source: IFES Elections Guide, available at: <http://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/1664/>, last accessed on: 29 March 2014

Although the nationalist versus integrationist divide, generally pitting the communist successor party against their liberal counterparts, marked the transition period in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>345</sup>, the same distinction did not quite hold in Albania, where the Democrats became known for their nationalistic undertones, while the Socialists enjoyed a clear pro-‘Europe’ reputation.

The communist past is still instrumentalised in parties’ political battles. For example, in August 2012, the government’s policy proposal on lifting the immunity of parliament members, ministers and other officials from investigation and legal prosecution in case of corruption charges met with strong resistance from the Socialists-led opposition.<sup>346</sup> The ensuing debate exposed a deep sense of distrust between the government and opposition. As one high-ranking representative of the Socialist Party explained, “the SP cannot accept the abolishment of immunity for the simple fact that it is supported by those ministers who have themselves nominated the judges and prosecutors.”<sup>347</sup> In other words, the opposition anticipated that once immunity would be lifted, the government would start a campaign of arbitrary investigations, using the new legal act against the SP. For their part, the Democrats-led coalition in power criticised the opposition for wanting to hold on to their communist past.<sup>348</sup>

However, the communist past influences political debate and party competition only when considered in the context of broader issues such as corruption and good governance, that is, when important laws and legal acts come under discussion and promise to tip the balance of power in favour of one party or coalition over the other. As such, party discourse seems in itself void of any concrete arguments and based instead on an acute sense of distrust between the main political actors in the country. It also suggests that the EU and the integration process serve as an issue of political struggle, in which each party reconfirms its own identity, and seeks to delegitimise its opponent as ‘non-European’.<sup>349</sup>

<sup>343</sup> Official website of the Socialist Movement for Integration (2013), available at: [http://www.lsi.al/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=6&Itemid=108&lang=AL](http://www.lsi.al/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6&Itemid=108&lang=AL), last accessed on: 20 November 2013.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>345</sup> Haughton (2014), *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>346</sup> *Top Channel*, “PD-PS, luftë verbale për imunitetin”, 13 August 2012, available at: [http://time.ikub.al/54b94c28cf/d871008c77098324f83713a4d01d50a0/Lajm\\_PD-PS-lufte-verbale-per-imunitetin.aspx](http://time.ikub.al/54b94c28cf/d871008c77098324f83713a4d01d50a0/Lajm_PD-PS-lufte-verbale-per-imunitetin.aspx), last accessed on 25 November 2013.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, also Shekulli PD: “Neoblokmenët e PS-së e ndiejnë veten të lindur me imunitet”, 15 August 2013, available at: [http://time.ikub.al/54b94c28cf/eafe265fec1c86d608f57e4c0ac0cac5/Lajm\\_PD-Neoblokmenet-e-PS-se-e-ndiejne-veten-te-lindur-me-imunitet-.aspx](http://time.ikub.al/54b94c28cf/eafe265fec1c86d608f57e4c0ac0cac5/Lajm_PD-Neoblokmenet-e-PS-se-e-ndiejne-veten-te-lindur-me-imunitet-.aspx), last accessed on: 25 November 2013.

<sup>349</sup> The abolishment of immunity was eventually voted almost unanimously (with 129 votes pro, 0 votes against and 0 abstains) in September 2012.

To be sure, evidence has emerged more recently that the communist legacy is giving way to more pragmatic reasons behind parties' policy stances, most notably to concerns about business prosperity and employment, which target younger segments of the electorate. The communist past resonates little among the Albanian youth, which is profoundly disillusioned with the SP and DP's old gimmicks and increasingly supportive of the SMI. The results of the 2013 elections showed how political discourses invoking the country's communist past have been wearing off with the voters, especially with the young ones, even in strongholds of the post-communist Democratic Party, such as the city of Shkodra, where the Socialists-led opposition won seven seats, compared to five in the previous general vote.

#### **6.4 THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ON PARTY POLITICS IN ALBANIA**

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Despite the frequency of EU membership-related comments in the public discourses of political parties in Albania, the goal of European integration has rarely affected change in the positions of the country's main political actors, and has not influenced significantly party competition. This also means that elections are rarely won or lost because of 'Europe'.

A study of the Open Society Foundation Albania (OSFA), based on computer-assisted textual analysis, shows that from 2009 to 2011, the former Prime Minister and leader of the Albanian Democratic Party, Sali Berisha, referred to the European Union three times more often than the current Prime Minister and leader of the Albanian Socialist Party, Edi Rama.<sup>350</sup> Whereas the former Prime Minister Berisha mentioned the EU in connection with liberal reforms driven by his centre-right government (such as on education, agriculture and employment), the Socialist leader Rama mainly touched on 'Europe' in relation to the organisation of democratic elections in the country.<sup>351</sup> Thus, in spite of its rhetorical salience, the topic of EU integration only serves as a framework for existing party debates and does not inject new points of contestation into domestic party competition.

Moreover, the Albanian political parties struggle to articulate their own understanding of European integration. Although both the DP and the SP invoke the EU rhetoric, their discourses on 'Europe' are often void of substantial arguments or viewpoints that build on ideological or programmatic differences. Instead of criticising the government's reforms in light of the EU conditionality and specific party policy orientations, the opposition merely resorts to the European integration topic in order to de-legitimise its political adversaries. The two main parties play with each other a constant game of 'naming and shaming', throwing back and forth accusations that the other one is not 'European enough' or not doing enough to fulfil and uphold EU conditions and norms.

Occasionally, the EU's conditions are also interpreted in different ways by the government and the opposition. For example, the debate on lifting the immunity of MPs was primarily framed in 'Europeanist versus anti-Europeanist' terms: whereas the ruling coalition linked this reform to the Commission's emphasis on getting results in the fight against corruption and organised crime, the opposition regarded the government's proposal as a mere ploy to control the judiciary and hit at the opposition. It is in this sense that the EU conditionality can become a tool deployed by the main political parties in order to push their own political agenda and fuel inter-party conflict.

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<sup>350</sup> Open Society Foundation for Albania (2012), "Analiza e Ligjerimit Politik. Raporti Nr 2-Ideologjite: Gazetat dhe Figurat Kryesore Politike", available at: [www.soros.al/2010/article.php?id=420](http://www.soros.al/2010/article.php?id=420), last accessed on: 23 January 2014, p. 4.

<sup>351</sup> The study shows the government and opposition are more in sync only in relation to the Commission's priorities number 4 and 5 which correspond to changes of the Electoral Code in compliance with the OSCE/ODHIR recommendations, and require the organisation of free and democratic elections.



There are currently two types of ‘EU-critical’ party discourses in the country, though both rather sporadic, building momentum mainly at elections time and falling short of a sustainable party option/project. The first relates to problems of democratic deficit and anti-immigration attitudes within the European Union. This type of rhetoric surfaced, for example, in the follow-up of the decision by the European Council in December 2013 not to grant candidate status to Albania. In response, the incumbent Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama, stated that the EU’s ‘no’ can only be explained in terms of a “compromise between Albania’s achievements and the deadlock outside Albania”, within/inside ‘Europe’.<sup>352</sup>

The second invokes the vision of a ‘Greater Albania’. In 2012, the then-Albanian Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, argued in favour of granting Albanian citizenship to all Albanians in the neighbouring states of the Balkans: “Let us unite with each other, let us unite with Europe. Nobody can deny the injustice towards Albanians, who were divided in five different states (...).”<sup>353</sup> Historical references to how Albanians were done wrongly bourgeoned during 2012, when the country celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> year since independence, albeit without any negative spill-over effects on the country’s high levels of popular support for EU integration<sup>354</sup>. During the 49<sup>th</sup> Munich Conference for Security in February 2013, Berisha declared that no one could ever be able “to clone five Albanian nations” in the Balkans, suggesting that the Albanian nation is one and indivisible.<sup>355</sup> Yet this ‘national unification’ discourse tends to be framed in a European context. Indeed, a few days after his statement in Munich, Berisha argued that the only viable unification of all Albanians can happen within the process of EU integration.<sup>356</sup> His specification was arguably prompted by the disapproval expressed by EU representatives and the US State Department to Berisha’s earlier nationalistic overdrive.<sup>357</sup>

Indeed, even if the question of EU integration is not politicised in elections, the Union does indirectly influence what can – or should not – be said or done during electoral campaigns. The marginalisation of the Red and Black Movement (RBM) in the 2013 vote because of the party’s calls for the unification of all Albanians in one state is a prime example of how the goal of EU accession

<sup>352</sup> *Gazeta Panorama*, “Shtyrja e statusit, Rama: reforma të thella shtetndërtuese”, 19 December 2013, available at: [http://time.ikub.al/cc12be7e72/c634a6a1617f70529e89480471a49879/Lajm\\_Shtyrja-e-statusit-Rama-Reforma-te-thella-shtetndertuese.aspx](http://time.ikub.al/cc12be7e72/c634a6a1617f70529e89480471a49879/Lajm_Shtyrja-e-statusit-Rama-Reforma-te-thella-shtetndertuese.aspx), last accessed on: 21 December 2013. *Gazeta* See also *Gazeta Panorama*, “Statusi kandidat shtyhet për në gershor 2014 Reagon Rama: Vleresohetlart puna e geverisë”, 17 December 2013, available at: <http://www.panorama.com.al/2013/12/17/statusi-shtyhet-per-ne-qershor-2014-rama-vleresohet-lart-puna-e-geverise/>, last accessed on: 22 December 2013.

<sup>353</sup> *Kosova Lindore Online*, “Berisha: shtetësi për çdo shqiptar kudo që jeton”, 4 December 2012, available at: <https://www.kosovalindore.com/2012/12/04/berisha-shtetesi-per-cdo-shqiptar-kudo-qe-jeton/>, last accessed on: 18 December 2013.

<sup>354</sup> Rakipi (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>355</sup> Berisha, Sali (2013), “No one will be able to clone five Albanian nations”, speech delivered at the European Council for Security, Munich, available at: <http://www.km.gov.al/?fq=brenda&m=news&lid=17720&gj=gj2>, last accessed on: 12 November 2013.

<sup>356</sup> Speech delivered by Sali Berisha in the Albanian parliament on the occasion of Kosovo’s fifth anniversary since independence, *Albanian Council of Ministers*, available at: <http://www.km.gov.al/?fq=brenda&m=news&lid=17769>, last accessed on: 15 February 2013.

<sup>357</sup> The EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Štefan Füle asked rhetorically on Twitter: “Is nationalism, in the form we hear it from Tirana, really based on Euro-Atlantic values?” See Koleka, Benet (2013), “Albanian leaders fan flames of nationalism, unnerving West”, *Reuters*, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/16/us-albania-election-nationalism-idUSBRE93FOWJ20130416>, last accessed on: 15 January 2014. However, given the sequence of events, one can assume that this criticism was addressed at the newly formed and radically nationalistic Red and Black Movement (RBM), which called for the unification of all Albanian populations in the Balkans in one state. An even harsher critique arrived from the US State Department to the Albanian Prime Minister’s statement that Albania will re-consider its relations with Serbia, following the removal of a monument dedicated to the Albanian Liberation Army of Presevo, Bujanovci and Podujevo. In a Memo leaked to the Albanian media and published simultaneously in several newspapers, the US State Department asked the Albanian government to not interfere with Serbian domestic politics. See *Top Channel TV online*, “Nacionalizmi, paralajmërimi amerikan” (“Nationalism, the American warning”), 14 February 2013, available at: <http://www.top-channel.tv/artikull.php?id=251649>, last accessed on: 13 January 2014.

discourages parties from playing certain ‘cards’ if they want to remain politically relevant and help their country’s integration effort. The rhetoric and activities of RBM were harshly criticised by the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Štefan Füle, as incompatible with Albania’s European ambitions. Conversely, words such as cooperation, dialogue, good governance, and anti-corruption make up the politically-correct jargon, even if they rarely translate into concepts that domestic political parties abide by in actual practice.

Furthermore, the EU has meddled in Albanian party politics in its attempts to persuade the two main political parties to talk to each other and strike deals.<sup>358</sup> The role of the EU is domestically construed by domestic political elites and European representatives as that of a neutral broker. This perception is reinforced by the frequent public appearances of the EU ambassador to Albania or of Commissioner Füle whenever public disputes arise between the two main political parties in the country. For instance, in May 2010, Martin Schulz, then leader of the European Parliament’s Socialists & Democrats group, and Joseph Daul, chairman of the center-right European People’s Party (EPP), sent a joint dinner invitation to Berisha and Rama, urging them to accept a mediation offer and bring the country’s political deadlock to an end. The two Albanian party leaders responded positively to this initiative and the event was attended also by Commissioner Füle.

But apart from acting as ‘broker’, the EU has also had a more structural impact on the Albanian party system, indirectly privileging larger over smaller political parties. For example, as a result of the constitutional changes adopted in 2008, which included a shift from proportional to mixed electoral rules, the threshold for entry into the parliament was raised to the disadvantage of smaller parties. Yet these amendments agreed by the two main Albanian parties were hailed by the EU as a major achievement.<sup>359</sup> In other words, by prioritising party consensus, the EU downplayed the content and implications of the reforms decided. While the EU did not prompt these changes, it did not discourage them either, nor did it properly assess their (long-term) effects. And, of course, the interest of the two main Albanian parties mattered greatly for the outcome: when negotiating could work in their favour, compliance with EU conditionality was no longer a problematic issue.

In addition, EU integration has helped to build ideological bridges between Albanian centre-left parties and their counterparts in member states such as Greece. In the 2013 electoral campaign, Rama promised to improve relations with neighbouring Greece and to strengthen regional cooperation, especially in the energy sector, as well as to tackle sensitive issues like the deal on naval borders between the two countries, as a means of advancing Albania’s membership bid.<sup>360</sup> Although it might be too much to speak of ‘party convergence’<sup>361</sup> between Albanian and Greek parties, the goal of EU accession has certainly encouraged inter-party synergies between these two countries.

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<sup>358</sup> The dinner took place at the Crocodile Restaurant in Strasbourg which made the initiative popularly known as “Crocodile Diplomacy”. See Primatarova, Antoinette and Deimel, Johanna (2012), “Bridge over troubled waters? The role of the internationals in Albania”, Centre for Liberal Strategies, Sofia, p. 28.

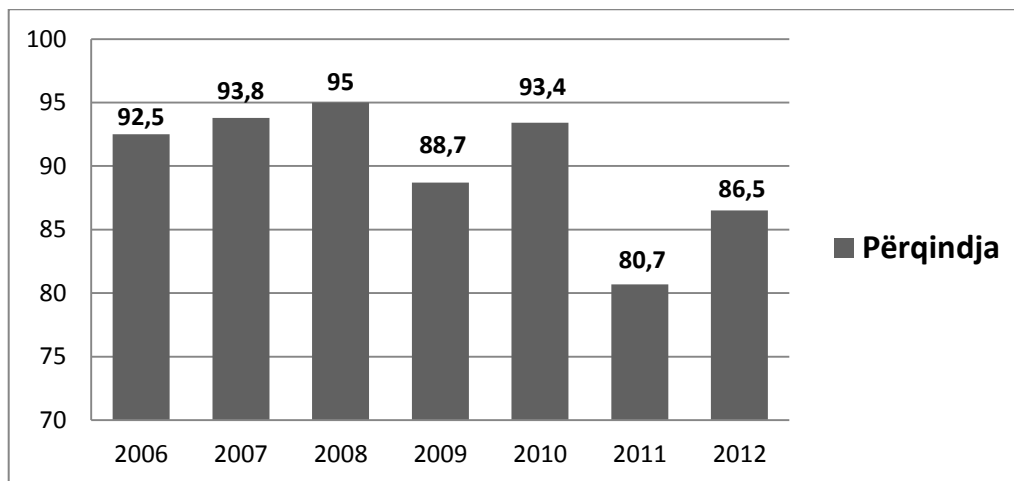
<sup>359</sup> Gjinishi, Erla and Roubini, Roubini (2014), “The impact of EU political conditionality”, *Working Paper*, Tirana: Institute for Democracy and Mediation, available at: [http://idmalbania.org/sites/default/files/publications/idm\\_impact\\_of\\_eu\\_conditionality\\_on\\_albania\\_final.pdf](http://idmalbania.org/sites/default/files/publications/idm_impact_of_eu_conditionality_on_albania_final.pdf), last accessed on: 14 February 2014, p. 4.

<sup>360</sup> Indeed, on 30 June, the Greek daily *Kathimerini* opened with an enthusiastic quote of Rama saying that the winter was over and spring was on its way in the relations between Greece and Albania. Also, the Socialist Party’s campaign received broad coverage in the Greek media even before the 23 June.

<sup>361</sup> Haughton (2014), *op. cit.*

Last but not least, EU integration enjoys massive popular support among the Albanian public<sup>362</sup>, even if somewhat less than in 2010. In line with research on this topic, the positive attitudes of the Albanians towards ‘Europe’ can be explained by the fact that the country is still far away from accession and the costs of joining the Union are not yet clear on the ground. Moreover, the Albanian citizens continue to be largely uninformed about what the EU project entails in terms of substance or procedures. The Council’s repeated refusal to grant Albania candidate status has probably started to take its toll on people’s opinions vis-à-vis the EU, and the drop in public support to 80.7% in 2011 – as shown in the table below – is widely assumed to be linked with the suspension of the country’s visa regime with the EU.

**Table 6.2: Public support for EU membership in Albania**



Source: Albanian Institute for International Studies

## 6.5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the case of Albania, the EU acted as mediator between the two main rival parties, seeking to appease tendencies of radicalisation of politics in the country. This effort has only had limited and short-lived success, and has proven more effective when the EU found allies in other international actors, such as the US, as well as when the interests of the SP and DP converged with the EU’s intentions for Albania. In addition, the EU set the boundaries of the political debate in the country and intervened whenever the domestic political parties deflected in their rhetoric or practices from the ‘normative framework’.

However, a low level of internalisation of EU conditions and norms seems to persist in Albania. Going beyond formal compliance requires that the European integration becomes a grand, national project that actively engages a multitude of national stakeholders – not just political parties. As Stratulat and Vurmo point out, “to be constructive, the (current) DP-SP dialogue must become an all-encompassing conversation with all relevant Albanian political and societal forces”.<sup>363</sup> Too much emphasis on inter-party dialogue may distract from the essential role that other domestic actors can have in the democratisation and Europeanisation of the country.

<sup>362</sup> See Albanian Institute for International Studies (2012), “The European perspective of Albania: perceptions and realities”, p.: 10, which shows that throughout the years, popular support for European integration has been in slight decline in Albania from 93.8% in 2007 via 90.4% in 2010 to 86.5% in 2012, even if it remains high, including by comparison to other Balkan countries.

<sup>363</sup> Stratulat and Vurmo (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Indeed, in the Second EU-Albania High-level Dialogue meeting in Tirana, Commissioner Füle insisted on the setting up of an inclusive mechanism for European integration, and made direct reference to the need of reaching out to and bringing in civil society.<sup>364</sup> The main challenge in this regard is to identify civil society actors that can provide alternative arenas of political expression and which are able to exert pressure to demand accountability from political representatives. Here, there is also the risk that conflicting parties could appropriate the agenda of civic resistance, as happened in the recent protests of November 2013 against importing nuclear waste, thereby feeding into public distrust of civic initiatives and civil actors as ‘neutral brokers’.

Moreover, for the EU integration process not to become ‘hijacked’ by the main political parties and transformed into an issue of political demarcation and antagonism between the government and opposition, the Union needs to focus its message to a greater extent on the specific conditions and implications of Albania’s accession. As the Albanian case demonstrates, the broader the question of EU integration is framed in the public debate, the more space it allows for domestic political parties to put their own spin on the process and interpret the conditions from Brussels in light of their particular interests. As such, the debate is hollowed of any substantial policy discussion, which suggests that EU representatives should make a greater effort to break down their discourse into very concrete requirements and recommendations for the country when targeting Albanian citizens. By doing this, the EU could help to increase public awareness of the integration process and people’s ability to put pressure on their political leaders, particularly when in office, to comply with the EU conditionality and tackle explicit areas of concern for Brussels.

Finally, the notion of ‘political dialogue’ should not be mistaken for political will on the part of the Albanian parties, whether in government or opposition. There are still several issues upon which Albanian politicians agree to disagree with the EU. One of them refers to the protection of human rights, the restitution of property and safeguard of minority rights, especially of the Roma population.<sup>365</sup> The Albanian politicians, in government or opposition, have continuously paid lip service to the European Commission by rhetorically committing to respect human rights. However, it is only through the pressure of the Ombudsman—whose appointment was among the 12 priorities set by the EU — that the questions of Roma exclusion and lustration made it on the agenda of the media and into public debate. This could be seen as another indirect consequence of EU conditionality but it is yet to result into actual policymaking and positive change on the ground.

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<sup>364</sup> EU-Albania: *2nd High Level Dialogue progress and commitment to EU integration*, European Commission press release, 6 May 2014, available at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release MEMO-14-163 en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-163_en.htm), last accessed on: 15 February 2014.

<sup>365</sup> European Commission Report (2013), *op. cit.*

# THE LIMITS OF THE EU'S TRANSFORMATIVE POWER IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA – IMPLICATIONS FOR PARTY POLITICS

BY BODO WEBER

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7.1	Bosnia-Herzegovina's ethnicised political system	97
7.1.1	Institutional setting	97
7.1.2	The postwar 'Dayton phase'	97
7.1.3	'The Brussels phase': faking 'progress' and 'process'	99
7.2	The EU and political parties' performance in Bosnia	101
7.2.1	The SNSD: post-socialist one-party system and EU-integration <i>à la carte</i>	101
7.2.2	The SDP: from landslide victory to the SDP-SNSD deal	102
7.3	Citizens caught in despair	105

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In February 2006 the leaders of the largest social democratic parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) – Zlatko Lagumdžija, President of the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina (SDP BiH) based in Sarajevo and Milorad Dodik, President of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) based in the Serb majority entity, the Republika Srpska (RS) – visited the German capital of Berlin as part of a joint European tour. The trip took place about half a year ahead of the general elections in Bosnia, and shortly after a political crisis in the RS had brought the SNSD to power and Dodik as the new Prime Minister.

Only one month earlier, the German politician Christian Schwarz-Schilling had taken office as the new High Representative on behalf of the international community, with the mission to implement the transition from the 'Dayton phase' to the 'Brussels phase' of Bosnia-Herzegovina's postwar development. This was combined with a shift from US to EU leadership in BiH. Schwarz-Schilling had been tasked with ending the international community's external state-building endeavour that was based on a half-protectorate headed by his Office of the High Representative (OHR). The OHR was to be closed in 2007 and domestic political elites were to continue postwar reforms, with the Union retreating to a facilitating role in the framework of the EU integration process.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Bassuener, Kurt and Weber, Bodo (2010), "Are we there yet? International impatience versus a long-term strategy for a viable Bosnia", *DPC Policy Brief*, p. 3, available at: <http://democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/briefs/policybrief1.pdf>, last accessed: 15 December 2013.

In Berlin, Lagumdžija and Dodik presented themselves in a closed-door event for a German political audience as natural partners – as the social-democratic political alternative to the ethnic Serb, Croat and Bosniak parties that had dominated (party) politics in Bosnia-Herzegovina since the introduction of the multiparty system in 1990. They spoke confidently about their victory in the then upcoming October elections and about their plans to social democratise, revolutionise and lead their country into the EU once in power. Moreover, in relation to a US-mediated constitutional-reform initiative launched with key party leaders but stuck since January – and which later became known as the ‘April package’<sup>367</sup> – they announced that they would take ownership of the process from international actors and successfully complete the negotiations. Finally, Dodik exposed his strategy for his SNSD to dominate in the next elections in the RS over the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), founded by Radovan Karadžić: he would take over the SDS’s policy line – a merger of Serb nationalistic rhetoric and social populism – and apply it more successfully than its adversary given his party’s uncompromised war record. This programmatic statement went uncommented by Dodik’s social-democratic partner and unnoticed by most participants, who left the event in Berlin impressed by the representatives of Bosnia’s civic political alternative.<sup>368</sup>

Except for Dodik’s programmatic outline, nothing announced at that meeting came to pass in the following years. On the contrary, Dodik won the 2006 elections and became the new strong man of Bosnia, moving the country’s politics away from compromise and reform, towards strengthened ethnic nationalistic rhetoric and conflict. The EU was handed over international responsibility for BiH, but European leadership never came. The OHR, as well as other Dayton institutions, grew progressively more marginalised and constrained in their ability to effectively fulfil their mandates, and conditions for their closure<sup>369</sup> were never met. The constitutional-reform initiative eventually failed in April 2006, and no other serious reforms were undertaken since. Bosnia-Herzegovina remains stuck on its EU path, at the back of the ‘queue’ of aspirant Balkan countries, and even regressing: BiH has moved in recent years from a phase of complicated political relations to an almost complete paralysis of most of its political institutions.

The SNSD and its uncontested leader have become the key political actors undermining BiH’s statehood. The SDP on the other hand, came out of the latest 2010 general elections as the main winner. Many civic-democratic-oriented Bosnians and Herzegovinians put great hope into this party. Yet they ended up greatly disappointed by the SDP and the performance of its long-standing President Lagumdžija in the aftermath of the elections, who was accused of having sold out the state of BiH in return for governmental posts.

The “transformative power of Europe”<sup>370</sup> has obviously not had much effect so far in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with multiple implications for the development of the country’s party system and

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<sup>367</sup> The initiative was formally led by a US-based NGO headed by the former Deputy High Representative in Bosnia, Donald Hays. The aim of these US-led negotiations with the leaders of BiH’s major political parties was to make the Dayton state at least partially more functional, including by strengthening central state level institutions. In April 2006, the initiative failed by only a few votes to receive a two third majority in the Bosniak parliament. See <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/323-constitution-drafting-bosnia-and-herzegovina>, last accessed on: 15 December 2013.

<sup>368</sup> Author’s personal observation (Berlin, February 2006).

<sup>369</sup> In 2008 the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), the international body that oversees OHR’s work defined a set of 5+2 objectives and conditions. These included selected elements of OHR’s Mission Implementation Plan in the areas of state and defense property, rule of law, fiscal sustainability, and Brčko District, as well as the signature of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU, and an assessment by the PIC that the situation was sufficiently stable. These are listed at: [http://www.ohr.int/pic/default.asp?content\\_id=41352](http://www.ohr.int/pic/default.asp?content_id=41352), last accessed on: 29 March 2014.

<sup>370</sup> See Börzel, Tanja A. and Risse, Thomas (2009), “The transformative power of Europe: The European Union and the diffusion of ideas”, Kolleg-Forschergruppe (KFG) *The transformative power of Europe*, Working paper No 1, available at: [http://www.polsoz.fuberlin.de/en/v/transformeuropa/publications/working\\_paper/WP\\_01\\_Juni\\_Boerzel\\_Risse.pdf?1367706571](http://www.polsoz.fuberlin.de/en/v/transformeuropa/publications/working_paper/WP_01_Juni_Boerzel_Risse.pdf?1367706571), last accessed on: 15 December 2013.

democratic political life. This paper analyses the failure of ‘Europe’ and its effects on party politics in Bosnia through the position and role of the two social democratic parties, the SNSD and the SDP.

## **7.1 BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA’S ETHNICISED POLITICAL SYSTEM**

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### **7.1.1 Institutional setting**

The key challenge for the transformation of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s politics from its post-socialist origins into a Western-style representative democracy has been – and continues to be – the complex, ethnicised constitutional Dayton system. The Dayton Peace Accord (DPA) marked the endpoint of a war of violent territorialisation of ethnicity. In Dayton, two ceasefire agreements – the 1994 Washington agreement that stopped the Croat-Bosniak war and led to the formation of the Federation of BiH, and the agreement signed in 1995 that ended the war and established the Serb nationalist entity, the Republika Srpska – were turned into a constitution that was initially meant to be of provisional character.

Dayton created a highly decentralised system that was built upwards and downwards from the mid-layer of governance – the ethno-territorially entities and cantons. This weakened the central state and municipal levels of governance, and produced unclear vertical and horizontal divisions of competencies. Moreover, wide-ranging ethnic veto mechanisms were installed at state and entity level with the intention of protecting the so-called vital national interests of the ‘constituent people’, that is, the Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats (plus similar mechanisms in the Federation’s 10 cantons). Furthermore, an entity veto in the state parliament offered the Serbs in the *de facto* mono-ethnic RS a double veto right. In addition, ethnic representation mechanisms for government and public administration posts were put in place.<sup>371</sup>

Finally, the Dayton constitution built in and consolidated the two conflicting political narratives that had fostered the Bosnian war: mono-ethnicism (by incorporating the ethnic para-state formations – the RS and the Croat Herceg-Bosna – directly into the state structure in the form of the Federation cantons) and multi-ethnicism (characteristic of the pre-war period and related to the right of refugee return, binding ethnic representation to the 1991, pre-war census, and so on). This overall institutional setting of the state and political system set very high margins for the implementation of any non-ideological, non-ethnic nationalistic policies, and for making any changes to the constitution.<sup>372</sup>

However, as Bosnia’s postwar history has proven, these institutional constraints did not *per se* raise an obstacle to the transformation of the country’s constitutional system towards a Western-style representative democracy.

### **7.1.2 The postwar ‘Dayton phase’**

Under the auspices of the OSCE, which for the first time in its history engaged in the organisation – not just monitoring – of elections, a first general vote was held in the country in September 1996, only nine months after the end of the war. While elections were intended to legitimise the new Dayton-state institutions, they primarily legitimised the three ethnic parties that had led BiH into and through the war. The Bosniak SDA (Party of Democratic Action), the HDZ BiH (Croatian Democratic

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<sup>371</sup> These mechanisms guarantee that posts are mostly filled based on ethnic criteria, though no quotas formally exist.

<sup>372</sup> Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), Annex 4, available at: [http://www.ohr.int/dpa/default.asp?content\\_id=372](http://www.ohr.int/dpa/default.asp?content_id=372), last accessed on: 15 December 2013.

Community) and the SDS gained 75% of the seats in the House of Representatives at state level in the first multiparty elections of 1990<sup>373</sup>; in 1996, they reached as high as 85% of all seats.

A dilemma evolved for the international community which wanted to quickly end its engagement of 60 000 ground troops but feared instability in the country. Thus the international community started to get involved into state building in BiH, pushing for a substantial democratic transformation of the 1996 non-state, albeit without any proper long-term strategy.

Until 2005, the international community initiated key institutional reforms – several state-level ministries were added to the Council of Ministers that had originally consisted only of three ministries; a number of judicial institutions were created at the state level (such as the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, the Court of BiH, and the Prosecutor’s Office of BiH) and largely undid the total fragmentation of the judiciary setting the stage for the later transition of war-crime prosecutions from the ICTY to national courts; the wartime armies were merged into one state army; and a unified indirect tax system with a single state account was established as the basis for a single BiH market.

Reforms of the electoral and party system transformed the legal framework of BiH party politics. In 2002 an election law was introduced and the Central Election Commission was set up as an independent body, taking over the organisation of elections from the OSCE, as well as assuming responsibility for the monitoring of implementation of the new regulations on conflict of interest and party registration and financing. Reforms included also the introduction of sanctions against the use of inflammatory rhetoric, the use of open party lists and gender quotas. The OHR led the way in these reforms by drafting laws and enforcing them in case of domestic resistance, based on the High Representative’s Bonn powers.<sup>374</sup> The High Representative used his powers to limit extreme nationalistic conflict rhetoric and undemocratic performance of political parties and officials.

Beginning with 2003, the international community’s reform policy went hand in hand with the EU’s conditionality for BiH’s European integration. That year, the European Commission adopted a Feasibility Study that conditioned the opening of negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with BiH on the fulfilment of reforms in 16 key areas.<sup>375</sup> The High Representative also directly intervened in party politics by sanctioning parties and politicians for non-compliance with the DPA. In addition, the international community at times engaged in political engineering – most directly in 1998, when it arranged for Milorad Dodik to become the new RS Prime Minister although his party, the SNSD, had only two seats in the RS National Assembly.<sup>376</sup> In a similar vein, the international community supported the Alliance for Change – an SDP-led, eleven-party coalition – that in 2000-2002 managed to seize power in the Federation and at state level, and for the first time kept the three dominating ethnic parties (that is, the SDA, HDZ and SDS) out of office.<sup>377</sup>

Whatever the limits of externally driven state-building and democratisation, during the ‘Dayton phase’, parties and the party system in BiH did modernise with the help of international organisations – above all the EU – which provided party aid at election times and support for inner-

<sup>373</sup> Arnautović, Suad, *Izbori u BiH '90*, Sarajevo 1996.

<sup>374</sup> In 1998 at a conference in Bonn, Germany the High Representative – the final authority regarding interpretation of the civilian implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement – was equipped with far-ranging authority. This includes the power to impose laws, dismiss state officials and ban persons from seeking public office.

<sup>375</sup> Conditions related to the judiciary/rule of law, economic reform, strengthening of institutional capacities and the effective functioning of state-level governance institutions. See [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-03-1563\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-03-1563_en.htm), last accessed on: 15 December 2013.

<sup>376</sup> At that time, Dodik and his party represented the only non-nationalistic, civic political option in the RS that had appeared since the end of the war. The then Deputy High Representative, Hans Schumacher, attended the Assembly session and pressed for a majority of MPs from several parties to rally in supporting Dodik.

<sup>377</sup> *Democracy Assessment in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Open Society Fund Bosnia & Herzegovina, Sarajevo 1996, pp. 127-184.



party organisational development, capacity building for parliaments, and the like. The international community as an external tutor assisted party politics in developing a culture of dialogue and compromise,<sup>378</sup> and also led to a substantial reduction of inflammatory nationalistic rhetoric.

### **7.1.3 The 'Brussels phase': faking 'progress' and 'process'**

In 2005, when the US and the EU decided to pass on their leadership in state-building and democratisation to domestic 'ownership', the issue was not whether such a shift made sense – in principle it was both meaningful and inevitable – the key question was how to design such a transition process and how to adjust the EU-integration framework and toolbox in order to secure the sustainability of a nationally-driven reform process in BiH. The EU's repertoire of action in 2005 consisted of policies and approaches developed in relation to the transformation of societies in Central Eastern Europe, that is, in a political framework that was substantially different from that of Bosnia. The EU did not quite find the right answer and instead became one of the lead actors in an enduring regressive political dynamics in the country.

At the beginning of 2006 – half a year before the general elections – the new High Representative Christian Schwarz-Schilling took office and announced that his mission was to close the OHR, and, as such, he would immediately stop using his executive Bonn powers. This came as an invitation to re-activate wartime narratives for the two party leaders – Milorad Dodik (SNSD) and Haris Silajdžić, who headed the Bosniak Party for BiH (BH), a splinter of the SDA – and who aimed at turning their parties into the leading Serb and Bosniak ethnic political actors, respectively, in the upcoming vote.

Dodik translated the Serb-nationalistic narrative into a discourse that warned about the alleged risks that the postwar and state-building reforms posed to the existence of the RS. He insisted that BiH could only survive if it returned to the 'original Dayton' setting of 1996 with only three state-level ministries, and threatened with a referendum and secession if these demands were not met. Silajdžić became his natural counterpart by insisting the RS was a "genocidal creation".<sup>379</sup> The new war of words led to a level of inflammatory rhetoric unseen in previous elections and proved to be a winning strategy in the October 2006 vote: the SNSD became by far the strongest party in the RS, and Silajdžić won the Bosniak seat in the three-member Presidency of BiH.

To a large extent, this success was enabled by the 'role' of the international community that did nothing more than to verbally condemn the new political leaders' nationalistic rhetoric. This passivity came as an invitation to move beyond previously established rules of the political game and to test the West's 'red lines' that increasingly were not there any more<sup>380</sup> – first and foremost for the man who controlled the only mono-ethnic polity in BiH, Milorad Dodik.

The emerging conflict among Bosnia's political elites destroyed the carefully developed culture of dialogue and compromise, and in 2007 killed the last joint OHR-EU reform project, that is, police reform – the remaining condition for initialling the SAA. Faced with a widening gap between the intended policy change and the resulting, escalating political situation on the ground, the international community did not revise its approach but opted to keep out of BiH's internal affairs. Instead of critically re-evaluating its perception of the Bosnian politicians' ability to act in a responsible manner, the Union started to echo the RS leadership by blaming the continued existence

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<sup>378</sup> Over time, ever more reforms initiated by the international community were passed by the political parties in the parliaments instead of being imposed by the High Representative.

<sup>379</sup> This expression refers to the widespread ethnic cleansing and mass murder that occurred in Srebrenica in 1995, and that was qualified by the ICTY as genocide, accompanying the creation of the *Republika Srpska*.

<sup>380</sup> Threatening with the breakup of the country and demanding the complete rollback of the internationally backed postwar reforms would have led, before 2005, to the removal of the respective official from office/ political life.

of the OHR for the impossibility to (fully) transfer ownership of the integration agenda, and for the complicated domestic political relations in BiH.

This approach of the international community was not founded on a lack of political understanding but on the absence of political will to face reality; while the EU was occupied with other hot spots in the Balkans (such as Kosovo's independence of 2007-2008) and then a too disunited<sup>381</sup> actor to change course, the US had handed over leadership to the EU in light of the 9/11 events and later could neither develop the political will nor the means to re-claim leadership back from the Union. Left without high-level support, mid-layer bureaucrats and diplomats in the European Commission and the member states essentially began to mask the deepening, structural political crisis in BiH behind the EU-integration terminology of 'progress' and 'process'. Eager for any 'momentum', they found creative ways to adjust the political reality in the country to their 'progress'-narrative by lowering the bar on EU-integration conditionality, in the hope that BiH political elites would eventually jump over it – they never did.

The initialling of the SAA in December 2007 set the stage for this awkward EU-integration policy strategy: condoning the failed police reform agreement, the EU negotiated a mere declaration of intention for future police reform with the leaders of the most important BiH parties, and then assisted them in turning this declaration into law to be able to declare success. Police reform never came about. Instead, the EU ultimately removed police reform from its EU-integration agenda, and in 2011 the Union decided to close down its police monitoring mission (EUPM) in the country, at the height of a fight between the EUPM and RS leadership, as well as the SDP-led Federation government, over attempts to re-politicise police forces.

Following the signing of the SAA in 2008, the EU constantly subverted its own rules and conditions to avoid any breakdown of the EU-integration process, which for all intents and purposes had already broken down and remained that way. Between mid-2010 and early 2012 Brussels did not suspend the EU's interim trade agreement, even though Bosnia was in breach of it.<sup>382</sup> Since the end of 2010 when all member states had ratified the SAA, Brussels did not allow the agreement to enter into force. Because Bosnia did not meet the last remaining condition – that is, the implementation of the 2009 so-called Sejdić-Finci ruling of the European Court of Human Rights<sup>383</sup> – the EU would have ultimately had to suspend the agreement immediately after coming into effect.

Brussels has constantly responded to attacks and provocations from the RS with an appeasement policy that saw Commission officials entering into various backdoor deals with Banja Luka (as was the case, for example, in a 2011-2013 conflict over the RS Law on Courts<sup>384</sup>). None of these agreements managed to stop Dodik and his SNSD government from undermining the state and its institutions. Instead of setting

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<sup>381</sup> It was only in 2009, that the EU, under US pressure, was finally forced to recognise the existence of a deep structural crisis in Bosnia. From 2010 onwards, the EU became increasingly divided over how to handle the country. A group of member states led by the UK wanted to adjust the Union's policy. A second group, led by Germany and supported by France insisted on the continuation of the initial policy, and blamed the continued existence of the OHR for the political crisis because in their opinion, it had created a political culture of dependency. The latter group succeeded in subsequent years to hollow out the OHR and prevent the High Representative from using his Bonn powers. Though the crisis persisted and deepened and thus essentially refuted the 'business as usual' thesis of these countries, they continued to resist any policy change.

<sup>382</sup> Parliamentary parties had failed to pass a State Aid law, one of the conditions for the trade agreement.

<sup>383</sup> In its ruling, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the constitutional order in Bosnia-Herzegovina was in violation of the European Convention for Human Rights, which BiH had signed, because citizens who did not belong to one of the three constituent people could not run for most public offices (that is, the three member State Presidencies and the state parliament). See [http://www.coe.org.rs/eng/news\\_sr\\_eng/?conid=1545](http://www.coe.org.rs/eng/news_sr_eng/?conid=1545), last accessed on: 15 December 2013.

<sup>384</sup> See Bassuener, Kurt and Weber, Bodo (2013), "House of cards: the EU's "reinforced presence" in Bosnia and Herzegovina", *DPC Policy Paper*, available at: <http://democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/briefs/may.pdf>, last accessed on: 15 December 2013.

a clear strategic framework for Bosnia's integration path the EU has, amid resistance from political elites on the ground, tacitly forgotten about its strategic document, the 2008 European Partnership,<sup>385</sup> and responded to demands for real leadership (from think tanks, individual EU member states and others) with calls on BiH's political leaders to "agree among themselves".<sup>386</sup>

The EU's policy towards BiH has yielded no tangible results and has also lost credibility by turning the Union into the co-creator of a rules-free environment. This unintended, *de facto* EU meddling has provoked the deepest political and institutional crisis in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina. As such, the nationalistic and state-subverting policy of Milorad Dodik (then Prime Minister in the RS) progressively spread during the 2006-2010 mandate to the rest of the country, and rendered the work of governments at all levels increasingly more complicated (except in the RS where it led to an authoritarian transformation). In the state parliament, for example, over 50% of all laws that were submitted during that period were blocked by an RS entity veto.<sup>387</sup> After the 2010 elections, this development escalated into a government-formation crisis at the state level and in the Federation, as well as into a wide-ranging and persistent institutional paralysis.

## 7.2 EU AND POLITICAL PARTY PERFORMANCE IN BOSNIA

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But the EU has also deeply affected party policy and party development in BiH. This can best be demonstrated in the case of the two social democratic parties that at the beginning of Europe's intervention in Bosnia in the middle of the previous decade had the potential to develop into serious civic democratic alternatives in the two Bosnian-Herzegovinian entities.

### 7.2.1 *The SNSD: post-socialist one-party system and EU integration à la carte*

Milorad Dodik first appeared on the political scene at the time of Bosnia-Herzegovina's first multiparty elections in 1990, when he entered the parliament as member of the Reformist party – the party of the last Yugoslav Prime Minister, Ante Marković. He left the parliament on the eve of the Bosniak war together with Karadžić's SDS MPs to form the breakaway RS National Assembly. Towards the end of the war, Dodik formed an independent club of MPs that he turned into a party after the signing of the DPA. He established himself as one of the few alternative democratic figures in the RS in the immediate postwar period and joined the so-called Alternative Council of Ministers, that was formed by a couple of multi-ethnic parties and civil society representatives. In 1998, he and his SNSD helped the West and the then RS President, Biljana Plavšić, to break the SDS's monolithic one-party regime in the Republika Srpska. Dodik lost power in the RS in 2001 to the SDS, partly because his government had demonstrated to be no less prone to systemic corruption than its predecessor. But the SNSD continued to grow in each subsequent election thanks to the conflict between the SDS and the OHR.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> The partnership document spelled out a clearly defined set of institutional reforms that included the establishment of a large set of state level institutions, including a state-level Supreme Court and a state-level agricultural ministry. All these reforms were rejected by the entity leadership in the RS, and ultimately dropped by Brussels, without the EU taking a formal decision to give up on any of these conditions or suspend the partnership.

<sup>386</sup> For a detailed description of post-2006 developments in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the role of the international community see Bassuener, Kurt and Weber, Bodo (2013), "House of cards: the EU's "reinforced presence" in Bosnia and Herzegovina".

<sup>387</sup> Pejanović, Mirko (2010), "Protivrječnosti odlučivanja u parlamentarnoj skupštini BiH: problemi uspostave konsenzusa unutar parlamentarne većine", in Abazović, Dino and Hammer, Stefan (2010), *Bosna i Hercegovina petnaest godina nakon Dayton*, p. 77.

<sup>388</sup> SNSD, *Istorijat* ([http://www.snsd.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=124&Itemid=247&lang=en](http://www.snsd.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=124&Itemid=247&lang=en)). The use of the High Representatives Bonn powers stripped the SDS off part of its top leadership and its party finances.

When the West needed a democratic political alternative in the RS for its policy shift in 2006, Dodik was best positioned and clever enough to present himself and his party as a suitable choice, thus seizing a historical moment to grasp power in the RS. He proved to be a Machiavellian-type of politician, who inherited Slobodan Milošević's 'tactics without strategy', exploiting Serb nationalistic ideology and combining it with social populism – a mixture to which he added a pro EU-integration touch. Seeing that his provocative statements and actions met no resistance from the West, which had stopped enforcing previously-defined 'red lines', he turned the practice of bending the rules of the democratic game into a fully-fledged political approach. He built his authority less on the record of his domestic entity policy – he solved none of the pressing political issues in the RS that brought him into office (that is, systemic corruption, weak economy and huge social problems) – but more and more on the EU and the US's *laissez-faire* approach.<sup>389</sup>

In the RS, Dodik and his SNSD established a *de facto* post-socialist, one-party regime after the EU took over responsibility for Bosnia. The party experienced exponential growth in its membership base after entering office thanks to the clientelistic distribution of administrative jobs and resources in a weak-entity economy, in which the public sector is by far the biggest employer. If the number of 140 000 party members cited by the SNSD<sup>390</sup> is correct, it amounts to roughly 10% of the RS population – a ratio comparable to that enjoyed by Tito's League of Communists in socialist Yugoslavia. Moreover, semi-formal and informal networks among state institutions, the ruling party and business elites penetrate all spheres of society in a typical post-socialist way. In addition, in 2010 Dodik maneuvered a Putin-like change in power from the position of Prime Minister to that of RS President, based on the instalment of a weak Premier, his personal authority as President of the SNSD and an unclear constitutional division of executive competencies between the President and the government in the RS.

The EU's performance has enabled Dodik and his party to establish a two-track narrative for his regime: Dayton *à la carte* and EU-integration *à la carte*. Dodik presented himself as the defender of 'the real Dayton' against domestic and Western advocates of its devolution, although he did in fact re-interpret the Dayton constitutional order in favour of the RS and his own political interests; 'the state will either be as I say or it will not be at all' became the mantra of his discourse.

The same approach was reproduced with regard to the topic of EU integration. Like all other political leaders in BiH, Dodik and his SNSD representatives repeatedly declare their support for Bosnia-Herzegovina's EU integration ambition. But as with 'support' for Dayton, EU entry has to happen on terms defined by the RS (by Dodik), not by Brussels. Neither the entity President nor his colleagues have ever bothered to explain to their citizens that the original Dayton state of 1996 – multiple times more dysfunctional than the current one – would never have any prospects to join 'Europe'. Instead, when the government-formation crisis paralysed the Federation in 2011-2012, Dodik 'offered' to the EU that the RS integrates into the Union "without Bosnia-Herzegovina", as the entity was already implementing EU-demanded reforms on their own.<sup>391</sup>

### **7.2.2 The SDP: from landslide victory to the SDP-SNSD deal**

The party that Zlatko Lagumdžija has been leading since the end of the 1990s – the SDP BiH – is no less a one man-party than the SNSD. The SDP BiH was established in 1990 when the core of Bosnia-Herzegovina's communist party transformed in order to prepare for the first multiparty elections.

<sup>389</sup> Bassuener and Weber (2010), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>390</sup> SNSD, *op. cit.*

<sup>391</sup> On Dodik's approach to EU integration see <http://bljesak.info/rubrika/vijesti/clanak/dodik-rs-je-posvecena-procesu-europskih-integracija-bih/8152>; <http://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/rs-podrzava-proces-integracija-bih-u-eu/090517092>; <http://www.predsjednikrs.net/sr/milorad-dodik-intervju-vecernje-novosti-10-08-2012/>, last accessed on: 15/12/2013.

The SDP came out of the elections as the largest opposition party to the ethnic three-party coalition, along with the Reformist Party with which it merged after the war. Lagumdžija seized leadership in 1998 and vowed to develop the party into a modern European social democratic party. In reality, he only superficially copied the Blair-Schröder model of a modern, 21<sup>st</sup> century social democracy. At the same time, he surrounded himself with a group of new, young and obedient party officials that formed the basis of his leadership, and whom allowed Lagumdžija to strengthen the authoritarian inner-party structures.

Under Lagumdžija's leadership the party did not develop any serious strategy on how the largest multi-ethnic, civic BH party could move beyond its predominantly Bosniak membership and electoral base. Attempts to establish itself in the RS and the ethnic Croat nationalistic strongholds of the Federation of BiH were not seriously prepared, and thus ultimately failed. In 2006, and again in 2010, the SDP leaders decided to nominate Željko Komšić as the Croat candidate for the Presidency of BiH and succeeded in getting him voted into office with a majority of ethnic Bosniak votes.<sup>392</sup> What could have been the cornerstone of a subversive tactic to start overcoming Bosnia's ethnicised, dysfunctional constitutional order turned out to be void of any strategic considerations – or in the words of a member of Lagumdžija's inner circle: "we did it because we had the power to do so."<sup>393</sup> Instead, the SDP only alienated the two ethnic Croat parties, the HDZ and HDZ 1990. These two parties had traditionally regarded the Croat seat in the Presidency as part of their chiefdom. The SDP thus further antagonised party-relations, as well as the prospects of political compromise and cooperation.

After eight years in opposition and amidst a growing political, institutional and economic crisis that left citizens all over BiH dissatisfied with their ruling elites, the SDP emerged as the great victor of the 2010 general elections. It replaced the SDA as the largest parliamentary group in the Federation and became the strongest party at the state level. The SDP announced that it would form a government that would give the country a new reform and EU-integration impetus. Yet caught between the RS leaders' usurpatory attack on the state and the EU's 'agree among yourselves' approach, the SDP and its leader, Lagumdžija, strayed away from the political track.

Briefly after the October elections, the SDP took the lead in drafting a reform programme, the so-called platform document, which was meant to serve as the governmental programme for the next Council of Ministers at state level, as well as for the next Federation government.<sup>394</sup> The platform's key elements were Euro-Atlantic integration and the fulfilment of all outstanding obligations for the opening of EU accession negotiations (as well as for gaining NATO membership). The document was signed by the SDP, the SDA and two smaller parties from the Federation, and it was also offered to other parties to join, especially the two Croat parties. However, the radicalisation and polarisation in the party system of BiH led to the formation of two post-election ethnic Serb (SNSD-SDS) and Croat (HDZ-HDZ 1990) party blocks that prevented the extension of the platform coalition, or of any other reform alliance, for that matter.

That resulted into the most serious postwar government-formation crisis in the Federation, where the four platform-parties formed a government in spring 2011 without the two HDZs, which saw the coalition in breach with the entity constitution. On the central-state level it was only after a 15-month impasse that the SDP and SDA 2012 agreed, on 28 December, to a six-party Council of Ministers coalition, including the four parties of the two ethnic blocks. The coalition agreement only emerged under legal-financial pressure – had no agreement been reached before 1 January 2013, a

<sup>392</sup> The Bosnian constitutions and laws do not specify that the Croat and Bosniak members of the Presidency can only be elected by Croat and Bosniak voters, respectively. Yet this was traditionally the case as before 2006 only candidates from ethnic parties had succeeded to be elected.

<sup>393</sup> Author's interview with high-level SDP official, Sarajevo 2011.

<sup>394</sup> Platforma SDP-a BiH, SDA, HSP-a BiH I NS Radom za boljitak, Sarajevo, December 2012.

constitutional crisis with a legal impossibility to have even an emergency budget would have occurred on all governance levels in BiH – while its programmatic basis remained completely unclear.

The newly formed coalition saw its first and final crisis after only four months. The source of the crisis was the unsolvable dilemma of those coalition parties that insisted on defending the state with regard to the issue of how to create a working basis with the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) that wanted to weaken or break up the state. The Bosniak SDA (Party of Democratic Action) (SDA) accused the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the SNSD for standing behind a coalition draft budget that would strengthen the entities at the expense of the central state. When the party voted against the budget, the SDP declared the end of the platform coalition with the SDA in the Federation of BiH, and the removal of the SDA from the central-state government. The SDP became the prime executor of that endeavour that was supported by two HDZs, the SDS and especially the SNSD (the SDP was tasked with going against the SDA).<sup>395</sup> Though the SDA insisted that the reduced state budget would endanger the functioning of state-level institutions that had been created as part of the EU's conditionality for integration, European officials refrained from reacting to the events.

At the end of October 2012, Lagumdžija and Dodik – the leaders of the SDP and SNSD that headed the entity governments – signed the *Agreement on programmatic/project cooperation in the legislature and executive in BiH 2012-2014*<sup>396</sup> that was intended to be the governmental programme of the new coalition, replacing the previous platform document. The agreement, which soon thereafter became seven draft law proposals, was the exact opposite of the platform. It was divided into two parts, the first dealt with economic reform, the second with changes to BiH's democratic institutions. The former mainly aimed at giving the entities additional access to state financial resources and offering them further possibilities to borrow money on international markets. The latter clearly sought to roll back a large number of key democratic reforms accomplished since Dayton. Among these, the most important initiatives were: a return to closed candidate lists for elections, a move that would strengthen the authority of party leaders over their MPs; changes in the public procurement and conflict of interest laws that would open the door to systemic corruption; and a proposal to shift the power of appointment of chief prosecutors at all levels (from central state to cantonal) from the independent body of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council to parliaments – a move that would re-politicise Bosnia-Herzegovina's judiciary.

What is remarkable about this development was not only the fact that the SDP, after years in which it had been the most vocal opponent of the SNSD's anti-state policy, joined forces with the SNSD and consented to the strengthening of the entities at the expense of the state and of democratic achievements; a step that provoked massive outcry from the civil society sector and eventually caused the split with Lagumdžija's SDP. Equally significant was the fact that both the SDP and SNSD tried to portray their agreement in European integration (and economic prosperity) terms. And as many times before, the agreement was met with little resistance or open criticism from EU officials or member states diplomats.

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<sup>395</sup> The SDA resorted to all available means to resist being removed from the government at different levels and succeeded in blocking a change in the ruling coalition at the Federation level. This prolonged the political crisis throughout the 2012 and the first half of 2013. With the 2014 general elections approaching, access to governing posts became progressively less attractive and the conflict cooled down in the latter half of 2013, although it remained unsolved. See also Weber, Bodo (2013), "Odnos medija u Federaciji BiH prema pravosuđu: Slučaj krize vlasti u (F)BiH 2012.-2013. godine", *Sveske za javno pravo*, No. 14 (forthcoming).

<sup>396</sup> "Sporazum o programskoj / projektnoj saradnji u zakonodavnoj i izvršnoj vlasti u BiH 2012.-2014.", *Dnevni Avaz*, 16 November 2012, pp. 10-11.

### 7.3 CITIZENS CAUGHT IN DESPAIR

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The citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina have mostly been spectators and consumers of this very specific relationship between the EU and domestic political parties. This 'theatre' left them increasingly confused and desperate, as public opinion polls conducted in the country over the years amply demonstrate. Ever since the middle of the previous decade, surveys indicate a constant, overwhelming support by BiH citizens for the country's EU perspective. Numbers vary between different polls and years, but pro-European sentiments range between 60 and over 80%, and seems to have generally risen in time. Hopes connected with the entry into the EU are identical throughout BiH – more jobs, the fight against corruption and the strengthening of the rule of law.

Support for EU membership is the lowest in the RS, where about a third of the citizens are not in favour of EU integration. The conflicting political messages sent out by the entity's leadership and never seriously countered by the EU – for example, that a breakup of the Bosnian state is feasible, that the RS authorities' policy is promoting EU integration – are arguably reflected in the constant overwhelming support of the RS citizenry for the entity's secession from Bosnia. The gap between citizens' interests as reflected in various opinion polls and the blockage of the country's EU path due to political parties' poor performance transpires in the surveys conducted in recent years through a general mood of despair and depression. BiH citizens from all over the country have a very negative attitude about the political elites as a whole, and an increasingly pessimistic view of their country's future. Thus, for example, in opinion polls conducted in 2011-12 around a third of those interviewed saw the country closer to a new conflict than to the EU.<sup>397</sup>

Unlike other neighbouring countries, Bosnia-Herzegovina has not seen any real progress in EU-integration in recent years. In fact, that process currently remains completely blocked. The efforts of the international community to complete the postwar state building and democratisation of BiH and handover responsibility for reforms in the EU integration framework into the hands of the domestic political elites, have essentially led Bosnia back into political conflict, nationalistic rhetoric and the deepest crisis of politics and state institutions since the end of the war.

The lack of political will within the European Union to face and fix the unintended consequences of this ill-designed transition in BiH established a very specific relationship between the Union on the one side and the country's political parties on the other. Since the EU (and the West in general) did not confront the return of nationalist rhetoric as well as the attacks on the integrity of the state of BiH and its most important institutions, political parties and its leaders exploited the emerging vacuum in order to undermine existing rules of the political and institutional 'game'. This process started with Milorad Dodik and his ruling SNSD in the RS, but gradually spread to the Federation and the rest of the political parties in the country, generating a rules-free-type of environment. As the EU responded neither with clear and adequate actions, nor with strong messages, a paradox came about in which those rolling back democratic achievements and embracing a nationalistic discourse, presented themselves and their actions as pro-European and pro-EU integration. Dodik's EU integration *à la carte* and the 2012 SNSD-SDP agreement are prime examples of that ironic situation.

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<sup>397</sup> Data taken from Foreign Policy Initiative (2012), "BiH public opinion on the EU Integration Processes 2009-2012", available at: [http://www.vpi.ba/upload/documents/eng/BiH\\_Public\\_Opinion\\_on\\_the\\_EU\\_integration\\_process\\_2009-2012.pdf](http://www.vpi.ba/upload/documents/eng/BiH_Public_Opinion_on_the_EU_integration_process_2009-2012.pdf); Gallup Balkan Monitor 2008-10 Survey Reports, available at: <http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/index.php/reports>; Public polls (2008-2013), Directorate for European Integration in BiH, available at: [http://www.dei.gov.ba/dei/media\\_servis/istrazivanje/default.aspx?id=1905&langTag=bsBA&template\\_id=120&pageInd ex=1](http://www.dei.gov.ba/dei/media_servis/istrazivanje/default.aspx?id=1905&langTag=bsBA&template_id=120&pageInd ex=1), all last accessed on: 15 December 2013.

And the quality of democracy, political pluralism and the rule of law were not the only victims; the economic and social conditions in the country have been equally harmed by the party leaders and their strategies. Party politics became increasingly more disassociated from reality on the ground, and gradually more unresponsive to the needs and basic interests of Bosnia-Herzegovina's citizens – a vast majority of whom still back the country's EU perspective.

The violent protests that broke out in large parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina on 7 February 2014 took the international public by surprise. Yet they are a direct consequence of the political and institutional line-up that emerged in recent years. Although the protests were social in nature, they were first and foremost the expression of people's frustration with their political leaders and distrust that existing institutions can solve the country's pressing problems. At the same time, the absence of any reference in the protests to the EU as an actor that could be called upon to help BiH, signals the public's disenchantment with the Unions' performance vis-à-vis the political elites in the country.<sup>398</sup>

Given this widespread popular disenchantment with the EU's approach towards Bosnia-Herzegovina, several recommendations seem in order. First, the Union should recognise the very specific and serious challenge that BiH represents for the EU's integration policy and develop the political will to effectively deal with it. Second, the EU should return to a policy of strict conditionality, laying out a roadmap for reforms that can turn BiH into a functioning state. Such conditions should define what the country needs to do before it can enter the Union, while at the same time allowing room of manoeuvre to national political and social actors in finding their own way through the 'to do' list. Third, EU representatives should send clear messages to domestic political actors who deviate from the reform path and not shy away from naming and shaming those politicians who jeopardise Bosnia's European transformation. Finally, the EU should not only encourage more strongly domestic political actors to engage in a proper communication campaign about the costs, benefits and conditions for EU membership but should also more directly work and link with the country's citizens as vital partners in the integration effort. The Union's representatives, alongside national political elites, need to spell out to citizens the added value of joining the EU, the necessary reforms in view of accession and the implications of non-compliance with the conditionality for membership.

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<sup>398</sup> For a more detailed analysis and interpretation of the social protests see: Bassuener, Kurt and Weber, Bodo (2014), "EU policies boomerang: Bosnia and Herzegovina's social unrest", *DPC Policy Brief*, Berlin-Sarajevo, available at: <http://democratizationpolicy.org/pdf/briefs/DPC%20Policy%20Brief%20Bosnia-Herzegovina%27s%20Social%20Unrest.pdf>, last accessed on 25 April 2014.



## CONCLUSIONS

**BY CORINA STRATULAT**

The democratisation of the Balkans is the focal point of the EU's engagement in the region and a *sine qua non* condition for the Balkan countries' accession to the Union. Ever since the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, when the member states offered their unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Balkans, the enlargement process has put a high premium on transforming the aspiring countries of the region into democracies.

A decade or so later, the Balkan countries are all recognised as democratic regimes and the status of democracy, as the only legitimate and desirable form of government, is uncontested by their political elites and citizens.<sup>399</sup> Yet for all these good news, the different shades of democracy in practice throughout the region – as captured by the *Freedom House* and *Bertelsmann Transformation Index* – tarnish the Balkan democracy's balance sheet and call into question the EU's model of democracy promotion through integration.

The cornerstone of the EU's democratic conditionality for the region make for apt ambitions: the introduction of free and fair elections, the adoption of popular rights, and the protection of these certified freedoms and liberties through an effective rule of law system. The EU's understanding of democracy in these particular terms is reflected in the Copenhagen political criteria that all Balkan countries must fulfil before they can hope to join the Union, and it is also reinforced by the European Commission's 'new approach' to enlargement. But where does this strategy of enacting and enforcing EU-compatible norms and standards – democratic as they might be – leave party politics? In short: largely unaccounted for.

To be sure, the EU is ill equipped to make room for political parties on its already (over)loaded democratic agenda in the Balkans. There is yet no democratic *acquis* inside the Union – let alone laws dealing explicitly with political parties – that the Commission could bring into play for the aspiring countries of the region. Nor are there commonly agreed yardsticks or examples of best practice among the member states for democratic party

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<sup>399</sup> See Krastev, Ivan (2011), "Democracy and dissatisfaction", *Journal of Globalization Studies*, Volume 2, Number 1, pp. 22–31, especially p. 23.

development and interaction that Brussels' executive could transpose in the Balkans. And resources to sponsor potentially new initiatives and/or policies in this field are increasingly limited in times of crisis. Small wonder then that the situation of parties in the region is not systematically addressed by the membership conditionality, even if this could provide the best possible evidence of the nature of the Balkan regimes.

To say that party politics is a hot potato for the Union is not to suggest that it is unaffected by the EU integration process. While involvement in domestic politics of the aspiring Balkan countries may not have been in the Commission's intention – or indeed, mandate – through its demands and incentives put forward at different stages to individual EU-hopefuls, 'Brussels' did become an intervening factor, influencing inter-party relations as well as party links to electorates. This influence has been by and large positive but, in the absence of a fully-fledged strategy, the EU's piecemeal approach to party government has on occasion either overlooked crucial aspects or took steps that have negative implications for the democratic project in the Balkans.

This is all in spite of the fact that the EU is not a novice in democratisation via integration. For example, its Central and Eastern European enlargement rounds in 2004 and 2007 supplied various political lessons (especially in regard to good governance practices) – many of which the Union learned and incorporated into its enhanced conditionality for the Balkans. Still, past observations about the interplay between national party politics and EU integration have arguably not received due attention in the process of upgrading the policy. Four such observations, verified in previous analyses of the EU-15 and CEE countries, were presented in the introduction to this paper, as baseline for the subsequent chapters on Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. They refer to the impact of integration on domestic politics in light of (1) parties' proximity to power; (2) office seeking and coalition building; (3) party-society links; and (4) the time-scale until EU entry.

So, according to the case studies covered, does the experience of political parties 'East' and 'West' find resonance also in the Balkan context?

### **(1) Protest-based party Euroscepticism**

It was first suggested that office tenure is likely to have a moderating effect on parties' rhetoric on 'Europe', while being in opposition – and even more so, on the political fringes – can facilitate the espousal of a critical EU stance. With the overwhelming majority of parties in the Balkans – irrespective of their position in the party system – declaring support to the goal of European integration, this argument seems *prima facie* of little relevance in the region.

However, the Serbian and Albanian case studies revealed examples of Balkan political parties that fit the profile sketched for peripheral parties elsewhere in the EU. For instance, the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) is the only anti-EU party in the country and it is clearly marginalised by its

counterparts on those grounds. The calls of the party for the severance of ties with the Union – primarily due to the US/EU-sponsored process that led to the recognition of Kosovo – might help to set it aside from its mainstream competitors but it also serves to explain its location on the flanks of the Serbian party system.

Similarly, the discourse and initiatives of the Red and Black Movement (RBM) in Albania, promoting the unification of all Albanians in the region into one state, are both at odds with European principles, as well as largely responsible for the party's domestic political isolation.

Additionally, much like in the rest of Europe, the government or opposition status does mediate Balkan political parties' reactions towards integration when assessed through the prism of the membership conditionality (including, most notably, the requirements of full cooperation with the ICTY and normalisation of relations with neighbouring countries), as well as the Commission's annual Progress Reports on the EU-aspirants in the region.

Instances of unpopular demands from Brussels being instrumentalised by opposition parties as a means to criticise the Union and stake out a clearer stance against the government (often by accusing it of acting against the national interest) have been documented, for example, in the cases of Croatia and Serbia. The Croatian Democratic Union's firm stance before 2003, while on the opposition benches, against the EU's request for the arrest and extradition to The Hague of Croatian war-criminal indictees, is evocative in this sense. Especially since the party took a 'U-turn' on the subject once in government, starting to facilitate the capture of fugitives and thus helping Croatia to make important strides forward towards integration.

Similarly, the Serbian DSS and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) initially attacked their governments in the early 2000s for compliance with the ICTY condition only to have a 'change of heart' on this issue once they gained office, ultimately lending support to Serbia's efforts to fulfil this requirement.

Furthermore, the chapters on Montenegro and Albania showed how specific reforms asked by 'Brussels' have opened space for political 'blackmailing'. Such was the case when the Montenegrin opposition parties asked for concessions from the government on largely unrelated policy areas in exchange for their support to the electoral law that was conditioning the country's opening of accession negotiations with the Union. Or when the Albanian Socialist Party (SP) – in opposition at the time – refused to vote on legislation tied to Albania's chances of becoming a candidate country (like the reforms of the judiciary, public administration and parliamentary statute) over disagreements regarding the outcome of the 2009 general elections.

In addition, all case studies uncovered marked differences in the way the governing and opposition parties interpret the Commission's Progress

Reports. As a general rule, and similarly to the standard practice noticed in previous rounds of enlargement, throughout the region, governments try to put a positive spin on the reviews received from Brussels and to book recognised progress as their own merit. Conversely, parties in opposition normally tend to downplay the role of the ruling parties in any achievements, and to shine a bright spotlight on the less positive comments made by the Commission about their country's reform efforts (or lack thereof).

On this point however, an interesting recent development noted, for example, in the chapters on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (for 2011) and Albania (for 2013), is that governing parties themselves (that is, the Internal Democratic Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for Macedonian Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the Albanian SP) evaluated the Progress Reports as overtly critical. Their reactions were arguably prompted by their interpretation that the countries' integration paths are being obstructed by hurdles – the name dispute with Greece and internal EU dynamics, respectively – which have little to do with their actual record on the EU agenda. This type of responses could increase in the future if the enlargement process continues to be held hostage by outstanding disputes or by random preoccupations on behalf of the member states. In turn, this might not bode well for the reform momentum if the commitment of governments in the region to the integration process weakens under the perception of changeable considerations for progress or an apparent absence of 'promised rewards'.

**KEEP TO SET  
PROCEDURES  
& PROMISES**

## **(2) The European Union and inter-party relations**

Second, it was argued that the parties' efforts to gain office and appeal to prospective coalition partners might translate into a softening of anti-EU party sentiment and, *vice versa*, periods of exclusion from power can strengthen Eurosceptic tendencies within parties.

The account provided in the Croatian case study on the internal transformation undertaken by the HZD between 2000-2003 demonstrates the impact that the EU can have on the identity of a party. The fact that the HZD shed its hard-line stance on the cooperation with the ICTY and refugee return issues, and started to project a pro-EU image, was described by the author of the chapter as a pragmatic decision to cultivate the favour of the EU, precisely with the intention of eliminating any potential external veto on the party's inclusion in government. The move paid off as the more EU-compliant HZD seized office in 2003. And the reverse might also hold true as post-2011 elections – which the HDZ lost – the party seems to fall back on Tuđman's dogmas and neo-fascist discourses, even if it is still premature to properly qualify these tendencies or assess their prospective impact.

By the same token, the fragmentation of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) in 2008, when the majority of party members broke ranks with the minority fraction of ultra-nationalists and went on to form a new, pro-European party – the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) – was also triggered by strategic competitive considerations. As the Serbian case study explains, the SNS came

to the realisation that the SRS's strong anti-EU rhetoric was preventing the party from gaining executive power, despite its consistent electoral success at the polls. Thus, the SNS arrived at the conclusion that if it wanted to participate in government and start being perceived as a benevolent coalition partner by the ruling parties, it needed to abandon its staunch opposition to European conditions and reforms, including with respect to the ICTY and Kosovo issues. And the same type of office aspirations also motivated the gradual makeover of the formerly EU-hostile SPS into a party devoted to EU membership – and thus 'coalitionable'. In both cases, the European rebranding of the parties proved a successful adaptation to present-day political realities in Serbia, which are defined by the goal of EU integration, given that both their domestic political allies and the Union embraced it.

Building a culture of consensus on the strategic objective of EU integration across the main political parties can certainly give credibility to a country's membership bid and can enable swift domestic progress with necessary but often costly reforms. This is arguably why the Commission's Enlargement Strategy for 2013-2014 insists on it. The National Committee for Monitoring the Accession Negotiations of the Republic of Croatia – an example of successful efforts to bridge the government-opposition divide on the European question – is often quoted for its positive contribution to the country's EU accession in July last year.

Yet it is also Croatia that offers some of the most vivid clues about the potentially adverse effects of depoliticisation by means of broad-based party consensus on the desirability of EU membership. As the Croatian case study reveals, despite being one of Europe's most Eurosceptic societies, today, Croatia no longer has even one single Eurosceptic party. This begs some important questions pertinent to all Balkan polities: if European integration is shielded from the cut and thrust of political debate, who represents the more sceptical voters on the subject? And if all political elites are 'believers' or silent critics, who is left to entertain a realistic discussion about the costs and benefits of joining the Union? How can democracy thrive in the absence of clashing arguments that give voice to the diversity of views in the electorate?

To be sure, the leverage of the EU has not always worked on inter-party relations in the Balkans, even when the Union explicitly attempted to instigate change. For instance, the case study on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia revealed how the Union repeatedly assumed the role of 'broker' in the recurring episodes of parliamentary boycott initiated by at least one of the main political party in the country at some point or another. However, the EU has so far failed to inculcate respect for the principle of 'political dialogue' in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; just recently, opposition MPs again refused to participate in the workings of the parliament in Skopje, this time because they disputed the legitimacy of the April general election results, which they claim it was defrauded.

The EU also seems to have been unsuccessful at setting and enforcing boundaries of political acceptability in the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina,

**BRING  
POLITICS  
BACK IN**

where ruling political elites have still not given up on inflammatory rhetoric and state-subverting policies, despite their avowed commitment to European integration. The puzzling aspect highlighted by the Bosnian chapter is not only that such party political dynamics in the country are met with little criticism from the Union but also that, routinely (see, for example, the agreement between the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD)), they are portrayed in EU-integration terms. This type of associations, which so far Brussels has not properly and openly denounced, undermines EU's standards because it sends the wrong message both to domestic political actors (who can start thinking that they can get away with breaking rules) and to the public (which get confused about the substance of the membership conditionality and about the Union's support for phony Europhile politicians).

**RED LINES  
SHOULD  
REMAIN RED**

In addition, the perpetual challenges faced by the EU in trying to reduce the divide between the two main Albanian political parties – the SP and the Democratic Party (DP) – speaks volumes in this case study about the limits of the Union's influence on domestic party politics. In fact, the Albanian chapter illustrates how, by prioritising political dialogue and consensus, the EU has overlooked the content and implications of certain cross-party agreements in the country. For example, the constitutional changes adopted in 2008 were hailed by the EU as a major breakthrough in Albanian party relations but they also resulted in a higher threshold for entry into the parliament, thus putting smaller parties at electoral disadvantage. In other words, the longer-term consequences of policies that received the seal of approval from Brussels were not properly considered, despite their negative bearing on party competition. This is counterproductive both for aspiring countries and the Union if laws need to be revised upon adoption or have undesirable spillover effects for the quality of national democracy.

**THINK OF  
LONG-TERM  
IMPACT**

What appears to be the common denominator in these three Balkan aspirants abovementioned – beyond the fact that they seem to lurch from one political crisis to another without the EU being able (or willing) to help reverse the trend – is that they are all at some distance from the Union's doorsteps, and their fading prospect of advancing swiftly towards accession is causing the process to lose traction in each case. Put on the back burner, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania have already experienced – to various extents and in different ways – wear and tear to their domestic situation and, in turn, the lack of progress – or outright back paddling on reforms in some cases – is not likely to help them move forward on the EU track. Therefore, it is high time to break this vicious circle, and the EU should probably show the way in this regard with some fresh and more effective approaches to these countries.

**DO NOT LEAVE  
COUNTRIES IN  
LIMBO**

Last but certainly not least, the Union's political conditionality seems to have a blind spot when it comes to the consolidation of political power in a few hands. The case of Montenegro is exceptional in the region for it is the only Balkan country where one major party – the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) – has held office uninterruptedly since 1991, albeit

occasionally in coalition with smaller allies. Without a *de facto* alternation in government and in the absence of any viable opposition forces, the value of democratic elections is seriously called into question, especially in a country that is so advanced in the process of EU integration. And similar dilemmas have emerged more recently also in regard to the Serbian Progressive Party, under the leadership of Aleksandar Vucic, which stands unrivalled in the domestic political arena and also controls the media in the country. Such cases should give rise to feelings of *déjà vu* (think Hungary and its Prime Minister Viktor Orban who morphed over the years into an advocate of illiberal democracy<sup>400</sup>), and should prompt the European Commission to insist on the existence of meaningful political opposition as on any other formal accession requirement.

**MEANINGFUL  
POLITICAL  
OPPOSITION  
MATTERS**

### **(3) European integration 'lost in translation'**

The third observation referred to the disconnect between political parties and voters concerning European attitudes, whereby public opinion on 'Europe' is not mirrored in the political choices offered by elites in the member states. The situation is little different in the Balkans, though the picture is arguably more complex. In the Croatian and Serbian case studies, the authors argued that the tough line of the EU's political conditionality has provoked public consternation and has led to a steady decline in popular support for membership. However, people's disenchantment with the conditions entailed by the integration process has not dented the Croatian and Serbian parties' determination to comply with the politically charged demands made by 'Brussels' (like the full cooperation with the ICTY, normalisation of relations between Belgrade-Pristina, refugees return, and so on).

In fact, as a side remark but important point highlighted here by the chapters on Croatia and Serbia, the EU has focused disproportionately on political conditionality at the expense of progress on structural reforms. This was most recently demonstrated in the case of Serbia, which received in December 2013 the green light for the start of accession negotiations with the Union in spite of the fact that the country was nowhere close to being a functioning market economy or up to scratch with the work on the other Copenhagen criteria (according to the Commission's Progress Report from October 2013). While it is true that political issues need to be sorted out prior to accession, the promise of stability and prosperity entailed by the European perspective should not be forgotten, not least because it is the best way to demonstrate the Union's added value on the ground to the people of the Balkan countries.

**PUSH FOR  
STRUCTURAL  
REFORMS**

Conversely, the Montenegrin, Albanian and Bosnian chapters showed that the European perspective still enjoys massive support among the population, and voters' positive views on 'Europe' mirror those of their political leaders. However, this apparent synchrony should be taken with a grain of salt as, according to surveys, people's pro-EU attitudes in these

<sup>400</sup> Orban announced his plans for Hungary to break with liberal democracy in a speech held on 30 July 2014 at Băile Tuşnad, Romania, available in English at: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp>, last accessed on: 30 August 2014.

countries are based neither on a realistic assessment of the costs/benefits of integration nor on knowledge about the EU itself. Moreover, the disparity between talk and achievement at the level of political elites in these particular cases, throws into doubt parties' self-confessed commitment to EU accession. In addition, the fact that polls repeatedly expose low levels of public trust in politicians in these countries is a clear sign that the harmonious European attitudes of their citizens and parties is not an expression of functioning political representation but more likely a mere coincidence, as both sides support integration for different reasons and often with various degrees of sincerity.

Then the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is somewhat of an outlier insofar as the gap between people and parties is also narrowing in this country, albeit on grounds of mutual dissatisfaction with the integration process and because of a very specific reason: generalised frustration with the endless prolongation of the candidacy period because of the name dispute with Greece. As a result of this impasse, public opinion (and trust) on the EU has begun to turn sour in recent years, just as Skopje's leadership has become more openly critical about the Union and less focused on the (sustainability) of reforms; even if the national goal of membership has not been abandoned. Yet again, while the country's citizens and their representatives might share the source of their fading enthusiasm about 'Europe', there are no compelling reasons to assess this symmetry of views as telling of a robust party-society link, especially since public trust in political parties is just as feeble here as elsewhere in the Balkans.

Indeed, the broken relationship between citizens and their political representatives in the region is one consistent and problematic finding of all the case studies included in this paper. Throughout the Balkans, popular trust in political parties and other democratic institutions is drastically low; party membership and identification are dwindling; people are voting in fewer numbers and with less feeling of partisanship; citizens' perceptions of the terms and benefits of EU membership are out of sync with those of political elites, as well as oftentimes based on insufficient information and/or awareness; and there is an acute sense that voters can no longer influence the policies of their governments. As parties become less engaged in society, they find it ever more difficult to legitimise their governance and this opens up space both for popular protest and for radical political mobilisation.

And so, behind a shell of democratic institutions set up in the Balkans, politicians look self-interested and more responsive to the preferences of the EU than to those of their electorates. This is largely due to the fact that, despite the emphasis laid in recent years by the Commission on the role of civil society, parliaments and inclusive processes – the logic of EU's democracy-building in the region continues to be driven by a strong dose of technocratic thinking: "Strengthening democratic institutions is seen mostly as a legal and bureaucratic challenge. Policy deliberations [...] are not considered terribly important – the experts already know [...] best."<sup>401</sup> This

**FOCUS ON  
GOVERNMENT-  
CITIZENS LINK**

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<sup>401</sup> Krastev, Ivan (2002), "The Balkans: democracy without choices", *Journal of democracy*, Volume 13, Number 3, pp. 39-53, quote from p. 44.



reinforces the negative perception of European integration as an elite-driven project and makes people unable to hold their politicians accountable. In these circumstances of increased frustration with a political process whose democratic credentials leave much to be desired, the recent violent protests in Bosnia-Herzegovina are hardly unexpected – what might be surprising is that it took them so long to ‘burst out’.

Hence, more still should be done to strengthen the capacities of individual political parties, national parliaments and civil society actors in the region so that they can better influence the reform agenda and politicise ‘Europe’ in their domestic political arenas. Such support should be offered not just by European political foundations or via the European Parliament but should engage a greater variety of actors and donors to increase the scope of the assistance as well as to dilute its politically ideological bias. In addition, investments should focus on boosting political party activism and citizens’ engagement with political life in their countries. And any initiatives should simultaneously target the local, regional and national level of politics.

#### **(4) Does distance also make the heart grow fonder?**

The fourth and final observation suggested that the European attitudes of parties and electorates in the aspiring countries could be a function of the time-scale until EU accession, insofar as the articulation of concerns about integration tends to intensify as countries get closer to the Union. Indeed, this seems to hold true at the ‘extremities’ of the integration queue in the Balkans: Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina – ‘farthest’ away from membership – are the most pro-European countries in the region, while the case studies of Croatia and Serbia revealed an increase in public Euroscepticism as these countries advanced towards accession. However, in Montenegro, the mood continues to be highly positive about integration, regardless of the country’s forerunner status. A documented lack of public awareness about the implications of Montenegro’s EU membership could *inter alia* help to explain this finding. By contrast, hostility towards ‘Europe’ seems to be growing in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as the country remains stuck ‘midway’ in the integration process by its name conundrum with Greece.

Given the EU’s more cautious approach to enlargement and the ensuing of longer timeframes for accession of the countries in the region, the Commission will probably have to resort (again) in the future to ingenious tactics (like the High Level Dialogue with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) in order to engage constructively the Balkan aspirants while they await and ponder EU membership in the Union’s ‘antechamber’ for an extended period. The on-going crisis adds to this challenge because it fuels enlargement fatigue in the member states and ‘Euro-realism’ in the Balkans. As the prospect of a bright future inside the Union is no longer taken at face value, the EU is hard pressed to develop a more sensible membership narrative that can still be seen to be worth the hassle of the rigorous and lengthy integration process by the aspiring countries of the region.

**INVEST IN  
PARTY  
DEVELOPMENT  
AND PARTY  
ACTIVISM**

**POST-CRISIS  
ENLARGEMENT  
NARRATIVE  
NEEDED**

### **Why does it ultimately matter?**

Moving beyond the specific insights and recommendations that emerged from deconstructing the Balkan case studies by reference to the experience of the EU-15 and Central and Eastern European countries, two main overall conclusions are worth emphasising regarding party politics.

First, the European integration process has important implications for national parties and party systems in the aspiring countries of the region, even if for all intents and purposes party politics may fall outside the scope of the formal membership conditionality. This means that the EU should duly break the taboo and should develop a more systematic approach to the democratic party governments in the region in order to minimise the potential ‘collateral damage’ of its presently *ad-hoc* policy on this issue. While the European Parliament, different European political foundations, and other bodies (such as the Committee of the Regions) and donors can and should play a role in capacity building, when it comes to the scaffold of democratic party politics, the policy should be *EU-ised*. That is to say that the European Commission – from its authoritative and less politically-coloured position in the integration process – should devise and monitor standards of democratic performance for political parties and party systems in the aspiring countries. Looking more closely at how parties function and interact does not only make democratic sense, it is also good for the people, because the citizens are the ones who ultimately pay the price for a political tragedy or – conversely – reap the benefits of a successful political performance. Building democratic party governments in the region is therefore an integral part of transforming enlargement into a ‘people-first’ policy<sup>402</sup>.

Second, all the case studies have demonstrated that there is striking similarity between the ‘West’, ‘East’ and the Balkans, to the extent that in all these places, national political parties respond to the challenge of integration under analogous competitive pressures arising from inter-party relations and less so from electorates. In fact, the gap between citizens and their political representatives has been one of the most salient and disconcerting findings of this paper since it does not serve the cause of democracy as government by, of and for the people. Yet this is a phenomenon that is also witnessed inside the Union and which is effectively imported/fostered in all these countries by the ‘executive/technocratic bias’ of the European integration process. On the one hand, this flies in the face of all attempts to insist on the concept of Balkan particularism – for better or for worse, there is growing convergence across ‘Europe’ with regard to democratic party politics vis-à-vis EU integration. On the other hand, this “points to the unsettling conclusion that what we are seeing is a [metastasis of the] crisis of democracy rather than a problem of not-yet-completed democratisation”<sup>403</sup> in the Balkans. This does not make for any easier solutions but it does entail that dealing with the democratic ills in the Balkans, the EU also works to fix its ‘own’ European democracy.

<sup>402</sup> Balfour and Stratulat (2013), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>403</sup> Krastev (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 40.

**EU-ise PARTY  
POLITICS**

**A QUESTION OF  
EUROPEAN NOT  
JUST BALKAN  
DEMOCRACY**