THE EU COPING WITH THE WESTERN BALKAN STABILITOCRACIES

Avdi SMAJLJAJ[*]

Abstract. *The paper aims to explore and assess the EU capacities in ensuring stability in the Western Balkans. The six Western Balkan countries: Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo, are widely considered as stabilitocracies in their positions and relations to the main actors promoting democracy, liberalism, peace and stability in the region. Among the priorities in the region set by the international community is the stability of the region, often putting other important priorities down into the list of priorities. Among the main actors promoting those values in the region is the EU. However, taking into account the observable outcomes considerable challenges to stability remain. Despite the fact that the EU largely acts in the region in a form of partnership with the USA, the paper aims to study only the EU's capacities to deliver and ensure stability, democracy, and integration of the region in the EU while trying to get along with stabilitocracies. The study will add further to the enlargement policy, through exploring the prospect of the EU to promote and ensure stability, which is considered necessary for inclusion of the region in the EU.*

1. Introduction

The engagement of the EU in the Western Balkans is of decisive importance. Transition of the region towards democracy is enabled and ensured through the EU active support, creating an encouraging environment for the development of democracy and liberalism. Despite considerable pitfalls in the region in terms of consolidating democracies, the EU at least has ensured broad framework within which democracies are expected to be rooted and deliver as well. The EU engagement in the region is mainly done through crisis management mechanisms and enlargement policy. The crisis and conflicts that erupted during the fall of Yugoslavia necessitated the EU's actions, within its quite limited capacities, trying to prevent conflicts, manage them, bring them to the end, and build peace and state capacities after the conflicts. But, what mostly counts on the EU's role in the region is its struggle to integrate the Western Balkan countries into the EU through enlargement policy. Despite ups and downs within this long journey of integration, the process kept in track broadly democracy and democratization in the region, which otherwise would have had worse scenario. This is done mainly through conditionality, socialisation, and promotion and conflict resolution mechanisms. The extent to which the EU is successful in this regard is matter of debate, but it can be concluded that the enlargement process did not deliver, at least, as expected. After

---

[*] PhD in Political Science, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Epoka University, Tirana, Albania. Email: asmajljaj@epoka.edu.al

decades of integration process, the region remains as a black hole, surrounded by the EU all over in the map of the Europe. Perhaps the condition of the Western Balkan countries in terms of values and institutional settings is what mostly counts on the delays in the process of integrating the region in the EU and on the drawbacks in the democratisation process. As such, the EU could not ignore those settings that necessitated an establishment of the so called stabilitocracies that EU has to deal with during the integration process. In this way, such systems in the Western Balkans confused the priorities that the EU has in the region as well as the priorities that the Western Balkan countries have in their political, democratic, and integration objectives. This is what the paper is going to look at, how the EU is coping with the stabilitocracies, what are the consequences of it, and how far they can go along as such?

2. Transforming the region through stabilitocracies

The transformative power of the EU has been evident since its beginning. Yet, the research of the concept of the EU as a transformative power (Lenord, 2005) has increased its importance and attention. The EU has transformed within itself since its very beginning. It turned Europe from a war-torn continent into peace loving one. The most impactful transformative power of the EU is marks in the eastern enlargement (Grabbe, 2006; Matlak, Schimmelfennig, Woźniakowski, 2018). However, in the Western Balkans the issue of transforming the region by the EU so far does not seems to have the same impact. The region is still far from joining at least formally the EU, the state of democratisation has experienced drawbacks. If we speak of the transformation of the Western Balkans due to the influence of the EU, considerable flaws are observable. Among others, the priority given to consolidation of stabilitocracies (Antoinette, Deimel, 2012) instead of democracies and liberal democracies makes the lead into the hierarchy of causes of transformation pitfalls in the region. Probably the terrain to promote transformation in the Western Balkans was a bit different, compared to the eastern Europe, though when we speak of Eastern Europe there should be highlighted difficulties in the case of Rumania and Bulgaria that made mostly the difference. In addition, the EU is being challenged in the region by non-democratic global powers like China and Russia (Stanicek, Tarpova, 2022; McBride, 2023). It is important to emphasise the competing influence in the region, since this makes stabilitocracies even more favoured and accepted. As such, if stabilitocracies are meant to be temporary until circumstances through transformation change, then this extends further the livelihood and functioning of stabilitocracies, that among others compromises democratization and integration prospects of the region. If the EU was driven by the context in the Western Balkans to flirt with stabilitocracies, then now with the competing influence coming from China and Russia it has additional drivers to do so. The transformative power of the EU in the Western Balkans is mainly implemented through the instrument of conditionality, coupled with socialisation process, and persuasion and conflict resolution to some extent.

2.1. Conditionality

Conditionality is one of the most important instruments in the EU enlargement policy Schimmelfennig, Sedelmeier, 2004; Schimmelfennig, Scholtz, 2010). Conditionality started to be used as an enlargement instrument from the Copenhagen Summit 1993. Regardless of the academic debate on it, conditionality has proved a very useful tool in enlargement process. Beside increasing the number of members states it has served as a filter of Europeanisation of the eastern Europe and wider. In particular it

proved very successful in the EU eastern enlargement (Grabbe, 2006). It led to substantial, institutional, legal, and political changes that ensured the democratic transformation and consolidation in the region. Conditionality served among others to conceptualise and implement accordingly structural reforms made conform membership prospects of the region (Schimmelfennig, Sedelmeier, 2004).

However, the functioning of the conditionality mechanism is depended on the number of factors: the credibility of the conditions, clarity of the conditions, and the unquestionable EU commitments to integrate the region in the EU. Certainly, from the domestic perspective of the countries being conditioned, conditionality also depends on the readiness and the will of domestic agents to carry on with the reforms related to the conditionality. This varies from country to country, and also it is an obvious difference between eastern Europe and the western Balkans. In the case of the eastern enlargement, the EU showed more eagerness to anchor the region into the EU, it had in general no doubts and reservations on the necessity, be it geo political or geo strategic necessity, to integrate the region in the EU. Perhaps, this is to count mostly with the success story of the transformative power of the EU in the region. From here it can be argued that the level of the will of the EU might also have more impact in changing the domestic environment, making it more ready to pursue their accession reforms agenda. Something which does not seem of the same intensity in the western Balkans.

In the case of the western Balkans conditionality is keeping the region in track of the European integration, but the process is not delivering much, it is taking longer than expected, its transformative power is lagging much. In the Western Balkans it is more about keeping the process of enlargement alive though not delivering as in the case of Eastern Europe (O'Brennan, 2014), at least in terms of the progress measured. The enlargement process is taking longer than probably everyone expected. This led time after time in re-evaluation of the strategies and trying to adopt new one to facilitate the enlargement process (https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/policy-brief/2021/reviving-european-policy-towards-western-balkans#section-4). The time after time changes of the enlargement strategy is a sign of lack of clarity in the conditioning process that can also undermine the expected results of the transformation. The first criteria needed to make conditionality work that is the clarity of the conditions, in the case of the Western Balkans was partially fulfilled. Moreover, the carrot and stick tools are not systematically aligned to the conditionality. The EU proved insufficient to create tools that would penalise western Balkan states that fail to comply with the conditionality. In contrary, surprisingly often praised leader of the western Balkans that endangered the so far achievements of democratisation (Kmezic, Bieber 2017). This sound workable in stabilitocracy terms, but not in terms of promoting the EU values in the region and transforming the region. Apparently, the EU considered enough drawing routinely reports that bring into the surface the lack of reforms. But, as a routine with time it loses its pressuring power needed to carry on with the reforms. Yet, no other formal tools that would exercise pressure on the politicians to carry on with the reforms are present. An informal pressure that might come from various member states is often compromised by the national interests. In turn, this sort of negligence of the EU proved useful for the Western Balkan politicians to respond to conditions through pursuing a very formal way of partially fulfilling the conditions, echoing it in a rhetorical way, visible and remarkable to the public eyes, but in reality, making not much substantial reforms on the integration prospects. This is aided by the media that usually serve as the interpreters of the progress reports coming form the EU to the public. They interpret it

often in a non-systematic way, the way politicians would like to hear it. In this way, the blaming and shaming power that reports might have is minimised if not obsolete. Furthermore, it is not recorded a case where the EU leaders either in their bilateral or multilateral meetings with Western Balkan politicians would blame and warn them directly, though that are primary responsible for the failure of reforms. If there were such cases, they would be done in a very diplomatic way often shadowed by the appraisal they make to the politicians in the Western Balkans. Usually, this approach is pursued in a more diplomatic way, very much guided by stabilitocracy principles, in a form of green light given to their practices not in line with the conditionality requirements. As such, the western Balkan leaders could easily escape their responsibility on the failure to meet the conditionality criteria. Meanwhile, this stabilitocratic attitude on both sides, the EU and the politicians in the western Balkans, compromises the conditionality as a mechanism and the process of the integration of the Western Balkan countries in general.

On the other side, the rewarding tools for those who proved progress in fulfilling conditions often misses. The encouragement that a western Balkan state can count on the foreseeable possibility to get rewarded by the EU as an encouragement to move on with reforms was not present. In contrary, even the normal process of advancement on the integration steps sometimes was stuck by the possibility that the EU member states can use veto power for their national interests. So was the case between the Greece and FYROM. Now there are threats on using veto by Bulgaria against North Macedonia, and Greece against Albania. It should not be left aside also the individual members state approach and measurements that at times was different from the opinions of the European Commission, blocking the progress towards the EU singlehandedly (https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/the-netherlands-vetoes-albania-s-eu-candidate-status/13.12.2013). Actually, such behaviour of member states does not seem in line with stabilitocray rules, but it complicates the process of enlargement further and makes the process in broad sense to pursue stabilitocratic logic of doing things in the enlargement process. Furthermore, the EU is often said to face internal challenges to enlargement (Devrim and Schultz 2009; O'Brennan, 2014). This can also be described as an enlargement fatigue. EU member states, some of them more and some less, showing not much steadfastness and courage to open the door for the Western Balkan countries. This seems, among others to reflect domestic political dynamics within the member states, rise of rightist populism (van Rij, et.al., 2024). This empowers the stabilitocratic approach in the enlargement process as the EU needs to find the way between trying to keep enlargement in track and at the same time satisfying the internal growing demands for not further enlargement. From the EU side it slowed down the process of anchoring the region and demanding fulfilment of criteria, responding to the pressure coming from the member states to do so. While from the perspective of the Western Balkan countries, politicians highly appreciate it as an excuse for not moving forward with the reforms. In this way, it makes the process of integration not very much reliable, adding to other political implication coupled within the process.

From the side of the perspective of Western Balkan states, stabilitocractic approach of the enlargement has provided politicians from the Western Balkans with sufficient space to manoeuvre between rhetorical commitment to fulfil the criteria put by conditionality and possibility of substantially compromising the process of the reforms. This is best reflected into the huge gap between the laws passed and their implementation. Faced with the reality on the ground, politicians in the western Balkans put their narrow interests as a priority to common good that in this case among others mean integration in

the EU. Stabilitocracies fit well into such settings. Actually. Nothing explains better the realities in the western Balkans than stabilitocracies. It reflects a sort of integration just on paper. Therefore, stabilitocracies provide a very useful milieu to manage the formal pressure coming from the EU on one side, through a formal and partial fulfilment of requirements. This setting encourages such a political attitude and behaviour. Politicians from the Western Balkans were and are not sufficiently pressured by the EU to fulfil the agenda of the reforms. In stabilitocratic sense they used this supple attitude of the EU in the conditionality principle, never making them bother on the failure of the reforms. This in turn increased the nonaccountability and irresponsibility of politicians in the Western Balkans, automatically compromising democratic principles as well. Thus, the transformation power capacities of the EU through conditionality in the western Balkans very easily defied by the Western Balkan countries. The up to date obvious results of this are delayed integration and democracy drawbacks in the region.

2.2. Socialisation

Aside from conditionality, the transformative power of the EU is meant to be channelled and implemented also through the process of socialisation. As a process of learning, unlearning and transforming values it is a very broad. It encompasses number of actors and platforms where it takes place. When we speak of the EU values, they are now specified in the Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty. In the case of the EU teaching values to the others, known as a socialisation process, the EU is considerably powerful. Actually, this is the strongest weapon that the EU has, mostly structured through soft power mechanisms. Socialisation is used also in the enlargement process, considerably complementing the conditionality mechanism. It proved very successful in the eastern enlargement through Europeanisation process (Schimmelfennig, Sedelmeier, 2019). Yet, when we speak of socialisation in the Western Balkans, the process of promoting the EU values in the region and learning values at institutional, elite, and masses level, it seems that not much has been done (Dzankic, Keil, Kmezic, 2019). The traditional networks dominate communication through enlargement process in the socialisation process in the region. Predominantly, politicians to politicians and bureaucrats to bureaucrats is the platform where most of the official contacts took place. In such a way, process of learning the values is very closed and formal, and away from public at large. This is very suitable in particular in a stabilitocratic settings where Western Balkan politicians can easily be protected from direct pressure coming from citizens. It resembles more a sort of a political elite process. Actually, this was considered also as a sort of failure of the EU to transplant the its values beyond the eastern Europe, like in the case of former Soviet Union countries (Votey, 2012). This means that value changing process does not touch citizens and society at large, that would serve as a sustainable transformation of societies. This is also reflected in the failure of the EU in long term socialisation process and return of authoritarian tendencies in considerable European countries and wider. In the Western Balkan countries such a politician to politician and bureaucrat to bureaucrat contacts did not lead to much value changes in the region. In contrary it is often used by politicians of the region through political declarations to promote themselves as committed guys to the integration process, but in reality, not doing much on this. So, as a level of contact proved insufficient for a successful socialisation process.

Another important value learning channel is the linkages between political parties at the level of the EU and political parties in the Western Balkans (Stratulat 2014). Almost all relevant political parties in the region are affiliated with the party federations

at the EU level. Formally this worked often to increase professional and technical capacities of the political parties in the region through consistent meetings at various levels of political parties. However, taking into account the structure of most of political parties in the region, in particular their socialisation function, then political parties are not much to be expected that they can implant and develop further the EU values in their societies. Political parties in the western Balkans are the main governing actors, cohabiting well within their stabilitocracies. They are the main actors that created and cultivate stabilitocracies, in a way increasing obstacles to democratization process as well as to the fulfilment of the reforms within conditionality. Political parties as normatively the main actors of democratisation in the region, are to be blamed for the failures and drawbacks of democratisation in the region. As such, political parties to political party's link is not meant to be a functional way to socialise the region with the EU values. In contrary, political parties in the region often use such relationship with the European parties to legitimise their dominant stabilitocratic political attitudes and behaviours, since at the masses level such contacts are precepted as a sort of approval of what they are doing by the parties of the EU, largely considered by masses as an abstract, intended model of politics. In addition, thin structures of political parties in the western Balkans does not provide a space for rooting the EU values at the society level.

Civil society and public sphere is a complementary milieu where socialisation process takes place. Civil society in the region is considered by the EU an important actor to promote its values. The EU is one of the main supporters of the civil society organisations in the region (https://webalkans.eu/me/themes/democracy-and-fundamen tal-rights/civil-society/#:~:text=The%20EU%20has%20been%20supporting%20 civil%20society%20in,Facility%20with%20a%20designated%203%25%20of%20IPA %20funding).

The EU tries to complement its influence aside from the level of politicians. Yet, looking at the civil society in the region, its level of development, actually its underdevelopment, complicates further the situation. The civil society organisations in the region continue to remain project based, relying on the financing their projects from their governments or from the EU or less and less from foreign donors (Minić, Nechev, Nikolovski, 2019). This dependence of civil society has undermined the credibility of the civil society, and as such their capacity to promote the values of the EU and values of democracy and liberalism in general. As such, civil society organisations themselves van not escape values of stabilitocracies. It seems they have adopted themselves very well within the stabilitocracies, but at a very cost of credibility. They are there very much formally, very high in number, but in terms of challenging the status quo, challenging the stabilitocracy mindset, and trying to develop democracy and promote the EU integration, civil society organisations in the region actually are actors not to be count on. Furthermore, civil society organisations in the western Balkans are known for a very low level of integration of society. They have not penetrated into society and therefore their capacities to promote the EU values and to socialise society with the EU values is very low, often even non-existent. One of the fundamental reasons why civil society is at this condition can be found also within the functioning of the stabilitocracies as a system, promoted also by the EU, where those belonging to the system have to adopt to. This seems to be also the reason why the EU is so lenient towards not performing and not delivering civil society supported financially by the EU itself.

The experience of the EU in a number of countries where the EU could not perform much in terms of promoting its values, has pushed the EU to try to find the way

how to reach to the people. In this way it has developed P2P programs (https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/newsroom/14-02-2023-people-to-people-cooperation-across-eu-s-external-borders-eni-cbc_en).

2.3. Persuasion and conflict prevention
The EU is committed in the Western Balkans consistently since the end of Cold War. Aside from the enlargement process, the EU was and is still engaged in the promotion of peace, conflict management, conflict prevention, and peace building processes. In the conflicts in the region with breakup of Yugoslavia, the EU could not do much to prevent them and to end them as well. Most of the decisive decisions on ending conflicts in the region were done due to the US and NATO involvement, such as Dayton Agreement and the Decision of NATO to intervene and stop humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo. Due to its political and decision-making system the EU could not do much in this regard. However, it was very much engaged in diplomatic way to stop the conflicts and in the implementation of the agreements reached by the end of conflicts. It was part of peacebuilding missions and rule of law missions in the region (Ioannides, 2018).

Currently it is involved in the hot issues that are threatening the regional security, it is facilitating the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo. This issue now represents the most sensitive issue in the region in terms of security. Speaking of security is what is mostly concerned the EU in the region and is also directly very much linked to the issue of the concern here, the stabilitocracies and stabilitocracy concerns. This is coupled with the geopolitical concerns and security threats knocking on the doorstep of the EU in the Western Balkan region. However, the overextended dialogue is also reflecting the incapacity of the EU to find a solution. This in turn empowers further the concept of stabilitocracy, making the EU to have security as a apriority of priorities, putting aside democratisation, rule of law, and other criteria within the conditionality.

Another pinching issue that adds to stabilitocratic settings in the region is the issue of Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity. Leaders of *Republika Srpska* often threaten the security in the region by stating the secessionist ambitions. The EU is trying to calm down the situation, but does not seem to be efficient. In this regard, what it actually matters is that the necessity of stabilitocracies remains intact. Recent war in Ukraine in one side and the rising nationalism in the Western Balkans are adding further to the appraisal of stabilitocracies in the region. Russia considers Western Balkans as an important region from where it can challenge the EU and NATO.

(https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/russian-ambassador-says-bih-can-join-nato-but-moscow-will-react/). Moreover, it has a stronghold in the region such as pro-Russian governments in Serbia and Republika Srpska, and the influence that such governments have in the security prospects of the region. Therefore, the EU seems to be fine with the declining democracy in the region, like in Serbia for example, moving into dominant party system, with limited media freedom and so on. This can not be explained in other way except through stabilitocracy concerns of the EU in the region. The EU without the support of the US does not seem itself ready and capable to ensure security of the region. No agreement would be done if the US is not there to back the agreement.

3. Conclusion
Thus, the question is how far can the EU and the Western Balkans go through stabilitocracies? What can actually deliver this? Where does this bring the region in

medium and long term? The delayed process of the integration is a consequence of stabilitocratic approach of the EU towards the region. As we have stated earlier democracies in this region are becoming weak and weak, with the declining independence of media, and weak institutions, and clientelism. Preventing wars and conflicts and keeping stability through stabilitocracies is providing justifiable unaccountable and irresponsible political behaviour, among others like state captures that undermines a sustainable future democratic and integration prospect. The shallow Europeanization of the region, largely through formal declarations, is a warning to the EU enlargement process and to the integration of the region in the EU. In other words, stabilitocracies present a sort of pact between the EU politicians and the western Balkan politicians silently to make stabilitocracies as the only game in town. Such an approach makes the EU an assistant in legitimizing the political regimes in the region. Furthermore, it diminishes the transformative power of the EU. The transition to democracy without democracies being consolidated is not sufficient for a pro-European region. And stabilitocracies are undermining such democracy prospects. In turn they are legitimizing the drawbacks. Such failures of the EU would be much more dangerous in the long run than actual threats of influence coming from non-democracies.

There is an illusion that the power of the EU's attractiveness is so great that it can attract also negligent countries like in the western Balkan countries. This probably might go beyond the stabilitocracies, but does not seem likely. Or, alternatively it can apply the everything but membership policy toward the western Balkans. This also would not seem effective since it does not have sufficient pressuring power to carry on with the reforms. Finally, ff the EU during past two decades has failed to transform the small and deeply connected region like the western Balkans, how will it succeed elsewhere? Would these failures of the EU in the western Balkans undermine the credo of the EU as a global power? Probably yes. If unable to transform a close region within the yard of the EU, a region that is very much dependent on the EU, how can we expect that the EU can transform other parts of the world. We can conclude that neither peace nor democratization is safe through the current level of engagement of the EU in the region. The stabilitocracies are being used by both sides as modus vivendi for the time being, but with the very high costs in the future. More workable, substantial, and intensive approach of the EU is needed to transform the western Balkans, to democratize, to integrate and anchor it substantially to the EU. Alternatives to stabilitocracies should me though of if the integration of the region is meant one day to come true. Stabilitocracies are not the solution.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Antoinette Primatarova; Deimel, Johanna (2012), *Bridge Over Troubled Waters? The Role of the Internationals in Albania*. Sofia: Centre for Liberal Strategies.

Devrim Deniz; Schultz Evelina (2009), *Enlargement fatigue in the European Union: from enlargement to Many Unions*. https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/work-document/enlargement-fatigue-in-the-european-union-from-enlargement-to-many-unions-wp/, accessed on 19.08.2024.

Ioannides Isabelle (2018), *Peace and Security in 2018. An evaluation of EU peacebuilding in the Western Balkans*. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/

etudes/STUD/2018/621816/EPRS_STU(2018)621816_EN.pdf, accessed on 24.08.2024.0

Džankić Jelena; Keil Soeren; Kmezić Marko (ed) (2019), *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans, A Failure of EU Conditionality?* Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Grabbe Heather (2006), *The EU's Transformative power: Europeanization through Conditionality in Central and Eastern Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

How is the EU responding? https://webalkans.eu/me/themes/democracy-and-funda mental-rights/civil-society/#:~:text=The%20EU%20has%20been%20supporting %20civil%20society%20in,Facility%20with%20a%20designated%203%25%20 of%20IPA%20funding, accessed on 01.08.2024.

Minić Jelena; Nechev Zoran; Nikolovski Ivan (2019), *Regional cooperation in the Western Balkans – is there acivil society pillar?* https://www.balkanfund.org/ site/pubs/uploads/publications/think%20and%20link/WEBA5_Regional_Cooper ation_in_th.pdf, accessed on 11.08.2024.

Kmezic Marko; Bieber Florian (2017), *The crisis of democracy in the western Balkans: An anatomy of stabilitocracy and the limits of the EU democracy promotion*. The Balkans in the Europe policy advisory group.

Lenord Mark (2005), *Europe's transformative power. Center for European reform*. https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/bulletin-article/2005/europes-transforma tive-power, accessed on 20.08.2024.

McBride James (2023), *Russia's influence in the Balkans. Council of Foreign Relations*. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/russias-influence-balkans, accessed on 05.08.2024.

Michal Matlak; Schimmelfennig Frank; Tomasz P. Wozniakovski (2018), *Europeanization revisited: central and eastern Europe in the European Union*. European University Institute.

O'Brennan John (2014), *On the slow train to nowhere? The European Union, enlargement fatigue and the Western Balkans*, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, pp. 221-241.

Russian Ambassador says BiH can join NATO, but Moscow will react. https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/russian-ambassador-says-bih-can-join-nato-but-moscow-will-react/, Mar 17, 2022.

Schimmelfennig Frank; Sedelmeier Ulrich (2004), *Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe*, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, pp. 661–679.

Schimmelfennig Frank; Scholtz Hanno (2010), *Legacies and leverage: EU political conditionality and democracy promotion in historical perspective*, in *Europe-Asia Studies*, pp. 443-460.

Schimmelfennig Frank; Sedelmeier Ulrich (2019), *The Europeanization of Eastern Europe: the external incentives model revisited*, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, pp.814–833.

Stanicek Branislav; Tarpova Simona (2022), *China's strategic interests in the Western Balkans*. European Parliament Briefing. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/ etudes/BRIE/2022/733558/EPRS_BRI(2022)733558_EN.pdf, accessed on 11.08.2024.

Stratulat Corina (2014), *EU integration and party politics in the Balkans*. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/183389/pub_4716_eu_integration_and_party_politi cs_in_the_balkans.pdf, accessed on 02.08.2024.

The Netherlands vetoes Albania's EU candidate status – Euractiv, The Netherlands vetoes Albania's EU candidate status – Euractiv, https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/the-netherlands-vetoes-albania-s-eu-candidate-status/, accessed on 13.12.2013.

van Rij Armida, et.al. (2024), *How will gains by the far right affect the European Parliament and EU?* https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/06/how-will-gains-far-right-affect-european-parliament-and-eu, accessed on 05.08.2024.

Votey Maxwell (2012), The Failure of Democracy in Post-Soviet Eurasia. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-failure-democracy-post-soviet-eurasia, accessed on 07.08.2024.