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The Western Balkans and the EU: 'The Hour of Europe'

Edited by Jacques Rupnik

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The Western Balkans and the EU: 'the hour of Europe' ", is a book published by the EU Institute for Security Studies and printed in Condé-sur-Noireau (France), Chaillot Paper - No126 - 06 June 2011 and relates to and reflects on the situation in the Balkan region and prospects of the Western Balkan countries to join the European Union.

The book is written by several authors: Morton Abramowitz, Florian Bieber, Dejan Jović, Robert Manchin, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Sašo Ordanoski, Momčilo Radulović, Jacques Rupnik, Denisa Sarajlić-Maglić, Igor Štiks, Veton Surroi, Jovan Teokarevic, and edited by Jacques Rupnik.

Chapter one is titled Turning Nationalists into EU supporters: the case of Croatia, in which is written Croatia's fivefold transition from war to peace, constructing a new narrative that makes nationalism compatible with EU membership. When the Accession Treaty was signed, it was followed by a referendum on Croatia's accession to the European Union that gained sufficient support for EU membership among Croatian voters. The next step will a long process of national ratification in member states EU. The more nationalistic the government's rhetoric regarding the EU agenda, the more likely it is that these voters will be in favor of EU membership.

Chapter two talks about Bosnia and Herzegovina after the elections, the relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina with its neighbors, the shadow that is thrown on democracy in this country and the fact that integration in the European Union is only declared goal.

Given the need for constitutional reform, the international community, and the EU in particular, could play a constructive role by designing a framework that sets the parameters for changes that are essential in order to remove the obstacles to EU integration. Unfortunately, this is an area in which the EU seems to be losing the war of rhetoric. "This chapter tells about the 2006 elections that marked a turning-point, with the government agenda veering sharply towards nationalism and away from Euro-Atlantic integration." With the election of Ivo Josipović as the new Croatian President in January 2010 created a new dynamics in the relations between the Western Balkan neighbors.

Chapter three titled "Ten years of post-Milosevic transition in Serbia: problems and prospects" contains information about the economy, politics, European integration of Serbia, as well as the issue of Kosovo, which is just one of the major problems Serbia will have to face in the years ahead. Serbia's path to EU integration has been uneven and rocky. Ten years after the end of the previous regime, Serbia still does not have EU candidate status, although EU membership

has always been a priority and all post-Milosevic governments claimed they were dedicated to and busy with Europeanization. After the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement in 2008, Serbia officially applied for EU membership at the end of 2009, which coincided with another major success, acquiring a visa-free regime for Serbian citizens travelling to the Schengen area.

Kosovo's secession from Serbia in 2008 has been an issue of the utmost importance for Serbia's internal and external policies.

Chapter four is titled Montenegro's journey towards EU accession. This chapter contains data concerning the referendum of 2006 and its aftermath, including future prospects about the path toward European integration of Montenegro.

EU candidate status was granted to Montenegro in December 2010. At the beginning of 2011, its European and Euro-Atlantic integration prospects look promising, offering many opportunities to Montenegro and its government. According to the author of the book, there are still many serious issues that need to be addressed urgently in order to speed up the EU integration process and the overall democratization of Montenegro. Immediately after the referendum on independence, both the government and the parliament of the Republic of Montenegro emphasized the European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes as a priority for Montenegro. The role of Djukanović, the opposition in Montenegro, the economic context and political progress on Montenegro are also mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter five is titled "The Story of Macedonian populism: 'all we want is everything!'" This chapter includes information about polls for government, exit strategy, whether or not it is necessary for the state to take loans and to borrow, the 'name dispute', sharp divisions on EU perspectives, and about future prospects.

VMRO-DPMNE, or political party that had the power in this country, confirmed its landslide victory in parliamentary elections in 2008 and won an absolute majority in parliament. In 2009, VMRO-DPMNE won both the local and presidential elections decisively.

Opinion polls in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 have suggested that Gruevski was by far the most popular politician in the country. Gruevski's political ratings were largely attributed to his tough and 'strictly principled' stance on the Macedonian-Greek name issue.

Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration process has been effectively blocked by the well-known dispute over the 'name issue' with Greece. In the early days of his government, Gruevski clearly stated that any compromise solution, if and when it came, would be put to popular referendum, and that his government would not support any compromise that involved changing or adding to the name 'Republic of Macedonia.'

Gruevski and his associates have never been enthusiastic about Macedonia's integration into the EU. Their attitude can be summed up as integration, but not under EU terms. The dispute with Greece served as a perfect excuse for any and every stumbling block in Macedonia's path to NATO/EU integration.

According to this book, in Macedonia there has been no significant investment in roads, railways, energy, infrastructure, technology and tourism industry and the biggest disappointment was the low level of foreign direct investment.

Sixth chapter is titled “The unfinished state(s) in the Balkans and the eU: the next wave” is written about anomalies resulting from Kosovo’s contested status, the EU’s unfinished policy, for regional dynamics of integration and disintegration, and about possible future scenarios.

Kosovo is an unfinished state. Since Kosovo’s declaration of independence on 17 February 2008 there have been three layers of contestation. Serbia, claims Kosovo as part of its territory. In having a ‘special relationship’ with Republika Srpska in a dysfunctional Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia is another unfinished state. Pristina and Belgrade and Brussels need to agree on the aim of EU integration within a ten-year timeframe, which would not be binding on Brussels, but would provide the two societies with a framework within which to prepare themselves.

Second part of the book, titled “Horizontal Perspectives”, consists of five separate chapters.

Chapter seven explains the European Union and citizenship regimes in the Western Balkans and about five ways to manage or mismanage citizenship regimes in the Western Balkans. The process of gradually turning the people of the Western Balkans into European citizens is clearly under way. Some 50,000 Macedonians have already acquired Bulgarian citizenship. It can also be predicted that dual citizenship will become a widespread phenomenon across the region. It is difficult to predict possible political consequences of overlapped citizenship regimes.

Chapter eight is titled “The Western Balkans after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) opinion”. This chapter explains about the International Court of Justice decision discussing whether or not it is a precedent, partition debate, the future Serbia-Kosovo relations, and disintegration debate in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

According to this book, since declaring its independence in February 2008, “Kosovo has found itself in a strange state of limbo in regard to its international recognition.” The Court found in its opinion that ‘the adoption of the declaration of independence of 17 February 2008 did not violate general international law, Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) or the Constitutional Framework’ and that consequently, the opinion appeared to remove a key obstacle to widespread international recognition. A number of international lawyers have argued that the opinion does not set a precedent.

Bosnia is in fact the only country of former Yugoslavia besides Serbia not to have recognized Kosovo.

Chapter nine writes about building the rule of law in the Balkans, the EU as a promoter of the rule of law, the evolution of the rule of law, and the control of corruption. A new Member State’s capacity to enforce EU law is therefore critical for the success of its EU integration process. The EU’s enlargement to include ten post-communist countries meant bridging the differences not only in economic development between the two halves of the continent, but also between two distinct legal cultures. The EU was not new to the experience of assisting rule-of-law reforms in aspiring Member States, although it had not dealt with former communist regimes before. This chapter briefly reviews the lessons learned from the efforts to

build the rule of law during the EU accession processes, particularly in the Eastern Balkans, and applies them to the Western Balkans.

Chapter ten is titled "Balkan public opinion and EU accession". According to public opinion, the EU accession still supported, but not so fervently. There is little change in expectations concerning the dates for EU accession, except in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Chapter eleven talk about the US and the EU in Balkan questions or problems and a new era of Western policy cooperation under EU leadership.

This chapter of the book says that "The main unfinished business as regards state-building in the Balkans revolves around Serbia. Serbia is central to the futures of Bosnia and Kosovo. The region will not be stable until Serbia makes up its collective mind on these two countries, especially Kosovo. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) is another piece of unfinished business, but in the short term this has more to do with Greece."

The book is a work of fine experts of situations and problems faced and are still facing the Western Balkans on their path towards European integration. The book is not an analysis of some problems of the Western Balkans, but more or less covers all weaknesses of individual countries, while failing to offer solutions to overcome them through the perspectives for the future. This book explained about the Western Balkans that is necessary to examine the regional developments and international trends, but also the contentious issues and obstacles to the process for euro integration. Some have to do with the uneven pace of reform and democratic change in the region, others with doubts about the existence of sufficient political will to support enlargement process for European Union.

The book abounds with statistical, comparative and historical analysis. It was interesting and easy to read, in this short review I tried to cover all the material, but I recommend to all readers to read the book to enrich their knowledge in this area.