

SERBIA'S EU PATH: BEYOND THE COMPLEXITY OF AN INSTITUTIONAL PROCESS

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Abstract

This study seeks to bring a new understanding of Serbia's European integration and the implications for its external policy in the context of the current geopolitical decisions taken in the region. The aim is to emphasize the complexity of the enlargement process, as well as the difficulties created by Kosovo's decision to declare independence (2008). The first section focuses on the analysis of the consequences of ethnic and / or interstate conflicts from the '90s, in order to underline the importance of the wars for the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the accession process and their role in determining the further institutional steps of Serbia. The second section is dedicated to describing Serbia's rapprochement with the EU and its future steps towards joining the organization. The main hypothesis is that Serbia's accession process is no different from that of former candidates. Nevertheless, the weight of the wars for the disintegration of Yugoslavia and Kosovo's decision will play an important role in the negotiation process. The last section is dedicated to a case study on Kosovo, the decision of declaring its independence still representing a source of diplomatic disputes between Serbia and the EU. In order to give a better understanding of the implications of this decision, an analysis of the main challenges is conducted within this section. The analysis focuses on several topics: the reaction of the five EU opponents to the decision, the future of the Albania-Kosovo relation, the reaction of the main EU institutions and the development of a "Kosovo precedent".

Keywords

Diplomacy; Enlargement; European Union; Kosovo; Serbia

1. INTRODUCTION

"A day will come when you France, you Russia, you Italy, you England, you Germany, you all, nations of the continent, without losing your distinct qualities and your glorious individuality, will be merged closely within a superior unit and you will form the European brotherhood" (Ames Mead 1904, 10). This was, in 1849, a glimpse into the future as seen by French writer Victor Hugo. The necessity of unity in diversity was also alive in the minds of Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer, the founders of the European Union (EU) when they decided to create an international organization bringing together European states on their way to post-war reconstruction.

Forty-four years later, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), torn and isolated by a civil war, decided to break the challenges put by the Belgrade authorities (through the decision to create a single state for all Serb inhabitants of the former Yugoslavia) and start on the path of European integration. The aim of this paper is to bring a new understanding of the process of European integration of Serbia and how Serbia managed to evolve from an isolated country of Europe to a candidate in the EU's enlargement process.

The first section of this paper aims at analysing the impact of the 1974 constitutional reforms, political relations within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after Marshal Tito's death and the process of disintegration of the Yugoslav state in the early 90s. It is also important to emphasize the role of 1991-1999 inter-ethnic conflicts, as a contributing factor in the relation between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and the EU and Serbia's accession process. Although this is just a historical overview, it is important to emphasize the main events that conducted to the isolation of Serbia for almost a decade.

The next section will focus on the post-Milošević era, as Serbia worked to fulfil its commitments to international courts (mainly the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia). Nevertheless, the main focus of the analysis is Serbia's capacity to fulfil its commitments as a future EU member state (as specified by the Copenhagen Criteria). The main analysis in this section concerns the steps taken by Serbia in the period 2000-2015, from the initiation of pre-accession until the start of the negotiation of the *acquis* chapters. I will also analyse the progress made by Belgrade since 2009 (when Serbia submitted its official application for EU membership) and finished in 2014 (the beginning of negotiations). Finally, I will provide a review of the

following stages (from the evaluation and negotiation of the 35 *acquis* chapters until the completion of negotiations) and follow the medium term steps that Serbia and the EU will have to follow until the conclusion of the accession process (from obtaining consent from the Commission, EU Council and European Parliament until the completion, signing and ratification of the EU Accession Treaty).

In the last section, I propose an analysis on the impact that the Kosovo's declaration of independence had and continues to have on Serbia-EU relations and the process of finding peace in the Western Balkans (and not only). The aim is to identify the role / impact that the province's declaration of independence had on Serbia-EU relationship, in terms of how the main actors (mainly UN Security Council members) reacted. It is important to determine the source of the distrust shown by some EU member states with regard to Kosovo's decision and how those states (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) can be persuaded to accept the geopolitical changes in the region. The development of a so-called "Kosovo precedent" is now a primary focus of security policy in the region, in the context of the ongoing events in Ukraine. This situation will also be analysed highlighting the differences between Kosovo and Crimea and the way the situation contradicts the idea of a "Kosovo precedent" in International Relations theory.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this project I follow a constructivist design, which aims to offer a better understanding to the development of post-war Serbia as an independent state, that wishes to fulfil its obligations to the international community and the European Union as part of the accession negotiations.

It is also essential to follow the institutional developments that occurred after the wars for the disintegration of Yugoslavia. As Serbia (and not only) carries the weight of war actions, it is important to demonstrate that international obligations with regards to the targeted countries must also be fulfilled. In this particular case I selected a historical study in order to underline the developments that followed the reorganization of the party system and the belligerent actions taken by FRY (as successor of the socialist federation) in neighbouring countries.

Following the historical overview, a chronological timeline is established in order to explain the institutional and legal steps taken by Serbia

in the process of becoming candidate to accession, this part emphasizing not only the institutional challenges but also the geopolitical ones. The goal is to demonstrate the complexity of the accession process when political (will and interests of local and European leaders) and geopolitical (regional insecurity) factors intervene.

Finally, a case study on Kosovo is presented, seeking to underline the main developments that followed the declaration of independence and the implications of that event. The case study is itself divided into several categories: the events that preceded the declaration of independence (using a historical study); the international reaction and influence on the structure and role of the UN Security Council; the reaction of the five contesting EU member states; the role of EU institutions in the process of independence recognition and EU accession; Albania's role in Kosovo's decision and the prospects of a "Greater Albania" in the near future; the impact on current international issues with emphases on the development of a "Kosovo precedent" (using a comparative study in which Crimea and the current events in Ukraine are taken into consideration). This multilevel analysis aims at establishing the facts and explaining the complexity surrounding Kosovo's actual status its role in the international community.

3. THE WARS FOR THE DISINTEGRATION OF YUGOSLAVIA: INFLUENCE AND IMPLICATIONS

The disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) represented the beginning of a black period in the recent history the Serbian state (and not only). After the reorganization of the party system (1990), the ex-communists failed in their attempt to gain power. Most governments had taken up a nationalist platform, ensuring the public that national interests will be respected and protected. Following these results, SR Croatia, SR Slovenia and SR Macedonia suggested (in autumn 1990) the transformation of the SFRY into an improved federation, consisting of six republics that would enjoy greater local power. Slobodan Milošević rejected the proposal of the three republics, stating that Serbs have the same right of self-determination as Slovenians or Croats. Also, Serbian politicians expressed their concerns about the constitutional changes brought by Croats – they involved, among others, that Serbs from Croatia had to be removed from

the list of nations – *narod* – and included in the list of the minorities – *narodi i manjine* (Bokovoy, Irvine and Lilly 1997, 27-28).

Between 1990 and 1991, three of the constituent republics of SFRY (Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia) organized independence referendums. The overwhelming results in all three countries conducted to their declarations of independence. As such, the three countries were recognized as independent by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC Resolutions 753/1992, 754/1992 and 817/1993).

The problem of Bosnia-Herzegovina was by far the trickiest in terms of geopolitical consequences for the Bosnian state and the region. The republic, located in the geographical centre of the socialist federation, was a genuine ethnic puzzle (Council of Europe 1991, 3)¹. This led to tensions related to the membership of each region (or even urban/rural entity) to a political entity. The main tool used throughout the indoctrination campaigns was the media: in Serbia, media outlets were promoting the inclusion of Bosnia-Herzegovina in a new Yugoslav union based on democratic governance. This campaign was never taken into account in Bosnia (Burg and Shoup 1999, 102). In January 1992, the Serbian Legislature of Bosnia proclaimed a Serb republic of Bosnia, separated from the rest of the country (the region took the name "Republika Srpska", after the Dayton Agreement of 1995), initiating the formation of the Serbian Autonomous Regions territory of Bosnia. Between 29.02-01.03.1992, Bosnia-Herzegovina held a referendum for independence. Although turnout was much lower than in other republics, the referendum was valid (despite protests over its constitutionality) and its clear result (99.7% of the participants voted in favour of independence) allowed local authorities to declare the republic's independence on March 3rd, 1992. Bosnia-Herzegovina was admitted as a UN member on May 20th, 1992 (UNSC Resolution 755/1992).

As a result of geopolitical changes, on September 19th, 1992, the United Nations Security Council declared the cease of existence of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (UNSC Resolution 777/1992). The two remaining republics of the former communist state (Serbia and Montenegro) decided previously (on April 28th, 1992) to form a new Yugoslav state. The transformation of the former communist state was realized by adopting a new Constitution (April 27th, 1992). This meant that the new state would have been

¹ Following the 1991 census from SR Bosnia-Herzegovina, the entity's population was divided into: Muslim citizens / Bosniaks (43.5%), Serbs (31.21%) and Croats (17.4%).

composed of two republics (Serbia and Montenegro) with equal rights. Also, the act "left an open door" to eventual former republics that wanted to join them (Constitution of FRY 1992, art. 1-2).

On April 6th, 1992, with the international recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, ethnic Serbs from the newly established republic declared the independence of Republika Srpska, while triggering the siege of Sarajevo (capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina). This moment would mark the start of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995). According to data provided by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the war lasted approximately four years and claimed the lives of about 89,186 people, of which 57,992 were Muslim (Bosniaks), 19,398 Serbs and 7,543 Croats (ICTY 2010, 14-15).

One of the main consequences of the conflagration was the economic and political isolation of the FRY. This was realized through a succession of resolutions adopted by the UN in order to force the Yugoslav state to abandon the funding, support and involvement in the civil war in Bosnia and Croatia. The most important document in this regard was UN Resolution 757/1992. This document reaffirmed previous UN positions and decisions, while asking signatory nations (and all UN members) to impose severe political, economic and cultural sanctions on the FRY ensuring at the same time an increase of humanitarian aid to war-struck regions that represented FRY's targets (UNSC Resolution 757/1992, art 4-8, 17).

In 1997 the term of Serbia's President Milošević expired. Thus, he decided to run for president of FRY. Enjoying the biggest political influence in the country, Milošević succeeded, thus being appointed President of the FRY. After taking office, he gained direct control over the military and Yugoslav security which he used to target separatists in Kosovo. The first step in the new war was made by the paramilitary forces in Kosovo, united under the name of "Kosovo Liberation Army" / KLA (Reveron and Murer 2013, 68-69). Attacks committed against Yugoslav authorities stationed in the region led to an increase of Serbian conventional and paramilitary forces, which triggered a campaign of revenge against KLA sympathizers and political opponents in the region. The campaign resulted in the deaths of 1,500-2,000 KLA fighters and civilians (Human Rights Watch 2001). After diplomatic attempts to resolve the conflict failed, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervened, stating that their intervention was a "humanitarian war" (New York Times 2007). This action precipitated mass expulsions of the Albanian population of Kosovo by Serbs, while the Yugoslav forces continued the fight during the

NATO bombings. The latter were the main form of aggression against the FRY during this period; the operation lasted two months in the period March 24th - June 10th 1999, all without UN approval (Chomsky 2001). Different regions of the FRY were the targets, including the capital Belgrade. In total, NATO launched 2,300 missiles to 990 targets - mainly elements of infrastructure and communication channels (Amnesty International 2009), throwing approximately 14,000 bombs. More than 2,000 civilians were killed (including 88 children), while thousands of people were injured. Over 200,000 ethnic Serbs were forced to leave their homes in Kosovo. In Serbia, NATO attacks destroyed over 300 schools and 20 hospitals. More than 40,000 homes were either completely destroyed or suffered severe damage; in addition, 90 historic and / or architectural monuments were also destroyed (Chomsky 2001). Following the attacks, President Milošević decided to end the anti-separatist campaign and gave NATO forces permission to enter the territory of Kosovo.

The Kosovo conflict left behind almost 3,000 deaths; in 2001 a Supreme Court under UN administration concluded that "there was a systematic campaign of terror by inducing murder, rape, arson and extremely serious mistreatment" although mentioning that the Serbian people tried to remove the Albanian population, not to eliminate it (BBC News 2001). The war was put to an end by the Kumanovo Agreement (June 9th, 1999). The agreement established a cessation of hostilities between NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) and the FRY, a staged withdrawal from Kosovo by FRY forces, including the clearing of military assets (mines, booby traps) from communications lines, and use of necessary force by NATO to create a secure environment for the international civilian presence (NATO 1999, art. 1-2). Eventually, the KLA was dissolved, its members being divided between the National Liberation Army, the National Army of the Republic of Albania and Kosovo Police forces.

In addition to this, as a result of the conflict, the province of Kosovo was placed under UN protection. The international organization took political and military control over the province, in order to prevent further conflicts between the Albanian majority and Serbian authorities who led the province. The key document in this process was Resolution 1244, adopted by the United Nations Security Council on June 10th, 1999. Among its objectives: the placing of Kosovo under UN administration (process conducted by UNMIK), authorization of presence of NATO peacekeeping forces in Kosovo, the return of refugees to their homes and the continuing efforts to establish autonomy for Kosovo, using the population's will as a main instrument in the process of negotiation (UNSC Resolution 1244/1999, art. 7-11).

As a consequence of the armed wars and following trials undertaken by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, several political and military leaders were accused of war crimes. The most important trials in this regard have focused on Slobodan Milošević (died while on trial, in 2006), Radovan Karadžić (former President of Republika Srpska during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, charged by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia for crimes against non-Serb population of Bosnia) and Ratko Mladić (military leader of Serbians from Bosnia-Herzegovina, also charged by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia for crimes against non-Serb population of Bosnia). The main charges brought against the three include: genocide, persecution, crimes against humanity (extermination, murders, illegal deportations), war crimes (creating and spreading a state of terror, unlawful attacks committed against citizens, hostage taking).

The year 2000 brought significant changes in the political sphere of the FRY. On September 24th the first democratic presidential elections were organized. Five candidates registered for the scrutiny; only two were ranked as favourites, Vojislav Koštunica and incumbent President Slobodan Milošević. Following the first round, no candidate managed to obtain the majority needed to claim victory (Government of Serbia 2000). On October 10th a second round was held, in which only the two frontrunners took part. After counting the votes, it was decided that Vojislav Koštunica obtained the required majority victory: 50.24% of the votes (Election Guide 2000). The period between the two rounds was marked by the many violent demonstrations against President Milošević. The protests were fuelled by accusations of electoral fraud, censorship against media organizations and arresting of members of a political organization (B92.com 2000). Following the protests, Milošević admitted his defeat in the second round, thus ending a bleak period in the history of the young state.

4. SERBIA IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: THE ROAD TO THE EU

Until the conflict with NATO, Belgrade did not benefit from financial assistance from the US or Western European states. The only such aid came from traditional allies, Greece and Russia. After the elections in October 2000, aid coming from the EU increased, while the US embargo was gradually removed as the Yugoslav state met its obligations to the international

community (active participation in identifying and handing over of war criminals to international tribunals, and improving relations with the targeted countries of the two conflicts of the 90s).

Regarding the relationship with the EU, the Yugoslav state was virtually nonexistent on the humanitarian agenda of the organization, most of these actions being directed to states / regions targeted by the forces of the FRY in 1995-1999 (EU Commission 1995). In October 2000, the new president Vojislav Koštunica accepted the invitation made by European leaders to attend the summit in Biarritz, France (Government of Serbia 2014). At that meeting, EU leaders said that the FRY will be quickly accepted by Member States as a reliable collaborator. They also expressed their readiness to help the Yugoslav state. After the first day of the summit, Koštunica said that his participation as guest is "a confirmation that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, are and have always been in Europe" (Los Angeles Times 2000).

To show its support for the FRY, in 2000 the EU lifted the flight ban applied to the Yugoslav airspace and taxes on imports from the FRY. In November 2000, President Koštunica was invited to attend the EU-Balkans summit held in Zagreb. During the meeting, the prospect of a Stabilization and Association Process was settled, in accordance with decisions of the EU Council. It was also decided to establish a Consultative Task Force, which would allow the start of feasibility studies directed towards negotiating the necessary directives that would conduct to the implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement.

Table no. 1. Serbia's EU accession steps (2000-2014)

Period	Event
October 2000	FRY's President Vojislav Koštunica invited to the EU Summit in Biarritz (French chairmanship), FRY joins the Stabilization and Association Process.
July 2001	The "Consultative Task Force", which had the responsibility of preparing the Feasibility Study for FRY, as a prelude to negotiations on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), held its first meeting.
June 2003	The Summit in Thessaloniki confirmed the European future of states in the Western Balkans according to individual progress of each of them separately. The "regatta" principle ¹ was also adopted (Bărbulescu 2008, 71).

¹ The "regatta" principle (proposed by the Spanish delegation at the 1997 meeting of the EU Council) requires all candidate states to start accession negotiation procedures simultaneously,

October 2003	The first meeting of the "Enhanced Permanent Dialogue" was held as a substitute for the "Consultative Task Force". Preparations took place for the Feasibility Study.
June-July 2004	It became clear that a single market of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG) would not be established and that SCG would thus not be able to negotiate the economic part of SAA as one party.
December 2004	The EU adopts the "twin-track" approach according to which Montenegro and Serbia would separately negotiate the trade chapters of the SAA, while SCG would as a state jointly negotiate on the political part of the SAA (Medjiak 2004, 1-3).
October 2005	Negotiations were initialized between the European Union and SCG on concluding the SAA, which represents the first step towards EU integration.
May 2006	Due to insufficient cooperation with The Hague, negotiations with SCG called-off.
May 2006 - June 2007	Negotiations called-off. EU's reason was Serbia's unwillingness towards meeting its obligations towards the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Specifically, the EU expressed concern at Belgrade's inability to identify and capture of Ratko Mladić, the war crimes suspect (SETimes 2006).
June 2007	The negotiations on concluding the SAA between the European Union and Serbia continued (after the establishment of a new Government).
September 2007	The Agreement on Visa Facilitation and the Agreement on Readmission were signed between the European Union and the Republic of Serbia.
November 2007	The SAA between the European Union and Serbia is initiated.
April 2008	The SAA between the European Union and Serbia was signed (the EU adopted the decision not to implement the Interim Trade Agreement - TPA - signed along with the SAA).
November 2009	The Council of the European Union published the document on visa liberalization with countries of the Western Balkans.
December 2009	<i>Serbia submitted its application for EU membership.</i>
January 2010	The implementation of the TPA entered its second year, thus bringing the EU and Serbia into regulated relations.
February 2010	The Interim Trade Agreement between the European Union and Serbia came into force.
June 2010	The European Commission adopted the decision on initiating the ratification of the SAA between the European Union and Serbia.
October	The Council of Foreign Ministers of European Union Member States adopted

each state choosing its own path / tactic to follow in order to reach a final point, also common to all states.

2010	the decision to forward Serbia's application for membership to the European Commission for consideration.
January 2011	The European Parliament ratified the SAA between the EU and Serbia.
October 2011	European Commission presented its annual Enlargement Package in which it recommended that Serbia be given the status of candidate for membership in the EU. The European Commission recommends the opening of negotiations with Serbia as soon as Belgrade achieves further good progress in normalizing its relations with Kosovo (European Commission 2011).
March 2012	The European Council granted Serbia membership <i>candidate</i> status.
April 2013	The European Parliament adopted report on Serbia's progress in the EU integration.
	The European Commission recommended the start of accession talks with Serbia.
June 2013	European leaders at the meeting in Brussels decided to start accession negotiations with Serbia in January of the following year.
July 2013	EU member states and institutions completed the ratification process of the SAA.
September 2013	The Stabilisation and Association Agreement entered into force.
January 2014	The First Intergovernmental Conference was held in Brussels; the event marked the formal start of Serbia's negotiations to join the EU.

Source: EU Commission 2014

The period preceding the ratification process of the SAA was not a quiet one, as Serbian authorities encountered numerous obstacles. The most notable of these was the declaration of Kosovo's independence (February 17th, 2008), rejected by the Serbian state and its partners (among others, Russia, China, and five EU member states¹ have rejected Pristina's decision). Serbia sneeringly reacted by calling on consultations with ambassadors of countries that recognized the declaration (Economic Team for Kosovo and Metohija 2008). In Belgrade, Government dissensions sparkled on the province's decision, President Boris Tadić being forced to dissolve the Parliament and call

¹ Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain have all rejected Kosovo's declaration of independence, using as arguments either the creation a precedent that would affect local political stability or the friendly relationship they had with Serbia.

early general elections (B92.com 2008). The refusal to recognize Kosovo's decision constituted the start of another postponement of Serbia's negotiation process, the EU noting that Serbia must maintain stable (even peaceful) relationships with all its neighbours. Following Serbia's decision, in late 2008, the EU decided (with UN's approval) to send 2,000 troops (police officers, including four anti-riot units), prosecutors and judges to Kosovo, in order to ensure the respect of rule of law, democratic standards and provide support in the fight against corruption (EULEX 2014). In early 2011, the EU started talks to persuade Serbia to take part in negotiations with the aim of normalizing its relations with Kosovo (and enabling the process of negotiation). In 2008-2013, the two sides reached agreements on trade, fuel deliveries, diplomatic representation (through diplomatic liaison offices) and recognition of diplomas. However, Belgrade authorities said they will never recognize Kosovo's independence (Balkan Insight 2012).

Following two-year talks, Serbia and Kosovo reached an agreement on the proper conduct of relations between the two political entities. The Brussels Agreement, signed in April 2013 stated that the two parties shall (Office of Kosovo's Prime Minister 2013):

- establish an association of municipalities in Kosovo, inhabited mostly by ethnic Serbs. It would have a legal status; it can be dissolved only by decision of its members. Decisions would be taken by majority rule. The associations would have an obligation to ensure the development of local community members' access to education and health systems, and urban / rural planning. Other powers would be delegated by the central authorities in Kosovo.
- ensure the existence of a single police force called the Kosovo Police. All existing similar forces in the north of Kosovo would be integrated in the Kosovo Police. Members of other Serbian security forces would also take positions in the Kosovo Police;
- establish regional headquarters of Police for the four municipalities mainly populated by ethnic Serbs (North Mitrovica, Zvečan, Zubin Potok and Leposavić). The commander would be an ethnic Serb from Kosovo, nominated by the Ministry of Interior, following proposals from members of local associations;
- integrate legal authorities within the legislative framework of Kosovo. Pristina Court of Appeal would establish a panel of judges

to ensure the fair conduct of trials in municipalities mainly populated by ethnic Serbs;

- organize municipal elections in 2013, with the participation of OSCE delegations, in line with Kosovo's and international law;
- set up an implementation committee, with EU's support.

On January 21st, 2014 the first Intergovernmental Conference was held, marking the start of Serbia's accession negotiations. In an analytical report, the European Commission made a forecast on how difficult it would be able to align national policies with the EU's *acquis*. The 35 chapters were divided into several categories, based on the difficulty expected in the negotiation and alignment process. Upon preliminary analysis, the most difficulties are expected in the fields covered by chapters 23: "Judiciary and Fundamental Rights", 24: "Justice, Freedom and Security", 27: "Environment" and 35: "Other: Relation with Kosovo" (European Commission 2011, section 3.34: General Assessment).

In the second half of 2013 the screening process of 34 of the 35 chapters of the EU's *acquis* started. The first chapters submitted to the process were "Judiciary and Fundamental Rights" (25.09.2013), "Justice, Freedom and Security" (10.02.2013) and "Financial Control" (17.10.2013). The main objective of the evaluation was to identify the differences between Serbia's legislation and the EU's *acquis*. Following this analysis, the candidate must demonstrate that it is capable to accept the legislation and to iron out existing differences. Also, the candidate must state if it requires a transitional period to align with the *acquis* of the particular chapter.

The screening process begins with an explanatory evaluation: the European Commission presents the *acquis* to the candidate state; the *acquis* is divided into chapters in order to facilitate the negotiation process. The next step is a bilateral evaluation process, resulting in deciding the degree of alignment of national legislation with the EU *acquis*, while establishing the necessary reforms to align. The European Commission estimated that in the case of Serbia, this process will take about two years: September 2013-June 2015 (MFA Serbia 2014). In March 2015 the screening process of all chapters was finalized (Balkans.com 2015). Following the meetings devoted to the evaluation process, the Commission will present a report to the Member States. This report will contain benchmarks to be considered for each chapter. The opening of negotiations for each chapter for which benchmarks were established can begin only after the EU Council decides that the candidate country has met these criteria.

If the EU evaluation report contains the required benchmarks for opening negotiations, the EU Council will invite Serbia to talks, after which action plans will be presented, including measures to be taken during the process of alignment with EU legislation. As soon as the benchmarks for opening negotiations on a given chapter are met (and the recommendations are approved by the Member States), the EU Council will invite Serbia to present its position on a specific chapter (only if the level of alignment with EU's *acquis* can be presented) and the remaining alignment program; Serbian authorities can also make requests for transitional periods or derogations (where they want permanent derogation in the implementation of the *acquis* in a given area). During the negotiations with the EU, Serbia will be able to submit amendments to its negotiating position (MFA Serbia 2014, section 2).

After the evaluation process will be concluded, the European Commission will submit to the Council's Draft EU Common Position, the organization will state that either (MFA Serbia 2014, section 4):

- Serbia has reached a sufficient level of alignment with the EU's *acquis* in the field of a chapter, not requiring further negotiations on that chapter (this situation is currently specific only to the "Institutions" chapter). In this case, the chapter will be closed;
- the level of alignment with the *acquis* does not allow the temporary closure of negotiation chapters, determining the necessary benchmarks for its closing (currently, a specific situation of most chapters);
- it takes determination of temporary / intermediate benchmarks (the specific case for chapters 23, 24 and 35). After fulfilling the respective benchmarks, the chapters can be closed.

Moreover, within this document, the Serbian state can be asked to present additional information and analysis, necessary in areas for which transitional periods or derogations were requested.

Based on the Commission's proposal, the EU Council unanimously decides on opening negotiations on a given chapter, followed by the holding of an inter-governmental conference on all chapters (usually, with support from the European Council, General Affairs Council or the Foreign Affairs Council). In rare instances where there are no interim and/or closing benchmarks, a chapter can be opened and closed within the same inter-governmental conference. However, when the above-mentioned benchmarks do exist, the candidate country will continue to work on the fulfilment and will

regularly submit a progress report to the European Commission (MFA Serbia 2014, section 3).

Negotiations on a chapter are therefore opened and closed through intergovernmental conferences. If the benchmarks are met, the chapter can be declared "closed" within the conference only if the EU Member States representatives have declared their satisfaction on the progress made by Serbia. Regarding Chapters 23 ("Judiciary and Fundamental Rights"), 24 ("Justice, Freedom and Security") and 35 ("Relations with Kosovo"), Serbia will be obliged to submit monthly reports to the EU Council and the Commission on progress in those fields and to send experts to check their progress. As regards to Chapter 35, Serbia will be monitored by the European External Action Service. They will provide regular reports on progress made by both sides (Serbia and Kosovo). The EU Council can decide that negotiations on chapters must be temporarily suspended only when serious violations of the basic principles of the EU (ex. breaching the "Copenhagen criteria" or the four fundamental freedoms of the EU) are identified. The duration of negotiations will largely depend on Serbia's capacity to respect its obligations as a result of EU membership, but also the organization's willingness to admit new members (MFA Serbia 2014, section 6). Accession negotiations will be concluded once Serbia and the EU will reach an agreement on all 35 chapters included in the process, an agreement that must be confirmed by the European Council.

In October 2015, after concluding that Serbia continued to make progress as regards the political and economic criteria and acknowledging the country's need to consolidate and further sustain its economic and structural reforms agenda, including on public administration reform and economic governance, the European Commission and the European External Action Service put forward the recommendation to the Council of Ministers and the EU Member States to open negotiation of *acquis* chapter 35, regarding the relation with Kosovo (European Commission 2015a). In November of the same year, Serbia's Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić stated that by the end of the year Serbia will begin negotiations on two chapters: "Relation with Kosovo" and "Financial Control" (InSerbia 2015). On December 14th, 2015 Serbia officially began the negotiation the above mentioned *acquis* chapters, Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić stating that he expects a rapid progress of the negotiation in the field covered by chapter "Financial Control" (Government of Serbia 2015). Meanwhile, EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, announced that "in the first half of

2016 it will be possible to open chapters 23 and 24" – concerning the fields of "Judiciary and Fundamental Rights" and "Justice, Freedom and Security" (Government of Serbia 2015).

After the closure of each chapter, the Commission will report on the general situation of the negotiation process. This report will include remarks regarding the overall level of preparedness of Serbia to assume the responsibilities as member of the EU, as well as recommendations on the conclusion of negotiations. Such recommendations will also be provided by the General Affairs Council, in partnership with COREPER. The latter will determine the conclusion of the negotiation process, in a last intergovernmental conference, when the signing the Accession Treaty will be proposed along with a specific date of accession. This decision will finally be accepted by the European Council (MFA Serbia 2014, chapter V).

Before the end of negotiations, it is necessary to decide a preliminary date of the official accession. Regarding this date, there is still a discrepancy at the EU level regarding the optimal time for Serbia's admission to the organization. Although the accession process is essentially a technical one, it largely depends on the political will of European leaders (both national and those who lead the main EU institutions). Thus, in 2014, with the appointment of Jean Claude Juncker as head of a new European Commission (marked by the renaming of the DG Enlargement), the extension has been placed in "waiting" state, the future head of the Commission European stating on July 15th, 2014 that "it is not expected that new countries to join the Union in the next five years", but that "ongoing accession negotiations will continue" (EurActiv 2014). The most likely accession period for Serbia was established as early as 2020. Although disappointed, Belgrade authorities proved to be confident, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Kori Udovički confirming that Serbia aspires to become a European Union member state around the year 2020. She added that EU's five years enlargement break does not mean that the accession prospects of the Western Balkans have decreased (EurActiv 2014).

Negotiation results will be included in the Accession Treaty, which will also mention the date of accession, the conditions of accession and transitional measures required in areas identified by the Commission. The distribution of votes within the EU Council and European Parliament, and the foreseen number of MEPs for Serbia will also be decided and stated in the Treaty. The treaty will be initially examined by the Commission and the European Parliament, later to be signed by Serbia and the EU Member States representatives. Between the signing of the Treaty and the actual accession, the

Treaty will be subject to ratification by Member States and Serbia. After this process is over, Serbia will be declared a full member of the EU (MFA Serbia 2014, chapter VI).

5. KOSOVO: A CASE STUDY

Since its debut, Serbia's EU accession process was marked and determined by the dynamics of the state's relations with Kosovo. As mentioned before, since 1999 Kosovo has been placed under UN administration, following the UN Security Council 1244 Resolution (UNSC Resolution 1244/1999, art. 7-11).

In February 2007 (following a meeting with the stakeholders), former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari was entrusted by UN to prepare his own version of a peace agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, which he would then send to the UN Security Council (UNOSEK 2007). Ahtisaari noted that during these discussions a final status of the region must be established. The Serbian Prime Minister refused to receive Ahtisaari's visit, motivating his decision through the unclear status of the legislative power in Belgrade (Serbia did not have a functioning Parliament after the elections on January 21st of that year), having practically no mandate to discuss the matter of Kosovo with Ahtisaari. On 21 February 2007, Ahtisaari started a campaign of consultations with the two parties in order to finalize the agreement. He stressed that his proposal was (for the moment) a draft that will include compromises in the final set after negotiations. After this period of negotiations (and changes to the agreement), Ahtisaari agreed with the two sides on a high level meeting which had to take place in March 2007. Following this meeting, the leaders of both sides reported a total refusal to reach a compromise on the main themes of the Agreement (Kosovar Albanians' desire to gain independence and Serbia's desire to maintain its sovereignty and territorial integrity). Concluding that there were no chances for reaching a common position, Ahtisaari went on to declare that he would send the proposals to the UN Security Council to finalize by March the province's final status (International Crisis Group 2007).

However, Vojislav Koštunica was quick to declare that the proposed agreement was "illegitimate and unacceptable" because it "violates the UN Charter, by undermining the sovereignty of a UN member state - Serbia"(Government of Serbia 2007). President Boris Tadić finally received Ahtisaari; after talks, Serbian President swore that he would never recognize

an independent Kosovo. Serbia's Foreign Minister warned that "it is now necessary to avoid an imposed solution that would lead to transforming Serbia into a "factor of instability" (Government of Serbia 2007). Nevertheless, US officials declared that Ahtisaari's proposal was "fair and balanced" (US State Department 2007), while EU leaders concluded that the proposal was "built on approximately twelve months of direct talks between Pristina and Belgrade" (German Presidency of the EU 2007). According to the International Crisis Group, the implementation of Ahtisaari's Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement (as the agreement was officially called) would pose significant challenges. The think-tank also noted that decentralization was the key to peaceful transition. The Ahtisaari Proposal was seen as wisely ambiguous with regard to the powers and duration of the EU mission that will oversee this settlement, ensuring that the international community will retain the final word in Kosovo through its formative years of statehood. Although acknowledging the strong support for the use of the plan as base for the adoption of a resolution, the International Crisis Group recognized the importance of unity when it came down to positions assumed by UN Security Council, in order to avoid a Russian veto (International Crisis Group 2007, 1-3).

In early 2008, Kosovars were determined to declare their independence. That decision came amid the tenth anniversary of the conflict with Serbia. The population of the region based itself on the inability of US President Bush to engage in a new international campaign (in 2008, Bush's term would end leaving him little time of manoeuvre in international politics), and also on the important positions in which two of the former SFRY republics were to be found¹. Most likely, the decision to declare independence was postponed after presidential elections in Serbia (in order to avoid offering a new campaign topic to the nine registered candidates). On February 17th, 2008 the Parliament of Kosovo proclaimed the independence of the province, issuing the following statement (Parliament of Kosovo 2008):

"We, the democratically elected leaders of our people, hereby declare Kosovo to be an independent and sovereign state. This declaration reflects the will of our people and it is in full accordance with the recommendations of UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari and his Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement. We declare

¹ Slovenia held the Presidency of the European Council at that time, while Croatia had voting right within the United Nations Security Council as one of the 15 non-permanent members, elected by rotation.

Kosovo to be a democratic, secular and multi-ethnic republic, guided by the principles of non-discrimination and equal protection under the law."

The declaration was adopted by unanimous vote (with the presence of the majority of required quorum: 109 members). Eleven MPs representing the region's Serb minority boycotted the voting procedure, while other minority representatives participated in the vote (Parliament of Kosovo 2008).

108 of the 193 UN members have recognized Kosovo's independence (as of May 2015), the main challengers being Russia and China (permanent members of the UN Security Council), but also their traditional allies (India, Venezuela, Cuba, DPR Korea, etc.). The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement according to which through the declaration of independence, Kosovo violated Serbia's sovereignty, the UN Charter, UN Resolution 1244/1999, and other international agreements. Russia declared their support to Belgrade, demanding the restoration of territorial integrity of Serbia (MFA Russia 2008). On the other hand, China refused to accept the declaration of independence, noting that it seeks to respect the territorial integrity of Serbia (B92.com 2009). The positions of the two countries thus assumed (and maintained until present day), leave little chance that any UN resolution on Kosovo recognition would be adopted, given that Russia and China have the right to "veto" within the United Nations Security Council. This again raises the issue of reform of this international institution, a necessary and long awaited one, especially by states like Germany or Japan (who recognized Kosovo). The reform would entail a reorganization of the Security Council by adding permanent members and eliminating the right of veto. This process would lead to a redistribution of spheres of influence in the process of dialogue and negotiation, a situation that could prove favourable to Kosovo (by increasing pressure on states like Russia or Brazil for accepting independence, reorganization of poles of influence in the negotiation process or the removal of the main obstacle that stand in the way of a favourable resolution for the Albanian province – the veto right).

A special case is that of the EU. Like other international organizations, the EU lacks the legal power to recognize a state. Most Member States have recognized Kosovo, but in order to establish a common foreign policy towards Kosovo, the approval of all Member States is required, a situation that is currently inexistent. In February 2008, EU officials said they had "taken note" of the decision of the Kosovo Parliament (EU Observer 2008).

At the time of declaration, 23 of the 27 EU Member States have recognized Pristina's decision. The refusal came from five countries: Cyprus,

Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain, each motivating the decision in a different manner:

- Cyprus: the Foreign Ministry mentioned in 2008 that "Cyprus will never recognize a unilateral declaration of independence, which is outside the framework of the UN" (B92.com 2008). President Dimitris Christofas confirmed in March 2008 the decision not to recognize Kosovo's independence out of respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia. He said that "the only thing Kosovo and Cyprus have in common is that the principles of international law and the fact that UN decisions are constantly violated," adding that "the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Cyprus and Serbia have been violated in the most brutal manner as possible" (B92.com 2008). The decision of the authorities in Nicosia has so far remained unchanged. The position assumed by the Cypriot state is clearly linked to the unclear status of the northern area of the island (occupied by Turkey in 1974 and proclaimed "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus", recognized internationally only by Turkey).
- Greece: has taken a neutral stance on the declaration of independence. After an analysis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Greece took the decision not to recognize Kosovo independence, arguing that it violates the territorial integrity of Serbia (Kosovo Young Europeans 2010). Although this decision has remained unchanged so far, Greece has opened a liaison office in Pristina, facilitating communication with Kosovo (MFA Kosovo 2014a).
- Romania: the Parliament decided by vote not to recognize Kosovo's independence; the only support came from UDMR party, representing the Hungarian minority in Romania, in search of recognition of Transylvania's autonomy (Reuters 2008). The Parliament's position was supported by the Government and the Presidential Administration, while the following statement of President Traian Băsescu was recorded: "territorial partitions are unacceptable, regardless of the explanations that come in their support" (The Sofia Echo 2009). Up to now Romania's position remains unchanged. However, there are signs of Bucharest and Pristina normalizing relations such as Romania's decision to open a liaison office in Pristina, facilitating communication between

Romania and Kosovo (MFA Romania 2014) or the decision of Bucharest to recognize Kosovar passports (MFA Kosovo 2014b).

- Slovakia: Bratislava's reaction was largely that of rejection of the declaration. The Foreign Minister said that there's a need to analyze the situation. Meanwhile, the Deputy Prime Minister replied that Kosovo's decision, taken without Serbia's approval, is a flagrant violation of international law, which could set a precedent. Reacting to that statement, specialists from Bratislava explained that the situation of Albanians in Serbia is totally different from that of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia (The Slovak Spectator 2008). However, in 2009, the authorities in Bratislava admitted that the process started by Pristina is irreversible. After Serbia-Kosovo relations improvement, former Prime Minister Iveta Radičová said that there is no reason for not recognizing Kosovo's independence, a position assumed by the new Slovak president, elected in 2014, Andrej Kiska (Nationalia 2014).
- Spain: is the only Western country that has refused to recognize Kosovo's independence. While acknowledging that the decision opens a new chapter in Kosovo talks between Belgrade and Pristina, Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos maintained his position, noting that Kosovo's independence violates Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, constituting a dangerous international precedent (20minutos 2010). Although this seems a bizarre statement, the precedent Moratinos referred to could affect Spain, where two of its autonomous regions (Catalonia and the Basque Country) are campaigning for independence. A possible "loss" of Catalonia (through the application of a "Kosovo precedent"), for example, would seriously affect the Spanish economy, significantly dependent on Catalan contribution. Nevertheless, Moratinos said that the situation would change in case of a revocation of the UN Resolution 1244/1999 (which would lead to changes in the province's status).

Thus, a certain diversity can be identified when it comes to the external policies of the EU member states, Although being encouraged even by the EU's motto ("unity in diversity"), this principle now acts as an obstacle to the favourable development of EU-Serbia relations. This diversity will have to be harmonized with the EU's enlargement policy in the Western Balkans, in

order to maintain a climate of stability and ensure a fluid and consistent European path for states in the region.

Although the European Parliament (EP) has no authority when it comes to managing the organization's foreign policy, in 2008 (during an inter-parliamentary meeting attended by representatives of Kosovo's Parliament) it accepted Kosovo's declaration of independence (Blic 2008). On February 5th, 2009 the European Parliament adopted a resolution (424 votes for, 133 against) designed to encourage EU member states to recognize Kosovo. According to the resolution, the idea of partition of Kosovo along ethnic criteria was rejected (European Parliament 2009, section E, art 1-6). The resolution was welcomed by representatives of EULEX in Kosovo, but was flatly rejected by Slovakia and Spain (B92.com 2009). In 2010, a new resolution was adopted by the EP, urging all member states to recognize Kosovo's independence in order to facilitate international recognition. The resolution called on Member States to adopt a common position on the EU's relationship with Kosovo (European Parliament 2010, section E, pct. 1-5). Finally, a third EP Resolution was adopted, calling on the five contesting Member States to recognize Kosovo (European Parliament 2012, section I).

After the EU's reaction, it became clear that Kosovo would develop its own relation with the organization, independent from that of Serbia. On October 10th, 2012 the European Commission declared (following a feasibility study) that there are no legal obstacles to the eventual signing of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo, because this approach does not require full sovereignty of the state entity. Therefore, the Commission recommended that same year the start of negotiations for signing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo. The only condition imposed by EU institution was for Kosovo to make progress in four areas of interest: rule of law, public administration, protection of minorities and trade (European Commission 2012, para. 4). On October 15th, 2012, Kosovo's Prime Minister, together with the Ministerial Committee for European Integration approved the list of tasks to be fulfilled, to start negotiations on signing a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (Government of Kosovo 2012).

European Commissioner for Enlargement, Štefan Füle, declared that by spring 2013 the Commission will report on the progress made by Kosovo. Following the Brussels Agreement, which facilitated relations between Serbia and Kosovo (where the two sides pledged not to interfere in each other's European course), the EU Council recommended the start of negotiations for

signing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement EU and Kosovo (European Commission 2013a).

On October 28th, 2013, the negotiations for the signing of the agreement were officially launched; they were concluded on May 2nd, 2014. In June of that year, Štefan Füle declared that Stabilisation and Association Agreement could be signed by the spring of 2015, as the Serbia-Kosovo relations improved (Tanjug 2014). Eventually, the agreement was signed on October 27th, 2015, being expected to enter into force by the first half of 2016 (European Commission 2013b). As it is the first to be signed after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between Kosovo and the EU will no longer need to be ratified by each member state (the member states not being any more a party individually), thus facilitating the process of entering into force (European Commission 2015b).

An important role throughout Kosovo's history (both until 2008 and after the declaration of independence) was that of its relation with Albania. When Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia on February 17th, 2008, Albania was one of the first countries to officially recognize the new republic. On August 18th, 2009, Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha said that "there should be no customs administration between the two countries" and that citizens of Albania should not "allow Albania and Kosovo to perceive each other as foreign countries" (SETimes 2009). The reaction was received with anger and indignation by Serbia's authorities (SETimes 2009). Serbia's fears towards the possible independence of Kosovo are mainly related to the possibility of an eventual annexation of Kosovo by Albania as part of a comprehensive process of creating "Greater Albania", a process that started at the end of World War II and which drew attention to both Albania's neighbours (Serbia and Greece showing deep concern over the territorial aspirations of Tirana) and the "powerful states of Europe" (Bogdani and Loughlin 2007, 230-231). Such a process has been described by experts from International Crisis Group as a potential source for a new conflict in the Balkans in terms of similar aspirations of Serbia (in 1992-1999) and Croatia (International Crisis Group 2007, 5). A Greater Albania (described as "Ethnic Albania" by Tirana authorities) would constitute a new challenge on the world diplomacy scene, opening a potential 'Pandora's Box', given that both Serbia and Bulgaria (Savich 2011) have expressed or manifested expansionist tendencies in the region. However, the Ahtisaari Plan mentioned the adoption of a multi-ethnic "Kosovar" identity (rather than an Albanian one) as a condition for the region's independence. However, a survey showed that 75%

of Kosovo Albanians would prefer to live together with Albanians in Albania, under a unified state. The same support was observed in Albania, where 68% of citizens would opt for unification of Albania with Kosovo (Mabry *et al.* 2013, 182). Nevertheless, a *de jure* unification prior to full accession of the two entities might take decades and is impossible due to constitutional obstacles and opposition of international actors (Kalemaj 2014, 36-37). With regards to the future of the Albania-Kosovo relation in the next twenty-thirty years, Ilir Kalemaj analyses four possible scenarios, based on the relation between the two entities and their EU membership status (Kalemaj 2014, 29-ibid):

- Kosovo and Albania borders become gradually irrelevant as part of the EU if both are integrated at that stage. Ilir Kalemaj projects that “for Albania, the prospect of membership, if due reforms are undertaken and laws properly implemented, thus constituting the rule of law, can be as early as 2022-2023”, whereas Kosovo’s prospect of membership can be as early as 2030. Therefore, this scenario is considered to be “the most probable one” only when it comes to analyzing the relation on a long term perspective.
- Albania and Kosovo are part of one of the following regional forums: CEFTA, Balkan Union, Balkan Benelux, etc., but only one of them, most probably Albania, is part of the EU in the next ten years or so. This situation would transform the relation between Albania and Kosovo, making it clearly asymmetrical on the short-term. If Albania would benefit from the EU-member status, being able to access structural funds and develop its own economy, Kosovo would have to wait for a development of its relation with Serbia in order to become member of at least the aforementioned regional forums, without restraints.
- Albania and Kosovo realize a *de facto* unification before accession in EU. Kalemaj considers this scenario an unlikely one, although being claimed by nationalists from both sides of the border (political parties like Vetvendosje from Kosovo or PDIU in Albania). A *de facto* unification would culminate in either a free market zone, a custom union or a fully integrated economic zone, before or after EU accession for the two entities, depending on political willingness and geopolitical circumstances.
- Albania and Kosovo operate as functional countries without any projected unification of any kind, where Albania joins the EU, with

Kosovo still to conclude its state-building process. Kalemaj sees this scenario as the most probable one, anticipating that Albania will join the EU by 2022-2023 (as it already received candidate status), with Kosovo having to wait until at least until 2035-2040 for that to happen, "unless there is a change of plans and the region is integrated in the block". Kalemaj expects Albania to start negotiations on chapters, as it already received the "reform plan" from the EU. The author states that due to the recently decided five-year enlargement postponement, Albania will not be able to join the organization sooner than 2019, while Kosovo will have to deal with issues such as state-building in order to obtain the legal right to apply for membership. This position contradicts the expectations of Kosovo officials (i.e. former Minister of Foreign Affairs Enver Hoxaj) who stated that Kosovo will join the EU by 2024 (MFA Kosovo 2014).

Though it may seem that Albania's role in Serbia's EU path is insignificant, its cultural and historical ties to Kosovo play an important part in the Western Balkans' European integration process. Albania's relation with Kosovo can be thus analysed (more than just the mere analysis presented in this paper) as an evolutionary model of the region in the context of EU enlargement process.

Despite their EU neighbourhood processes being conducted separately, Serbia and Kosovo still maintain a state of unrest, determined by the bizarre dynamics of the relationship. Although Kosovo has expressed a clear desire to move closer to the EU, it remains to be seen how the five states contesting Kosovo's independence will be persuaded to accept the reality. Although apparently their relationship with Serbia is the main reason cited by these states, internal tensions between the ethnic majority from these states and minorities who aspire to greater autonomy (and in some cases even independence) can maintain this state of uncertainty for a long time. Thus, if Greece (a traditional partner of Serbia in international relations arena) could be satisfied only by a sessions of tripartite talks (Greece-Serbia-EU), the question remains tricky in the case of other states. In Romania, the members of the Hungarian minority (in search of recognition of Transylvania's autonomy) said that recognizing Kosovo's independence could be used as a model for Transylvania (Szekler National Council 2008). The situation is the same in Slovakia, where the Hungarian minority advocates for extension of rights and a wide autonomy of the region that forms the border with Hungary. Instead,

Cyprus is a subject already under review, Kosovo's independence representing an opportunity to extend the negotiations with ethnic Turks to solve the above mentioned local territorial problem. Finally, Spain is a clear example of how central authorities wished to ignore the political changes at the international level, leaving the "door closed" to claims carried out by the autonomous regions (with a complex ethnic composition).

In the current context of European security policy, Kosovo has been perceived by most opposing states (whether EU members or not) as a dangerous precedent that could be used by various minority entities within those states to obtain autonomy or even independence. This approach was most recently used by Russia. Although in 2008 the Russian representative to EU declared that Kosovo's independence "would create a serious negative precedent in terms of international law" (Financial Times 2008), the Russian state used the very same "precedent" as a mean to recognize the independence of Crimea (an autonomous republic within the independent state of Ukraine), which in March 2014 held a referendum for independence, a ballot that was contested and not recognized by Ukraine (as it is contrary to the Constitution of Ukraine 1996, art. 1 and art. 73) and the international community. The Venice Commission concluded that "circumstances in Crimea did not allow the holding of a referendum in line with European democratic standards. Any referendum on the status of a territory should have been preceded by serious negotiations among all stakeholders", stating that "such negotiations did not take place" (Venice Commission 2014, Conclusion). Unlike Kosovo, where the decision has received wide popular support (since the 90s), being challenged only by the Serb minority in northern Kosovo, Crimea's decision to secede from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation is easily contestable just by analyzing how the referendum was held. Besides the fact that there were no consultations between stakeholders (supporters versus opponents of the independence), the elections in Crimea were widely criticized for the overwhelming presence of military (and paramilitary) in and around polling stations, but also for the non-existence of a possibility for Crimea to maintain the status-quo (the voters had to choose between independence and joining Russia). Also, Kosovo's decision didn't come as a result of pressure applied by a third state, while the referendum in Crimea was organized under the influence of Moscow (both at a statement level and through the deployment by Russia of "peacekeeping forces", which hindered the work of the Ukrainian administration in Crimea).

On this issue, Hajrudin Somun, former ambassador of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Turkey elaborated a short comparison of Crimea and Kosovo, concluding that for several reasons, the two political entities are rather different when it comes to the manner in which their status should be approached (Today's Zaman 2014):

- Kosovar Albanians were subject to Milošević's genocidal intent, seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. On the other hand, Crimean Tatars were never threatened or attacked by Ukraine's administration or military.
- Kosovo was part of Serbia, but the Albanian majority that inhabited the province lost all its rights and local institutions during Milošević's regime. In Crimea the situation was different: after gaining independence from the USSR, Ukraine did not strip Crimea's Russians of their rights. On the contrary, they received the right to self-govern the region (Crimea became the only Ukrainian province with the status of autonomous province);
- Kosovar Albanians did not receive any support or interference in their fight for independence. In Crimea's case, Russia sent ~ 16,000 troops to Crimea before the referendum for the province's secession. Also, during the war in the '90s Albania did not enter Kosovo, nor did Kosovo ask for accession to Albania.
- Kosovo will remain significant only for the Balkan region and Serbia (as an important part of their history, due to the role played by the region during the Ottoman rule). If before 2000, Kosovo was a leading international issue, now the tone is slightly appeased. On the other hand, Crimea played for centuries a strategic role for Russian, Ottoman and other European empires. Now, though the geopolitical map has changed, the region still poses an interest for Russia and it's perceived as a major pawn in the battle between East and West (in Europe and not only).

The view that the two political entities are different (when it comes to reason and means of secession) is not general accepted. Luca J. Uberti states that "there is little contextual difference between Kosovo's and Crimea's secession claims: whatever their moral and political merits, both are made against a constitutional backdrop that asserts territorial integrity, and more or less explicitly proscribes secession" (Open Democracy 2014). Also, the role played by foreign powers is quite similar: neither NATO (in Serbia) nor

Russian (in Crimea) interventions were authorized by the UN Security Council; in both cases, although it followed a multilateral process of conflict mediation, the military action itself was unilateral (Open Democracy 2014).

In terms of perspective, the situation in Kosovo has been clearly defined by Western leaders. German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared in 2014 that the decision to recognize Kosovo does not violate international law, while Crimean referendum organized at the request of Moscow, constitutes a breach of international law, through the rapidity of the decision to organize the ballot, lack of appropriate training and rejection of foreign observers (EU Observer 2014).

The Kremlin authorities' position on Kosovo's status remains ambiguous until now; while not accepting to recognize the province's independence, they are obviously using it as a means of legitimizing the decision taken (under pressure) by the Crimean population (Kremlin 2014). Thus, it can be said that Russia would continue to apply a double standard with respect to the status of Kosovo.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper aimed to underline the challenges faced by Serbia as a candidate for accession to the European Union. As opposed to the case of former candidate countries in the region (Romania or Slovenia) the local and regional particularities transform Serbia's negotiation process. Whether the international community and current scholars accept it or not, the wars for the breakup of Yugoslavia still persist as a burden for the hopeful countries of the Western Balkans. The multiple issues rose by the events in the '90s (a consistent relation with the ICTY, a functioning rule of law, respect of human rights, with emphases on minority rights, economic and social reconstruction) are still recurrent in the process of negotiation.

The legacy of Milošević's regime does not pose a serious burden just for Serbia, but in this case it is important to demonstrate the ability of a former isolated state to rejoin the international community as a respected and respectful member. Being able to demonstrate that "there is life after Milošević" was an essential part of the negotiation's debut. In the decade that followed the wars of the 90s, FRY, then Serbia-Montenegro (2003), became actively involved in promoting their interests by participating in a series of summits (Biarritz-2000, Zagreb-2000, Thessaloniki-2003), all designed to

confirm the European course of the former Yugoslav state. This was just the beginning of the road for Serbia, whose administration and political leadership managed to improve relations with the EU in less than a decade, when the country was granted candidate status.

Although the accession process is essentially an administrative one, its implementation largely depends on the political will of European leaders (both those at national level and those who lead the main EU institutions). Thus, in 2014, with the appointment of Jean Claude Juncker as head of a new European Commission, the enlargement process has been placed in a "waiting state". Currently Serbia wishes to join the EU in 2020, a realistic perspective, given the progress reached in the main areas of interest and the openness proven by Belgrade in the negotiations on Kosovo's status.

With regard to the geopolitical aspects that hold back Serbia's negotiation process, the dynamics of the Serbia-Kosovo-EU relation represent the main issue approached by the current paper. Since the declaration of independence, the political status of Kosovo has been the source of new diplomatic tensions between Belgrade and EU representatives. This decision also raised tensions between EU Member States, five of them refusing to recognize Kosovo's independence. These countries are in a delicate situation at least, being forced to choose between compliance with international law (and the principle self-determination of peoples, which themselves were formed on) and increased internal pressures, coming from ethnic groups that advocate for widening rights, autonomy or even independence. Their official reaction places raise the question of the relation between Serbia and the recognizing countries as well as the relation between Kosovo and the contesting countries, in the eventuality that they will decide to recognize its independence, at a given moment. This diversity, currently manifested in the external policies of the EU Member States, is also acting as an obstacle to the favourable development of EU-Serbia relations. It is clear that the five contesting Member States will maintain pressure on EU, forcing the organization to prevent the implementation of a coordinated foreign policy. But this internal diversity will have to be at some point harmonized with EU's expansionist approach in the region of Western Balkans, all in order to maintain a climate of stability and ensure a fluid, consistent European path for states in the region.

The complexity of Kosovo's decision from 2008 still remains a topic of discussion among specialists in international relations. It is not just the impact on Serbia and the EU accession process that must be taken into consideration, but also legal aspects such as the creation of a "Kosovo precedent", which

could fuel similar decisions in the autonomous provinces of other countries. It's would also why some EU Member States (mainly Spain, Cyprus and Romania) still refuse to recognize its independence. Moreover, the decision of the authorities in Pristina was widely used by Russia in the recent crisis in Ukraine, when the Russian state recognized the independence of Crimea (after a referendum which was largely disputed by the international community). This current situation places Russia in an ambiguous position, the state's representatives refusing to recognize the independence of the Albanian province, but using it as a means of legitimizing the decision taken in 2014 (under pressure) by the Crimean population.

As for the status of Kosovo and the decision of local authorities to start on a separate path from that of Serbia's, the situation is not as unclear as it may seem. Although the process of independence recognition is expected to be a lengthy one, Serbia will be forced at some point to recognize a historical truth: since 2008, Kosovo is independent. When Belgrade will decide to recognize Kosovo's decision and the new state's separate European path, relations between the two countries will witness real improvement. Such a development would force the challengers among EU Member States (and beyond) to accept the status-quo. So perhaps the key question is not "how can five EU members be convinced to accept Kosovo's independence?", but "how can Serbia be convinced that Kosovo's independence will bring a part of the region's much desired peace and stability?" In the event that the five EU challengers will decide to recognize Kosovo, this process will automatically lead to developing a coordinated (and long awaited) position of EU Member States, as well as a relief of diplomatic dialogue (both at EU level and internationally).

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