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## Accession Regatta Lull

The Western Balkans' long journey to the EU

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## The Western Balkans' long journey to the EU

Theresia Töglhofer<sup>1</sup>

*Croatia is the name of the country slated to become the 28th member of the European Union. On December 9, 2011, officials signed the accession treaty in Brussels and on July 1, 2013, the country will become a member of the EU. Croatia will not only be the first country from the Western Balkans to join the EU—it will also be the only one for the next few years. Firstly, Croatia's relatively straight course to the EU is not the rule but the exception in a region in which the issues of stabilization and unresolved bilateral conflict still present a number of hurdles on the road to EU integration. And secondly, the clear trend within the EU itself is toward dealing with accession conditionality more strictly—a position reinforced by the current debt and financial crisis. Given this background, the question of how the EU will maintain its powerful appeal and transformational power in relation to the Western Balkans is especially urgent.*

The negotiations over Croatia's accession to the European Union went on for six years. On June 30, 2011, the last day of the Hungarian presidency, they finally came to a close. Jadranka Kosor, prime minister at the time, and President Ivo Josipović signed the accession treaty for their country on December 9, 2011. In a popular referendum, the rather EU-skeptical Croatian voting population approved the step by a majority of 66.27 percent. This opened the gates for Croatian accession to the EU on July 1, 2013.<sup>2</sup>

Croatia is the first of the seven Western Balkan countries<sup>3</sup> to complete the accession process initiated for all of the states in the region in 2000. At the signing ceremony in Brussels, therefore, the importance of the Croatian accession's function as a signal to the other Western Balkan countries was especially emphasized. According to European Council president Herman Van Rompuy, Croatia's achievement "proves to all in the region that through hard work, persistence, political courage and determination, EU membership is within reach."<sup>4</sup>

But the signal function evoked by numerous EU representatives cannot really hide the fact that the prospect of EU membership for Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia is clouded by many question marks. Until today, none of these accession hopefuls has

been able to open the (protracted) negotiation process with the EU. Under the impact of the last two great waves of enlargement in 2004 and 2007—in some places considered precipitous—and within the context of the present EU debt and financial crisis, the framework conditions for accepting additional countries into the EU have become appreciably stricter. This means Croatia will not only be the first country in the Western Balkans to become an EU member, but that for the foreseeable future, it is also likely to be the only one.<sup>5</sup>

Accompanied by augmented accession conditionality, the prospect of accession has proven to be an effective instrument for triggering political and economic reforms in the countries of the region. But in view of the sobering timeline for any future accessions, the question of how the EU will be able to maintain the potency of its power of transformation in the Western Balkans is especially urgent.

### The "Regatta Principle"

In June 2000, the European Council in Feira declared that the Western Balkan countries are "potential candidates"<sup>6</sup> for EU membership and established the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) that defines the framework for step-by-

step movement toward the EU, in the same year. The EU focused on the “Regatta Principle,” which says that integration into the EU should progress in accordance with a country’s reform milestones, and assigned a supporting role to the regional approach. The Council made the “Copenhagen Plus” criteria the prerequisite that a country has to fulfill before it can become an EU member. Based on the Copenhagen criteria already applied during the fifth enlargement round that encompassed Central and Eastern Europe, the accession conditionality envisages the fulfillment of central democratic, rule of law, and market economy standards as well as the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*.<sup>7</sup> This conditionality has been augmented relative to earlier enlargement processes as a result of the conditions derived from the wars fought in the wake of the breakup of former Yugoslavia and the way they have been dealt with: compliance with the peace treaties, cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (which also provides for the detention and extradition of fugitive defendants), the return of refugees, and the willingness to participate in regional cooperation. Tailored to a specific regional context, these accession conditions provide for the dual goals of stabilization (in the sense of guaranteeing statehood and democratic order) and association (to be understood as integration into EU structures). Although the Western Balkan countries all acquired their accession prospect at the same time and under the same conditions, the following interim report on the state of the integration process shows that their bilateral association with the EU has progressed to different extents and at different speeds in the course of the last decade.

Croatia was the trailblazer among the accession candidates from the very beginning. While the EU was defining the rules of the game for the accession process for the Western Balkans in the SAP, the death of long-term president Franjo Tudjman and the parliamentary and presidential elections at the beginning of 2000 triggered the swing toward democratic change in Croatia. The EU reacted by quickly intensifying its relations with Croatia and signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement

(SAA) as early as October 2001. At the same time as Turkey and as the first—and until now, the only—country from the Western Balkans, Croatia was able to open accession negotiations in October 2005 after the European Commission determined that Croatia did indeed fulfill the political criteria and possess a functioning market economy.<sup>8</sup> Croatia was soon able to take the uncontested lead in the accession regatta.

The only other country to have made rapid EU association progress in the past few years is Montenegro. It received candidate status in 2010, and the Council intends to open accession negotiations in June 2012. The prerequisite: the assessment the European Commission submits on Montenegro’s implementation of reforms in the areas of rule of law and fundamental rights with a special focus on the fight against corruption and organized crime has to be positive.<sup>9</sup>

Accession negotiations are still not being opened for Macedonia, which has had candidate status since 2005. Although the Commission has repeatedly declared that it is in favor of opening negotiations in its annual progress reports, the Council has not yet acted on this recommendation. The reason is the conflict with Greece over the country’s name of Macedonia that has been going on for two decades.<sup>10</sup> The UN-mediated dialog was at a standstill for an entire year and the talks that resumed in January 2012 have not yet led to a breakthrough.

And when it comes to the internal reform steps Macedonia has taken, the latest European Commission review is mixed. Commissioner for Enlargement Stefan Füle noted that with the current pace of reform and only half-hearted approach in the implementation, the country can no longer take it for granted that the Commission will continue to recommend opening its accession negotiations—even if the conflict over its name is resolved.<sup>11</sup> A clear message to the politicians in charge: they should not use the unresolved conflict as an excuse to postpone unpopular reforms and make Macedonia’s EU association dependent on this bilateral question alone.

Serbia, on the other hand, has finally been able to overcome a perennial stumbling block in the accession process. The arrest and extradition of alleged war criminals Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić—the last ones wanted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)—and the positive report on political and economic reforms moved the European Commission to recommend granting Serbia candidate status in October 2011. The condition of full cooperation with ICTY was the focus of the country's accession conditionality for a long time. And now that Serbia has fulfilled it, paving the way for further steps toward integration, its next hurdle is on the horizon: the controversial status of former Serbian province Kosovo. The Council—and Germany in particular—demanded to see further progress in the dialog between Belgrade and Pristina begun in the spring of 2011 before it finally named Serbia an accession candidate in March 2012. The question of how Serbia's goals of EU accession and the retention of Kosovo are compatible acquires a new sense of urgency.

For the second time in October 2011, the Commission referred to a lack of reform steps in its refusal to support the accession application of Albania, which is also waiting to receive candidate status. The ongoing political crisis between the ruling Democratic Party and the socialist opposition that broke out after the parliamentary elections in June 2009 led to repeated boycotts and the impairment of parliamentary work there. The parliamentary crisis and the fact that the two large Albanian political parties are at opposite poles of the political spectrum almost disrupted the adoption and implementation of EU-relevant laws as well. In this context, Albania has not made significant progress in fulfilling the political criteria required for receiving candidate status.<sup>12</sup>

Bosnia-Herzegovina also needs to initiate basic reforms in order to achieve the positive assessment it requires to put an accession application within reach. But the profound crisis of the country that is still under the international supervision set up when the Dayton Agreement was signed in 1995 is preventing this. A political system based on an ethno-national principle and a complex, inefficient

administrative apparatus significantly limits the state's ability to make decisions and act on them.<sup>13</sup>

Characteristic of the situation: after the elections in October 2010, one year went by until the largest parties of the three dominant groups—the Bosniaks, the Serbs, and the Croats—were able to agree to the formation of a government at the national level. Although the European Court of Human Rights objected to ethnic discrimination as a result of the way the different ethnic groups are represented in state institutions,<sup>14</sup> they have not been able to agree on suitable modifications to the constitution and Election Act yet. Given this situation, the SAA signed in 2008 has not yet taken effect.

With the passage of the census law that enables the head count other European countries took in 2011 to finally be taken in 2013 and the law on state aid at the national level, the country was able to fulfill two long-formulated EU stipulations in February 2012. This partial success came about under great pressure from outside forces and it cannot hide the fact that, due to the state's limited ability to function, the circumstances for fulfilling the accession criteria that prevail there are unfavorable.

Kosovo is confronted with a similar situation: its controversial status under international law sets up difficult framework conditions for developing a functional state. The Council has repeatedly assured Kosovo that it has a European perspective, but the internal EU division in regard to the recognition of Kosovo has prevented an active accession prospect from materializing until now. Kosovo has not been able to enter into contractual relations with the EU, and the citizens of Kosovo are the only people in the Western Balkans who still require a visa to enter an EU country. The recently announced feasibility study for an SAA<sup>15</sup> and the initiation of the visa dialog at the beginning of 2012 are only the first steps needed to realize progress in the association process for Kosovo—"without prejudice to Member States' positions on status" as the Council formulates it.

This brief examination of the integration prospects of individual accession hopefuls shows that the

course of their convergence on the EU is accompanied by extremely different sets of problems. Preparation for planned accession is not a linear process in which the applying countries are able to meet the political and economic requirements step by step—as the terminology of the “progress reports” the European Commission produces every year might suggest. On the contrary, stagnation, hurdles, and deviation are fixed components of the reform and association process. Especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, the attempt to overcome basic issues of the state building process by walking the road to EU association has not paid off. In turn, these problems pose a massive obstacle for the EU integration of Bosnia and Kosovo. The speed of Serbia’s EU association is highly dependent on the solutions to the Kosovo issue. In the case of Albania, the obstacle to progress in the association process is internal—in the case of Macedonia, it is external. At present, the EU can only rely on rapidly opening accession negotiations with Montenegro to guarantee a follow-up to the Croatian success story.

## Croatia’s road to the EU: the exception, not the rule

Why was Croatia able to develop into a successful accession candidate in this difficult environment? Pre-conditions favored its comparatively rapid completion of the individual phases of the SAP, which allowed the country to put the accent on association with the EU, while the emphasis has been on stabilization in other countries. Three aspects that have had a significant impact on the course of the EU integration process in the Western Balkans make this especially clear: issues of statehood, cooperation with the ICTY, and the resolution of bilateral disputes.

The Croatian post-war policy did not have to deal with issues of unsolved statehood or fragile inter-ethnic relationships that would have hindered the development of a functional state to the same extent as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, whose territories also became theaters of war during the collapse of Yugoslavia. When the Tudjman era ended and the initiation of the SAP put EU pros-

pects within reach in 2000, Croatia had achieved the governmental and institutional framework required to effectively adopt the political and economic standards and the *acquis communautaire* of the EU.

But the legacy of the 1990s also managed to overtake Croatia. The EU and the US made the requirement of full cooperation with the ICTY a major prerequisite for further steps in the Euro-Atlantic integration of the post-Yugoslav countries. After the ICTY chief prosecutor reported a lack of cooperation, the opening of the accession negotiations with Croatia planned for March 2005 was postponed to October of the same year. When General Ante Gotovina was detained in Spain, Croatia was able to remove the ICTY conditionality as an obstacle to its association process—unlike Serbia. There, the demand to extradite the still-fugitive defendants only led to protracted delays in opening and holding SAA negotiations, and in signing and ratifying the agreement.<sup>16</sup>

Not only that: the border dispute with Slovenia resulting from the collapse of the common state also led to an interim break in the Croatian accession negotiations. Because Slovenia thought that Croatia had predetermined the course of the controversial borderline in the negotiation documents, the member state vetoed a number of negotiation chapters between December 2008 and September 2009. Croatia and Slovenia were only able to overcome their differences in November 2009 after agreeing to arbitration proceedings that would determine the borderline and the especially sensitive sea border in the Gulf of Piran. A bilateral conflict with an EU member country led to even longer blockade in the association process in Macedonia. Here, Greece has blocked the opening of the EU accession negotiations because of the dispute over the country’s name for three years now.

Croatia can be considered an exception to the rule in two ways. On the one hand, its EU association has not had to deal with many problems with the state building process or inter-ethnic cohabitation. And on the other, Croatia was able to overcome the obstacles that arose during the accession

process as a result of its more recent past rather quickly—despite the fact that the requirement of full cooperation with the ICTY and the border conflict with Slovenia slowed down its integration into the EU. This is why it was able to fulfill the aspects of EU conditionality aimed at stabilizing the region more easily and as a result, complete the association process with the EU more rapidly than other Western Balkan countries, in which the enlargement process was and still is subject to multiple crises and blockades.

## The rising standards of a sobering enlargement policy

Not only are the pre-conditions in most Western Balkan countries unfavorable for rapid EU integration, but a rough wind from the EU is also hitting the accession regatta head on. The debt crisis in the euro zone and the growing problem of competitive ability has caused the governments of the EU to focus inward for the past two years. Foreign relations, which include the enlargement policy, have low political priority at present. The enthusiasm for new enlargement rounds has visibly cooled among the member states and at the same time, the EU is tightening the requirements for accession hopefuls. In view of the lessons learned from previous enlargement rounds—especially the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, which had not fulfilled the EU stipulations in the areas of judiciary reform and the fight against corruption and organized crime in 2007—and the current course the SAP is on in the Western Balkans, the EU institutions are making sure that candidate countries are complying with accession conditionality to the letter.

The European Commission is now taking a closer look when internal reforms for fulfilling the political and economic criteria and accepting *acquis communautaire* are at issue. In the past few years, it has not only emphasized the adoption of *acquis communautaire* but has monitored its implementation as well. Instead of the formal fulfillment of stipulated criteria, the accession process will lead to a “real” and “profound transformation,”<sup>17</sup> according to the key words of the current enlargement strategy. The accession negotiations with Croatia

had hardly been closed when the EU started to extract lessons learned from them. Since rule of law issues caused problems up to the last minute, the Commission suggested that in future accession negotiations, chapters 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security) should be opened at the beginning and kept open until the very end of the multi-year negotiation process. This means that the required track record in the area of rule of law will be established from the start of accession negotiations and encompass a longer period of time. This new approach will be applied for the first time during the accession talks with Montenegro, which are scheduled to begin in June 2012.<sup>18</sup> Croatia will also be subject to a European Commission monitoring mechanism until it becomes a member, with the goal of maintaining its reform momentum beyond the closure of negotiations, especially in the sensitive areas of rule of law and competition policy.<sup>19</sup>

The emphasis on accession conditionality in regard to regional cooperation and the principle of good neighborly relations is also being reinforced. The import of a bilateral conflict like the one resulting from the accession of Cyprus in 2004, which has caused a significant impairment in the ability of the EU to act as a whole in some areas, should be avoided in the future. This is why the EU stresses that countries have to resolve their bilateral disputes before they can be accepted into the EU. This principle has been concretely applied in the accession process of Serbia and Kosovo since the fall of last year. After Serbia fulfilled the key condition of full cooperation with the ICTY, the EU shifted the focus of its accession conditionality to the unresolved issue of Kosovo. The Commission recommended that Serbia receive candidate status in October 2011 “on the understanding that Serbia reengages in the dialogue with Kosovo and is moving swiftly to the implementation in good faith of agreements reached to date.”<sup>20</sup> To assure that the Serbian government remains as committed as possible to the talks with Kosovo, under pressure from Germany the Council postponed its decision on Serbia’s candidate status until March 2012. Referring to the progress that Serbia has made in the Belgrade-Pristina dialog and its implementation of the agreements achieved until now, the Council

declared Serbia a candidate country at the beginning of March—an important achievement for the pro-European forces in Serbia that will bolster their position for the elections in May 2012.

And for the next step in the association process, the opening of accession negotiations, the EU has stipulated the normalization of relations with Kosovo<sup>21</sup> as the top goal for Serbia. While it prioritized seven key priorities in a wide range of reform areas for opening accession talks with Montenegro and twelve for Albania,<sup>22</sup> the Kosovo issue is clearly the area of concentration in Serbia's case. On the other hand, the EU does not seem to be placing particular emphasis on the principle of good neighborly relationships in the Greek-Macedonian dispute—it is not putting much pressure on Greece or Macedonia to find a solution to the name in the near future or to at least overcome the blockade to opening accession negotiations.

This trend of insisting on strict compliance with the accession criteria goes hand in hand with frequently cited “enlargement fatigue”—and appears to be more than temporary. In particular, the current national debt crisis clearly illustrates the potentially devastating consequences individual countries trigger when they do not comply with the stipulated criteria. The member countries have also learned lessons from Greece's premature accession to the euro zone. Against this background, we can assume that they will not be very willing to make trade-offs when it comes to accession conditionality in the future. With this, the road to the EU is not only a long one for the Western Balkan countries but also the hurdles they need to overcome are now higher.

## Conclusions

Accession to the European Union is at best a medium-term prospect for the countries in the Western Balkans—with the exception of Croatia. And it is less tangible than it was 10 years ago, due to the EU's emphasis on stricter accession conditionality and the fact that the enlargement policy does not have a high priority on the EU agenda. A look at the region shows that the integration pro-

cess in many countries is impacted by occasional blockades caused by internal and external factors—it does not necessarily proceed as smooth convergence on the European Union. Therefore, it will take a special effort to maintain the dynamic of the enlargement process even after the Croatian accession to the EU.

The countries of the region are, of course, primarily responsible for fulfilling the accession criteria themselves. But the stakes are also high for the EU. Firstly, the prospect of accession the EU is offering to the Western Balkan countries is the greatest possible incentive for reform. Secondly, the EU has a direct interest in having stable, prosperous neighbors. Since this interest is not temporary either, the EU should make sure that it maintains and uses the formative options available within the framework of the enlargement process. Precisely because the membership horizon for further Western Balkan countries will be medium- to long-term after the accession of Croatia planned for 2013, the EU will be able to push the association process forward without having to immediately make good on its promise of accession. On the other hand, passiveness or a freeze in the enlargement policy due to the EU's current, internal problems and the unpopularity of the enlargement project would inevitably have a reduction in reform incentives as a consequence, which would undermine the goals of stabilizing and preparing the region for membership in the EU.

The stabilization aspect played a subordinate role in Croatia's accession process, but it is clearly much more relevant for the other Western Balkan countries. In order to prevent current crises and blockades in the enlargement process from perpetuating themselves or coming to a head, it is time to tackle the problems that impede the further convergence on the EU. The EU-mediated dialog between Belgrade and Pristina is an exemplary approach and will continue to demand lots of attention from the EU in the next few years. The EU has repeatedly emphasized the principle of good neighborly relations in its dealings with Kosovo and Serbia, and it should do this just as vehemently in the case of the Greek-Macedonian name dispute. This would include renouncing provocative gestures and

nationalistic rhetoric as well as complying with the principle that bilateral issues should not hold up the accession process of any country. An active, coherent policy will also be required to accompany the reform of the crisis-ridden political system in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The EU has obviously learned from the mistakes of previous enlargements and as a consequence, is applying stricter standards to current accession hopefuls. In principle, this is a positive development. If the EU demands that candidate countries and potential candidates fulfill the accession conditionality to the letter, the member countries are required to offer them a transparent association process with clear prospects for accession at the end in return. Stricter conditions with poor prospects for accession, on the other hand, would lead to a loss of credibility for the enlargement project.

In the past few years, the exertion of political influence on the accession process has meant that countries have entered the EU more rapidly than their reform report would have allowed. At the same time, the member countries should avoid preventing a country from progressing in the association process if the European Commission has declared that they have fulfilled the accession criteria—even in an era of growing enlargement skepticism. The fear that participants in the enlargement regatta may arrive at the finish line too quickly is unreasonable. It is more important to make sure that all of them have wind in their sails.

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## Notes

- 1 The author would like to thank Almut Möller, Cornelius Adebahr and Florian Bieber for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this text.
- 2 Karl-Peter Schwarz, Das große Ja der kleinen Zahl, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 24, 2012, p. 6. The 27 member countries are required to ratify the accession treaty for Croatia, but no complications are expected at this time.
- 3 The term “Western Balkans” is an EU *terminus technicus* that includes all of the countries in Southeastern Europe that are not EU members yet. With the exception of Slovenia, which acceded to the EU in 2004, it includes the post-Yugoslavian countries of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo, as well as Albania.
- 4 European Council, Speech by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, at the signing ceremony of Croatia’s Accession Treaty, EUCO 156/11, Brussels, December 9, 2011. See also: European Commission, Statement by President Barroso at the signature ceremony of the Accession Treaty of Croatia, SPEECH/11/869, Brussels, December 9, 2011.
- 5 In addition to the countries of the Western Balkans, Iceland and Turkey are also candidates for EU accession. The negotiations with Turkey began in October 2005, at the same time as Croatia. Until now, they have opened 13 negotiation chapters (most recently in June 2010) and closed one on a provisional basis. However, in view of the Turkish/Cypriot problems and the disunity among EU member states on full membership for Turkey, negotiations are at a standstill, cf. Natasha Wunsch, EU-Turkey: An (A)symmetric Relationship, in: Almut Möller (ed.), *Crossing Borders. Rethinking the European Union’s Neighborhood Policies* (DGAP, DGAPanalysen 2/2011), Berlin, August 24, 2011, <<https://dgap.org/en/think-tank/publications/dgapanalysis/crossing-borders>>, p. 39–42. Severely affected by the financial crisis, Iceland submitted its accession application in July 2009 and negotiations were opened one year later. Until now, they have opened 11 chapters and closed eight on a provisional basis. In view of divergent interests, whether or not Iceland will actually decide in favor of accession to the EU still remains to be seen, especially in regard to the fisheries *acquis*, cf. Marek Souček, The Enlargement of the European Union: The Case of Iceland, in: Almut Möller (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 31–38.
- 6 European Council Conclusions, June 19/20, 2000, para 67.
- 7 European Council Conclusions, June 21/22, 1993, para 7.
- 8 European Commission, Opinion on Croatia’s Application for Membership of the European Union, COM (2004) 257 final, April 20, 2004, p. 120 et al.
- 9 European Council Conclusions, December 9, 2011, para 12.
- 10 After the country declared its independence in 1991, it was accepted into the United Nations in 1993 under the provisional name “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” because Greece rejected the name of “Republic of Macedonia.” Although the EU and NATO maintain their relationship to the country using this name, more than 130 states, including Germany, have recognized the coun-

try under the constitutional “Republic of Macedonia.” Because of the dispute over the name, Greece prevented the acceptance of its northern neighbor into NATO at the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008. For the same reason, it has also blocked the opening of the EU accession negotiations recommended by the European Commission for the first time in 2009.

- 11 European Commission, Press conference with Commissioner for Enlargement Stefan Füle, September 12, 2011, <<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/videoplayer.cfm?ref=80199&sitelang=en>>.
- 12 European Commission, Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012, COM (2011) 666 final, Brussels, October 12, 2011, p. 52–55.
- 13 Cf. Vedran Džihčić, Bosnien und Herzegowina in der Sackgasse? Struktur und Dynamik der Krise fünfzehn Jahre nach Dayton, in: Südosteuropa 1/2011, p. 50–76.
- 14 ECHR, Sejdić/Finci v. Bosnia-Herzegovina, December 22, 2009. The chair of the Roma Council Dervo Sejdić and the president of the Jewish community Jakob Finci took their country to court before the ECHR, since only members of the three constituent peoples (Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks) can be elected to the collective Presidency and the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly.
- 15 “[...] it’s important that the Commission is now proposing a feasibility study, which looks at the potential of having a stabilisation and association agreement. It doesn’t mean it will happen and doesn’t mean it won’t happen: it is a feasibility study.” (EU, Remarks by High Representative Catherine Ashton following the Foreign Affairs Council meeting, A 87/12, Brussels, February 27, 2012.)
- 16 Due to unsatisfactory cooperation with the tribunal, the EU suspended SAA negotiations from May 2006 until June 2007. Before the Serbian parliamentary elections the agreement was signed in April 2008, but member states did not initiate the ratification process until June 2010 (Conclusions of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, Luxembourg, June 14, 2010).
- 17 European Commission, Press conference with Commissioner for Enlargement Stefan Füle, September 12, 2011.
- 18 European Council Conclusions, December 9, 2011, para 12.
- 19 The Council of the European Union, Press release, 12332/11, PRESSE 219, Brussels, June 30, 2011.
- 20 European Commission, Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012, COM (2011) 666 final, Brussels, October 12, 2011, p. 29.
- 21 According to the recommendation of the Commission, the exact meaning is “fully respecting the principles of inclusive regional cooperation; fully respecting the provisions of the Energy Community Treaty; finding solutions for telecommunications and mutual acceptance of diplomas; by continuing to implement in good faith all agreements reached; and by cooperating actively with EULEX in order for it to exercise its functions in all parts of Kosovo.” (European Commission, Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012, COM (2011) 666 final, Brussels, October 12, 2011, p. 30.)
- 22 European Commission, Commission Opinion on Montenegro’s application for membership of the European Union, COM (2010) 670, November 9, 2010, p. 11 et al. European Commission, Commission Opinion on Albania’s application for membership of the European Union, COM (2010) 680, November 9, 2010, p. 11 et al.

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