

SPECIAL ISSUE

SEER

JOURNAL FOR LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS IN EASTERN EUROPE

Journal of the European Trade Union Institute

An Elusive Target

The EU Perspective of the Western Balkans

A Selection from 17 Years of SEER

Calvin **Allen** and Béla **Galgóczy**: Review essay: Souvenirs of the post-crisis politics

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SEER aims to stimulate an exchange of information between researchers, trade unionists and people who have a special interest in the political, social and economic development of the region of eastern Europe.

It seeks to draw attention to new research results and the latest analysis about the ongoing process of political and social changes in the broader eastern European region, and tries to create deeper understanding of the importance of the elaboration of democratic structures within industrial relations.

SEER combines contributions from different disciplines and schools of thought into an information package intended to be of interest to policy-makers, researchers, academics and trade unionists from various backgrounds.

The editors would like to point out that it is the authors who are responsible for the content of their own articles and that neither the editors nor the publisher, the European Trade Union Institute, necessarily share the opinions of the authors whose work is featured in the SEER.

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JOURNAL OF THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION INSTITUTE

An Elusive Target

The EU and the Ever-Continuing Accession Perspectives
of the Western Balkans

A Selection from 17 Years of SEER



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Calvin Allen and Béla Galgóczi

Review essay: Souvenirs of the post-crisis politics*

Abstract

This review article examines the contributions we have selected for this special issue in terms of what they have had to say about EU enlargement to the south-east. Given that the timetable for accession for south-east Europe stretches – even still – into the long-term, it seeks expressly to explore what our authors have had to say about why the pace of enlargement has been so much slower than that of previous enlargements. Looking at the barriers that remain and at where the fault lines continue to lie, our review highlights a descent into sclerosis but also seeks to explore avenues of change that offer a more positive view of the prospects for enlargement. In repeating the call for the Commission to adopt a new vision for Europe, the review emphasises the need for the creation of an EU that truly achieves unity and solidarity. In doing so, the review highlights the benefits of expansion for the EU itself, given its own security needs and existing high-priority policy concerns, as well as for the countries of south-east Europe.

Keywords: enlargement, accession, Balkans, social Europe, crises, institutions, reform

Introduction

The *SEER Journal*, having started life in 1998, has had the EU's approach to enlargement as an institutional constant throughout: the 1993 Copenhagen criteria, confirmed by the 1995 Madrid administrative criteria, have guided the Union's approach to the desire of ex-communist bloc central and east European countries, encompassing (in some cases) and extending to (in those of others) those in south-east Europe, to gain membership. To remind ourselves, these criteria are:

- stability of the institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities
- a functioning market economy
- the capacity to adopt the common rules, standards and policies of the Union, accompanied by the adaptation of applicant countries' administrative structures so as to create the conditions for a gradual, harmonious integration.

As regards the western Balkans, the formal Stabilisation and Association Process was set as a precursor to integration at the EU-Western Balkans Summit immediately following the 2003 European Council in Thessaloniki. This, in turn, built on the commitments at Santa Maria de Feira in 2000 which saw a credible prospect of EU membership as the main motivator for reform within the countries of the region. This has,

* With grateful thanks to Thomas Allen for comments on an earlier draft.

however, been added to in the form of a requirement for regional co-operation as well as co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Christophe Solioz's first contribution re-printed in this special issue, back in 2007, and citing EU sources, envisaged even the laggards – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia – as likely to have gained accession to the EU by 2015. Clearly, 'What happened?' is, therefore, a very pertinent question.

It is clear that applications for EU membership progress at different rates – that the accession process can be likened to a regatta, not a convoy (Solioz, 2010), with the intention that competition should drive faster and better integration. Turkey, one of the countries that we regularly cover in the pages of the *SEER Journal*, has been an Associate member of the EU since 1963 and formally applied for membership as far back as 1987 before eventually being accepted as a candidate country in 1999. The UK first applied at the end of the 1950s but only eventually became a member in 1973, following its third application. Hungary, quickly followed by Poland, was the first ex-communist bloc country to apply to join the EU, at the end of March 1994, with both joining the EU in the *en bloc* accession of no fewer than ten countries, including Cyprus and Malta, nearly ten years later, i.e. from the start of 2004. This was nearly a decade and a half after the start of the transition.

The ex-communist bloc countries of central and eastern Europe have now already been members of the EU for a decade – for them, EU membership is business as usual (even if some appear more than willing to press the boundaries of what that means in practice). But what about the remaining countries in south-eastern Europe?

Here in 2015, twelve years after the Thessaloniki Council and fifteen after the Zagreb Summit which confirmed the prospect of EU accession, Croatia is the only country to have joined the EU (in 2013) from the western Balkans, although it (like Slovenia before it) may well refute the relevancy of such a label (as Gordana Đurović and Milivoje Radović pointed out in 2010). The others all have Stabilisation and Association Agreements in place – Macedonia since 2004 the earliest (and one year earlier than Croatia); Kosovo since 2015 the most recent – but have likely accession dates which extend into the future.

There are – as the articles in this special issue of the SEER explore – many reasons for why. Given that there was a wealth of technical expertise and assistance provided to the states of central and eastern Europe (as Renate Langewiesche (2000) and Christophe Solioz (2010) both indicate), and that this particular enlargement might have provided something of a template for the countries of south-east Europe, we might legitimately wonder why the process has not actually speeded up.

This would be too simplistic a perspective, given the complexities of the recent history. However, the Juncker Commission's decision to reject any future expansion of the EU until at least 2020 identifies that the process will continue to be a slow, drawn-out one. It is impossible realistically to argue that the very clear, and relatively uncontroversial, Copenhagen criteria are actually being met by any south-east Europe EU applicant: they continue, in contrast, to be missed by a distance. What matters instead is, quite clearly, what can be done about it, and by whom. Seeking answers as to why the process has become so drawn out – why the road has become such a long and winding (Solioz, 2010), or a weary (Solioz, 2014), one – is a key question.

Over a decade ago, Wim van Meurs (2003) identified that progress as regard the south-east had reached a stumbling block as a result of developments in the region and the projected consequences of eastern enlargement for the EU itself. Indeed, he called for:

Determined rethinking and a renewal of European strategies for south-eastern Europe.

Christophe Solioz repeated the call in 2007, pointing to the need for the EU to:

Re-think the European project in the region and, above all, to embrace politics in order to make south-eastern Europe work.

That such a rethinking and renewal, and a re-embracing of politics as the art of the possible, has not overtly taken place seems clear enough, and that the answer to why may well lie in the absence of a concerted will to do so – but on whose part?

It is plain that the bright beacon of hope that the EU represented for many countries of central and eastern Europe back in the early years of the transition has failed to carry very far into south-east Europe at all. Of course, countries burdened by war and continuing tension, displaced people and weak and incomplete resolutions to conflict have myriad concerns within their own rebuilding processes. EU enlargement might once have been seen as a good deal for both existing and future members of the EU (a position re-committed to by the EU as recently as 2011), but it has become increasingly clear that this may no longer be the case, even if the process is not completely frozen, and that such a view may affect countries not just on the one but on both sides of the EU membership question.

Enlargement represents, without doubt, a complex and multi-dimensional set of processes in which all the participants are, to a greater or lesser extent, feeling their way as a result of the geography being (reasonably) clear but the roadmap, confusingly, rather less so. To extend the metaphor, it looks to us not only like there is no-one in the driving seat; neither is there anyone in charge of the sat-nav. The view which we explore in this review is that – in firm contrast – an EU which was firmly driving the process of enlargement would see quicker results not only for the countries of south-east Europe but also for itself. In this context, it is apparent that the lack of a driver in this process pins the blame for the lack of progress quite firmly on a lack of will within the EU – and that is a dismal conclusion.

Wim van Meurs (2003) pointed out that:

The paradigm shift from stabilisation and reconstruction to regional co-operation and European integration has to be completed.

In 2015, that it hasn't been completed is obvious – as is that we have never progressed beyond 'reconstruction' (and some might say that not even that has been completed). The answers to 'Why?' are complex, multi-faceted and riven by the confusions and contradictions of political realities, as well as by human and institutional failures which have prevented people on all sides from grasping the opportunities.

'Top-down' and 'bottom-up': accounting for the failures of a vision for 'Europeanisation'

For George Aspridis and Marina Petrelli (2012), the central problem faced by south-east European countries on their journey to the EU is that there is a deficit in the extent to which they are becoming 'Europeanised' as a result of the accession processes on which they are embarked. They identify that gaining access to the EU is not just an ability to surpass the requirements of the appropriate accession criteria, it is also a case of the extent to which the country becomes 'Europeanised' as a result of the process, i.e. that it is able to reflect the values and the traditions of Europe. Consequently, we may see the *acquis communautaire* not just as a body of law to be translated into domestic legislatures – it is just as much an idea, a faith, an outlook. It is the:

Processes of construction, diffusion and institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies. (Aspridis and Petrelli, 2012)

A lot of these essentially 'club rules' are, of course, entirely invisible to those not already in the club – which is a key part of the problem. Indeed, this lack of 'Europeanisation' can be most clearly seen in the halting progress of Turkey's own accession negotiations.

Clearly, this is an immense process – and attaining it represents an immense burden. Inevitably, it is also a conditional process – that progress towards the goal of membership hinges on meeting the legislative and other conditions that are attached to membership. It is absolutely correct to highlight, as Renate Langewiesche (2000) does, that the accession countries from central and south-east Europe never had the chance to shape the *acquis* and thus contribute to defining the EU; this evidently raises the burden higher, not least since that definition is itself the result of decades of:

Sometimes very difficult policy-making based on muddling-through, compromise and just a few great leaps forward.

Langewiesche (2000) argues that the fabric provided by the *acquis* is existing, already defined, but continually changing, even as accession countries continue their accession process. In such circumstances, slow (not to say slowing) progress is an understandable eventuality.

The requirement to hit a continually moving target also has the effect of individualising the level of progress. Despite this inherent processual individuality, strong attempts have been made to define the importance of regional co-operation (Solioz, 2007) and *en bloc* integration initiatives (Qerimi and Sergi, 2009), most recently manifest in Solioz's (2014) 'caravan approach' to a single round of integration, as a way of hastening the outcome of the process.

The impact on collective bargaining power of such an individualised approach to accession is clear: that a process which had been organised not on the regatta principle,

but which was a collective one – in line with previous rounds of enlargement, the shared past of the region and the solidarity demonstrated by the Visegrad Four – might have induced a quicker, more responsive process, as well as an ultimately more fruitful and rewarding one. In a process memorably damned by Solioz (2014), in his call for the replacement of the 'regatta' with a (collectivist) 'caravan', Đurović and Radović (2010) too point out that the regatta principle was not – even then – working as it ought, although they conclude differently, that it needed to be split, rather than torn up completely:

Competition in the speed of integration did not create synergies in regional stability, nor a real improvement in neighbourly relations to the expected degree.

The authors point out – from the particular perspective of Montenegro – that a more collectivist, regional-based approach is not itself fault-free where an already-weak integration dynamic ends up in penalising more agile, more responsive countries forced to move at the pace of the slowest.

Christophe Solioz (2010) points out, too, that south-east Europe is not a homogenous region 'but rather a multi-faceted network linked to other networks'. In this context, regional co-operation takes on both a more complex face but also becomes in itself a more essential part of the process. Conversely, and from the perspective of the impact of the role of regional co-operation in integration, it is one where failures – and these are legion – are at their most evident.

Ela Golemi (2013) nevertheless argues that the EU needs to visualise each nation as part of a wider region: that it needs to:

[Recognise] the common denominators of problems which, in some cases, need collective solutions [but] without losing sight of a country's specificities.

Seideneck (2000) argues likewise: for a return to first principles in which:

The rapprochement of EU and Balkan states requires a substantial commitment by the European Union and its member states, as well as a political and economic reform process within south-east European states along the criteria of the Copenhagen Summit.

Seideneck is thus clear that the faults in the failure to deliver progress lie on both sides; and we might openly wonder whether the required level of that commitment – again, on both sides – has ever been quite 'substantial' enough. Given the assessment of Sergi and Qerimi (2007) that it was the EU's 'Most important project', that such a commitment has deviated away from what was required is immensely disappointing. van Meurs (2003) highlights that proposals to shift the Stabilisation and Association Process from DG External Relations to DG Enlargement were actually dropped at Thessaloniki – an eventuality which could inspire only a gloomy prognosis. With this in mind – although it was, wisely, reversed, two years later – any follow-through which did take place would have had less of an enlargement orientation than a foreign affairs one. We might wonder whether this eventual shift (i.e. to Enlargement) was ever reflected similarly in the minds of the policy-makers.

Europeanisation could, in the context of such an individualised process, be described as both bottom-up, with accession countries able to push for an accession position which reflected their own situation; as well as a top-down one, i.e. based on the EU's attempts to transfer its rules to accession countries. A view of the process as a two-way one does stretch understanding, however; recent enlargements might more accurately be described as a one-way, top-down process, something which has been unhelpful as regards the democratic process in accession countries and as regards perceptions of the EU itself as an undemocratic set of institutions.

Certainly it was a concern over the top-down nature of the negotiation process that saw the replacement of the Stability Pact for South-East Europe in 2008 with the Regional Co-operation Council. The Stability Pact – launched in 1999 at the Köln European Council in the immediate wake of the war in Kosovo – was a brave attempt by the international community (not just the EU) to give itself a framework within which to secure the pacification and democratisation of south-east Europe, with the EU clearly taking a lead role, and intended to gain institutional confidence from the competencies it thereby gained.

Peter Seideneck (2000) reviewed the launch of the Stability Pact initiative for us from the perspective of the international trade union movement, but warned already that the initiative was going to be a long-term one and that it did not signal the early entry of any of the states covered by it – including Romania and Bulgaria – into the EU. In particular, his warning that any anticipation of such a development:

Raises unjustified expectations and hopes which will, in turn, produce disappointment and frustration,

was clearly a prescient one. Seideneck goes on to argue that the 'carrot of integration' had already – even at that stage – produced dashed expectations and setbacks in the reform process: that it was too much top-down and not enough bottom-up.

Even so, a two-decades long process of Europeanisation for the bulk of the states covered by the Stability Pact might seem to stretch the definitions. It is clearly arguable that greater honesty at the outset, to which Seideneck implicitly refers, might have been more helpful.

Nevertheless, a failure to complete this wave of enlargement does not reflect a failure only on the part of the EU – although as the power broker, with an immense quantity of soft power, and given the substantial degree of power asymmetry between the EU and accession countries from south-east Europe, a large part of the blame for the slowdown in progress must lie in principle with the institutions of the EU.

In this respect, we might thus conclude, alongside Aspidis and Petrelli (2012), that enlargement (or the lack thereof) reflects the balance of willingness to offer a clear routemap for Europeanisation just as much as it reflects applicant states' aspiration towards, and ability to meet the demands of, such a concept: i.e. that it is a problem:

Both by the applicant countries to comply with and fulfil the necessary criteria; and by the EU to move gradually towards a new enlargement process.

In such a situation, it is inevitable that there is no uniform Europeanising effect in south-east European countries; instead, the top-down pressures for adaptation have produced, as Aspridis and Petrelli (2012) argue, a range of ‘diverse and ambivalent responses’. Consequently, as Robert Ladrech (cited in Aspridis and Petrelli, 2012) has argued, it may be that we can describe Europeanisation as a continuum of responses to implementing transition-oriented aims and goals, with countries being placed on it anywhere from ‘inertia’ (no change) at the one end, to transformation (the ability to effect substantial change) at the other; stopping off in the middle at retrenchment (a resistance to change); absorption (a low degree of change); and accommodation (adaptation but without changing core or essential features).

Countries' positions on such a continuum are a reflection of their own endeavours and their own outlooks; and the extent to which they are able to be proactive and, thus, seek to force the pace of progress a little more (Solioz, 2010). This at least recognises that countries of south-east Europe are in control of their ultimate position (although such a designation is, perhaps, one stronger than political circumstances would really allow).

This is, however, certainly the perspective of the EU itself, for which the progress of each accession country depends on its own individual efforts to comply with the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilisation and Association Process. A satisfactory track-record in implementing the obligations is evidently an essential element in the EU's review of the progress of any membership application.

Nevertheless, this is an unburdensome perspective since conditionality means, as Sergi and Qerimi (2007) highlight, that the process ‘Comes to a halt if the candidates fail to deliver on their promises.’ Unburdensome, since it absolves the EU of any responsibility in that failure. This is not to argue that the EU is responsible for the failures that occur – responsibility lies within the candidate countries themselves. But, where the EU does have a responsibility in the process – and where it is failing to deliver – is in providing a strong helping hand to countries who have failed: making good its own commitments on integration continues to present a strong policy gap for the EU.

A top-down approach in which failures are held entirely to be bottom-up may not be a surprising outcome, but it readily becomes clear just how immensely frustrating it is.

At the same time, we might also wonder whether the process has become just too complex, not only for candidate accession states but for the EU, too. We are not referring here only to the size and weight of the *acquis* but to the diverse and confusing range of technical instruments available, as well as the geo-political issues which also feature strongly in any consideration of the home and future place of south-east Europe.

In calling for a more ‘flexible architecture and strategy’, as a means of being more responsive to the weight of the issues involved and the level of diversity the EU needs to embrace, Christophe Solioz (2010) highlights that:

New strategic thinking is also needed in order to be able to cope with the greater complexity resulting from, first, the relations among south-east European countries (sub-regional co-operation and multiple bilateral issues); and, second, the co-existence of numerous programmes – such as the pre-accession process, the ENP [*European Neighbourhood Policy*]... numerous

bilateral agreements, various action plans and the wide range of EU and CoE [Council of Europe] cross-border, transitional and inter-regional programmes.

Some rationalisation, and a greater focus, is surely required. Bruno Sergi and Qerim Qerimi (2007) also point out:

In the last ten years, the western approach towards the Balkans has changed dramatically, from ignorance through involvement to advocating integration. It now remains to be seen whether the EU will follow through regarding the bringing of south-eastern Europe into the structures which increasingly apply across the rest of the continent.

Eight years on, and we are still waiting for that follow-through. This represents a failure to set in place a generous vision which appropriately locates the myriad challenges facing all the countries in the region and, indeed, across Europe into their context. Solioz (2007) argues:

Only a pan-European vision, firstly, sets the bilateral issues and the regional dimension in a coherent and significant framework for an efficient development of economic, political and cultural co-operation, and, secondly, ensures a bold and new vision for south-eastern Europe and also for Europe as a whole.

For Solioz, completing the EU integration process would be a way of giving life to a new – and more confident – pan-European dynamic, as well as a way of coping with the diverse challenges of the 21st century. Jens Becker (2008) argues similarly and passionately, warning that, despite the challenges that clearly exist as regards stabilisation and integration:

If Europe fails to integrate [the Balkans], all dreams of European unity and common policies may fade away.

The EU needs, it seems, to decide not just what it wants to do but to deliver in practice a Europeanisation process which can proceed in a more simplified, clearer and more direct fashion, as well as one which truly reflects notions of solidarity and common goals. Deep in the heart of the immense policy problems of 2015, this is a vision which – nevertheless – urgently needs to be re-established.

Crises and reactions

It is clear that economic growth plays a major role in accession: accession means new markets for producers and service suppliers in central and eastern Europe, where the likely lower production and supply costs convey some natural market advantages in terms of growth and development – a factor which, as Ela Golemi (2013) points out, is also likely to account for opposition from some existing member states. Nevertheless, companies from other EU member states are also able to gain equal access to domestic markets where they do not have the same cost advantages but in which their ‘western’ cachet has other, perhaps deeper, attractions for consumers and where, more appositely, a more ready access to international capital conveys substantial advantages.

Equally, however, the difficulties in establishing the precise growth prospects of accession countries (Langewiesche, 2000) have added to the uncertainties of the economic aspects of integration and enlargement. At the same time, an incomplete restructuring process provides further worries over firms' abilities to compete as well as over how deep the market economy runs in the countries in which they are located. EU accession may well thus have some potentially negative consequences for western Balkans countries as a result of economic co-operation within the EU (Aspridis and Petrelli, 2012). Indeed, these, or the fear of these, may explain the reluctance for economic reforms among south-east European states. Indeed, where the costs of accession are high, countries are inevitably likely to be less advanced in their level of Europeanisation – and, therefore, less far down the road to EU membership.

Writing before the onset of the crisis, Christophe Solioz (2007) was able to point to a number of positive economic trends which produced 'A far more positive than negative picture overall' and which pointed to one very hopeful sign for the future:

The economies of south-east European countries clearly show signs of catching up.

It may have been true that there was still some way to go even then, but the trend was, at that point, at least directionally correct.

It would seem that the international economic crisis which then ensued has had even deeper implications, extending past austerity and crisis economics to delaying EU integration to the south-east, Qerim Qerimi and Bruno Sergi (2009) pointed out as such in their early analysis of the implications of both the crisis and the EU's own post-Lisbon world. Furthermore, one of the authors of this review article has pointed to how the new accession countries in central and eastern Europe were being affected by the shockwaves of the crisis (Galgóczi, 2012) and that this was, furthermore, likely to have implications for a 'multi-speed' Europe subsequently. We might only be able to estimate the impact on people's attitudes in the west towards expansion to the south-east of the financial crisis in Greece, Portugal, Spain, Ireland and Italy – substantially southern European states in themselves – but it is likely to be sizeable. Additionally, crisis and five years of adjustment have undermined and fundamentally questioned the convergence perspective which, up to that point, had been an obvious one: central and east European states have stopped converging (Galgóczi, 2012) while southern Europe has moved backwards. The result has been that EU membership has lost one of its main motivation factors as regards low-income countries.

We can also see that the integration model, which had previously helped countries achieve a considerable degree of convergence with western Europe in the pre-crisis period, and which was one of the fundamental pillars of the European idea, is in practice a very fragile one. Ela Golemi (2013) identified that 'There remains some optimism' about the economic prospects of south-east European countries but, even so, the western Balkans remains poorer than the average and certainly poorer than central and east European countries.

The crisis of capitalism really does have a lot to answer for.

The full lessons of the economic crisis from 2007 have yet to be understood, although many of the impacts are plain in too many cases – chiefly in governments taking

advantage of the crisis and the openness of citizens in general towards austerity measures – at a time of trade unions being weak and, thus, powerless to resist (Galgóczi, 2012) – to roll back the involvement of the state and extend the influence of the private sector. On top of this, a greater political conservatism in many – but certainly not all – cases, seems to be having a chilling effect on perceptions of the legitimacy of supra-national institutions, such as the EU. We can see this most vividly in terms of the results of the elections to the European Parliament in 2014 and the rise of euro-sceptic parties.

Yet, it is not too long ago that we were talking of a more hopeful period of international co-operation. Qerim Qerimi (2002) commences his article by quoting Konrad Adenauer to the effect that a new age was dawning in which people would be more willing to look across borders and work in co-operation with each other for the greater good of humanity. Self-evidently, this is the fundamental reason for the very founding of the EU – and it is here that the lapse in organisational memory has its most acute, and most shameful, effects concerning south-east Europe. At least in principle, the countries of the EU have much to offer as regards states coming together – and quickly – to overcome conflict-ridden relationships.

The EU has had a crucial historic role as a 'peace project' in overcoming the limitations of the nation state – although peace-keeping and stabilisation initiatives through Europeanisation do not automatically mean that the idea of the 'nation state' is outmoded. Nevertheless, the EU's role in creating stability and establishing the room in which co-operation between nations might take root, and grow, is an attractive one. Its relevance to western Europe might be less these days – nearly seventy years on, the EU must offer more than just its historic role – but we might well usefully contrast the early growth of the EU, and the co-operation it engendered over the next twenty years, with the position of ex-Yugoslavia states now given that the wars – Kosovo apart – formally ended nearly twenty years ago.

Such a message is a complex one in south-east Europe subsequent to the tearing apart of Yugoslavia in the 1990s – a process whose urgency and importance the EU, then deep in the midst of an agonised introspection over economic and monetary union, seemed barely able to recognise at the time, let alone grasp in policy terms. But were such problems any deeper than between those of immediately post-War France and Germany: two states that had been to war over resources three times in the previous seventy years? Or indeed between Germany and Poland: countries that had suffered from occupation and shifted borders? (Buxbaum, 2014).

Conversely, to some parts of ex-Yugoslavia, any initiative which resembled a return to the Yugoslav model was something to be resisted or, otherwise, something to which they might pay little other than lip service. We should recognise that the EU, originally established and which has subsequently grown on the basis of a voluntary supra-nationalism, might appear in these cases to be one such initiative. Writing in somewhat more optimistic times, Jens Becker (2008) articulates:

The EU conception of sovereignty assumes as outmoded any indivisible, illimitable and exclusive form of public power embodied with an individual state. Global governance, or multi-dimensional forms of governance and learning, describe the reality of European network society.

Attitudes focused on the narrow definition of a state might be seen as increasingly outdated as time goes by, in the context of shape-shifting processes in which networks have become more important than the nation state (Becker, 2008; Solioz, 2010). Indeed, there are some signs of progress at the political and social level in south-east Europe. Unfortunately, these are accompanied by some significant and destabilising signs of regression and backsliding (Golemi, 2013) within certain more established EU members, where such ideas of establishing a supra-nationalism might be viewed more poorly these days (although contemporary views are not necessarily more correct just because they are current).

Qerim Qerimi (2002) correctly points to the history of south-east Europe, especially in the last century, as being one of ‘failed reconciliation’. This presents an imminent concern, since it has historic implications for meaningful multilateral co-operation, while it also presents a significant challenge to a united Europe. We should not underestimate the continuing challenges in this regard, with the refugee crisis representing a most obvious facet. Nevertheless, we might also wonder why more has not been done by the EU directly to address this, given that it strikes directly at the heart of the reasons which underlie its own establishment.

We should recognise that there is frequently domestic resistance, and a lack of consensus, towards the notion of expansion, even if that seems particularly unfair on the applicant countries. It is true, as Golemi (2013) highlights, that:

Support for the Union’s enlargement to south-east Europe varies immensely from country to country among the member states.

This is a problem which the countries benefiting from the 1980s enlargements to southern Europe, i.e. to states emerging in fairly short order from dictatorship, military rule and civil unrest (Solioz, 2010), did not have to deal with. Equally, however, we might wonder where is the plan to address domestic opposition, to change public opinion and to seek to re-define the terms of the debate. This is, quite clearly, lacking particularly in those existing member states in which the will to address the public debate over migration is also sorely missing.

Aside of that, it is plain that the reasons for states in central and eastern Europe to enter the EU – to confirm the irreversibility of their transition; for security; and to gain market access (Qerimi, 2002) – perhaps apply less (and less acutely) to south-eastern Europe than they did to the central Europe of two decades ago. It seems likely that such pressures will grow less acute as time goes by. Where the pressures sparked by the prospect of EU membership are not as acute, the pressures for reform to gain accession are also experienced with less energy and less urgency.

More broadly, however, states turning inwards, in refusing to look beyond their borders and in re-promoting the ones that exist – even building new ones, both metaphorical and physical – represents an aspect of the costs of the crisis of which we do not yet know the full scale. Accompanied in many places by an ‘aggressive nationalism’ (Solioz, 2007), which has given a fresh impetus to domestic divisions and conflicts, the signs are not hopeful for a progressive, more inclusive politics based on a supra-nationalist perspective. Solioz (2014) correctly argues, quoting Habermas, that

greater supra-nationalism does not necessarily come at the expense of disenfranchising the citizens of nation states. However, this is a sophisticated argument which is little understood, perhaps especially among those for whom the promotion of division is their own *raison d'être* in which obfuscation is a means to serve an end.

This navel-gazing process might be informed by a lack of appetite for supra-national solutions among EU citizens – at least in some cases – but we are entitled to look for a little better leadership, both from domestic politicians as well as from those which operate at the supra-national level.

Meanwhile, a torn and divided Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the very heart of former Yugoslavia, remains an unresolved policy issue and, to that extent, it is a continuing policy failure which haunts Europe. It is not a major jump to recognise that the stumbling nature of that irresolution presents a major hurdle to the integration of south-east Europe into the EU. Peace has been kept – mostly – and the region has become more stable as a result, but a new future has yet to be built and it is at least arguable that the very mechanisms and structures introduced to keep the peace are, exactly twenty years on, what are preventing the construction of that future (Buxbaum, 2014).

Furthermore, there has been no follow-on to the Stability Pact which recognises the continuing legitimacy of its goals of reconstruction in a more stable time (Becker, 2008). Instead, we see only a process which is grinding to a halt under a Regional Co-operation Council which plays a much less visible role than it ought in driving both co-operation and integration, despite the requirement for regional co-operation being a criteria for EU accession, and where co-operation is seen through the singular prism of trade rather than through political exigency.

Our authors have addressed this issue, too, including the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina itself as well as the challenges which it represents to the EU's policy towards the region. Jürgen Buxbaum (2014) reviews the political complexities of the position of Bosnia and Herzegovina, striving to see a breaking of the deadlock and the political sclerosis, both internally and, indeed, as regards the EU. He points out that:

...it is impossible that the current state of affairs in BiH – sunken in poverty and with ongoing tensions and dysfunctionality – can continue indefinitely. A democratic awakening, let alone within a multi-ethnic co-operation, is nowhere in sight.

Sergi and Qerimi (2007) identify:

Even though the international community has provided large amounts of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country now faces a deep economic crisis triggered by protectionist policies, communist economic legacies and by an overwhelmingly non-transparent and, often, corrupt, bureaucracy.

Kosovo, faced with internal divisions and over the existence of which there are splits among the member states of the EU sufficient to trigger a different approach to the reaching of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, evidently presents similar issues as regards its own integration into the EU. Levels of domestic conflict are present as a result both of governance issues stemming from a gap in institutional legitimacy and effectiveness as well as having emerged from war more recently, with such a history

having created a specific path dependency. Furthermore, it is clear that Kosovo's international and domestic sovereignty is both externally constrained and ethnically contested, again creating specific blocks on the extent to which the country is able to respond to a Europeanisation agenda.

All such issues may have been easier to resolve within the context of a Europe where borders were less of an issue than they are currently, and where minority rights were more advanced. But a Europe in which some parts are battenning down the hatches and re-focusing on internal borders has little constructive to say which would help towards the resolution of those issues which arise from a definition of borders and demarcation lines.

The timing of this is, to say the least, both sad and extremely unfortunate but it is likely to reflect the times in which we now live: a crisis over resources – a politically-driven one, in many cases, given the prevalence and results of austerity economics – frequently produces reactionism.

Competing priorities

The EU might well have re-committed itself in 2011 in its Strategy Paper to a future that saw mutual interest in enlargement to the south-east – but it is evident that politics has intervened in the meantime, certainly as regards the position that south-east Europe occupies in the EU's external policies. An EU faced with a Greek debt crisis, inwards migration as a result of war and conflict and at least one key member state (the UK) re-considering and seeking to revise its own relationship with the EU has various other issues to pre-occupy it.

This embodies not a rejection of enlargement to the south-east exactly, but a reflection of the other major, and weighty, political issues that are currently at the top of the EU's priorities; not *ennui* so much as an inability to deal with so many important issues at once, especially where internal organisational issues are placed at the top of the priority list. This might, in some respects, be understandable but, alternatively, Europe is repeating the mistakes of 1992.

There is little that is new about this: a fear of what we might define either as 'enlargement fatigue' or a 'desire for consolidation' has been present for a while; it featured, for example, in the article by Andreas Graf Wass von Czege (1998), contained in our very first volume. Here, reporting the results of the *Wolfsburger Gespräche* – the first of two such reports we carried – Wass von Czege referred to there being no appetite for reform within the EU and no majority in favour of enlargement. He also contrasted the hurdles now being set for applicant countries with the previous southwards enlargements of the EU (in the 1980s) when:

Entry to the EU was still largely a matter of political development objectives.

By the middle of the 1990s, however, such objectives clearly no longer dominated the EU's external agenda, with some countries from central and eastern Europe complaining of the EU's 'wait and see' attitude to their applications (Wass von Czege, 1998). Indeed, as van Meurs (2003) points out, enlargement to the south-east was not

at the top of the EU's priority list even at the Thessaloniki Summit, on the threshold of enlargement to central and eastern Europe.

Despite warm and solemn, and no doubt sincere, words, this has been the same ever since. In 2006, the Brussels European Council in December 2006 adopted its so-called 'enlargement consensus', or 'enlargement-plus' approach, entailing a 'More detailed pre-accession dialogue and a more complex negotiations process' (Đurović and Radović, 2010) in response to the experiences of the fifth enlargement in 2004/07 – a clear pause for breath in which:

... the criteria are higher, the requests stronger and the sensitive transition from being a potential candidate, via the Commission Opinion, to candidate status and the opening of formal negotiations starts to become a real European challenge.

In 2007, Christophe Solioz was pointing to the negative consequences of 'enlargement fatigue', with the 'pull factor' and the stimulus for reform that this provides being 'less convincing' given the slow rate of progress. Three years later, the same author pointed out that the Thessaloniki enthusiasm had, in actual fact, 'quickly vanished' amidst the problems of the 2004 and 2007 enlargements; the EU's own limited 'absorption capacities'; the unfinished transition in the Balkans; and the challenges represented by Turkey's position and its incomplete accession process.

It is against a continuation of this reluctance, but in conjunction with the other issues weighing down the EU, that the Juncker Commission has turned its face from enlargement for the rest of this decade. Here, this seems to be a clear case of a self-fulfilling prophecy: even the most advanced countries are unlikely to be fit enough to join before 2020 – Đurović and Radović's (2010) 'less desirable' option – and most are, realistically, looking at dates much beyond that.

The key question in the meantime is whether, with the process being slower, and with the signs of the EU's other competing priorities coming more to the fore, the prospect of membership for south-east European countries can remain a credible one sufficient to drive domestic change and reform; or whether a sclerotic EU is likely to induce a sclerotic accession and reform process in south-east Europe: a 'never-ending negotiation' that may well end up in a complete abandonment of the process for the slowest (Solioz, 2014). This would be as disastrous as its rationale would be viewed normal by an EU audience which has become beset by other preoccupations to the point where it almost seems like progress that the EU has not openly pulled back from its Thessaloniki commitments. In the meantime, the 'development gap' (Solioz, 2010) continues to widen – a process which seems set to continue in the absence of a more concerted programme to bring south-east Europe closer to European standards.

We could, of course, have it so much better. A more confident, or at least a more assertive (Solioz, 2010), EU might recognise that enlargement was as equally important as the other concerns that pre-occupy it.

Sergi and Qerimi (2007) point out that enlargement would 'Literally change the shape and the dimension of the EU', and that:

Not only does enlargement pose serious challenges to the candidates but also the Union itself will be affected, positively or adversely, by this process.

Perhaps this is a fundamental definition of the continuing problem – that the EU is not sufficiently self-assertive or confident in its ambitions to integrate south-east European countries; and that, against such a backdrop, it has allowed the other problems simply to overwhelm the issue. Solioz (2010) wonders whether the EU might seek constructively to use the current delays to try and close the gaps – but this is a process which does not appear to be happening.

Most importantly, the EU seems to have lost sight of the truth that ‘Enlargement is about the transfer of stability’ (Sergi and Qerimi, 2007) – failing which, south-east Europe will transport instability to the EU (van Meurs, 2003; quoting former European Commissioner Chris Patten). Turning to the economic sphere, Ela Golemi (2013) is absolutely correct to highlight:

If integration is to happen successfully and effectively, not only the European Union but also the entire western Balkans region would benefit in respect to improved prosperity and stability in the post-Cold War era.

A closer integration perspective and better attention to the issues thrown up by south-east Europe does look like a win-win scenario and, given this, it is odd that the EU should continue to turn its back on such mutual gains. Furthermore, Golemi (2013) points to the integration of central European countries as a process which has significantly re-affirmed fundamental values of Europeanisation. Here, the resulting achievements of stability, prosperity and democratisation do not have to be pursued by individual, isolated – and less resource cost-effective – initiatives. She argues that integration could be a success story which contributed to stability and regional peace across the continent. Christophe Solioz (2014), writing a quarter of a century after the start of the transition, adds that the post-1945 Cold War world has been overcome and that we stand on the threshold of a new world order. It is perplexing why the EU does not apparently want to grab with both hands the opportunities presented by this to define itself and its future.

Sources of political instability in Europe these days are many, stemming not least from events in the middle east and north Africa – but there seems to be an increasing fear that the EU may, by having an integration perspective, directly be importing instability on the grounds that several south-east Europe countries have a different religious faith to that of a nominally 'Christian' EU. It is apparent that this has already been a continuing problem in relation to Turkey's accession.

Such conservative barriers must be overcome and Europe must accept that it has the responsibility to assist the modernisation and development of a south-east Europe which may, in parts, be different to its own cultural-religious traditions. Jürgen Buxbaum (2014) has much to say in this direction from his review of the future of Bosnia. It does not represent a great leap of faith to realise – in retrospect – that, had the EU grasped the nettle a decade or more ago, refugees fleeing war zones in the middle east and north Africa in search of the EU's stability, peace and freedom might well have found their place not just in north-central Europe but across the breadth of our common European home.

Wishful thinking dressed up as policy analysis, perhaps: and Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia may still anyway be seen today by refugees as transit states. These are countries which are much more developed than their neighbours to the south, so it would be somewhat naïve to see the countries of south-east Europe, which frequently experience issues arising from a lack of demand for labour in their labour markets as it is, as potential destinations for refugees.

Furthermore, when wages for comparable jobs (often in the same multinationals) in the more advanced countries of Europe are several times the wages paid in central and eastern European ones, the latter will (economically speaking) rarely be viable destinations for migrants. In this respect, Europe does need to establish concerted action on wages and on living standards across Europe as a key part of establishing a single European market.

We should also observe that the substantially mono-ethnic states that have been recently established not least through wars fought largely over fears and a history of ‘the other’, and ethnic cleansing, or in pursuit of the 19th century European aim of the ‘nation state’, are also rarely likely to be seen as encouraging destinations for refugees. Neither, of course, are they likely to be ones to adopt and declare an open face to refugees from different backgrounds. This also, ultimately, represents a failure to translate a modern version of a supra-national Europeanism to central and south-east Europe, which has both historic and continuing facets.

People fleeing war and terrorism are looking for peace, stability and opportunity: those ideals tend to come with development. Taking the long-term view is usually necessary – and, in this respect, it may not yet be too late for the EU to start taking a more enlightened perspective and direction towards south-east Europe.

Reform within the EU

The reference by Andreas Graf Wass von Czege (1998) to internal reform within the EU is an interesting one. Several of our other authors have referred to an EU which cannot reform itself as being unable to secure the benefits of enlargement (or those of a single market); and that the EU needs to be more confident of its own direction, and appropriately reform its institutions and policies, before enlargement could be successfully established. The EU’s lack of ‘absorption capacity’ is, indeed, one of Christophe Solioz’s (2010) four arguments for why the road to enlargement to the south-east is such a long and winding one.

This was a theme of the *Wolfsburger Gespräche* at the end of the 1990s, and it is clear that *Quo vadis?* remains a pertinent question. An EU designed originally for the six, or the nine, or the twelve, or even the fifteen, always looked potentially more conflicted as regards its institutional arrangements when expanded to the new market economies of the east (let alone the south-east).

The issue was meant to be resolved when, after a long ‘period of reflection’, the German presidency of the EU put huge effort into re-opening the treaty reform process in the first half of 2007 (Solioz, 2007). The new framework that emerged – under what became the Lisbon Treaty – was intended, as Solioz points out, not least to streamline the EU’s decision-making and improve its international presence, as well as to provide the institutional framework in which enlargement might be resumed. However, a de-

layed ratification process (on top of the earlier rejection in France and in the Netherlands of the draft constitution for Europe) meant that the new era got underway only with delay and, even then, under a scepticism which has weighed it, and the EU, with charges of being anti-democratic.

The modern history of the EU has been dominated by the debate over a wider/deeper trade-off as regards enlargement; or by a multi-speed Europe (Galgóczi, 2012; Solioz, 2014) whose greater/slower speed was intended to encompass the diversity of approaches to EU goals and institutions engendered by its heterogeneity. But what we can see in practice is a union of divisions and tensions against the background of which the notion of expansion to the south-east continues to present more questions than answers. The debate is a dangerously introspective one, but it is important since it presents barriers to further integration. It is a question which, on the face of it, must be addressed if expansion to the south-east is to take place in a timely fashion and if this is, when it happens, to be a success.

The question may well turn out to be an unresolvable one. Quandaries over the political direction of the EU will continue to exist – and that is a healthy development – and regardless of the future size of the EU. Expecting these to be resolved prior to south-east expansion – perhaps creating another section of the *acquis* to add to the list of responsibilities which south-east European countries must take on – represents a barrier that is, in one sense, too high. Moreover, as Solioz (2014) identifies, we are already on the way to a more flexible EU as a result of the heterogeneity that exists within it currently: that is an inexorable shift whose parameters, actually, have little to do with further expansion.

Nevertheless, the continuing difficulty for the EU associated with internal reform is that, as Solioz (2014) also argues:

After more than fifty years of European integration, the EU has to tackle a crisis of delivery and a crisis of identity.

We would agree that its politicians are making a decent fist of neither and that trust and disenchantment both highlight an EU which is ‘hardly workable’.

Further institutional reform is not currently a debate within the EU. The UK’s attempts at a re-negotiation of its terms of membership are a more selfish concern which leave the issue of (institutional) reform well alone other than, perhaps, in the context of Eurozone/non-Eurozone countries and a prioritisation of trade over social dialogue and social rights. Nevertheless, there is a clear argument that a striving for institutional reform will be required if an expanded EU is to retain some semblance of control over its direction.

Solioz (2014) correctly argues that ‘Deepening and widening go hand-in-hand’; but a debate which is, in reality, between a homogenous EU and one whose heterogeneity requires greater flexibility (but not an *à la carte* Europe), as opposed to institutional rigidity, is a complex one. A reformed EU would mean that further expansion should not jeopardise its ‘absorption capacity’ – and it would, meanwhile, also serve to recharge and to legitimise that expansion.

Wass von Czege (1998) concludes:

‘Community’, after all, pre-supposes common objectives and values, generally accepted rules of cohabitation, common economic activities and defence, an accepted internal hierarchical ranking, a common identity and above all solidarity.

His assertion that these are not met within the EU of the fifteen – thus precipitating a need for internal reform – remains as clear now as it was then.

Meanwhile, the danger that a lack of understanding of those issues present within the sense of community which underpins the EU is clear: an EU in which ‘community’ – and, indeed, ‘solidarity’ – has different interpretations and different understanding is not a cohesive entity at all, simply an economic trade club (as indeed its enemies would like it to become). Jens Becker (2008) argues that ‘Economic issues alone cannot bring a European identity.’ Those who are presiding over the current crisis in the social dialogue within the EU need to think on that.

The faces of south-east Europe in response to the crises of Europe

It is clear that people who have a lot to lose will – where they occupy a sufficient place in the power structure – influence the level of Europeanisation. This is one of the features that Aspridis and Petrelli (2012) identify in their comparison of the relative positions *vis-à-vis* the EU of Croatia and Kosovo. They identify that:

A sustainable reform process also requires certain domestic conditions to prevail. The Europeanisation mechanism does not work properly when it meets with conflict and resistance in the national arena.

However, even where the will towards significant and fundamental reform is there, in spite of the domestic costs, success remains dependent on the extent to which domestic institutions are capable of effective implementation and enforcement. Meanwhile, corruption, the influence of organised crime, signs of state capture in several states and a generally weak emphasis on the rule of law also represent major, and continuing, issues both to co-operation and to integration. It is impossible to disagree with Qerimi and Sergi (2009) that:

A corrupt society or region is simply not an option; it is the enemy of an open, prosperous and value-oriented Balkans, and runs contrary to the indispensable aim of making the region self-sustainable and part of a free and larger Europe.

The authors articulate the extent to which some states in south-east Europe are ‘weak’ or, even, ‘failed’; both are significant descriptors for an EU already struggling with the concept of expansion (not least against a background in which the view that the 2007 enlargement round was not a success has a strong currency) and in which, therefore, these might represent major barriers to expansion and to integration.

The uneven and slow progress in tackling these issues, to which Ela Golemi (2013) also points, is evidently a major factor contributing to the slow progress of integration more generally. It is difficult to blame other factors for this than internal institutional

failures within the states themselves. Consequently, the impetus towards resolving these must come from within, as well as from co-operation between, them (Qerimi and Sergi, 2009). More broadly, however, interference from outside may not only be counter-productive, it may actually further entrench the problems. And the policy problems in integrating countries where corruption is an ongoing problem are evident. Perhaps this might seem paradoxical, given the EU's existing direct role in state construction and decision-making processes in the region (Solioz, 2007), but it is not a good sign either for independence or of capacity that such problems mark the external perspective.

Even so, the resolution of these problems remains closely linked to an EU integration perspective remaining credible and relevant; where, and for as long as, integration continues to hover tantalisingly out of reach, that resolution remains equally distant. There have been policy successes in this regard elsewhere, for example in Romania; the lessons here need to be analysed more closely from the perspective of their applicability elsewhere.

In addressing this issue, Qerimi and Sergi (2009) argue for a multi-measure approach based on economic openness and 'More focused, comprehensive, integrated and systematic action'. Continuing reforms here are key. Ultimately, however, as Aspridis and Petrelli (2012) argue, following the arguments of Canan Balkır and Digdem Soyaltın (2009) regarding the limits of Europeanisation as regards Turkey, it is:

Unfavourable domestic factors, the high costs of compliance, the existence of domestic players who have veto power and the failure of the countries to include civil society actors in the transformation process that account for the limited impact of the transformative power of EU, as well as for the low level of compliance in candidate and, mostly, in potential candidate countries.

One size does indeed not fit all: it is domestic factors and domestic actors – and the level of engagement of each – that will continue to mark the level of progress towards accession of a country from candidate to member. Here, Qerim Qerimi (2003) is critical of the inability of the political elites of the region to work at bilateral relationships; and this lies also at the root of the conclusions of Wim van Meurs (2003) as to why he feels that European crisis managers have been kept on high alert.

In this respect, it is a failure of state capacity which is burdening the integration process.

It is also, however, a failure to deliver sufficient incentivisation for states and elites to act differently. Once approaches have become embedded routine, persuading elites to act differently becomes a more complex, and probably much more long-term, activity. Addressing this, and the state-building process more generally, would not only strengthen democracy in the countries of the region but would also overcome the perception of the international community's failure to offer a convincing perspective to south-east European societies (Solioz, 2007). Furthermore, it would have the knock-on effect of making such states both more proactive and better equipped to make demands of the EU, thus making the process more effectively a two-way one.