



Centre for Southeast European Studies  
Zentrum für Südosteuropastudien

European Fund for the Balkans

Executive Summary  
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# Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group

**THE UNFULFILLED PROMISE:  
COMPLETING THE BALKAN  
ENLARGEMENT**

# The Unfulfilled Promise: Completing the Balkan Enlargement

Eleven years after the EU committed itself to the European future of the Western Balkans, only one country—Croatia—managed to join. The accession process remains slow and the remaining aspirants in the region are unlikely to enter the EU before the end of the decade. In addition to an increasingly demanding conditionality, member states seem to be intervening more often with the integration process, often delaying in predictable ways. As a majority of citizens in many EU member states oppose further enlargement, membership seems remote and uncertain for many countries in the region. This policy paper explores the risks and opportunities that different potential paths in the integration process can take. More specifically, the report discusses four scenarios for the future of EU enlargement towards the Balkans:

## **Scenario 1: Business as Usual**

This entails the continuation of the gradual and slow approach to EU membership, based on enhanced conditionality, a strong focus on the rule of law during the accession process, and new means of engaging with countries in impasse. So far, this approach has failed to fully unlock some countries on their EU tracks. The risk of this “new” approach is that while it might work for some countries, it might be insufficient for others to overcome their particular problems, such as the bilateral dispute with in the case of Macedonia, incomplete recognition for Kosovo or deadlock in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## **Scenario 2: Following Turkey’s Path: Alienation from the EU**

If the accession process continues to drag out without a tangible prospect of membership, this scenario becomes realistic. As opposition to enlargement in the EU and various blockades by member states make

accession unpredictable and remote, countries start giving up on the goal of accession. As a result, EU conditionality loses its credibility and ability to support and induce reforms. Abandoning the EU membership perspective in all but name holds potential negative consequences for the consolidation of democracy, stability of interethnic relations and long-term economic investments in the Balkans.

## **Scenario 3: Abandoning Enlargement and New Unpredictability in the Western Balkans**

This scenario extends the risks of the previous scenario with enlargement grinding to a standstill. As accession becomes unlikely due to continued internal crisis in the EU and opposition to further enlargement, alternative actors might become engaged in the Western Balkans. In particular, considering the crisis in Ukraine, Russia might be tempted to lure or coerce countries in the region to move closer to it and to undermine the EU. This, in turn, might motivate other countries, such as Turkey, to engage politically and economically in the Balkans as an alternative to the Union. These external actors bring with them different incentives that focus less on democratic and economic reform and might in fact explicitly seek to reverse them.

## **Scenario 4: The Balkans Big Bang**

This scenario would see the acceleration of integration, including the start of accession talks with all countries of the Balkans and the offer of a single entry date, as happened in the case of the Central and East European enlargement. Instead of increased conditionality, which is particularly hard to fulfill by countries plagued by statehood issues (such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo), this approach would focus again on the acquis itself, and require substan-

tial EU engagement to resolve disputes that currently hinder accession.

What emerges from the scenarios is that the current approach is not enough. The risks are too great and the transformative potential of the EU too slow to fully mitigate the risks of keeping some countries of the Western Balkans out for another decade or more. As a result, the EU needs to explore new approaches to keep its promise of a European future for the Balkans. Two policy briefs explore options for the new EU Commission and also for countries of the Western Balkans on how to reinvigorate the accession process and help it to remain a tool that transforms the region into a vibrant and prosperous democratic space.

### **About the Report**

This Report was written by members of the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group and its contents were discussed at several meetings of the group in Graz (October 2013), Brussels (November 2013), Zagreb (January 2014) and Belgrade (February 2014). The primary contributors to this report are Florian Bieber, Marko Kmezić and for Scenario 1: Corina Stratulat; Scenario 2: Leon Malazogu; Scenario 3: Dimitar Bechev and Vedran Džihčić; Scenario 4: Dejan Jović.

### **About the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group**

The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) is a co-operation project of the European Fund for the Balkans (EFB) and Centre for the Southeast European Studies of the University of Graz (CSEES) with the aim to promote the European integration of the Western Balkans and the consolidation of democratic, open countries in the region. BiEPAG is composed by young researchers from the Western Balkans and wider Europe that have established themselves for their knowledge and understanding of the Western Balkans and the processes that shape the region. Current members of the BiEPAG are: Florian Bieber, Arolda Elbasani, Dimitar Bechev, Dejan Jović, Marko Kmezić, Nermin Oruč, Leon Malazogu, Corina Stratulat, Milan Nič, Marija Risteska, Nenad Koprivica, Nebojša Lazarević and Vedran Džihčić.

### **About the European Fund for the Balkans**

The European Fund for the Balkans is a multi-year joint initiative of European Foundations including the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the King Baudouin Foundation, the Compagnia di San Paolo and the ERSTE Foundation. It is designed to undertake and support initiatives aimed at bringing the Western Balkans closer to the European Union through grant-giving and operational programmes. The Fund's objectives are: to encourage broader and stronger commitment to the European integration of the Western Balkan countries and societies; to strengthen the efforts undertaken by a range of stakeholders in this process also with a view to developing effective policies and practices in the region and in the EU; and to support the process of member state building as envisaged by the International Commission on the Balkans, in particular by building constituencies in the societies of Southeast Europe who will be offered an opportunity to experience and learn about Europe.

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### **About the Centre for Southeast European Studies, University of Graz**

The Centre for Southeast European Studies was set up in November 2008 following the establishment of Southeast Europe as a strategic priority at the University of Graz in 2000. The Centre is an interdisciplinary and cross-faculty institution for research and education, established with the goal to provide space for the rich teaching and research activities at the university on and with Southeast Europe and to promote interdisciplinary collaboration. Since its establishment, the centre also aimed to provide information and documentation and to be a point of contact for media and the public interested in Southeast Europe, in terms of political, legal, economic and cultural developments. An interdisciplinary team of lawyers, historians, and political scientists working at the Centre has contributed to research on Southeast Europe, through numerous articles, monographs and other publications. In addition, the centre regularly organizes international conferences and workshops to promote cutting edge research on Southeast Europe.

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