

# The transition paradigm *versus* integration in the context of political transformation of the Balkan countries

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## Abstract

Three decades since the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism, some of the Balkan nations are not following yet the lessons for building sustainable peace and functioning democracies according to their aspirations (at least in a declarative way) for association with the liberal democracies of the European Union (EU). Rather, the Balkans' history is transforming into a story of importing the habits and principles from the communism period in a paradoxical way of establishing the illiberal democracies followed by controversies and defects in the process of state-building. More than a decade, the Balkans, from one side, is transformed into a zone of periphery with a focus of the European determination for the support of the institutional reform through the process of integration, but in parallel, it is being self-formatted into a zone of self-isolation of the Balkan nations.

This article will discuss the transition paradigm of the Balkans through functional analysis of aspects related to the rhetoric of Balkan countries in the discourse of the criteria of the European integration project; the dimension of the Balkan ancient myth with the new additional attribute of self-isolation; the insisting of the Balkan political elites for catapulting to the European project; and as well as the dynamics of the transition, internal and European integration of the Albanians and other nations of the Balkan region in the general.

**Keywords:** Europeanisation, the Balkans, transition, political transformation, European integration, fall of communism.

## Paradygmat transformacji a integracja w kontekście transformacji ustrojowej krajów bałkańskich

### Streszczenie

Po trzech dekadach od zakończenia zimnej wojny i upadku komunizmu niektóre kraje bałkańskie nie wyciągnęły jeszcze wniosków z budowania trwałego pokoju i funkcjonowania demokracji zgodnie z ich aspiracjami (przynajmniej deklaratywnych) do stowarzyszania się z liberalnymi demokracjami Unii Europejskiej (UE). Historia Bałkan przekształca się raczej w opowieść o przenoszeniu nawyków

i zasad z okresu komunizmu i w paradoksalny sposób ustanowieniu neoliberalnych demokracji, a następnie kontrowersji i defektów w procesie tworzenia państw. Od ponad dziesięciu lat Bałkany, z jednej strony, przekształcają się w strefę peryferyjności, skupiającą się na europejskiej determinacji wspierania reformy instytucjonalnej poprzez proces integracji, z drugiej zaś strony – jednocześnie stają się strefą samoizolacji narodów bałkańskich.

Niniejszy artykuł omawia paradygmat transformacji Bałkanów poprzez analizę funkcjonalną aspektów związanych z retoryką krajów bałkańskich w dyskursie kryteriów projektu integracji europejskiej; wymiar starożytnego mitu Bałkańskiego z nowym dodatkowym atrybutem samoizolacji; naleganie bałkańskich elit politycznych na włączanie się do projektu europejskiego; a także dynamikę transformacji, wewnętrznej i europejskiej integracji Albańczyków i innych narodów regionu bałkańskiego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Europeizacja, Bałkany, przemiany, transformacja ustrojowa, integracja europejska, upadek komunizmu.

Apart from what in continuity is associated as a zone with fragile progress within a much longer transition and its awkward journey to the European integration, the Balkans from another hand seems not to appear as awkward in terms of generating innovative cases and controversial situations within the integration processes itself, bringing even the European Union's enlargement policies often into a new complex and challenging situations (Latifi 2016: p. 279).

From a post-conflict zone initially treated with immediate demands for peace-building projects, economic and inter-ethnic reconciliation, then with hopes of promotion of the regional cooperation, and from a zone identified for the need of launching the European instruments for stabilisation of bloodshed of conflicts along with the 1990s – the Balkans region in the second and the third decade of the XX century faces a dynamic of a zone, where the nature of the transition problems and integration challenges continues to vary further in a non-linear way (Latifi 2016: p. 279).

In the first two decades of the XXI century, the Balkans from one side is transformed into a zone of the periphery relevance with a focus of the European determination for the support of the institutional reform through the process of integration, and from another hand, in parallel, it is being self-formatted into a zone of often frequencies for challenging the stagnation of the EU enlargement policies due to the nature of the new regional challenges as are the bilateral inter-neighboring disputes (between candidate and member countries) and the chronicle problems of the internal political statuses and democracies (Latifi 2016: p. 284).

The Balkans again with these developments is being classified in the category of the processes with atypical natures. For instance, the increase of the frequency of inter-neighbor blockades along integration processes (as it is a case of recent disputes between Croatia and Slovenia, and as well as the recent name dispute between Greece and North Macedonia, or the latest dispute between Bulgaria and North Macedonia) is shaping new moments for the enlargement policies of the EU itself, because indirectly is challenging with a non-linear dynamics the criteria and mechanisms of the consensual spirit of the European project of the EU (Latifi 2016: p. 284).

Three decades since the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism, the Balkan region from time to time is jeopardising to create an image of a zone, where along the Euro-Atlantic integration process, the neighboring countries are competing and attempting in advance to block some of their EU aspiring neighbors through the enlargement mechanisms and through contesting (either with a justified argument or without it, but always in the spirit of traditional Balkan style of historical contested motives). Unfortunately, a part of this, in meanwhile the Balkans as well as is getting transformed into a story of imported habits and principles of the period of communism in the paradox establishing of the illiberal democracies and into a controversial zone of plenty of handicaps of the state-building having in mind the resistance of the authorities toward acknowledgments of diversities and shifting from the recognition and further institutionalisation of the multiethnic realities (Latifi 2016: p. 284).

However, awkwardness along with the European integration, the cosmetic reforms and not substantial reforms, and as well as the lack of stability and sustainable vision in the Balkans are producing situations that seem to self-isolate somehow the Balkan nations.

The use of the notion Balkans in the article is referred to in several contexts and contents. When the conflicts of the 1990s are discussed, it is actually about the Western Balkans. Therefore, only the Western part of the Balkans could be classified as a "post-conflict zone". When the Euro-Atlantic integration process is discussed, the range of region includes Bulgaria and Romania, as well. And when the Balkans is referred to as a "transitional zone" here are meant as well as Greece and Turkey. Therefore, the precise delineation of the Balkan region is always of necessary relevance because of various kinds of interactions and orientations of each of the different groupings of Balkan countries within the interdependence constellations.

### **The Balkan rhetoric into the discourse of the criteria of the European project**

One century since the end of the First World War, in the Balkan Peninsula, where it escalated at that time, some of the Balkan nations are not following yet the lessons for building sustainable peace and functioning democracies according to their orientations and aspirations (at least in a declarative way) for association with the liberal democracies of the European Union. The progress of pacing into the aspired European road is slow yet for some time and it differs from country to country. Even the moderated critics would be skeptic, and all the time they could use the qualification of progress terminology for the case of the European road of the Balkan countries (Latifi 2016: p. 281).

The hope of European integration of the Balkan region seems to be of help to preserve peace in the region while also providing stability and, consequently, political and economic growth. Furthermore, we note the growing need for interdependence amongst all of the European nations and states on different political and societal levels (Trenchov 2012: p. 1–12).

Two decades since the end of the last conflict of dissolution of former Yugoslavia, the European integration often remains to be a controversial process from one side and unique from another side, having in mind that apart from installing the monitoring criteria for membership in the EU by the Balkan countries, the European Union opted for a regional approach in this part of Europe to achieve greater stability among the conflicted states and a normalisation of relations between them. Its role is predominantly stabilising, as each country has applied for, or expressed interest in, acceptance into the EU. To avoid further possible conflicts and promote regional cooperation, the "Enlargement Newsletter" of the European Commission (2011) reminds us that "the region needs a clear European perspective".

Dissimilarly to the transition experiences of the other former socialist and communist countries in Eastern and Central Europe that succeeded following intensive reforms and systematic transformations, the issue of the European integration that is modeled for the Balkan countries as a catalyst of transformations and reforms and at the same time as stabilisation for achieving progress and modernisation of the Balkan societies, still is not proved to be a solvable formula for the authorities of the Balkan countries. The problem is not with the design of the European model itself, but rather the local authorities of the countries that came from a socialist regime and conflict bloodsheds that followed the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation, still are not able to find the appropriate formula for applying the model, as often the authorities of some of the Balkan countries seem to use the European integration issue as a priority for their rhetoric (either political or nationalistic rhetoric) instead of using it normally as a window opportunity and priority for modernising their countries. In the case of the Balkans, the transfer from communism to democracy occurred without any completed transition and to some extent without any significant change of concepts, but rather it was conducted through re-naming of the system only (Wolchik, Curry 2010).

In the case of integration aspirations of the Balkan countries, the irresolvable formula for the membership in the EU is remaining with many complex variables and at the same time with the erroneous cast. The formula for how to be integrated a country in the European structures is not being solved yet by any aspiring country by the rhetoric only, as are pretending many Balkan countries. Therefore, it is irrational and useless the illusion of some of the Balkan governments and nations in the last decade for progress in the EU integration process based on declarative commitments only, through the rhetoric and with applying activities of the political marketing, rather than the required systematic reforms and brave decisions and compromises.

The phenomenon of the electoral results in many Balkan countries apart that shows the growing tendencies of the political apathy, as well as it shows a mirror of a growing trend of the winners of power through a metamorphosed way of populism, rhetoric, and declamation characterised with anti-theoretical, abstract and anti-intellectual discourses rather than contextual discourses. The metamorphosed cycles of populism and political rhetoric are associated with a political discourse delivered by a particular leadership style that is specifically personalised, strong, and sometimes quasi-charismatic leader-

ship. The metamorphosed populist rhetoric tends to be a set of threads for both right- and left-wing concepts, with a strong focus on leadership on the one hand and calls for popular equality on the other hand and in most of the cases associated with a high level of intolerant position on the traditional conception of civil liberties (Latifi 2014b: p. 177–178).

The issue of the European integration has been infiltrated deeply only into the political rhetoric of the political leaders and structures of many Balkan countries for motives of winning the next elections through the motivation of the psychology of masses, and it has not been involved so much in the engagements for systematic and meaningful reforms of the countries. In essence, in terms of the real engagements of the authorities of the Balkan countries, the EU agenda remains to be only a superficial message imposed to the political discourse. Therefore, this is only a commitment to the declarative level and the symbolic politics (Latifi 2016: p. 279).

Most of the Balkan countries in their road to the EU integration process are insisting in a rhetorical way to get catapulted into the negotiating chair with the EU for a membership or to receive positive annual reports by the European Commission each autumn of the year while their internal situations may not be so much in accordance with political or economic criteria of membership. If this persistence is seen in terms of achievement of some political progress, then this approach is not logical even for the political discourse of the rhetoric itself, because one positive report by the European Commission without any start of negotiations would not create any space for pride or political achievements. So, remains this situation eventually implies only some kind of encouragement for further extension of the EU agenda that often eternizes fluctuations and it is clasped with skepticism. And in fact, the strangulation of the process of European integration in practice would continue to be associated with the agglomeration and habitués of political and economic problems (Latifi 2016: p. 279–280).

If the phenomenon of insisting on a positive EU's evaluation report is seen then given the personal political achievements of the political parties' leaders that lead the governments of the region, then in the electoral campaigning periods in the Balkan countries each positive point of the annual progress reports of the European Commission in a traditional way would be used as an element of the political marketing and party propaganda by the ruling parties. These political establishments of the Balkan nations do not differ so much among themselves in this view. They seem to be similar, even identical according to their political rhetoric and learning from each other (Latifi 2016: p. 280).

And this insisting doesn't seem to be a real and sincere objective all the time, but rather it seems to be conducted only for political marketing motives in front of the electorate and eventually aimed to improvise some accountability behaviour in front of the European diplomacy. It seems to be more a matter of rhetoric rather than any objective persistence of elites. The last-decade insisting of North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia from one side seems is applied not with a high-level objective will and highly desirable, but rather it more seems to be kind of hastiness that through illusions as quick as possible to close in whatever way the combinatory for all their disputable internal political issue once

forever especially those ethnic issues with the other non-majority ethnic communities. However, even that is an illusion having in mind that even if they would join the EU, the internal disputes and issue of the rights, status, and relation to the ethnic communities will persist further and they can't pretend to close them once forever. On another side, the high degree of insisting for the European integration that comes from the ethnic Albanians all around in the Balkans either in the political or civil society level in each of the Balkan countries, where they live and regardless of their party affiliation, it is a natural insisting. At the same time, it is quite logical insisting having in consideration the historical strategic European orientation of Albanians in the continuity, but at the same time having in mind as well that through the European integration the parts of the Albanian nation in Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia see it as the only and last hope for escape from the stagnation of long democratic transition of the Balkan countries and eventually as a hopeful chance for rejoining the nation, if each of the above-mentioned countries would join to the EU (Latifi 2014a: p. 155).

Under such undefined situation and unclear vision for the EU integration perspectives of the Balkan countries followed by a rhetorical degree of the national political elites, most of the Balkan countries remain with years immobilised, and they are under process of integration with a little progress there are no indications for any quick progress.

If the Balkan countries would step more sustainably and essentially in the EU integration path, then as the experience of the other former socialist countries from the Eastern and Central Europe demonstrates, many perspectives and political streams would positively change, at least in a principle.

When the processes are blocked, then it is usually opened a space for accumulating various problems as is the case with the chronic internal political problems of the Balkan countries for a longer period. The ethno-nationalistic rhetoric returned to the Balkans countries seems to be the last attempt and cogitation of all those that pretend to use the chaos and to try the last chance for the local political elites to block the region for membership in the EU and to keep it as a hostage of the personal agendas. These turbulences are still present in the Balkans even in the morn of marking the one century since the First World War and these seem to be the last flounders before the new realities to be accepted for meaningful reforms with the start of the negotiations with the EU of each of them. As if the countries of the region would be integrated into the EU that would mean that after several decades they need to open among others as well their gates often hermetically closed in front of essential reforms for both the functioning democracy and creating liberal systems without *majorisation* practices. Ironically, a considerable part of the political elites all around the Balkan countries despite their rhetoric in favor of integration, in essence, seems to be afraid somehow from the essential integration and real functioning of the democracy that although have achieved some progress however are still unsustainable, wired, selective and superficial reforms only. According to many experts in the region (Demetropolou 2002: p. 87–106), the Balkans that emerged from the bloody conflicts of dissolution of Yugoslavia represent the least integrated and the most unstable region in Europe. In this context, the intention of the European Union to

integrate the region as soon as possible, and to make this a priority, is quite understandable and warranted. But, in this view among others, one of the main obstacles seems to be the political elites in the region of the Balkans being many of them ineffective, corrupt, or illegitimate (Latifi 2016: p. 281).

### **The Balkan myth of self-destruction and attributes of the phenomenon of self-isolation**

If one hundred years ago in the western diplomats' perception of the Balkan region existed an assumption that the nations of the Balkans can't move ahead and that these nations would potentially continue further to remain hostages of their histories and remain preoccupied with contesting the histories of the other nations as well as spending their energies in their interpretations for the controversial histories, now not all the nations have been learned the lessons from the self-destroyed perspectives of the Balkan nations at that time.

Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Nowhere has this greater resonance than in the Balkans (Anastasakis et al. 2016: p. 41).

Unfortunately, following the conflicts of dissolution of Yugoslavia and fall of communism in general in the Balkans, the heritage of the Yugoslav bloodshed at the end was not shown to be the lessons learned from these wars, but rather the process of the transition of the Balkan countries showed to be based on the heritage of manifestation of extreme nationalism in the public discourse even during the recent and ongoing state-building. Nationalism was and still is generally considered a central problem for the attainment of progress. "Liberal internationalism conceived progress, at the historical juncture of the inter-war years, in association with the notions of peace as the absence of war, of international order and stability, of prosperity and freedom. Nationalism was responsible in that these goals still appeared like a distant dream for the Balkan peoples" (Hatzopoulos 2008: p. 117).

Ethnonationalism is still present almost in each of the states that emerged from the dissolution of the former Yugoslav federation regardless of the peace agreements and peace-building processes that followed. Even a recent report of the Council of Europe are identified directly the current problems undergoing countries of the region related to the past and the "black hole of ethnonationalism" (Council of Europe 2011), that are present in the Balkans in a systematic way not only within the institutional practices but as well as with social tendencies, and therefore is suggested further promotion of the dialogue on issues that are related with the past of the Balkans and that would help to the citizens of the Balkan countries to run out from the claws of ethnonationalism. The phenomenon of the contemporary Balkan ethnonationalism presents to be a factor of a common disadvantage for the Balkan countries, but from other side all the indications from the annual reports of the progress of the European Commission in the last decade highlights in a comparative way that it is not of the same and common level the stadium of Europeanisation within various Balkan countries, that then works in disfavor of the

suggestions of the last decade for a joint integration in a package of the countries of the Balkans in the EU (Latifi 2016: p. 282).

Nevertheless, the process of integration should not be seen only in the view of one of the sides of the integration process, having in mind the high level of frictions, hesitations, and reserved perceptions by the Member States, when it comes to the issue of readiness for accepting the membership. Although the process of joining the EU needs to be transparent and stimulating, as well as relevant to the Western Balkans political elites, attention should be paid to the way integration is presented in the Member States because of the negative attitudes regarding the further enlargement of the EU (Rupnik 2011: p. 17–30).

One century following the end of the First World War, the main problem of relations among Balkan states remains to be the public historical discourse of wars and the past. Each of the sides has its "own truth" regarding the interpretations of conflicts, which makes then the establishment of sustainable neighboring relations. The relativity of 'truth' has already been discussed in the work of many scholars (e.g., Cloke 2001), who compare it to the systems of morality and value held by all individuals. A few months before the First World War escalated, it is reported that the British foreign minister at the time Edward Grey was writing to his ambassador to Vienna Fairfax L. Cartwright "that was trendy to hear about so many and various horrible events even to that extent that you can't be sure if all of them are true or not, but still, in the Balkans, it has been certain that there have been happened terrible things" (Duka 2012: p. 43).

Three decades since the end of the Cold War, the transition of the Balkans to democracy still is prolonged and the transition paradigm is characterised with the traces of myth of self-destruction in a figurative war within the Balkan nations. Although they pretend the integration with the European civilisations and supranational institutions, still many of the Balkan nations remain preoccupied and lead in their discourse by the inclination for redefining the history. At this phase, the myth of self-destruction and redefining and contesting the history of others is a real barrier in the overall essential progress of the EU integration and under these circumstances, this way is being shaped the attribute of self-isolation within the frame of the active myth of self-destruction (Latifi 2016: p. 283).

In absence of substantial progress, the transition of the Balkan nations is overloaded with contested histories are coming to the dimension of their self-isolation, but at the same time, some are keeping as a hostage as well as the perspectives and progress of the others in the Balkans, which is then in a contradiction to their aspiration (at least in a declarative way) for joining to the EU family that contrary to these Balkan contradictions function based of parameters of the tolerance, cooperation and common ground of understanding (Latifi 2016: p. 283).

Eventually, the ethnic Albanians in the Balkans may be criticised for many stagnations in terms of certain issues of the political reforms both on the institutional level and regarding their autocratic leadership, but at least the discourse of the Albanians in Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and in the other countries of the Balkans demonstrates that they have been learned the lessons in this view and they have been overcome the challenges imposed by the myths of self-destruction of perspectives and self-isolation.



The emphatic political and inter-religious tolerance in the case of Albanians, and as well as their orientation and historical pro-western orientation are the factors that have been influenced the Albanians to move forward in their national mindset and in relation of the respect of the history, which can serve as a good model for other nations. The nationalism of the Albanians all around the region used to be historically shaped by the motto for freedom of people and the call for integration with the western part of Europe.

Contrary to this case, the nationalism of some other nations of the former socialist Yugoslav federation, unfortunately before and during its dissolution and even nowadays in the era of integrations it contains chauvinistic dimensions and calls for violent resistance and historical suspicion toward Western Europe, and all this followed with the syndrome of attempting the dissuade and deflection of the history of the other nations in the Balkans.

Therefore, for the observers of the transition of the Balkans three decades, it would not be correct and original any approach that would pretend to classify each of the Balkan nations in a common Balkan pot, having in mind that in the Balkans still some of the nations in their political and public discourse pretend to have the problems with the history of others, and in their rhetoric pretends to reshape their states based on small progress that can't move from the myth of self-isolation, which seems to be in contradiction with the integration fundamentally principles (Latifi 2016: p. 283).

### **The prolonged transition of the Balkans and repercussion to the *Europeanisation* in terms of the need for structural transformation and modernisation**

In most of the Balkan countries, the illusions have been succeeded in shifting the reason and the real expectation, when it comes to the level of integration. There are present around plenty of dreams and many imaginations for the European project of integration seeing it as some kind of train waiting to come one day with plenty of railway carriages that would automatically bring with them exotic situations to the Balkan countries in terms of their future and to construct allegedly itself a system of democratic and liberal values. Instead, the Balkan's expectation would be more generalised eventually, as a process that firstly at all would open completely new paths.

The opportunity for providing a political, economic, social, and ethnic balance in the Balkan countries with a fragile democracy would be much higher if it could be launched according to some realistic expectations.

In the period of 1990s that used to be quite difficult and dramatic for the Balkan region (characterised at the same time with the tendency of recovering the old nation-states), it started the use of the notion of *Europeanisation* mainly referring to the countries of the Balkans more than for any other region. So, again the Balkan issue happens to be innovative in terms of the new trends and terminology of the enlargement of the EU.

However, a lot of time has been spent and seems to continue to be spent in identifying what exactly the process of *Europeanisation* in the Balkans would mean in terms of

the structural transformation, modernisation, and adjustment to the advanced European models in the areas mentioned above as well as higher levels of security and prosperity. It also represents desirable modernising changes for the region (Anastasakis 2005: p. 84)

If the original idea was that *Europeanisation* would mean the structural transformation, modernisation, and adapting to the advanced models in certain fields of criteria and as well as high levels of security and prosperity, then it is obvious that more than for two decades the *Europeanisation* concept remains to be only idealistic and confuse for the Balkan countries and it didn't succeed so far to be linked with the Balkan reality. One of the fundamental components of the *Europeanisation* approach in continuity used to be the integration in disfavor of the Balkan's fragmentations. The countries of the Balkans in the second decade of the XXI century remained fragmented with high levels of polarisation along several lines and finally far away from any completed structural transformation (Latifi 2016: p. 284).

The Europeanisation of the Balkans means an inextricably interlinked process of democracy and development. Balkan readiness for development and Europeanisation is not negligible according to Blunden and Burke: "Despite serious economic crises in post-communist Balkan countries, there is a noticeably increased acceptance of the market economy. Despite the brutal wars which have torn the region apart, there is hope for renewed regional co-operation" (Blunden, Burke 2001: p. 11)

Having into consideration that the *Europeanisation* concept didn't manage to achieve in total its expected effects in the Balkan for which region it was initially destined, meanwhile the conceptualisation of *Europeanisation* expanded its meanings, but even that it didn't help to make the goal as a successful doctrine for the EU's enlargement policies. Therefore, the conceptuality of the *Europeanisation* with its new reformulations is being transformed more in a theoretical issue of studying and theoretical debates rather than any programme or objective goal. As a result, that it didn't work in the Balkans still, today the *Europeanisation* is wired with confusion even expanding its meanings into (1) dynamics, (2) the nature of interactivity between European and national levels, (3) the mechanisms of impact on domestic politics, (4) the impact of the EU beyond its geographical borders—enlargement eastwards (Papadimitriou, Gateva 2010: p. 152–166).

In terms of the dynamics of changes and integration reformation process, in the case of the Balkans since the *Europeanisation* process was launched so far there are noticed important and quite encouraging drifts on the level of synchronisation of the legislation of the EU by the Balkan countries and to some extent in terms of the institutional reforms. However, the overall progress of the Balkan countries including some other fields and aspects are estimated to be conducted with turtle steps that are quite slow in front of the European dynamics (Latifi 2014a: p.165). Certainly, in the age of the major technology and internet developments and achievements, the motions with the turtle steps followed with the retrograde Balkan style risk to result in many hazards. Firstly, at all, as a result of this dawdler dynamics and absence of the essential and real vision and commitment, and as a result of their contesting myths, the Balkan countries are jeopardising with the isolation. Unfortunately, the young part of the population is being lost their hopes in

a significant way in their highly politicised environments and with countries with no near perspectives ahead (Latifi 2016: p. 285).

Thus, it is happening to be in rising the trend of their migration and their massive exploring out of their homelands. The Balkans now under these clumsy progress circumstances is getting closer to the disillusionment that is being felt by a progressive youth educated under the spirit of plenty of opportunities offered by the technologies of information.

In these cases, alternatives always exist. The problem is not related only to the knot of slow mechanisms of opening doors of the EU or to various eventual tactics of the EU's geo-strategies concerning the Balkans, but rather as far as the people and the leaders of the Balkans are not able to overcome themselves realistically there can't be expected a quicker dynamic than that of the turtle steps (Latifi 2016: p. 285).

Instead of abandoning the inherited communist freaks of the realities of the Balkan illiberal democracies and instead of abandoning from the retrograde pretending in favor of the sense of compromises and modern state-building potentials, in the countries of the Balkans that are still not integrated (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro) is happening the contrary phenomenon in these countries more and more, the folklores is coming to expression to their political discourse both as states and ethnicities.

The transition from the speed level of turtles into the level of faster steps it requires from the Balkans fundamentally changes the institutions and mindsets, and political cultures as well, and in no case, it requires any presence of the complacency from the make-up and camouflages of the political decision-makers. In meanwhile, in the case of the Balkan countries, the benefit would be extraordinarily significant from the European integration process serving as a strong guide that would accelerate the expected changes for many decades back.

But, what in fact under these circumstances the Balkan countries can offer to Europe at this stage one century since the escalation of the First World War? A patriotism? It is not enough. Exporting any kind of stability? In essence, the Balkan countries have no potential at this phase to provide the stability more than to their respective countries, and even the regional stability in the Balkans is often under a question mark. An example of the model of dialogue? Even most of the countries are not close to the practicing of fundamental principles of the political or inter-cultural dialogue and not ready to offer any model of advanced dialogue.

Then it remains to be offered eventually only the model of the absence of political modernisation, model of excellent interethnic and interstate cooperation in the field of corruption and transnational organised crime, politically controlled and influenced courts, attempts for removing and controlling the freedom and media speech, avoiding of the process of the multiethnic state building, etc.

Simply, without any aim for an irony, if from the countries of the Balkans there would be requested to present with something in front of the European gate of membership, with the current rhythm of reforms and failing elements of the democratic processes, unfortunately, these countries would present at the main gate only the model of the

delayed democracy and the practices of cultivation of the illusionary attempts for re-shaping and correcting the EU's rules and criteria for membership for them and for their waiting practices for some kind of political luck that would open for the countries the membership gates based on some new eventual circumstances of the geo-strategic advantages of the European politics.

From another hand, to avoid any confusion, such a kind of slow rhythm of the Balkan countries should not be misinterpreted as any kind of alleged cultivation of the Euro-skepticism all around the Balkans.

With political establishments with limited inclinations for visions, with many political leaders mired in corruption and eventually at any time ready to scarify and undermine the European agenda and progress of their nations to keep their political control of power and developments in the society, and with many politicians that widely are not inclined to feel and percept the politics as a matter of compromise but rather as a magic opportunity for redistributions of economic and state resources, the Balkans in this way is persisting to remain as a fragile region, where the demoralisation of its population is occurring yet.

## Conclusions

Three decades under the prolonged transition, the Balkans remains the region associated with serious problems in terms of the functioning of the real democracy and the typical practices of illiberal democracy are multiplying in the region, and at the same time the frustration from delayed progress is aggregating in the continuity. As Anastasakis (2013: p. 18) points out, the early years of transition in the Balkans are remembered as a period of distorted democratisation, of gains and deficits that are still affecting current political practices and discourses.

Certainly, even the European integration project itself has its challenges and difficulties in the aspect of the enlargement policies, but the key of progress still should be searched within the reformation and modernisation processes of the Balkan arena, regardless of the dilemmas and internal crisis that may have the European project.

In the history of the enlargement policies of the European Union so far none can find any case of aspiring countries for membership in succeeding the change of the membership criteria and principles of functioning of the supranational structure regarding the ways of its decision-making about the membership in the EU before its integration (Latifi 2016: p. 285-286).

Therefore, it presents only an irrational time deprivation and a typical illusion the eventual pretending of any of the Balkan countries, aiming to change the rules and criteria of membership and as well as the consensus concept of the EU either in the early phase of the integration process or during the accession phase. The application for the EU of any Balkan countries should not be conducted for aiming to change the rules and criteria of the European project, but rather the application should be conducted for aiming to become a part of the European project with clear conditions and principles stated in advanced.

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