

## The Enlargement After *Non*: Room for One More?

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The task of bringing along Serbia closer to the EU is not an easy and glamorous one. Behind the political agenda of integration with the European Union there is a lot of work to be done in the fields of legal harmonization, opening up the economy and communicating all that to the people, aka voters. This uneasy, but rewarding, task has not been made easier by the recent developments regarding Constitution and Budget. As Mr. Olli Rehn has put it, Brussels is still in the “political hangover” after a party where things didn’t go exactly according to the plan. Let us not dwell too much upon all aspects and reasons why the EU is in crisis, but try to look at it from the outside perspective of the country aspiring to become a member, specifically from the Western Balkans. We should try to allocate ourselves in the new environment and look at the issue of future enlargement from both sides – Western Balkans and the EU and its member countries.

Obviously, EU is in deep crisis which doesn’t necessarily have to be a bad thing, but more of a challenge. **EU is not a State**; it is not formulated within the boundaries and given state of things and affairs. It is a living organism that manages to surpass its previous form and adapts to the new conditions. Nevertheless, present state of things may affect the perception of the whole enlargement process. Let us openly raise the question: **has the accession of the ten countries of Central and Eastern Europe contributed to this crisis**, whether that is institutional or a crisis of political leadership?

We can contemplate and talk for hours that these allegations do not have an objective basis in the macroeconomy or how this issue has been abused in the political struggle for power amongst some countries like Germany or France. Unfortunately, I am afraid that it is not the objective state of things that matters the most, it is the common **perception of things**. If this wasn’t the case, polish plumbers wouldn’t gain on popularity these days and wouldn’t have become one of the hot topics for discussion.

One can differently value this criterion of common perception – it could be said that this is the basic condition for gaining the democratic

legitimacy of the EU, or unnecessary shifting of the dialogue into the populist arena. But, it is definitely one more thing to worry about if you are a country wanting to join the EU, plus having your whole reform agenda and political stability depending on the prospects of the accession.

In this sense, Serbia's position is made even more specific, having in regard its overlapping of the transition and integration process, burden of political heritage, and the "unfinished" issues of Kosovo and state union with Montenegro.

Fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria is a process in which two sides become partners, overcoming its relations based on the policy of conditionality. To be clear – conditionality is necessary, but it is certainly not someone one should strive for, at least if he is on the receiving end. The new approach defined by Commissioner Rehn is highly welcomed, based on three Cs - Consolidation, Conditionality and Communication, and I regard them as a basis for the fair game. In heart of these principles is a historical desire for **true partnership** between countries of Europe, a true solidarity among equals. It is surely the goal to strive for and to which the whole region of Western Balkans should focus their efforts even more vigorously and relentlessly.

But what if this means postponing the (sometimes only suggested) dates for the future accessions of respected (non)candidate countries? Is that where the problem lies, bearing in mind the "carrot" that leaders of the region countries promised to their voters, as a token for the "stick" they had to endure in the recent years. Is the promise going to be broken?

In my view, the strategy of politicians (not only from my country – Serbia) whereby the European Union is portrayed as some golden egg laying hen, although appealing to His Majesty the Voter, is dangerous and fundamentally wrong. Politicians of Western Balkan must develop an open strategy for EU accession, oriented primarily to their own countries' priorities and citizens. Fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria is not a mere instrument for anything, **it is a goal *per se***, from which we benefit the mostly. However, it must be noted that "golden egg laying hen" kind of strategy does not stem from this region. We have surely seen it before and it has much to be blamed for the present bad perception of the previous and future enlargements.

So, how can we solve this "Polish, Hungarian, Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian etc" plumber situation? One part of the solution lies in the hands of EU and its members, whereby they have to be frank to each other and

overcome their differences. Those differences are fundamental, not small, but they are also a potential source of a stronger, larger and more liberalized Europe with a more influential global voice. What is needed is a skilful leader able to “**cease the day**” and to offer new ideas to the citizens of Europe that are so badly needed.

The other part of solution lies in our hands, and when I say “our” I mean that there are no essential differences between countries of Western Balkans that amount to significant external advantage. We must prove that we have matured and that we can understand our position and our tasks in full. Only by doing so and showing genuine solidarity, we can claim the status of partners with the EU that we look for. The first step in that direction is to become genuine partners between ourselves, and from what we have achieved so far, enhancing regional cooperation and mutual understanding after a decade of aggression and separation, I would say we are on the right path.