

EU INTEGRATION AND ACCESSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR WEST BALKAN SOVEREIGNTY AND PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION

Bakar-e-Najmdeen*

Abstract

This is believed in Southeast Europe that its future and prosperity lies in the EU; the unfolding economic and socio-political reforms in the region are based on the impulse for EU membership. The EU continues to direct both economic and political incentives towards making the region ripe for integration and accession. This paper analyzes the increasing impulse for EU membership in the Balkan; brings forth the erosion of state sovereignty for institutional sovereignty, for which political landscape of the region gets changed. The trend is posing equal challenge to the identity of the region and its people, as influence of both domestic and foreign civil society grows. This paper also focuses on the extent of EU inspired reforms among the Balkan states. The intention behind this effort is to be understood. It is to be measured that whether or not this effort is based on state interests in the EU only. If so, the new members can latter return to their old ways of weak governance without democratizing their political systems in essence. For instance, the extent to which EU reform and membership has changed Romania and Bulgaria is arguable.

Introduction

The European Union, indisputably holds the credit of the model for all contemporary regional organizations, giving its achievement for over half a century.¹

Having a root embedded in the idea of Kant's democratic peace;² the European Union has displayed high level experimentation, that the

* Bakar-e-Najmdeen is teaching at Preston University Islamabad.

¹ EU, Basic information on the European Union, http://europa.eu/about-eu/basic-information/index_en.htm (accesses December 20, 2011).

idea of development and harmonious co-existence can be attained when nations decide to abandon discord for harmony. This further justifies the argument that democratic states will neither fight nor threaten other democracies, and hence increasingly becoming the rational disposition for the acknowledgment of democracy. The propensity of the Europeans to see light in market-oriented co-existence is worth applauding. This, however, does not insinuate that Europeans have altogether compromised their individual nationhood. Primordial sentiments and national integrity are forces that often haunt the decision-making process of the EU as an institution.

The creation of the union, which begun humbly with fewer number of countries (Belgium, France, Former West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) depicted a miniature association which was later consolidated by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, institutionalizing in form of the European Economic Community (EEC), or 'Common Market'.

With the passage of time, the EEC went through three waves of enlargement. This was owing to the fact that the future of any such the community of shared economic strategy arguably does not rest on its miniature, instead a bigger community is required that can pull together wealth, diplomatic and socio-political sway of countries in the neighbourhood. Commencing with what is technically known as the western enlargement, the first opening of the community began in 1973 as Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom became formal members.³

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, was the threshold in history of the community as Southern European countries got incorporated into the fold of this relatively -developed economic community. With the passage of time, the enlargement wave touched most of the communist gripped states of Eastern Europe and two Nordic nations.⁴

The dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia, as a result of humanitarian intervention drove a chisel into one of the authoritarian milieus of Europe. The aftermath of NATO-led strike on the Serbian authoritarian rule and disintegration brought forth the discussion of state building and getting the region intimated with European values to become impetus for Western Balkan enlargement.

The future aspirants and members have to grapple with varieties of changes in the EU accession region.. The underlying motive for EU integration rests on the political and economic benefits EU grants its member states. Evidently, the pattern of integration and accession for

² Michael Edward Brown, *Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller, Debating the Democratic Peace*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 160.

³ Jacek Rostowski, *The Eastern Enlargement of the EU*, (Massachusetts: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 170.

⁴ John O' Brennan, *The Eastern Enlargement of the European Union*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 18.

countries varies based on the socio-political and economic circumstances surrounding the aspirant country.

Premised on this, the pattern of integration for Western Balkan countries is apparently elucidated by the aforementioned circumstances. Rising from the wrath of war, haunted by enemy image of the past and state- building processes that followed; integration and accession of the Balkan creates a unique pattern. This distinctiveness cannot be discounted from Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) as the platform upon which future integration of the Balkan will be patterned.⁵

One will need lesser logic to fathom that the SAA was fashioned around the European Union Model (EUM). To begin with, the SAA has turned out to be a great political incentive to the region. Constructively, it has accelerated the transition from authoritarian to democratic system in the region. Though illiberal in character, the Balkans have agreed to this acceptable international norm as nations move closer to democratic principles of good governance and state responsibility towards citizens.⁶

From all indications and actions of the countries in the region, Western Balkan states believe their future prosperity lies with the EU, therefore the economic and socio-political reforms unfolding in the region are the result of impulse for EU membership. It is therefore not surprising to see countries in the region, susceptible to influence of external bodies, as precondition for their EU membership. Increasingly, the expansion of EU institutionalism into the Balkan, changes the political landscape of the region. The effect of this transformation is simultaneous; on one hand it is the challenge of already marginalized state sovereignty and on the other this poses challenges to the identity of the region and its people, as both domestic and foreign civil society grow in influence. The ramifications of this integration on the state sovereignty and democratization process of the Balkan should hence be deciphered by the unfurling realities in the region.

EU Enlargement

The expansion of the EU beyond the economies and socio-cultural boundaries of the founding countries, pressed the community to chalk out a manual for all future aspirants. This emphasizes need to chalk out

⁵ *European Commission: Enlargement, The Stabilization and Association Process*, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accesion_process/how_does_a_country_join_the_eu/sap/index_en.htm (accessed on 26 February 2012). The process allows the western Balkan countries to accustom to EU kind of market economy, promote regional cooperation after years of fragmentation and hatred and eventually holding the EU membership card.

⁶ Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 16.

certain requirements for membership of the EU. Erik Jones (2005) calls this the European Union Model (EUM): This is collection of norms which include adherence to “market economy, rule of law, respect for human rights and a system of good governance ... rewarded for their capability to imbibe the values, norms and principles and ultimately their ability to converge to the model.”⁷

Irrespective of the EUM, the European community members obviously have individual territorial and political issues to resolve; yet the nagging problem of having European constitution resonates for all before the Lisbon treaty, which became operational on 1st December, 2009.⁸ Some countries are yet to decide whether to accept the common norms rectified by the treaty that is likely to undermine their sovereignty.

Acceptance of a common constitution is construed to open lot of issues, among which is common immigration law and rules for enlargement. The enlargement of the union has been a serious contentious debate affecting Southeast European countries. Bulgaria and Romania would count themselves lucky enough, granted the membership of the union in 2007, while Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and Turkey remain in the pipeline of EU aspirants. The hope of Croatia was daunted by the last enlargement referendum held in Ireland which disapproved of enlargement and unsettled border dispute with Slovenia.⁹ Although, the latter two hurdles has somewhat been surmounted as Zagreb closes all chapters and is ready to become the 28th EU member.¹⁰

Reform and Integration

Enticing the Balkan countries towards good governance will not be a peculiar case having no comparison, in fact Washington and Brussels have experimented similar trend in Latin America with appreciable success.¹¹ Countries in the Balkan have turned into reformist countries,

⁷ Erik Jones, Amy Verdun, *The Political Economy of European Integration: Theory and Analysis*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 143.

⁸ “Treaty of Lisbon: Taking Europe into the 21st century,” *EUROPA* (Paris), http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/index_en.htm. (accessed June 4, 2011)

⁹ Prime minister sorry for Ireland rejecting EU reform treaty, *USA Today* (New York), June 20, 2008. http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-06-20-Irelandtreaty_N.htm (accessed July 15, 2010). And *Voice of America: Europe*, (Washington), “Slovenia-Croatia Border Agreement,” June 11, 2010. <http://www.voanews.com/policy/editorials/europe/Slovenia-Croatia-Border-Agreement-96167554.html>. (accessed June 26, 2011).

¹⁰ Croatia to Become EU's 28th Member in 2013, *Balkan Insight* (London), June 24, 2011. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/croatia-to-become-eu-s-28th-member-in-mid-2013>

¹¹ Richard Youngs, The European Union and Democracy in Latin America, *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 44, no. 3 (Autumn, 2002): 111-139.

trying to reform their systems in order to meet the standards and demands of the EU. The role of the EU as a force, influencing affairs within the Balkan states cannot be underestimated.

Serbia, the self-acclaimed inheritor of Yugoslavia, is at the core of EU integration and accession for many pressing reasons. On the account of making effort to adopt the EUM and ultimately joining the union, Belgrade has come to the realization that the path to Brussels is thorny. EU has been frank at making it straight to Serbian Republic that its EU membership aspiration will remain hanging, if the political uncertainty between the pro-West and radical parties persists.¹² Meanwhile, Belgrade is also expected to prove its capability to apprehend Ratko Mladic, war crime fugitive, whose recent arrest came forth as a result of enormous pressure.¹³

The report of the former Finnish Premier, Marti Ahtisaari, played a significant role, which accorded Kosovo a monitored independence. The report refused to merit serious consideration among the stakeholders in Serbia, rather the latter promised Kosovo ninety-five percent autonomy. Serbian refusal of the Ahtisaari's proposal was conditioned by the political tension between radical Serbs and Social Democrats. The latter wanted the accession of Serbia with the EU, while radical Serbs party do not see EU as the first priority of their country or giving in to the dictate of the West. The EU has been however particular about the issue of Kosovo as cord-tied with Serbia-EU accession.

Kosovo's unilateral independence declaration, displays the lack of political and diplomatic unity within the EU and a disturbing issue between Belgrade and Brussels. The declaration has though become recognized by seventy-seven countries¹⁴ and approved by the ICJ as accorded to international law.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Serbia remains resolute that giving away its southern region, most populated by ethnic Muslim Albanians, would be tantamount to opening a Pandora's Box within the region and across the globe. This view has been strongly supported by

¹² EU says Serbia agreement on hold, *BBC News* (London), February 6, 2008. Olli Rehn, the EU enlargement commissioner said a political deal due to be signed with Serbia remains postponed because of a political dispute in Belgrade. Meanwhile, the PM Vojislav Kostunica always wanted Serbia to maintain its integrity and Serbia-ness while Serbian President Boris Tadic has been more or less western leaning.

¹³ Ratko Mladic arrested: Bosnia war crimes suspect held, *BBC News Europe* (London), May 26, 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13561407>. (accessed July 14, 2011).

¹⁴ Who Recognised Kosova as an Independent State? *The Kosovar People Thank You*(Kosovo). <http://www.kosovothankyou.com/>. (accessed June 22, 2010.)

¹⁵ ICJ Clears Kosovo Independence, *International Relations and Security Network*, July 23, 2010. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch-Archive/Detail/?lng=en&id=119209>. (accessed August 22, 2010).

Russia, Serbia's traditional ally and certain nations with the view that Kosovo's independence will encourage other ethnic minority to tread same route.

Belgrade sees Kosovo as politically challenging, having serious reflection on its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Prior to induction of Serbia and two other countries into the Schengen free zone, Brussels desired to offer closer trade relations and relaxed visa requirements to Serbia, but scrupled by the then PM, Vojislav Kostunica, as a ploy to undermine Serbia's sovereignty that would further strengthen the unilateral independence of Kosovo.¹⁶

Belgrade rejection of, Kosovo as a sovereign state, has been made clear by its usual abstention from political and diplomatic events, for which Kosovo will be represented as a state.¹⁷ The fruition of this strategy remains contestable, owing to more recognition Kosovo continues to receive. The final straw that broke the camel's back was when the UN Secretary General called on Serbia to accept Kosovo's independence, a stance that was seriously condemned by Russia, staunchly against Kosovo's independence and a source of encouragement for Serbia.¹⁸ Similarly, the United States maintained an unequivocal position that relations with this former Socialist nation will be straightened if Kosovo is let go. The leadership of Serbia has had their political personality stained for encouraging and supporting a parallel structure in the north of Kosovo, for which Pristina believes undermine state building.

Belgrade on this account continues to grapple with maintaining balance between saving its bid for the EU and its sovereignty. It is on the similar account that Serbia is politically troubled between the radicals and the liberals; the former sees EU accession as path towards perverse loss of sovereignty, though Belgrade believes that EU integration will further strengthen its diplomatic clout to consolidate its sovereignty.

Accession and Internal Rifts

Introducing economic reforms was not the only prerequisite for membership in the EU; rather EU requires (from all aspirants) a comprehensive transformation in shape of socio-political and judicial reforms. These requirements have been the road blocking hurdles for some countries. For instance, minority crisis across the region is not peculiar to EU aspirants only, but inclusive of Balkan countries already

¹⁶ EU says Serbia agreement on hold, *BBC News* (London), February 6, 2008.

¹⁷ Valentina Pop, Kosovo status issue threatens EU-Balkan summit," *EU Observer* (Brussels) April 29, 2010. <http://euobserver.com/15/29974>. (accessed June 22, 2010).

¹⁸ Fred Weir, Why Russia is against Kosovo plan, *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), June 28, 2007. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0628/p06s02-woeu.html>. (accessed June 21, 2010).

members of the EU. Ahmeti Ali, the leader of the ethnic Albanian minority party, Democratic Union for Integration (BDI), has been struggling to give Albania a place in Macedonian politics. Among other reasons, Macedonia is seen by its ethnic minorities as having less strength to join the EU, without ethnic consensus and respect for minority. Similarly, the political turmoil and divide in Bosnia-Herzegovina is another hurdle, obstructing the Serb-Croat-Bosniak from getting a strong point on their EU aspiration.

Albania cannot be left out from the political turmoil in the region, although ethnically Albania remains in political stalemate. Despite efforts to resolve challenges of political and electoral reform, political tug of war still characterises Albanian political landscape.¹⁹ Such bitter atmosphere is explicable for the refusal of candidate status to Tirana.²⁰ Albanian sovereignty is challenged as the nation cannot resolve its internal political matters, rather beckoning external meddling. Brussels believes that the way Tirana follows pathway to the EU membership is a key test before joining EU.²¹ Nevertheless, minority crisis has become a trend in the Balkan ranging from Slovakia, Romania, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Bulgaria and others. It is this trend that determines the stance of many of these countries towards the issue of Kosovo's independence that exacerbates the existing tension in the region.

The political crisis across the region cannot be side-lined because of its role in shaping the overall domestic and foreign affairs over the years. The political uncertainty in Bosnia-Herzegovina does not make the plan of a united country realistic. The memories of the past continuously disturb the Bosniaks, resenting their Serb neighbours. The Serbs are accused of sharing radical views with Serbian Republic, which for many Bosniaks and Croats, brings back the painful memories of the past. Both the Serbs and Bosniaks have been through a political tussle over the issue of police reform and constitutional amendment. The Bosniaks want the Serb police to be incorporated into the larger federation force, while the Serb believed doing that will jeopardise their safety. Amending the constitution was another troubling issue derailing the country's path towards Brussels. Due to the marginalisation, the Bosnian-Croats minority supported the constitutional reform in view of an aspiration to having a separate entity for the Croats as owned by the Bosniak and Serbs. The latter believed it was a planned strategy engineered by the Bosniak and if

¹⁹ Nikolaj Nielsen, Albania's bitter political stand-off intensifies, *EU Observer* (Brussels), February 18, 2011. <http://euobserver.com/15/31836>. (accessed August 12, 2011).

²⁰ Svetlana Jovanovska and Augustin Palokaj, Albania is refused EU candidate status, *EU Observer* (Brussels), November, 10, 2010. <http://euobserver.com/9/31237>. (accessed August 12, 2011).

²¹ Andrew Willis, Albanian elections seen as key test before joining EU, *EU Observer*, (Brussels), May, 9, 2011. <http://euobserver.com/15/32285>. (accessed July 29, 2011)

such third entity surfaces, it will reduce the land occupied by the Serbs. Croats in the country often accused both (Bosniak and Serb) of politically marginalising them. Subsequently, the Serb entity's accusation and claim that Bosniak politicians are devising to Islamize the country, is another salient issue. Blocking such reality of Islamizing the country, the Croat parliamentary member once asked that pork be served in parliamentary canteen, though well aware that the Bosniak do not eat pork; it was an attempt to express their political and social right as citizens of the country.

The political tension between the Serbs and Bosniak widened after the ICJ ruling on Srebrenica-genocide. The ruling absolved the Serbs of complicity in the atrocity; it failed to shoulder the blame on any country like Serbia rather blamed personalities responsible for not stopping the atrocities when committed.²² The ruling obviously angered most Bosniaks and a call for revision of the ruling was tabled.²³

The internal divide in Bosnia-Herzegovina makes matters worse for its EU integration. Political uncertainty, ethnic politics and dearth of mutual understanding among leaders across political spectrum dims quick accession with Brussels. Like their brothers in Serbia, Bosnian Serbs often recount similar fear that giving in to Brussels' demands would undermine the country's sovereignty.

Irrespective of the accuracy of this assertion, there was obvious compromise by the Serbs before Brussels could consider Sarajevo's qualification for visa-free travel within the EU.²⁴

Serbia's political divide between radical Serb parties and Social Democrats is one of the country's most disturbing issues. The country wanted to regenerate the Milosevic era in a bid to create a formidable integrity for Serbs in the region. They gave no concession for EU membership and believed strongly that Kosovo cannot be let go; equally ready to use force in obstructing any form of Kosovo independence. Meanwhile, the Democrats wanted a progressive Serbia; though many times sharing views of the radical party, they remained keenly attracted to the membership of the EU. Polls in Serbia showed divided support for the

²² Statement to the Press by H.E. Judge Rosalyn Higgins, President of the International Court of Justice on Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro) *International Court of Justice*, February 26, 2007. <http://www.icj-cij.org/court/index.php?pr=1898&pt=3&p1=1&p2=3&p3=1>. (accessed March 1, 2008)

²³ Martin Shaw, *The International Court of Justice: Serbia, Bosnia, and genocide*, *Open Democracy* (London) February 28, 2007. http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization-institutions_government/icj_bosnia_serbia_4392.jsp. (accessed March 1, 2008).

²⁴ EU visa-free travel in sight for Albanians and Bosnians, *BBC News Europe* (London), October 8, 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11504123>. (accessed January 9, 2011).

two political ends. Serbian Republic should be understood and given the benefit of doubt; it has not been too long since it lost Montenegro as integral part, and would be shocking to see Kosovo going out of the net, even though Kosovars might see it as their rightful choice. Serbia is equally fearful that most of its religious monumental structures located in Kosovo might be ultimately lost and its ethnic minority living in Kosovo might be disproportionately represented. Thus, bringing forth the question, should Serbia forsake all reminiscence of identity?

The year 2007 turned out to be achievement year owing to the integration of Romania and Bulgaria with the EU. The accession of both countries made the others in the region to further accelerate their efforts toward the EU reforms. Most of these countries were geared towards effecting structural changes suitable for the membership of the EU.

Despite becoming an integral part of the EU, Romania and Bulgaria are still faced with numerous internal political issues. Romanian politics arguably is characterised as a tussle between the parliamentary, presidential and judicial indecisiveness. At times, the political uncertainty in both countries delineates the picture that both countries have not fully ingrained the EUM into their systems. Questionably, if both countries have done great homework and such was satisfactory for the EU accession, then the report of 2009 should be a misrepresentation of facts and realities.²⁵ But recent rejection of the two countries into Schengen zone reiterates how accession process has not been fruitful.²⁶

EU Members' Sway

The anticipation of sitting in Brussels as integral decision makers of the EU is an added incentive for the west Balkan countries: besides the political and economic benefits of the EU, the decision making role remains an implicit yet driving impulse for the western countries towards attaining European Union Model (EUM). But the actualization of such ambition has been murky.

Beginning with Serbia, letting Kosovo off its hook, accepting the reality of Pristina and abstaining from fomenting brawl in Kosovo; are all opportunity cost and alternative that forgone Belgrade has to compromise and bear with. Netherlands, one of the founding members of the EU, takes a forefront position that accession of Belgrade with Brussels will be concluded on determination level of Belgrade to arrest absconded war

²⁵ Stephen Castle, E.U. Report Finds Bulgaria and Romania Beset with Problems, *New York Times* (New York), July 22, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/23/world/europe/23briefs-Brussels.html>. (accessed March 22, 2010).

²⁶ "Romania and Bulgaria bid to join the Schengen zone," *France24* (Moulineaux), March 23, 2011. <http://www.france24.com/en/20110209-romania-and-bulgaria-bid-to-join-schengen-zone>. (accessed July 27, 2011).

criminals, reconcile border and mend up differences with its neighbours.²⁷ Although bringing to book of these war criminals does not actually represent the nationalism of radical Serbs; it would not necessarily “put the European Union at ease about Serbia's membership bid in the bloc.”²⁸ The fact, however, persists that bowing to the EU could somewhat be a premium option in view of Belgrade hoping to break the EU accession record.²⁹ Eventually, if Serbia becomes an EU member before Kosovo, which is more likely, Belgrade should be rather expected to play a similar card against Kosovo's accession.

Same would be true for Croatia, standing at a threshold of Brussels but getting to that junction has not been either hassle-free or stress-free.³⁰ The border dispute between Croatia and Slovenia has played a significant role as a prospective stumbling block against Croatia's EU integration. Basil, in his work, notes that Croatia was expected to join the EU in 2007, but that aspiration often gets daunted and smacked by tussle over border and unpaid debt by Slovenian bank to Croats.³¹ Slovenia maintains an obstinate position that resolution over the border should be the point of reference for negotiating Croatia's EU integration. Such benchmark fails to go down well with Croatia wanting the debt matter as the point for table talk.³² Of recent, Croatians got relieved of Slovenia's influence following the referendum which “some 51.5 percent of Slovenes voted in favour of the deal. A negative vote could have held up Croatia's talks with the EU, which had already stalled for almost a year in 2009, when Ljubljana opposed the opening of negotiation chapters due to the border dispute.”³³

²⁷ Marise Cremona, *The Enlargement of the European Union*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). 154.

²⁸ Mladic's Arrest and Serbia's EU Accession Plans, Stratfor (Online), May 26, 2011. www.stratfor.com/.../20110526-mladics-arrest-and-serbias-eu-access. (accessed July 22, 2011)

²⁹ Serbia aims to beat EU entry 'speed record', *Euractiv* (Online), January 4, 2010. <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/serbia-aims-beat-eu-entry-speed-record/article-188519>. (accessed July 23, 2010).

³⁰ Valentina Pop, Croatia to join EU in 2013 at the earliest, MEP says, *EU Observer* (Brussels), January 27, 2011. <http://euobserver.com/9/31711>. (accessed March 20, 2011)

³¹ Basil R. Jones, *Europe at the Crossroads*, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2008), 128.

³² James Stewart, *Slovenia: Cadogan Guide Slovenia*, (London: New Holland Publishers, 2006), 20.

³³ Valentina Pop, EU relieved after Slovenian vote on border dispute, *EU Observer* (Brussels), June 7, 2010. <http://euobserver.com/15/30222>. (accessed July 18, 2010)

Macedonia's EU integration has long been tied to the name dispute with Greece. The dispute is one of the defining lines which Athens uses in undermining Skopje's EU integration.³⁴

*The adjective 'Macedonian' has turned into a particularly difficult stumbling block in Skopje's name dispute with its southern neighbour. Greece is blocking Macedonia's entry into both the EU and NATO by asking it to change its name. Greece's Northern Province is called Macedonia and some Greeks from this region identify themselves as 'Macedonian'. Athens desires to make a clear distinction between the names of the Greek region and the independent country. The dispute has continued since 1995, when both countries signed an interim agreement under UN auspices to search for a permanent solution to the name issue. The agreement stipulates that Macedonia will be referred to as the 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', or FYROM, until a definitive name is found.*³⁵

Appreciable number of Macedonians have shown their dismay over the delay in the negotiation process, disrespect for national identity, and more disturbing fact; the seemingly EU side-taking, as the European Commission no longer uses the term 'Macedonian'. Instead of mentioning a 'Macedonian language' it refers to a "state language" in its report.³⁶ Macedonian politicians see Athens as a cause wanting to impair Skopje's development as the dispute between the two countries is not confined to name rather stretches to border movement and obstruction to NATO accession. Thus, even when Athens displays any sign of patching the gaps, Skopje will always be chary of the move.³⁷ Macedonia's national cohesion has been threatened by its EU integration. The political divide across ethnic line vividly explains the reality in this Balkan state. A recent survey conducted in Macedonia shows a "vast majority of ethnic Macedonians (72 percent) do not trust the European Union's policy towards Macedonia, a

³⁴ John Shea, *Macedonia and Greece: The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation*, (North Carolina: McFarland Publishers, 2008), 16.

³⁵ Svetlana Jovanovska, Mounting pressure to end Macedonian negotiations with Greece, *EU Observer* (Brussels), November 16, 2010. <http://euobserver.com/9/31276>. (accessed March 23,2011).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Svetlana Jovanovska and Augustin Palokaj, Greece will fix dates for Balkan EU membership, *EU Observer* (Brussels), November 23, 2010. <http://euobserver.com/9/31326>. (accessed March 23,2011).

similar proportion of Albanians (74 percent) living in the country believe the EU to be a trustworthy body.”³⁸

Influence of Foreign NGO/Mega States

The role of the U.S. in bringing about peace during the Yugoslavia war cannot be underestimated. Washington had to shoulder the responsibility which Europe was hesitant to carry, although it was a tough policy decision. Since the collapse of Yugoslavia, Washington has remained a major player both in peace making and keeping. The extent to which American influence is felt in the region becomes more understandable during the fight for Kosovo’s independence. In one of EU Observer’s report, Ekrem Krasniqi suggested that “President Barack Obama: You should instruct your ambassadors in Kosovo to end the tragi-comedy of 'Kosovar democracy' and create an EU-US protectorate instead. US ambassador Christopher Dell should become Kosovo Prime Minister.”³⁹

Same will be true for Russia, having its neighbours disrobe of communist attire. Russian interest in the region goes deeper than the ideological affinity; in fact the shared identity of Slavic is the only underlining factor making Russia relevant in the region. This has become glaring by the staunch support thrown behind Serbia by Moscow and the different strategy by the latter, wanting to incorporate western Balkan into its energy politics.

Turkey’s role in the region is yet another expansion of external body in the politics of Western Balkan which, one way or the other, affects state’s sovereignty. History of the region will remain indelible of the Ottoman past, that ancient time is once again rising, looking at the political, economic and diplomatic influence of Turkey in the region. The latter has been instrumental in resolving geo-strategic matters among the Balkan countries and continuously to aid commercial and economic interaction. Adding to the complex political scape of the region is the non-state actors who have their own share of influence in the region. The non-state actors are represented under the umbrella of the civil society. It is in fact part of the EU strategy that the civil society of the region must be groomed and led to maturity for active participation in the socio-political and economic development of the region.

³⁸ Svetlana Jovanovska, Macedonians do not trust EU policy towards their country, *EU Observer* (Brussels), December 3, 2010. <http://euobserver.com/9/31424>. (accessed March 23,2011).

³⁹ Ekrem Krasniqi, The EU and US should take power in Kosovo, *EU Observer* (Brussels), February 16, 2011. <http://euobserver.com/7/31813>. (accessed July 7, 2011).

Most frequently, the Freedom House reports political development in the region, which are equally contested by the stakeholders. In one of the reports, Albanian politicians are portrayed interfering in independent institutions within the country. Many of the countries in the Balkan have, in the recent times, been alleged of serious political and economic ill-practices by the Transparency International and the Freedom House. Political certainty, non-ethnic politics, dearth of corruption, independence of the judiciary and viable economy, respect of human rights are norms the EU expects of the Western Balkan to cultivate and adopt before finally joining the EU. The extent to which SAA have actualized these norms is open to discussion. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria elucidates the picture vividly. Arguably both countries have not really spelt out or delineated much outstanding characteristic of the EU that could make entirely different from the yet to be EU members in the region.

The role of the EU in the region, points to the fact that political change can be affected not just within, but external incentive can equally catalyze a similar change. However, EU attempts to draw the region more closely through the SAA arrangement is an apparent challenge to the traditional realistic state-centric stance of sovereignty. The sovereignty of the region has since been eroded from state to institution in the form of supra-state institutions and civil society.

Brussels has to reshape its policy of enlargement towards the West Balkans, it is true that West Balkan accession is not uniform, there has been certain degree of differential treatment and holdback as in the veto power of EU member to roadblock the integration of aspirants. The fact of the matter is that Brussels should derail such trend as it will further complicate accession process of a genuine state.

The Western Balkan states should rather avail the opportunity accorded to them by Brussels, to effect actual reforms, instead of patching things all for the sake of grabbing the EU card. It is double benefit for the stimulator and the stimulated that reforms be done at the right time, since the wishy-washy reforms would later become detrimental; as in the case of objection of Romania and Bulgaria into the Schengen zone.

