

WestminsterResearch

<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/westminsterresearch>

**Stabilitocracy in Practice: An Analysis of the EU's Policy towards
the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue**

Emini, Donika

This is a PhD thesis awarded by the University of Westminster.

© Miss Donika Emini, 2023.

<https://doi.org/10.34737/w6z50>

The WestminsterResearch online digital archive at the University of Westminster aims to make the research output of the University available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the authors and/or copyright owners.

**Stabilitocracy in Practice:
An Analysis of the EU's Policy towards Kosovo-
Serbia Dialogue**

Donika Emini

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of
Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Abstract

This thesis analyses the evolution of the EU's foreign policy towards enlargement by focusing on the case of the Brussels Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. This case study is analysed within the framework of the concept of 'stabilitocracy'. It asserts that the EU initially interlinked its promotion of democratic reforms and the pursuit of stability but ultimately focused primarily on the latter. The thesis argues that the weakening of the EU's soft power due to enlargement fatigue, the heightening of geopolitical competition in Europe, and the securitisation of the Brussels Dialogue all contributed to the EU's shift towards this preference for stability and the status quo.

While the term stabilitocracy has been used to explain how the EU trades stability for reforms in the Western Balkans, there has yet to be an in-depth academic study of its application in a specific policy setting such as the Brussels Dialogue. This thesis outlines the impact of the EU's stabilitocracy approach towards the Brussels Dialogue on the democratic transformation in Kosovo and Serbia by showing how the EU disregarded the lack of democratic reforms within both countries and how the local elites within both gained from manipulating the EU's focus on stability in the absence of enlargement.

More broadly, this thesis extracts lessons from the Kosovo/Serbia case that can be applied to other cases within the Western Balkans and beyond. This issue is particularly important after the role that the EU has assumed following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the designation of Ukraine as an EU candidate country in June 2022.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Table of Contents	2
List of Tables	4
List of Figures.....	4
List of Abbreviations	5
Acknowledgements	7
Declaration	9
Introduction.....	10
Hypothesis/Focus	10
Existing Debates.....	11
Original Contribution to Knowledge	19
Methodology	22
Overview of Chapters	27
Chapter I: EU Enlargement Conditionality: Balancing Between Democracy and Stability	33
1. Introduction	33
1.1. Democratic Transformation through EU Integration Process: The Concept of ‘Democratisation by Integration’	35
1.2. The Democratic Decline in the EU and the Decrease of the EU’s Normative and Transformative Power	39
1.2.1. <i>The Concept of Democratic Backsliding</i>	<i>42</i>
1.3. Stabilitocracy: Trading EU Membership for Stability	45
1.3.1. <i>Western Balkans from Democracy to Stabilitocracy</i>	<i>45</i>
1.3.2. <i>The Emergence of Stabilitocracies in the Western Balkan</i>	<i>48</i>
1.3.3. <i>Stabilitocracy Leading to Competitive Authoritarian Regimes and State Capture.....</i>	<i>52</i>
1.4. Conclusion	54
Chapter II: The EU: From a Normative and Transformative Power to a Resilient Actor	56
2.1. Introduction	56
2.2. The Road to the Thessaloniki Summit: Securitisation and Europeanisation of the Western Balkans	58
2.2.1. <i>The Thessaloniki Summit: Democratisation and Europeanisation of the Western Balkans</i>	<i>60</i>
2.3. (Un)Sharpening the Toolbox: Introducing Enlargement Toward the Western Balkans	62
2.3.1. <i>EU Conditionality vis-à-vis Statehood Limitations and Instability in the Western Balkans</i>	<i>66</i>
2.3.2. <i>EU Conditionality Vis-à-vis External Illiberal Actors</i>	<i>69</i>
2.4. Rethinking Enlargement: From Transformational Power to Agent of Resilience	70
2.4.1. <i>The Bulgaria and Romania Effect on Enlargement</i>	<i>71</i>
2.4.2. <i>The Crisis of Democracy within the EU: The Relapse of the CEE</i>	<i>72</i>
2.4.3. <i>The Impact of the Euro Crisis on Enlargement.....</i>	<i>73</i>
2.4.4. <i>The Effects of Brexit</i>	<i>74</i>
2.4.5. <i>The Future of the EU Vis-à-vis Enlargement</i>	<i>74</i>
2.5. From Expansion to Resilience: The Impact of Diminishing Normative Post on Western Balkans	75
2.6. Conclusion.....	78

Chapter III: The EU as Mediator: Negotiating Normalization through the EU-Facilitated Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia	80
3.1. Introduction	80
3.2. The EU's Role as a Mediator in Peace Negotiations	82
3.3. Putting the Foreign Policy and Security Structure into Test in the Western Balkans	85
3.3.1. <i>Launching the EU-Facilitated Dialogue</i>	<i>87</i>
3.3.2. <i>Destination Normalisation: What is the End Goal of the Dialogue?</i>	<i>89</i>
3.4. Brussels Dialogue: Incrementalism by Introducing Technicalities First	92
3.5. Elevating the Brussels Dialogue from Technical to Political.....	99
3.5.1. <i>Deconstructing the Brussels Agreement: Juggling between Normalisation and Recognition</i>	<i>100</i>
3.6. Conclusion.....	107
Chapter IV: Reality on the Ground: Securitization and the emergence of stabilitocracy in the Brussels Dialogue.....	109
4.1. Introduction	109
4.2. Normalisation through Constructive Ambiguity and Incrementalism: The (Lack of) Implementation of the Brussels Agreements.....	110
4.2.1. <i>Association of Serb Majority Municipalities: The Breaking Point of the Brussels Dialogue and Heightening of Stabilitocracy</i>	<i>112</i>
4.3. From Normalisation to Exchange of Territories: The Game of Stabilitocrats.....	116
4.3.1. <i>Land Swap between Kosovo and Serbia as a Final Solution(?)</i>	<i>118</i>
4.4. Political and Country Transformation vis-à-vis Brussels Dialogue	122
4.4.1. <i>Brussels Dialogue as a Source of Political (in)Stability in Kosovo.....</i>	<i>128</i>
4.4.2. <i>The Quest to Find a Government that Fits the Brussels Dialogue.....</i>	<i>130</i>
4.5. Brussels Dialogue: the EU Integration Avenue for Kosovo and Serbia	136
4.6. Conclusion.....	138
Chapter V: Clashes of the Titans and Kosovo's (un)Finished Statehood	141
5.1. Introduction	141
5.2. The Complex Relations between the EU and the Member States in the Brussels Dialogue	142
5.2.1. <i>The Crisis of Values and Enlargement Fatigue</i>	<i>148</i>
5.3. The Role of the U.S. and the UK: Internalised External Actors in the Brussels Dialogue ...	150
5.4. Russia as the Main Driver of Stabilitocracy: Meddling with the EU through the Kosovo – Serbia Dispute	154
5.4.1. <i>Ukraine War: Further Securitising the Brussels Dialogue.....</i>	<i>159</i>
5.5. Conclusion.....	161
Chapter VI: The Brussels Dialogue: Lessons Learned and the Future of EU as a Negotiator	163
6.1. Introduction	163
6.2. Turning Negotiation Tables: What Could Have Been Done to Make the Dialogue a Success Story? 164	
6.2.1. <i>Strategizing before the Launching of the Brussels Dialogue.....</i>	<i>165</i>
6.2.2. <i>Strategising in the Brussels Dialogue: Drafting Sustainable and Implementable Agreements.....</i>	<i>171</i>
6.3. Turning Tables: How the EU could have Prevented Western Balkans Stabilitocracies?	174

6.4. Moving Away from Stabilitocracy: The Future of EU Enlargement	178
6.5. Conclusion.....	182
Conclusion: Beyond Stabilitocracy?	185
Chapter Overview	185
Original Contribution to Knowledge	191
Further Research and Applications.....	196
Appendices	199
Bibliography.....	203
List of Interviews.....	251
List of Cited Agreements Reached in Brussels.....	252

List of Tables

Table 1 Technical Dialogue: Rounds of Negotiations	97
Table 2 List of Signed Agreements (Technical Dialogue).....	98
Table 3 Political Dialogue: Rounds of Negotiations	104
Table 4 List of Signed Agreements (Political Dialogue)	105
Table 5 Comparison between the 2023 Arrangement with the Previous Agreements.....	106
Table 6 ASM as signed in 2013 and General Principles 2015. The Constitutional Court decision on the ASM 2015.....	113
Table 7 List of non-recognisers and level of cooperation with Kosovo	202

List of Figures

Figure 1 Timeline and teams of negotiations 2011-2023	199
Figure 2 List of the Agreements Reached in the Auspices of the Brussels Dialogue and the Implementation by April 2023.....	201

List of Abbreviations

CARDS	Community Assistance for Reconciliation, Development, and Stabilization
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement Area
CoFoE	Conference on the Future of Europe
CSCE	Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CSDP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DEVCO	DG International Cooperation and Development
DG	Directorate General
DG	Directorate Generals
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EaP	Eastern Partnership Region
EC	European Community
EC	European Council
EC	The European Community
EEAS	European External Action Service
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
ESS	European Security Strategy
EU	European Union
EUAM	European Union Administration of Mostar
EUGS	EU Global Strategy
EULEX	The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice-President of the European Commission
IBM	Integrated Border/Boundary Management
ICG	Inter-governmental Conference
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICO	International Civilian Office
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
INTPA	DG International Partnerships – former
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
RELEX	Working Party of Foreign Relations Counsellors

SAA	Stabilisation Association Agreements
SAP	Stabilisation and Association Process
SEE	South-East Europe
SL	Serbian List
UN	United Nations
UNGA	General Assembly
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

Acknowledgements

Writing a PhD dissertation is a challenging endeavour, and my journey was further complicated by the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and my persistent health issues. Spanning nearly four years, this journey has been shaped by the contributions of many individuals.

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Aidan Hehir, whose remarkable support was integral to the completion of this thesis. Having a very dedicated PhD supervisor made the entire process more manageable, as he understood my strengths and weaknesses and guided me impeccably. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Aidan for his invaluable academic, professional, and emotional support and to his wife, Sarah Hehir.

I am indebted to my friends and colleagues for their support and understanding. This thesis results from a long learning process and discussion with brilliant experts who never stopped supporting me and feeding me with ideas. Their willingness to share their expertise and assist me on various issues played a vital role in the successful completion of this dissertation.

I am genuinely grateful to those who have agreed to be interviewed for this dissertation and very thankful for generously sharing their knowledge and expertise.

I express my gratitude to Claudio Lanza, who provided unwavering technical support and guidance during the early stages of my journey at the University of Westminster. I want to thank my friend and colleague Olaf Wientzek for supporting me throughout my PhD journey— thanks to Florent Marciacq for providing guidance and support throughout this challenging process.

An emotional thanks to my friend Arta Ibrahim, who made my PhD London days better and brighter. Special thanks to my friends Dardan Kryeziu, Fleta Baraku, Gresa Berisha, and Veprim Morina, whose support was crucial throughout this journey. Without their encouragement and understanding, I would not have been able to accomplish this.

I want to express my gratitude to my therapist, Francesca Gizzi, for motivating and encouraging me during the past year, especially during moments when I felt on the verge of giving up everything. Thanks to Jaffa - the cat, and Agatha – the dog, for their emotional fluffy support. To Laura Renfree, who became my London grandmother. May your beautiful soul rest in peace!

Lastly, but with my entire heart, I want to express my most profound appreciation to my parents, Eroll and Seniha Emini. They have endured numerous hardships to provide me with an education, and their unwavering pride and encouragement have propelled me forward to support my ambition to become the first doctor in our family. I am forever grateful for their love and support! Also, thanks to my siblings Vjosa Emini, Njomza Emini, and Andi Emini for being there for me throughout this journey.

I dedicate this PhD dissertation to my parents. I am filled with joy knowing that I have made you proud! However, my admiration for you surpasses any pride you may have in me!

Declaration

I, Donika Emini, declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Introduction

The thesis critically examines the implications of the EU's stability approach within the context of the 'EU Facilitated Dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade'¹, specifically focusing on the tension between the EU's professed democratic values and its accommodation of authoritarian behaviour for the sake of short-term stability. It also analyses the EU's strategic utilisation of enlargement leverage in navigating the Brussels Dialogue to establish itself as a global player in international mediation. This trade-off between reforms and stability has led to the emergence of stabilitocracies, where democratic transitions have stagnated, and authoritarian regimes have gained ground.

This Introduction comprises five sub-sections. It provides an overview of the hypothesis and main research questions the thesis addresses through the six main chapters. The second section analyses the existing debates on the concept of EU conditionality, democratic backsliding, and stabilitocracy and how it has been applied to date in the context of the EU integration process, and how it explains the factors that have pushed the EU to adopt the stability approach in the Western Balkans. In the third sub-section of this chapter, the thesis emphasises its original contribution. It places particular emphasis on the significance and uniqueness of analysing the EU's stability approach in the context of the Brussels Dialogue. Furthermore, it delves into how this approach influences the internal dynamics of Kosovo and its capacity to navigate international relations and EU integration. Further, it presents the methodological framework employed in the research and outlines the data collection methods, including qualitative data collection. The chapter justifies the selection of the Brussels Dialogue as a case study to analyse the implications of the EU's stability approach. Lastly, it provides an overview of each main chapter in the thesis, outlining the trajectory of the research from the literature review to the case study analysis and concluding remarks.

Hypothesis/Focus

This thesis investigates the implication of the EU's stability approach in the case of the Brussels Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. The thesis examines how the EU has interlinked the enlargement – manifested through democratic reforms – with its ambition to gain a role in

¹ Hereafter, the Brussels Dialogue

international mediation in the case of the Brussels Dialogue. My hypothesis is that the EU initially prioritised the interconnection of democratic reforms and stability but gradually shifted its focus primarily towards stability, neglecting democratic transformation in the region. By examining the EU's stabilitocracy approach towards the Brussels Dialogue, I sought to explore the extent to which the EU overlooked the lack of democratic reforms in Kosovo and Serbia and whether this enabled local elites to exploit the EU's emphasis on stability in the absence of enlargement. I sought to determine the factors that contributed to the shift in the EU's approach, such as enlargement fatigue, increased geopolitical competition in Europe, and the securitisation of the Brussels Dialogue.

Furthermore, the thesis aims to determine whether it was possible to extract broader lessons from the Kosovo/Serbia case that apply to other situations within the Western Balkans and beyond. This exploration is particularly significant given the EU's evolving role following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the subsequent designation of Ukraine as an EU candidate country in June 2022.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the EU's policy towards the Brussels Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, this research sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of the stabilitocracy paradigm and its implications for democratic transformation in the region. The aim was to generate findings that could provide insights into the challenges and potential shortcomings of the EU's approach to promoting stability and reforms in its foreign policy, with implications for future policymaking and engagement in similar contexts.

Existing Debates

The literature reviewed for this thesis aims to identify the existing theories, debates, and knowledge concerning EU conditionality and its practical application. The primary objective is to identify the gaps within the current literature that need to be addressed and further examined. This thesis expands upon previous academic research in relation to enlargement, explicitly focusing on the concept of democratisation through conditionality as a foreign policy tool. Conditionality has been employed not only to foster democracy but also simultaneously to facilitate the transformation of nations, promote state-building in the Western Balkans (Bieber, 2011), and effectively manage conflicts through enlargement (Schneider, 2008). The existing scholarly work on EU conditionality primarily focuses on its application to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries, which were the pioneers in establishing formal membership conditions with the EU.

Debates on EU membership conditionality: This thesis starts by examining the academic work by predominantly examining the various ways the EU has contributed to the advancement of democracy by utilising conditional membership, particularly during the Third Wave of Democratisation. The EU has secured a significant role in the Third Wave of Democratisation, which was extensively shaped by the robust role and involvement of international and transnational organisations (Lewis, 2001; Schmidt, 2005). The EU started using its political condition with third European countries after the Cold War ended. This marked the first step towards launching democratisation by the conditionality (Weber, 1995; Smith, 1997) materialising in the declaration of the European Council (EC), which stated: ‘respect for and maintenance of representative democracy and human rights in each Member State are essential elements of membership in the European Communities’ (European Council, 1978).

Conditionality as a tool was first formally developed for and applied to the CEE after the end of the Cold War. The set of conditions included political and economic incentives and benchmarks offered to encourage these countries toward democracy (Grabbe, 2002). Conditionality, especially toward the CEE, has further defined and legally shaped the EU instruments, thus building its normative power. It also developed the Association Agreements (initially known as ‘Europe agreements’) in the case of the Western Balkans, adding the stability element, rebranded as Stabilisation Association Agreements (SAA) (Anastasakis and Bechev, 2003). The EU’s pre-accession conditionality is one of the main tools at the core of the accession conditionality policy - the ‘external incentives model’ as argued by (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004). Conditionality took more solid shape with the adoption of the Copenhagen Criteria, which established the rules and the standards required aspiring countries to fulfil prior to integration (Schimmelfennig and Scholtz, 2008).

The formalisation of EU conditionality immediately inspired scholars to look at its implementation as well as the relationship between the EU and the aspiring countries; as Heather Grabbe argues, the ‘accession partnership’, which was introduced in 1998, was a significant step because it marked a major shift in the EU’s relations with the aspiring countries (Grabbe, 1999, 2002). Conditionality is a requirement, thus limiting the room for flexibility and negotiations on what the EU has set as a condition for membership. Andrew Moravcsik and Anna Vachudova explore the motivation of the EU and the aspiring countries to engage in a contractual process based on conditionality. Their work underlines the geopolitical aspects that pushed the EU to pursue an enlargement agenda. It also looks at how the EU, in the long run, was considered a project of stability and economic prosperity and, at the same time,

highlights the benefits that motivate countries to undergo reforms and transformation, mainly in the economy. This explains the interdependency of both parties to engage in the process (Moravcsik and Vachudova, 2003).

The application of EU conditionality for membership in the CEE countries has garnered significant academic interest. Scholars, academics, and think tanks have extensively researched and analysed the effectiveness of EU conditionality to promote democratisation and elevate the EU's normative power. Particularly following the effective implementation of conditionality in CEE, the EU has established itself as a significant contributor and influencer in the third wave of democratisation (Hughes, Sasse and Gordon, 2004; Pridham, 2005; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005; Schimmelfennig, 2010; Tomini, 2014; Grimm, 2019). Numerous theoretical and empirical studies have examined various aspects of EU accession conditionality, resulting in substantial research and scholarly contributions. The analysed work deconstructs the complexities of EU conditionality and its impact on democratisation in the CEE region and other aspiring regions part of the EU enlargement agenda. It offers a substantial contribution not only in breaking down EU accession conditionality but also in evaluating the EU's normative influence using its conditionality (see Kubicek, 2003; Moravcsik and Vachudova, 2003; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004; Pridham, 2005; Vachudova, 2005; Haughton, 2007; Tomini, 2015). Further, the scholars have deconstructed how the EU developed conditionality, leverage, and incentives to promote democracy through political and economic reforms in the aspiring countries.

Debates on democratic backsliding and impact on Western Balkans: Vast scholarly attention has been given to analysing the internal and domestic factors limiting the EU conditionality but also the external factors and the global context contributing to the limitation of the effectiveness of the conditionality (Bogaards, 2018; Anders and Lorenz, 2021). These factors include the economic impact after the financial crisis of 2008, democratic backsliding within the member states, and lack of appetite for enlargement which I elaborate on in the thesis, which severely decreased the EU normative power. Licia Cianetti and Shawn Hanley discuss how unintended consequences of EU policies and changes in the global context contributed to this decline by examining the relationship between conditionality, domestic dynamics, and the rise of authoritarian alternatives which are directly challenging the EU (Cianetti, Dawson and Hanley, 2018; Hanley and Cianetti, 2021). The socioeconomic frustrations triggered by the financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis's aftermath have deepened the economic divide between West and East Europe (Bohle and Greskovits, 2009; Bohle, 2011). The growing concern about

far-right populism, which has also become a worrying trend across Europe, persists in the CEE but is not limited to (Gaston, 2017; Bugarič, 2019; Uroz, 2020).

As the shortcomings of EU conditionality became apparent, scholars opened debates aiming to enrich the discussion not only about the strategy that the EU pursued through conditionality but also on the ways that the domestic actors responded to it (Vachudova, 2006; Börzel and van Hüllen, 2011; Petrova, 2011). Vachudova's work explores the extent to which the EU uses its conditionality to transform countries and install sustainable democracies. This is important when we look at the democratic relapse in the CEE (Vachudova, 2005; Böhmelt and Freyburg, 2013). Similarly, in the case of democratic conditionality, the domestic actors, Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, argue that its effectiveness can be severely limited by the domestic actors in the aspiring countries. The adoption costs which, they argue, even when conditionality is fair, credible, and the rewards are ultimately substantial; the domestic elites are inclined to reject membership rather than accept the costs that it can bring to their authoritarian ruling (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004, 2005). Besides the adaptation cost, the domestic political infrastructure matters, according to Tanja Börzel continues to draw parallels between conditionality in the CEE and the Western Balkans, which lacks not only political will but also very poor institutional restructure to implement the EU reforms (Dimitrova, 2002; Borzel, 2016; Börzel and Schimmelfennig, 2017).

The application of EU conditionality became even more complex in the case of Western Balkans, as Florian Bieber explains (Bieber, 2013). In addition to the weak institutional infrastructure and the lack of democratic culture, as Börzel (Börzel, 2016) argues, it is also because, according to Bieber, the EU tried to utilise conditionality not only to achieve democratisation but also to perform state-building (Bieber, 2003, 2011). The same line with Bieber is followed by Solveig Richter, who de-constructs the application of conditionality in a region daunted by instability, which severely impacts the effectiveness of the conditionality (Richter, 2012; Karlas and Zuber, 2019; Richter and Wunsch, 2020). In the case of the Western Balkans, the EU was already applying conditionality to weaker systems and more reluctant elites to comply with the EU reforms. Furthermore, it requested numerous bilateral engagements in the process (Krastev, 2002; Noutcheva, 2007; Anastasakis, 2008). Furthermore, it is observed that the application of EU conditionality in the Western Balkans, which was initially modelled after the CEE experience, has yielded limited results when it comes to being tailored to the specific requirements of the region (Zhelyazkova et al., 2019; Kmezić, 2020).

The EU's conditionality policy in the CEE countries has widely determined and influenced the application of the EU's conditionality towards the Western Balkans. The democratic relapse triggered immense debates among scholars; again, the CEE region occupied wide scholarly attention. The concept of 'reversibility' in the democratisation process refers to the idea that progress in democratic reforms can be undone or rolled back if the necessary conditions are not maintained (Levitz and Pop-Eleches, 2010b). This concept has become particularly relevant in the context of the EU's conditionality policy, as it raises questions about the effectiveness of the EU in preserving democracy among its member states (Epstein and Sedelmeier, 2008). The issue of reversibility challenges the EU's ability to sustain democracy within its ranks. It raises concerns about the long-term viability of democratic reforms and the potential for democratic backsliding, even among established EU member states (Dimitrova, 2010; Sedelmeier, 2023).

In the scholarly discussions on the EU enlargement and conditionality in the CEE, there is a growing emphasis on the notion that the EU compromised the democratisation reforms by showing flexibility in its earnest pursuit of fulfilling what key policymakers at both the EU and member states, perceived as their significant responsibility towards the countries in the CEE (Sedelmeier, 2006). Scholars have listed factors contributing to the backsliding on democracy in the CEE; of such factors, the limitations of the EU accession conditionality have been topping the list (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2007; Rupnik, 2007; Sedelmeier, 2014). Furthermore, it questions the EU's capability to influence its members without the membership card. Once a country is a member, the EU's leverage immensely decreases as it has less scope to sanction backsliding members. However, much has been discussed about Article 7 as a means of sanctioning member states deemed to act against EU values (Theuns, 2022). Furthermore, the EU's failure to address the backsliding among member states and the CEE due to their lack of political commitment to pursue liberal-democratic values, especially toward Poland and Hungary, has significantly impacted the EU normative power (Kelemen, 2020; Bellamy and Kröger, 2021; Bernhard, 2021).

Nancy Bermeo elaborates on the precise way democratic backsliding takes place. Firstly, there is a significant decline in coups d'états, executive coups, or explicit election fraud. Instead, she argues that there is an increase in promissory coups, strategic electoral manipulation and harassment, and interference in the electoral processes through elements of state capture and control. Democratic backsliding takes place in a gradual form. It starts with the erosion of democratic institutions, the decline in democratic oversight over institutions, a decline in the rule of law, human rights and freedom, and increased state control over the media and civil

society (Mechkova, Lührmann and Lindberg, 2017). As democratic backsliding takes place gradually, many scholars have tried to identify patterns of this decline from illiberal democracies to straight-out autocratic regimes (Bieber, 2018a; Diamond, 2020). According to Natasha Wunsch, in contrast to the direct attacks on democracy that can lead to its breakdown, backsliding occurs in very subtle ways. It occurs when an elected government gradually weakens and eventually dismantles democratic safeguards. In her extensive study, she uses a multidimensional approach to examine the evolution of three types of democratic safeguards: vertical safeguards related to the formal electoral process and voter turnout, diagonal safeguards involving freedom of expression, association, and free media, and horizontal safeguards encompassing an independent parliament and judiciary (Wunsch and Blanchard, 2023). Most of the debate on democratic backsliding is focused on the EU, assuming that these regimes, at some points, have been fully solidified democracies. For a democratic regime to be fully consolidated, a vast number of criteria must be fulfilled; conditions must be established to ensure that habits are cultivated and deeply rooted in society (Levitz and Pop-Eleches, 2010b, 2010a; Cianetti, Dawson and Hanley, 2018).

Debates on the EU's normative power in the changing global environment: The end of the Cold War and the consequential transformations in Europe pushed academic researchers to define the EU's role as a global power. For almost half a century, the world had been dominated by two superpowers, with Europe in the middle. However, with the emergence of new dynamics, the EU was able to claim its role in global affairs in a multipolar world (Hardwick, 2011).

Amidst a significant geopolitical shift, the EU's role as a normative foreign policy actor has emerged. However, despite initial optimism regarding the EU's aspirations to become a dominant global superpower, its normative influence has decreased in recent years. This decline can be ascribed to various factors, encompassing the EU's economic downturn prompted by the constraints imposed by its political and institutional frameworks, which hinder the adoption and execution of coherent internal and external policies (Webber, 2016). The EU's main obstacle in maintaining its normative power is the internal difficulties in achieving unity and cohesion among its member states when responding to and resolving international issues due to the diverse interests of the individual member states (Gerrits, 2009; Skolimowska, 2015).

The EU's normative power can be analysed through the lens of strategic autonomy, which allows the EU to act independently, including in situations of strategic significance and even

from the U.S., particularly in matters of security. During the peak of its normative power, the prospect of achieving strategic autonomy appeared optimistic. However, during the past two decades, these aspirations have diminished, and we have witnessed the resurgence of geopolitics and power politics. This makes the EU's role even more challenging in a growing multipolar world for which the EU might not possess the necessary tools (Fiott, 2011; Cohen-Tanugi, 2016; Varma, 2019; Higgott and Reich, 2022; Miró, 2022). More specifically, and with significance for the Brussels Dialogue, is the EU's complex relationships with Russia and China but even the United States (U.S.). As already elaborated, the EU conditionality and its effectiveness heavily depend on the positions adopted by external actors; this particularly applies in the case of the Western Balkans, as Bieber and Nikolaos Tzifakis argue (Bieber and Tzifakis, 2019). The growing resistance of Russia and, to some extent, of China to the EU's efforts to promote liberal norms and principles has severely impacted its normative power. Consequently, the EU's inability to perceive the evolving detrimental role of China and Russia has hindered the development of an effective foreign policy, ultimately leading to a growing geopolitical competition in the past decades (Fassi and Zotti, 2018; Michalski and Nilsson, 2019). The geopolitical machinations of actors such as Russia have managed to bring a degree of political unity to the EU countries, albeit fragile, for example, in terms of the reaction to the invasion of Ukraine (Makarychev and Devyatkov, 2014; Lehne, 2023; Masters, 2023). Similarly to the Eastern Partnership Region, the role of Russia has equally had a detrimental impact on the EU's normative power in the Western Balkans (Gelhaus and Dinkel, 2021), as has the role of China in the past years (Zweers and Shopov, 2020). Dimitar Bechev further elaborated on the influence of Russia from the Brussels Dialogue perspective, pushing the process to a full securitisation (Bechev, 2019; Stanicek, 2022).

Debates about the EU's role in conflict management: The recent endeavours of the EU in conflict management have triggered scholarly attention (Migueis *et al.*, 2007). The EU set its ambitions to contribute to conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict peacebuilding by engaging in civil and military operations, stabilisation efforts, and enhancing democratic resilience both within the EU and beyond (Debuysere and Blockmans, 2019). The EU's initial 'comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises' has evolved into a more comprehensive and operational 'integrated approach to conflict and crisis.' However, whether the EU's commitment to an integrated approach has been effectively implemented is still a persisting question. Furthermore, the EU has developed tools to build on its ambition in conflict management in the Post-Lisbon phase. This new ambition later on would take form in the

Brussels Dialogue by becoming an integral part of the EU conditionality (Plänitz, 2018; Noutcheva, 2020; Osland and Peter, 2021; Bergmann and Niemann, 2015; Bergmann, 2019; Medović, 2022).

Debates about the emergence of stabilitocracies in the Western Balkans: In the case of the Western Balkans, when explaining why the countries did not manage to complete their democratic transition trajectory through the EU conditionality approach, Bieber looked at the way the EU tried to use it also as a tool to foster stability, ultimately resulting in what he called stabilitocracy. Bieber goes further by looking at how the democratic crisis in the EU led to the rise of authoritarianism in the Western Balkans. According to Bieber, this worrying trend comes as a result of the weakened transformative power of the EU in incentivising democratisation and the weak democratic structures in the Western Balkans (Bieber, 2018b). As the Brussels Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has been running for more than a decade (EEAS, 2023), the future of the process and its effectiveness, as well as the ability of the EU and the West to solve the Kosovo-Serbia issue, have been called into question in recent years (Bashku, 2021; Atlantic Council, 2023). The crisis of leadership and values within the EU, the worrying decline of the EU's normative power, the shifting geopolitical order, and the resistance of political elites in Kosovo and Serbia are continually detrimental to the outcome of the Brussels Dialogue.

The Brussels Dialogue, initially launched with the purpose of normalising relations between Kosovo and Serbia, has gradually turned from a focus on 'normalisation' to 'conflict management and prevention'. The securitisation of the dialogue has taken place due to the slow progress of normalisation, which came as a result of the intra-EU limitations but also as the result of other factors such as the geopolitical shift as well as the lack of political will of the parties to genuinely engage in the negotiations process (Visoka and Doyle, 2016). As the Brussels Dialogue became an integral part of the EU integration path for both countries in the framework of the good-neighbourly relations conditionality, the EU and political elites in Kosovo and Serbia have been criticised for political opportunism, which turned the process into an exercise 'trading off' genuine progress in the Brussels Dialogue and EU integration reforms against stability in the two countries and the entire Western Balkan region (Bieber, 2017).

This trade-off of political stability for EU reforms is not a new feature of the EU's approach to the Western Balkans; the term 'stabilitocracy' has been used by critics to describe the EU's approach towards the region (Pavlovic, 2017) and further developed by (Bieber, 2017). This

concept refers to regimes in the Western Balkans characterised by weak democracy and strong leaders who claim to provide stability (Pavlovic, 2017). However, the existing debate on stabilitocracy has predominantly focused on individual countries within the framework of the EU enlargement process. Previous work has focused on the political dynamics within a country's internal stability and its political willingness to engage in EU reforms and membership. For instance, the work of Srdja Pavlovic has predominantly focused on the case of Montenegro and the trajectory of Milo Djukanovic as a partner for dialogue in the country based on his pro-EU sentiment – albeit on paper – against the other political parties deemed largely pro-Russian (Pavlovic, 2017). Similarly, the work of Bieber and Marko Kmezcic focuses on internal developments and state capture, looking closely at the different aspects of the Copenhagen Criteria and the geopolitical factors, such as the partnership with Russia and China, which led to a strengthening of the EU stability approach in the region (Keil, 2018; Perry and Keil, 2018; Kmezcic, 2020).

Original Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis is unique firstly because it looks at stabilitocracy from a process which has not been explored before. Further, the selected case study provides a unique example of the EU's combination of enlargement policy, its goals for a unified foreign policy and security, and its ambitions to build a global profile in conflict mediation.

The thesis possesses conceptual and empirical originality based on the following interconnected elements: Firstly, the research contributes to the academic understanding of the concept of 'stabilitocracy' and its implications by applying it to the case of the Brussels Dialogue. The concept of stabilitocracy is thus defined more comprehensively, supported by unique empirical evidence. This enhances scholarly understanding of the concept and its manifestation in practice. It contributes to the overall understanding of the EU's role in international mediation and illustrates the power dynamics between EU institutions and member states on issues of strategic importance for the EU. Furthermore, it contributes to assessing the EU's role and leverage in international mediation in cases when enlargement applies, thus paving the way for other cases in the future, such as Ukraine, which also includes the security component.

The thesis assesses the case of Kosovo and explores the way the EU navigated through uncharted territory in dealing with inter-EU divergences in relation to the status of Kosovo. Furthermore, it analyses how the Brussels Dialogue has impacted Kosovo's already challenging

statehood-building process and presented difficulties for the EU's internal functioning and ability to navigate internationally. The case of Kosovo holds significant relevance due to the complex international dynamics surrounding the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. It serves as an illustrative example of the global order's transformation from 2008 to 2023, as well as the internal crisis within the EU. By focusing on this case, the thesis sheds light on the interplay of various actors and factors involved in the Brussels Dialogue.

This thesis takes the work of Pavlovic and then Bieber in relation to the EU's stability approach in the Western Balkans and applies it to the case of the Brussels Dialogue. Hence, this thesis looks at the implications of the EU stability approach when applied to the duality of the EU enlargement policy with foreign policy and the EU's ambitions in international negotiations. Pavlovic (2017) and Bieber (2019), followed by other scholars (Richter & Wunsch, 2020), have focused on the impact that the internal crisis of democracy in the EU and the external actors' support have had in establishing authoritarian regimes in the Western Balkans. On the other hand, little to no research has been conducted on understanding how the EU's degraded credibility has shaped one of the most important international negotiation processes. Chapter I maps the existing literature on stabilitocracy, aiming to elaborate on how the stability approach led to the rise of regional authoritarianism rather than precisely how it affected the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. By analysing the implications of the EU stability approach in the Brussels Dialogue, the thesis explores how the EU enlargement policy was used as leverage in the process and how this cohered with the EU's ambitions in foreign policy and security initially triggered by the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s and further sophisticated in 2009 with the Lisbon Treaty (Eeckhout, 2012; European Parliament, 2022). The Brussels Dialogue has become an integral part of the EU membership conditionality for Kosovo and Serbia. This thesis delves into the impact of the EU's stability approach on the Brussels Dialogue and how the EU employs its enlargement policy to exert influence in pursuit of its foreign policy and security objectives. It looks at how the EU navigated around its role as a normative power promoting democratic reforms to its position serving as a force for good in achieving stability by negotiating one of the most persistent bilateral disputes in the Western Balkans.

In sum, to deconstruct the emergence of stabilitocracy, the thesis looks at democratisation through conditionality, which in the case of the Western Balkans has primarily taken place in the framework of the EU enlargement agenda. It builds on the work of scholars such as (Schimmelfennig et al., 2015; Smith, 2003) on the growing importance of the EU conditionality and its effectiveness in the CEE countries. However, the democratic crisis in the EU has created

a critical juncture for enlargement and the EU normative power, consequently impacting the EU's leverage in the Brussels Dialogue (Bergmann and Niemann, 2015). The unprecedented democratic crisis has indeed triggered significant scholarly attention. The thesis uses the previous work of (Bermeo, 2016; Tomini, 2017 Bakke and Sitter, 2019; Bieber, 2018 Bakke and Sitter, 2019), who have analysed the linkage between democracy promotion and the emergence of authoritarian regimes, aiming to understand the factors contributing to the decline of democracy. Democratic relapse in the CEE and the emergence of hybrid regimes within the EU have abruptly impacted the already shaky trajectory of democratic transition in the Western Balkans (Bermeo, 2016). Thus, twenty years after the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, which formally started the democratisation process through enlargement, halfway through the process facing a declining EU normative power which has immensely decreased the EU's appetite for enlargement, the Western Balkan countries established the so-called stabilitocracies.

This thesis adopts a novel approach by analysing the implications of the stability approach using the Brussels Dialogue as a case study. To provide a unique empirical illustration of this recognised phenomenon, this thesis showcases the detrimental impact the lack of success in the Brussels Dialogue has had on the EU's status as a global actor, the democratic transition as part of the EU integration for both countries, the statehood trajectory for Kosovo as the unique case in which the intra-EU cohesion has been challenged, and the impact it will have in the future similar cases. The latter is essential, especially with the war in Ukraine and the similarities it shares, combining the EU enlargement and the EU's ambitions in security and foreign policy.

However, not much research has been focused on how stabilitocracy - driven by the good neighbourly relations component and the EU's ambition in foreign policy - has impacted the role of the EU in solving the Kosovo-Serbia dispute (Emini and Stakic, 2018). The Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia represents one of the best-case studies to analyse the EU stabilitocracy approach in the Western Balkans. It represents three key elements: 1) the countries have made EU integration their prime foreign policy goal and are in the accession phase, 2) the countries are going through democratic transformation primarily pushed by the EU, and 3) both countries share a conflicted past, thus increasing the fear for instability in the region with implications in the EU. The position of the EU in the region gained another level of complexity in 2011 when the EU was mandated to facilitate the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. This enabled the EU to combine enlargement and its foreign policy ambitions in conflict management. Though presented as a means to expedite EU membership for Kosovo

and Serbia, the Dialogue has come to have a detrimental impact on the role and the leverage of the EU as a transformative power in the region.

The novelty of this research also lies in the fact that it is conducted by a researcher from the respective country, adopting a “bottom-up approach”. This approach recognises the importance of local perspectives and insights in generating scientific contributions. By leveraging my direct experience and understanding of the context, the study aims to provide a valuable perspective on the subject matter.

Overall, in this thesis, I advance scholarly knowledge by exploring the concept of stabilitocracy, analysing the complex international context in which the EU currently operates, and providing an empirical example that enhances our understanding of the EU’s stability-orientated approach and its implications for the Brussels Dialogue.

Methodology

The methodology for the thesis includes qualitative research methods to ensure comprehensive data collection and analysis. Considering the focus of the research – the EU institutional approach in the Brussels Dialogue – the qualitative research methods employed are interviews, content and textual analyses, and participatory and non-participatory observation. These methods provided in-depth insights into the research topic and allowed for a nuanced understanding of the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders. Tailoring these various sources and methods has made it possible to achieve triangulation in the research. Thus, it enhanced the validity of the findings by minimising the biases or limitations associated with individual sources or methods. Furthermore, triangulation enabled me to cross-validate information, identify patterns, and comprehensively understand the processes. Thus, I have been able to utilise several sources and employ methods to triangulate the data related to EU integration and the Western Balkans through the following steps:

Content and Textual Analyses: This part of the qualitative research provides an analysis of the collected documents using content analysis techniques. The content and textual analysis provided an excellent basis to contextualise the research and provide a comprehensive understanding of the existing knowledge and discourse on the topic. Firstly, the desk research phase identified common documents, trends, and arguments presented in the EU official documents, think tank reports, and academic research. The first phase includes a review of national and international sources, focusing on official reports and documents published by the EU, the EU regulations and legislations, and the EU strategic documents and assessment

reports. These documents are essential sources of information that provide official perspectives, policies, and guidelines regarding EU integration and the Western Balkans. Consulting these documents helps establish a foundation of knowledge based on credible official sources. The second part of the desk research phase included mapping and consulting the existing policy papers and journalistic reporting related to the research topic. The review included reports commissioned by civil society organisations and publications from international organisations, universities, and research centres. The previous academic work provided valuable insights, theories, and empirical evidence contributing to understanding EU integration and the Western Balkans, stabilitocracy, and EU behaviour in international negotiations. By building upon previous scholarly work, I was able to identify gaps, validate existing knowledge, and develop the theoretical framework for the case study.

Additionally, the consulting work of the think tanks specialising in EU integration and the Western Balkans, which produced extensive research and analysis, further expanded the empirical scope of knowledge. The reports published by think tanks offer alternative viewpoints, policy recommendations, and an in-depth understanding of complex issues. Incorporating these perspectives has broadened the research's scope and enhanced its credibility.

It was imperative to develop a solid research design incorporating qualitative research methods, specifically interviews, to collect primary data. Furthermore, cross-referencing the findings gathered through desk research with the interview data was necessary to understand the research topic comprehensively. Thus, to utilise data triangulation to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings compare and cross-reference the data collected from different sources, the research design also included 15 semi-structured interviews. By mixing semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders combined with official documents, reports, and academic research, I was able to identify converging or diverging perspectives, validate findings, and ensure a comprehensive analysis. The interviews were conducted with diverse participants, including EU officials, experts, academics, and former politicians, to gather first-hand insights, experiences, and expert opinions. These interviews allow for in-depth exploration of specific topics, clarification of ambiguities, and the emergence of new perspectives. The majority of the interviewees are from the EU institutions aiming to gather institutional perspectives on the Brussels Dialogue.

The role of the member states is very important. Henceforth, the interviews included experts from member states playing a crucial role in the Brussels Dialogue, such as France and

Germany. Due to their important role in relation to the case study – especially to Kosovo – interviews were carried out with two stakeholders from the non-recognising member states – Slovakia and Greece – considered ‘soft’ non-recognisers. An interview was conducted with UK, U.S., and Russian experts to better understand the Brussels Dialogue's geopolitical aspects. Two interviews were conducted in Kosovo with a former diplomat who served as the first Kosovo liaison officer in Serbia after the Agreement in 2012 and a current advisor to the Government of Kosovo. Both were selected with the purpose of providing two perspectives on the previous elite negotiations during the technical phase and the current negotiation during the political phase. One interview is with a former political advisor and diplomat from Serbia to provide the Serbian perspective in the analysis. These interviews have been flexible in nature, allowing for open discussions and the exploration of emerging themes. The interviews provide valuable first-hand information and insights into the research topic.

Participatory and Non-participatory Observation includes my direct observation of, and participation in, key processes such as legislation reviews, forums, conference reports, seminars, and other relevant events related to the research topic². This approach has allowed me to gain first-hand experience and gather data on the processes and dynamics within these events. While these events have not been used directly as a reference in the thesis, these observations have been crucial in mapping the relevant stakeholders in the process.

Part of the research design is the selection of the case study. This process took place alongside the literature review and in the process of drafting the first draft of the thesis outline and structure. The Brussels Dialogue facilitated by the EU provides a compelling case study for analysing the EU's stabilitocracy approach in the Western Balkans. Firstly, it is a perfect case study to showcase the EU's unsharpened toolkit designed to exercise its normative power

² The following represents a small portion of events I have spoken at during my PhD studies: Belgrade Security Forum (BSF) - Academic panel: state capture as an unintended consequence of conflict- resolution: Presenting the draft paper titled: “Promoting Stability and Facilitating State Capture: A Case Study on the EU’s Role in the Kosovo/Serbia Dialogue” co-authored with Aidan Hehir; South-east European Studies at Oxford (SEESOX): Can elections bring (real) change? Lessons learned and prospects for the Western Balkans; European Policy Centre and United States Mission to the EU: The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue: Getting back on track?; European Council on Foreign Policy (ECFR): How Kosovo can build internal support for the dialogue? ‘Sounding Board’ Dialogue Working Group (Member since 2019); European Institute for Security Studies and Slovenian Presidency of the EU. The Strategic Compass and the Western Balkans: Towards a tailor-made and strategic approach to partnerships?; Antall Joseph Summer School: Western Balkans in the Spotlight – Challenges and Possibilities from a Parallel Perspective; Prague European Summit: Kosovo- Serbia Dialogue: Heading Towards a Break through or a Stalemate I Prague European Summit 2021; International Institute for Peace (IIP), Austrian Institute for International Affairs, the Karl-Renner-Institute: The Belgrade - Pristina Dialogue. Can an agreement finally be reached? International Institute for Peace (IIP): Reconciliation from inside the region: Challenges and Opportunities in Kosovo and beyond.

through conditionality in countries which share a conflicted past and a risk of tensions re-emerging; secondly, it combines the EU enlargement policy with the EU's ambitions in foreign policy and conflict mediation. This case is rare in the Western Balkans. It represents the only negotiation in which the EU not only uses its enlargement policy as leverage but is also fully and deeply integrated into the political system of both countries. Thus, it can apply its structural diplomacy. Secondly, this case occurs while the EU sharpens its global foreign policy and security approach. At the same time, by launching the Brussels Dialogue, the EU has taken serious steps to create a common foreign policy and security approach, which was formalised in 2009.

In hindsight, the following elements make this case unique and very relevant:

- The Brussels Dialogue is the only negotiation case led entirely by the EU, which combines the EU's enlargement policy and its foreign policy ambitions in conflict management. The Brussels Dialogue was launched almost hand-in-hand with the EU's goal to create a common security and foreign policy approach.
- The Brussels Dialogue involves parties that have made EU Integration a Prime Foreign Policy Goal; Kosovo and Serbia have made EU integration a top priority in their foreign policy agendas. This shared goal reflects their desire for economic development, political stability, and enhanced regional cooperation. The fact that Kosovo is in the pre-accession phase while Serbia is further along in the accession process creates an interesting dynamic, allowing for a comparative analysis of their progress, challenges, and the EU's approach towards each country.
- The case provides insight into how democratic transformation forms part of the EU integration process; Kosovo and Serbia are undergoing democratic transformation. They are subject to the EU's strategic leverage in the enlargement and assistance to complete the democratic transition.
- Studying stabilitocracy in a case involving two parties that share a very conflicted past – and fear future instability – provides a unique opportunity to test the EU's ability and political power and readiness to deliver on both enlargement and stability through negotiations. Kosovo and Serbia share a history marred by conflict and unresolved issues, contributing to the fear of potential instability in the region. The Dialogue between the two countries is a significant mechanism for addressing and resolving these historical tensions. By examining the EU's involvement in facilitating the Brussels

Dialogue and its efforts to promote reconciliation and stability, one can gain insights into the effectiveness of the stabilitocracy approach in the context of a volatile region.

Through these key elements, this thesis explores the implications of the EU stability approach in the Western Balkans. It analyses how it shapes the EU's global actorness and impacts both the democratisation and EU integration processes in both countries. The case study provides an opportunity to evaluate the limitations, weaknesses, and overall impact of the EU's stabilitocracy approach in the Western Balkans.

This thesis primarily centres on exploring the EU's approach to the Brussels Dialogue within the framework of "stabilitocracy." However, it places specific emphasis on the repercussions of this approach on Kosovo, which stems from several compelling reasons:

- First and foremost, this research delves into an in-depth analysis of Kosovo through the lens of "stabilitocracy" within the context of the Brussels Dialogue. This strategic approach addresses an identified gap in existing scholarly literature, which has yet to extensively investigate the role of Kosovo in the Brussels Dialogue from a "stabilitocracy" perspective. It is important to clarify that this study excludes Serbia, as other scholars have thoroughly examined it due its internal dynamics and "stabilitocracy," particularly in its interactions with illiberal actors such as Russia and China. Although this thesis briefly includes relevant events that took place in Serbia, which have had a critical impact on the Brussels Dialogue and contributed to the overall pursuit of stabilitocracy by the EU.
- The analysis of Kosovo looks at the complex dynamics of the Brussels Dialogue, where stability considerations can sometimes lead to unsettling events aimed at achieving longer-term stability. This has transformed Kosovo into an arena marked by recurrent tensions, thereby escalating security risks both within the country and the wider region. The Brussels Dialogue has profoundly impacted Kosovo's internal functioning and capacity to navigate regional dynamics, EU relations, and broader international affairs.
- A significant facet of this analysis is to look at how Kosovo operates internally during the Brussels Dialogue and how it manages its external/diplomatic relations. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for gaining insights into the EU's engagement with the region.

- Kosovo's statehood represents a unique element distinguishing it from Serbia. The absence of recognition by five EU member states has posed substantial challenges to the EU in exerting influence and addressing Kosovo's statehood status. This challenge has taken centre stage in EU-Kosovo relations.
- Despite playing a lesser role in the stability game compared to Serbia, Kosovo's destiny is closely linked to the EU's approach towards the autocratic regime in Serbia. This complex relationship has tested the EU's manoeuvrability and effectiveness in Kosovo.
- Kosovo offers a distinct case in which the issue of recognition is intertwined with the Brussels Dialogue, involving the navigation of a non-recognized state in international diplomacy. This situation is unique to Kosovo, as Serbia is a well-consolidated state with robust bilateral ties to numerous EU countries.
- Kosovo is ideal for examining the EU's structured diplomacy and comprehensive engagement. This engagement encompasses participation in the UNMIK governance, the EULEX Rule of Law mission with executive powers, the EU mission in Kosovo, and progress toward EU integration despite it still needing formal candidate status.

It is important to note that this thesis, due to the depth of analysis required, primarily centres on Kosovo, leaving limited scope for a comparative analysis involving Serbia. However, future research plans include an extensive comparative analysis of Kosovo and Serbia's trajectories within the Brussels Dialogue and the broader context of EU enlargement processes.

Overview of Chapters

The structure of the thesis is based on six main Chapters, which are strategically aligned to enable the unfolding of the theoretical framework through its application to the case study.

Chapter I: Enlargement Through Conditionality: Between Democratic Backsliding, Stabilitocracy, Semi and Competitive Authoritarian Regimes begins by examining the existing literature on democratic backsliding, stabilitocracy, semi-authoritarian regimes, and competitive authoritarian regimes in the context of EU integration. It provides an overview of previous and existing research on democratic transformation through integration and conditionality, as well as the challenges of democratic backsliding and the crisis of democracy. It also introduces the concept of 'stabilitocracy' and its application by the EU in the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue.

I demonstrate that the EU has traditionally utilised transformative and normative soft power through EU enlargement conditionality to promote democratic values and practices. This approach has proven successful in the third wave of democratisation, particularly in the EU enlargement process with CEE countries. However, I note that the crisis of democracy has presented new challenges, including democratic backsliding or relapsing the rise of illiberal democracy and semi-authoritarian regimes. These developments have, I demonstrate, had a detrimental impact on the EU's foreign policy tool of enlargement through democratisation. This situation has led to the emergence of the concept of stabilitocracy, which has been conventionally associated with the foreign policy approach of the United States. In the context of the Western Balkans, the EU has also been said to have adopted a stability approach due to the limitations and complexities of the enlargement process in a post-conflict region with unresolved disputes and the legacy of conflicts in the 1990s. The chapter lays the foundation for the subsequent analysis by synthesising the existing knowledge on stabilitocracy and developing a framework that can be applied to a specific case study. Doing so provides a basis for understanding the complexities of stabilitocracy and their impact on democratic processes. The literature review delves into various aspects of stabilitocracy, which refers to a political system in cases when the EU accepts and prioritises stability over democratic principles. The chapter explores different perspectives on stabilitocracy, including its forms and implications, as well as its application in the case of the Brussels Dialogue. This chapter sets the framework for the case study, forming the main focus of the research described in the thesis. It provides the necessary background information on previous research, the EU's approach to democratic transformation, the challenges posed by the crisis of democracy, and the concept of stabilitocracy.

Chapter II: The EU from a Normative and Transformative Power to a Resilient Actor looks at the decreasing trajectory of the EU's normative and transformative power. Taking place amid the enlargement process toward Western Balkans and whilst facilitating one of the most complex disputes in the region, the Kosovo-Serbia dispute, I argue that the decrease of the EU's normative power has been one of the key drivers leading to the EU embracing stabilitocracy.

The EU has been widely recognised as a normative and transformative power through its enlargement process and democratisation efforts. However, I note that over time, the focus of the EU has shifted towards resilience as it continues to face challenges related to its internal functioning and its ability to navigate in the international arena. This chapter examines this transition and provides a detailed analysis of the EU's trajectory from expansion to an actor

seeking resilience, focusing on how it has navigated in the Western Balkans. It starts by elaborating on the early 1990s EU approach to proceed with a specific focus on the Thessaloniki Summit 2003, which marked the formal opening of the enlargement process towards the Western Balkans.

Initially, the EU was conceived as a peace project, so each wave of expansion was driven by geopolitical circumstances and the aim to maintain stability while promoting democratisation. This culminated in the inclusion of the CEE into the EU. However, this chapter explores the underlying factors behind the enlargement agenda and the evolving balance between stability and democratisation in cases when the EU combines enlargement and ambitions to establish its role in international negotiations. It analyses the emergence of ‘stabilitocracy,’ wherein the pursuit of stability precedes the importance of democratic reforms promoted widely through EU enlargement. This shift reflects the changing dynamics within the EU and raises questions about prioritising stability over the transformative aspects of EU membership.

The chapter also examines the specific mechanisms applied by the EU in the Western Balkans, including the Copenhagen Criteria and the promotion of good neighbourly relations. These mechanisms were designed to foster democracy and regional cooperation in a post-conflict region. Thus, this chapter sheds light on the EU’s role in local democratisation processes and its efforts to build stability in a complex and challenging post-conflict region. Furthermore, the Western Balkans case study illustrates the interlinkage between democratization, regional cooperation, conflict management, and peace negotiations. It highlights the EU’s aspirations to take a leading role in these processes, emphasising its normative power and its transformative potential in conflict-ridden regions.

Overall, this chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the EU’s transition from a normative and transformative power to an actor seeking resilient as a result of the crisis of values and democratic backsliding among the member states. It examines the factors that have shaped this transition, particularly in the context of the EU’s enlargement process and its engagement in the Western Balkans. By exploring the evolving dynamics and priorities of the EU, the chapter contributes to the theoretical framework. It comprehensively explains the EU’s role as a resilient actor in contemporary global affairs.

Chapter III: The EU as Mediator: Negotiating Normalization through the EU Facilitated Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia analyses the role of the EU in international mediation/negotiation, paving the way for the case study. The Chapter examines the

transformation of the EU's foreign and security policy. In the late 1990s, the EU began to undertake a role in international mediation and negotiation, and the Yugoslav Wars drove it, which was further solidified with the establishment of common foreign policy and security goals through the Lisbon Treaty. This paved the way for the EU to develop a structured diplomacy approach, which was applied in the case of the Brussels Dialogue.

The EU's role as a mediator in the Brussels dialogue is important because it plays a crucial role in strengthening the concept of 'stabilitocracy' and testing the EU's tailored approach towards the Western Balkans. This approach combined conditionality and the good neighbourly relations policy presented at the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit. The chapter delves into the Brussels Dialogue, the most ambitious EU effort in the region to date. It examines the EU's approach in both the technical and political phases of the dialogue. It also explores the link between the reform process based on the Copenhagen Criteria and the stability approach. Using the Brussels Dialogue as a case study, the chapter showcases the limitations of the soft transformative approach employed by the EU. It highlights how the EU's mediation role, particularly through the membership process, has faced challenges and necessitated a reconsideration of the EU's enlargement methodology in the Western Balkans.

Overall, the chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the EU's role in international mediation and negotiation, with a particular focus on the Brussels Dialogue. It sheds light on the complexities of the EU's approach, its soft transformative approach's limitations, and the need to re-evaluate its enlargement methodology in the Western Balkans. The chapter provides all agreements reached from 2011 to 2023, paving the way for the case study, which looks at the limitations and how the EU has gradually fallen into the stability trap in the framework of the Brussels Dialogue.

Chapter IV: The Reality on the Ground: Securitization of the Brussels Dialogue delves into the case study and focuses on the impact of the Brussels Dialogue. It examines how this process has impacted the situation on the ground and analyses its effectiveness in resolving the dispute by aiming to reach stability and normalisation through enlargement.

The chapter highlights the limitations of the EU as a facilitator, emphasising its need for more experience and political power to effectively handle a frozen conflict with the potential for tensions to re-emerge. Furthermore, it looks at how the EU fell short in sharpening the enlargement toolkit when applying it to a negotiation process. It identifies the key limitations of the EU in the process, the incremental approach, which in the case of Brussels Dialogue

aimed to reach normalisation through a series of small compromises but instead made the process open-ended and more vulnerable to stoking tensions between the parties through having undefined goals. Similarly, it looks at the detrimental impact of the EU's constructive ambiguity, which has failed to produce effective results on the ground. It examines how the EU's incremental approach and constructive ambiguity led to parties involved in the dialogue using these factors as scapegoats to avoid implementing the agreements they had initially agreed upon.

The chapter also examines the impact of the Brussels Dialogue on Kosovo's internal statehood and its ability to navigate internally and externally while simultaneously engaging in negotiations with Serbia regarding its status. It delves into the complex trajectory of the normalisation dialogue, which has fluctuated between pursuing overarching objectives of normalisation and settling for any arrangement that would provide marginal stability. The chapter further explores how the EU fell into a stability trap, wherein the desire for stability and the preservation of relationships with autocratic leaders took precedence over the necessity for meaningful reforms and democratisation. Overall, the chapter critically analyses the Brussels Dialogue, highlighting its limitations and the challenges faced by the EU as a mediator. It also examines the consequences of this dialogue on the ground, particularly in terms of stabilitocracy and the trade-off between stability and democratic principles.

Chapter V: Clashes of the Titans and Kosovo's (un)finished Statehood elaborates on the geopolitical aspects of the Brussels Dialogue. The Brussels Dialogue itself involves not only the parties directly involved but also third parties such as the United States and Russia. Additionally, it analyses the complex relationships between member states and EU institutions, which is crucial in comprehending the dynamics of the Brussels Dialogue.

I demonstrate that though the EU plays a central role in the Brussels Dialogue as a global actor in peacebuilding and negotiations, the EU relies on political power and consensus among its member states to navigate the dialogue effectively. This necessitates carefully examining the interactions between member states and EU institutions. I demonstrate that enlargement, predominantly contingent on member states' political will, has considerably impacted the EU's leverage in the Brussels Dialogue. The absence of progress in the enlargement process has shifted the EU's primary goal to a focus on stability in the region. As a result, stability has become the main objective for the EU in the Brussels Dialogue and the wider Western Balkan region.

I show that one of the key elements influencing the EU's acceptance of stabilitocracy in the Brussels Dialogue is the geopolitical role of Russia in the Brussels Dialogue. Russia's influence in Serbia and the region has had a negative effect on the dialogue and has reinforced the stabilitocracy approach. Russia's support for autocratic leaders in the Western Balkans, primarily Serbia, poses a direct threat to the stability of the region. Additionally, this challenges the normative power of the EU and the influence of the West in general. The role of Russia as an illiberal external actor in the dialogue has significant implications for stability in the region. It poses a challenge to the EU's normative power and Western influence.

Chapter VI: The Brussels Dialogue: Lessons Learned and the Future of EU as a Negotiator advances the lessons learned from the Brussels Dialogue and the broader implications for the EU's role in global conflicts and its approach to similar situations in neighbouring regions. This chapter explores these lessons and their impact on the EU's research model and discussion.

Firstly, it looks at how the Brussels Dialogue has significantly shaped the EU's global role in mediation; the way the EU has approached and attempted to resolve this conflict provides valuable insights into its strategies and tactics in dealing with other conflicts in the near neighbourhood and beyond. By analysing the EU's approach in the Brussels Dialogue, the Chapter draws conclusions about the effectiveness and limitations of the EU's conflict resolution methods and their applicability to other cases.

The chapter investigates what the EU could have done differently to achieve success in the Brussels Dialogue without pursuing the stabilitocracy approach. It explores how the EU's structured diplomacy could have been more effectively utilised and coordinated to steer the dialogue and facilitate the completion of the enlargement process in the Western Balkans, which commenced at the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003. This analysis provides insights into the potential adjustments in the EU's approach to enhance its effectiveness in conflict resolution and enlargement processes.

Secondly, the chapter examines the impact of the EU's stabilitocracy approach in the Brussels Dialogue. The absence of progress in the enlargement process has affected the EU's ability to fulfil its foreign policy and security ambitions in the Western Balkans and the future of the EU's normative and transformative power. Additionally, it looks at the implications of the limitations in the Brussels Dialogue in future cases which share similar elements. For instance, Ukraine, in addition to the democratic reforms and stability, adds the security component. Furthermore, it combines the EU enlargement process with foreign policy ambitions.

Overall, the concluding chapter draws the lessons learned from the Brussels Dialogue have far-reaching implications for the EU's research model and discussion. It sheds light on the EU's global role, the impact of its policies, and alternative strategies that could lead to more successful outcomes in conflict resolution and enlargement process.

Chapter I: EU Enlargement Conditionality: Balancing Between Democracy and Stability

1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of previous and existing research on the democratisation-through-EU-conditionality approach adopted during the enlargement process in the Western Balkans. It assesses the emergence of democratic backsliding and its impact on the EU's normative power, which ultimately led to the emergence of the term 'stabilitocracy' employed to describe the EU's approach. Furthermore, it introduces the framework for the case study that comprises the research focus described in this thesis.

Democracy is in decline; the third wave of democracy - the 'global democratic revolution' that transformed former communist countries into democracies – though once believed to be very sustainable and irreversible (Huntington, 1993), is deteriorating. Moreover, the growing concerns related to the quality of democracy in the EU countries – particularly the Central Eastern European (CEE) countries – have weakened the role of the EU as the biggest promoter of democracy and its normative power based on which the EU became a global actor.

Furthermore, it called into question the future of the Union itself. This unprecedented democratic crisis has triggered significant scholarly attention (Bermeo, 2016; Tomini, 2017; Bakke and Sitter, 2019). Defining patterns between democracy and straight-out authoritarian regimes has been the focus of scholarly attention (Bieber, 2018; Bakke and Sitter, 2019). Belief in the idea that the EU serves as a transformative power toward the Western Balkans³ six, Turkey⁴, Ukraine, and Moldova from the European Union's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)⁵ has been decreasing as the EU faces a credibility crisis impacting its leverage in relation to the countries seeking membership.

In the case of the Western Balkans – a region with a shared conflicted past – EU conditionality has been challenged by the stability approach designed within the framework of the so-called Good Neighbourly Relations policy (Bieber, 2017) through which the EU sought to foster and achieve stability in the region. The two pillar conditionality, one based on the Copenhagen Criteria (Anastasakis, 2008) focusing on reforms and the other on good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation manifested through the EU's ambition in conflict management, placed the EU in a complex position struggling to balance between supporting reforms and solving open bilateral disputes in the region, both requiring immense political effort and investment. In the past two decades, the EU has been extensively focused on improving relations between Western Balkans countries while gradually overshadowing the importance of reforms and democratic transformation. The stagnation of enlargement toward the Western Balkans, launched by the EU in 2003, has raised debates about the EU's decreasing normative and transformative power. In the absence of the EU's transformational power, enlargement in the Western Balkans became a transactional process with stability in the centre (Stratulat *et al.*, 2021).

The focus on stability placed the EU in a vicious cycle of conflict and crisis management while seriously stagnating democratic reforms. In the literature, this is known as stabilocracy – a term widely used to depict the trade-off of reforms and stability in the region (Bieber, 2018,

³ Western Balkan candidate countries include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia. Kosovo is still in the awaiting the candidate status.

⁴ Albeit a candidate country and the European Council declaring that Turkey sufficiently fulfils the criteria for opening accession negotiations in October 2005, there is significant political stagnation which has put on hold the EU integration of the country.

⁵ There are sixteen ENP partners: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Republic of Moldova, Morocco, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia, Ukraine. Since June 2022, Ukraine and Moldova have received the candidate status.

2020b). Scholars have focused on linking stabilitocracy with the lack of democratic transformation in the Western Balkan region and the limited impact of the Copenhagen Criteria (Council, 1993). However, not much research has been focused on how stabilitocracy - driven by the EU's decision to use conditionality for its ambition in conflict management in the case of Brussels - has impacted the role of the EU in solving the Kosovo and Serbia dispute (Emini and Stakic, 2018).

1.1. Democratic Transformation through EU Integration Process: The Concept of 'Democratisation by Integration'

It is important to start unfolding the theoretical framework by deconstructing the concept of democratisation by integration as the most robust of the EU's transformative tools. This is relevant for the Western Balkans region, which started the trajectory of democratic transition in the framework of the EU integration process. Consequently, it will shed light on the emergence of stabilitocracy, which is elaborated on later in this chapter as the framework for the case study.

By the time the EU formalised the conditionality through membership, its normative power had been solidified as it gathered like-minded countries sharing democratic values, norms, principles, human rights, and the rule of law. The EU built the norms and standards through enlargement to achieve the aspiring countries' transformation. This has been implemented through the EU's direct engagement and conditionality, which has been more formalised as integration by conditionality. The primacy of the EU on conditionality lies in its political, economic, and social framework, encompassing democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law. Furthermore, it had an advantage due to its financial instruments attached to its conditionality. As such, conditionality is a deliberate instrument the EU employs to motivate the candidate countries to embrace its principles and standards (Dimitrova et. al, 2016).

Democratisation by integration is a term that refers to a chain of processes leading to democratic transformation and reforms undertaken in light of the EU integration process of a prospective country (Dimitrova & Pridham, 2004). Further, it refers to political conditionality as one of the most effective methods to trigger domestic change (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004). The advanced EU integration model as a means of democracy promotion has been considered an example of external pressure to leverage democratisation (Dimitrova & Pridham, 2004). Employing a combination of top-down (complex measures) and bottom-up (soft measures) approaches, the EU membership process aims to serve not only as an additional

incentive for democratisation but also to irreversibly consolidate democracy (Pridham, 2005). The conditionality approach increased the primacy of the EU as an external actor, surpassing the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) (Smith, 2001). As the most powerful external actor, the EU dictated the reform agenda within states, leaving domestic actors unable to negotiate the rules or influence the process.

Democratisation, especially in the case of the EU, falls among the notions of internationally influenced transformational processes materialised through conditionality and external pressure. This transformation is achieved through imposing conditions for support in exchange for political opportunity and financial aid (Grimm, 2019). As such, the simplified version is the trade-off democracy for EU membership. The conditionality approach originated in Copenhagen in 1993, and it includes a wide range of political and economic conditions in the form of obligations for EU membership. In the Copenhagen Criteria, it was set that the membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities (EUR-Lex, 1993).

The conditionality of the membership process is designed to take place in stages. The initial stage is the pre-negotiations, which is at the level of an aspiring member or the status of a candidate; the accession negotiations, which open the formal negotiations in which the candidate country is subject to scrutiny and assessment; and lastly, the country becomes part of the EU (Reinhard, 2010). The EU has considerable leverage over the candidate country in the first two phases (DG NEAR, 2023). In the last stage, once a country joins the EU, the direct leverage of the EU begins to weaken. This will be further elaborated on in the next section on democratic backsliding. The first and second are the most decisive phases, guaranteeing EU leverage and power over the candidate country. On paper, the negotiations can be blocked by the EU if the country fails to meet the political conditions of the EU, such as in the case of Turkey (EU Parliament, 2022), or essentially, the EU can interrupt and terminate negotiations if the country shows signs of regress and lacks the political will to meet the political conditions (Schimmelfennig and Scholtz, 2010). The process of interrupting negotiations for EU membership is rather lengthy and bureaucratic. It begins with a series of warnings in the regular annual report and a subsequent period during which the country is expected to address the concerns of the EU Commission Reports. However, in the case of the Western Balkans, this did not occur, albeit there are patterns of democratic regress and non-alignment with the EU's foreign policy (Keil, 2012; Dzankic, Kiel and Kmezic, 2018). For both bureaucratic and

political complexities and geopolitical considerations, it is improbable that the EU would completely terminate negotiations with a candidate country. Nevertheless, the process may stall, leading to a status quo. This situation is evident in the cases of Turkey and the Western Balkans, where the EU has effectively placed these regions in a status-quo state. Consequently, this impasse can result in the EU being satisfied with the lack of progress and even an erosion of democratic values, potentially leading to an authoritarian backslide.

The growing importance of the EU conditionality approach triggered much interest among scholars (Schimmelfennig et al., 2015; Smith, 2003). In the literature, democracy by integration has been qualified as an asymmetric process in which the EU is the donor, and the candidate countries are the recipients. More specifically, the EU provides funds, aid, policy incentives, and potential integration in exchange for the democratic transformation of the country (Richter, 2012; Bieber, 2017). In such cases, the relationship between parties is defined by their power to influence the other party. These circumstances place the donor or the stronger party in a position to influence the weaker party, thus applying the conditionality and defining the rules of the process (Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2008). This includes negotiating the content, procedures, timelines, and pace of reforms. The democratic transformation is effective only if both sides agree to engage jointly in the process. When a degree of conflict arises during the interaction, the external actor can slow down the integration process or even change the reform process (Richter, 2012). In practice, this is known as the ‘carrot and stick approach’, the trade-off the EU has placed in relation to the candidate countries (Toneva-Metodieva, 2014; Bechev, 2006). Further, it is widely acknowledged that this type of conditionality will bring substantial change and establish solid democratic regimes only if the costs of political compliance with EU rules by domestic political elites do not exceed the benefits – in this case, the credible EU membership perspective (Schimmelfennig, 2008). The successful transition of the CEE from communist regimes to stable democracies – due to the EU’s democratisation by conditionality approach – is considered one of the biggest successes of the EU (Cianetti, et al., 2018). This has significantly bolstered the EU’s transformative credentials in the democratisation (Meka, 2016). Further, the EU membership process of the CEE countries has contributed to framing the Copenhagen Criteria as one of the most effective tools to promote democracy.

According to the Copenhagen Criteria, the EU membership for the prospective members – firstly introduced toward the CEE countries - will take place provided that they successfully achieve 1) institutions to guarantee stable democracy, the rule of law, and human rights; 2) a functioning market economy; and 3) the ability to comply with the EU laws, what is known as

the *acquis communautaire* (Council, 1993). The Copenhagen Criteria and the EU enlargement conditionality have been hailed as the most successful foreign policy tool for external democracy promotion (Dimitrova & Kortenska, 2016). Nevertheless, a quarter of a century since the beginning of the transformation of the CEE, which positioned the EU as the most prominent actor in expanding democracy, there is a broad consensus among scholars (Dimitrova, 2010; Sedelmeier, 2013; Rupnik, 2007) that this cheerful picture of this process needs to be revisited. The CEE region is in a severe democratic crisis as many countries of the CEE showcase signs of democratic deterioration and institutional fragility (Blokker, 2021).

As the CEE enlargement - previously described as a 'turning point' for the effectiveness of conditionality – was showing its first signs of flaws, the EU had already replicated the conditionality approach in other regions subject to enlargement. Given the similar approach used by the EU to democratise the Western Balkan region, using the CEE countries as a starting point is particularly important for three reasons: 1) transformation of the communist countries in Europe into democracies represents a triumph of the 'West over the east'; 2) rapid transformation of CEE took place under the influence of the EU in the framework of the EU integration process or 'Europeanisation' thus making the EU a transformative force; 3) after the successful transformation of the CEE countries the same enlargement methodology is being used toward other regions such as the Western Balkans (Butkovic & Samarhija, 2014). In the case of the Western Balkans, however, alongside the Copenhagen Criteria, the EU added further political conditionality by introducing the Good Neighbourly Relations and Stabilization Association Process (SAA) (Anastasakis, 2008). This stability approach has been set out in the European Security Strategy and the Summit of Thessaloniki, which laid the ground for the EU accession of a post-war region (Keane, 2005).

The crisis of democracy within the EU and enlargement regions has led many scholars to raise questions about the effectiveness of transformation by EU membership (Levitz and Pop-Eleches, 2010; Blauberger and van Hüllen, 2020; Dimitrova and Kortenska, 2016). The reversal of democracy in the CEE countries and the long-lasting transitioning period of the Western Balkans have opened two debates. The first debate focuses on the effectiveness of the 'democracy by integration' approach (Grabbe, 2014; Böhmelt and Freyburg, 2018; Böhmelt and Freyburg, 2012; John O'Brennan, 2014). At the same time, the second debate revolves around the stability and quality of democracy, especially in the countries subject to the third wave of democracy, such as the CEE countries (Kelemen, 2017; Kelemen and Blauberger, 2017; Papadimitriou et al., 2017). The latter tries to capture the nexus between the democratic

transformation of the countries and the reforms imposed by the EU integration process. Each is discussed in turn below.

Though the conditionality approach is acknowledged as having succeeded in promoting transformation in potential candidate countries, employing democratic conditionality as a political tool has long been subject to critical debate (Freyburg & Richter, 2010). For instance, accession negotiations with the CEE countries, as part of the EU conditionality framework, have successfully shaped the political elite's behaviour subject to negotiations but are much less effective in consolidating democracy (Pridham, 2005). Another debate has been opened among scholars over accession conditionality. Many doubts have been raised about the effectiveness of democratic reforms imposed by the external actor and adopted under pressure by the recipient – the prospective member countries (Dimitrova & Pridham, 2004). Further, despite the initial success of the first and second wave of membership of the Eastern Enlargement⁶, the conditionality imposed by the EU has not overcome the difficulties of the 'new members' in establishing stable democracies (Dimitrova, 2018). Thus, these countries will likely experience rollback or backsliding once membership has been achieved and the conditionality approach does not apply (Schimmelfennig, et al., 2015).

The literature on EU integration shows that the EU reform demands often need to be more strictly fulfilled. However, the recipient country – the potential member state – still demands membership and accepts the EU conditionality (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2019). The conventional relationship between the donor and recipient changed, with the EU showing flexibility regarding reforms or adapting them to fit local purposes. In the case of the Western Balkans, the need to adapt for stability has been one of the critical elements behind what in literature is known as 'stabilitocracy' (Bieber, 2018).

1.2. The Democratic Decline in the EU and the Decrease of the EU's Normative and Transformative Power

As explained in the previous sections, the third wave of democratisation, the post-communist democratisation, has been considered the 'global democratic revolution' (Huntington, 1993). It is still subject to debate whether it represents the fourth wave of democracy or just an extension of the third wave (Huntington, 1991). Nevertheless, the process has succeeded by rapidly establishing democratic systems across Eastern Europe by transforming communist states into

⁶ Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia. In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU.

democratic regimes. This wave marked the collapse of communism and the penetration of democracy in almost every region of the world (Shin, 1994). Democracy was widely deemed the only viable alternative to authoritarian regimes (Fukuyama, 2006). Democratic regimes were established and consolidated. Thus, it became very unlikely that they would revert to authoritarianism (Ekiert & Kubik, 1998). This is mainly believed to be the case in post-communist regimes in the CEE region and later with enlargement toward Romania and Bulgaria.⁷ The EU's normative and transformative power has been one of the critical factors behind democratisation in Europe, especially after enlargement in the CEE. Enlargement manifested through conditionality, is considered the soft power that secured the EU a place among the global powers as a promoter of democracy.

Furthermore, the wave of enlargement in 2004 was heralded as a success in overcoming the continent's divisions. It also contributed to reducing the gap between Eastern and Western Europe (Sedelmeier, 2014). Enlargement gave the EU credit for the success of the third wave of democracy and securing stability in Europe. At the peak of its normative power in the early 2000s, the expansionist EU declared ambitions in the Western Balkans on its mission to shepherd these countries through democratic transitioning (Keil, 2012).

The third wave of democratisation resulted in the creation of regimes that are neither fully stable democratic regimes nor classic authoritarian ones. The so-called new democracies lacked sustainability, although all member states committed to upholding the fundamental values enshrined in the Treaty of European Union – Article 2. Democratic backsliding became more evident and reached concerning levels when the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) in 2019 (Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), 2019) and Freedom House Reports in 2020 (Csaky, 2020) considered Hungary 'no a longer democracy and Poland is about to go down the same path'.⁸ However, the Nations in Transit Report of Freedom House warned about the anti-democratic tendencies in the CEE countries in 2007 (Freedom House, 2007; Puddington, 2008; Gehrke, 2020). Elements of democratic erosion have been noted even among old member states, albeit more focus has been given to Hungary and Poland and the risk of reversibility of democracy once countries join the EU (Walker and Habdank-Kończakowska, 2012). The persisting question is whether, for instance, Hungary and Poland would today meet the Copenhagen

⁷ The CEE region refers to former communist countries that now are members of the European Union, such as Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia.

⁸ The Freedom House 2020 and V-Dem 2019 reports were among the first to specifically identify the occurrence of democratic backsliding within the European Union, mainly referring to the decline in democratic values observed in Hungary and Poland.

Criteria needed to join the EU. This has triggered scholars' interest in assessing the reversibility and decline of democracy (Puddington, 2011; Diamond, 2015). Many studies – especially on the democratic deterioration in the EU – primarily focus on the new member states of the CEE (Bochsler and Juon, 2020; Kapidzic, 2020; Kelemen, 2020). This is mainly because these countries have recently undergone the EU membership process. Thus, they have been considered democracies at one point, but also, as new democracies, are considered to have more vulnerable systems and weak resilience (Erdmann, 2011). Democratic backsliding took place in the old democracies such as the U.S. and UK and EU member states, which face serious challenges and the rise of far-right parties, including Germany, Austria, and France. However, the decline among the CEE questioned the effects of democratisation by enlargement (Lindberg, 2018).

The old and new democracy division is crucial for the case study of this thesis mainly because the ‘new democracies’ heavily support enlargement toward Western Balkans. This support has been primarily driven by the need to strategically bring more autocratic or hybrid regimes to challenge policymaking within the EU. For example, in the case of the strategic partnership between Viktor Orbán of Hungary and Aleksandar Vučić of Serbia, both were not only hybrid regimes but also very reluctant to impose sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine, thus playing the geopolitical card as well. Whereas the old democracies, mainly Germany, France, and the Netherlands, remain sceptical about enlargement, fearing further deterioration in democracy as the EU expands toward unsustainable regimes, fearing the lack of absorption capacity of the EU.

The decline of democracy triggered many debates and interest in analysing and defining patterns of democratic backsliding. Numerous terms have been used to depict variations between democracy and dictatorships (Lindberg, 2018). Similarly, illiberal democracy is widely used in the case of the CEE countries to illustrate the situation in which populist parties are prone to gradually chip away at liberal checks and balances (Meyer-Resende, 2018). Illiberal democracy has often been used to illustrate this decline, mainly referring to democratic deterioration in Central European Countries post-EU membership (Bakke and Sitter, 2019). These terms have been used to describe regimes within the EU under the assumption that these countries have been consolidated democracies and are currently undergoing a crisis of democratic values. The literature also includes terms such as hybrid regimes, regimes containing elements of democracy, and authoritarianism (Carothers, 2002); these terms are widely used to describe countries outside of the EU or prospective members.

Having strong democracies in the EU is vital because the member states commit themselves to fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria. Thus, having a stable and functioning democracy within the member states defines the internal functioning of the EU and its ability to project its power globally. Although the EU attempted to make internal reforms after each enlargement wave, it proved to lack the capacities needed to absorb new countries while maintaining internal political stability, accountability, and democracy at the institutional level. Thus, the initial enthusiasm and impact reached through EU conditionality have faded due to increasing concerns over democratic backsliding between EU members and the enlargement region (Kmezić, 2020; Batory et al., 2016; EIU, 2019; Janse, 2019). Democratic backsliding, which seriously impaired the EU's internal functioning, has significantly impacted its normative power and appetite for enlargement, thus gradually turning the EU from an expansionist force into a union, putting expansion on hold while striving to build mere resilience toward backsliding among its members. The crisis of democracy within member states has affected the EU normative and transformative power. As such, the transformative model that once gave the EU the position of a global actor promoting democracy turned into a transactional model focused on achieving specific, short-term objectives, often through financial incentives, trade agreements, and other forms of bargaining (Dimitrova et al., 2016). These goals, in the case of the Western Balkans, beyond the 'tick the box' technical exercise, included short-term stability. While the next chapter analyses this trajectory further, the following section looks at stabilitocracy, a popular term used in the past decade to describe the trade-off of stability with reforms between the EU and potential candidate countries in Western Balkans and Turkey. Both stabilitocracy and state capture in the context of the EU integration will be further elaborated and deconstructed in the upcoming sections.

1.2.1. The Concept of Democratic Backsliding

EU member states and enlargement regions have faced multi-faceted problems in the past decade, and scholars have been increasingly concerned with the trend of democracies in decline globally (Cianetti et al., 2018; Freedom House, 2020). This trend has further contributed to the emergence of the debate over the nuances and gradations of regimes between the ideal democratic and authoritarian regimes (Diamond, 2015). In response to the erosion of democracy, many scholars have tried to assess this process's trends, causes, and consequences. Trying to distinguish it from democratic break-down in which regimes reverse through military coups, mass protests, and demonstrations (Bermeo, 2003), scholars have used the term

‘democratic backsliding’ (Mechkova, Luhrmann, and Lindberg 2017; Ulfelder and Lustik 2007; Bermeo 2016) to illustrate a relatively gradual process of democratic erosion.

One of the first challenges in defining democratic backsliding is understanding how scholars define and measure the quality of democracy. To be considered a democracy in reverse, a regime must first be a consolidated democracy. However, a democracy cannot be regarded as consolidated until the transitioning phase to democracy has been fully completed, in addition to holding free elections (Linz & Stepan, 1996). For the democratic regime to be fully consolidated, many tasks must be fulfilled; conditions must be established to ensure that habits are cultivated and deeply rooted in society (ibid). In the case of the CEE, EU-applied conditionality fell short in the post-accession phase to ensure a continuation of reforms, thereby making these regimes vulnerable (Cianetti et al., 2018; Levitz and Pop-Eleches, 2010). This implies that no system is fully resilient and that democracies should be maintained rigorously to ensure continuity. For instance, the EU’s successful democratisation trajectory started to decrease markedly after the rapid expansion of the Union but also as a result of the crisis of democracy and values for which the EU had no leverage to solve internally.

As Huntington pointed out in 1996, each wave of democracy is followed by the reverse wave or what is known as de-democratisation, a term used to describe the difficulties in consolidating democracy or the inability of countries to ensure favourable conditions for democracy to thrive (Huntington, 1991). This reversibility takes place in the gradual regression and erosion of democracy. The problem is rarely an overthrow of democracy but a gradual weakening of essential elements of democracy (Huntington, 1996). When the process of democratic backsliding is a slow and gradual one, the trajectory starts with quality loss to a hybrid regime. Democratic backsliding can take many forms and occur gradually through small steps, many of which are legal and do not directly threaten democracy in themselves (Mickey, et al., 2017). Thus, the three types of decline are silent backsliding, which includes a gradual decrease in freedoms and rights, which are crucial elements for democracy; the relapse from a democracy into a hybrid regime; and a breakdown from democracy to an authoritarian regime, skipping the hybrid stage (O’Donnell, 1995). The latter is more prevalent but rare (e.g., Venezuela, Thailand, and Honduras) (Erdmann, 2011; Levitsky and Way, 2015).

Democratic backsliding has been widely used to explain a pattern of democratic erosion, a gradual process that occurs even in countries with robust democratic institutions (e.g., CEE countries starting with Hungary; Sedelmeier, 2014). As Nancy Bermeo defines it, democratic backsliding is the gradual elimination of political institutions that sustain democratic regimes

(Cassani and Tomini, 2020). Instead of engaging in anti-democratic manoeuvres, backsliding governments capture and utilise the existing institutions and regulatory mechanisms (Bermeo, 2016). Erdmann 2011 also contributed to theoretically conceptualising the patterns of democratic decline. According to Erdmann, the reverse or decline of democracy starts with the loss of quality in one of the two central dimensions, freedom and equality, and the horizontal control of power. Thus, gradually, the state becomes a defective democracy, a hybrid, or ultimately, an authoritarian regime (Erdmann, 2011).

While it is very difficult to place democratic backsliding in a theoretical framework, common definitions include the reversal of democratisation and the weakening of democratic institutions (Cianett et al., 2018; Bakke and Sitter, 2019). As a result, the country experiences a decline in good governance, lack of transparency, and deterioration of the rule of law. Under such circumstances, reforms are halted, and human/minority rights are not respected. The backsliding regimes are fed by nationalism and rising populism, hence the increase of extreme right parties (Rupnik, 2007). Democratic backsliding is closely linked to the rise of right-wing political leaders – even within the EU - which directly challenge liberal democratic regimes (Krastev, 2016). These elites and parties often become the most significant generators behind democratic backsliding. The governments they form precipitate increased corruption and state capture – leading to non-compliance with EU rules and regulations and the danger of a democratic deficit (Eisen, et al., 2019). Henceforth, looking from the conditionality point of view, democratic backsliding concerns both pre-accession countries in the Western Balkans and the post-accession countries in CEE. As such, for the EU, democratic backsliding is not only a phase or a policy challenge but also potentially an existential crisis (Bakke & Sitter, 2019).

The most apparent CEE cases of democratic backsliding, Hungary and Poland, belong to the Third Wave, according to which there is a tendency to reverse from a democracy into an authoritarian or hybrid regime (Tomini, 2017). The elements of this phenomenon include 1) the political elites of the CEE countries lack liberal democratic values (Ines, 2014); 2) The economic crisis of 2008 and the aftermath of the Eurozone Crisis (Bohle & Greskovits, 2009); 3) External influences, mainly political and economic from Russia and China (Shekhovtsov, 2016); 4) right-wing extremism and polarised populism (Enyedi, 2016).

While in the case of the EU, much has been discussed about democratic decline, Florian Bieber looks at Western Balkans through the lens of “de-democratisation” to describe the complex political dynamics in the region. De-democratisation takes place in a transitional grey area

between solidified democracies and authoritarianism. This process is characterised by continuous shifts and fluctuations, swinging back and forth, regimes oscillating between the democracy on paper and the informal realities of authoritarianism (Freeman, 2018) Similarly, autocratisation is the used to describe the shift from democratic governance to autocracy or authoritarianism. In the case of Western Balkans, this refers to democratisation fatigue in 2010, and the wave of autocratisation which followed. According to Bieber, this has been present in Serbia since 2012, Montenegro, and North Macedonia between 2006-08 and 2017 examples of competitive authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are considered partially competitive authoritarian regimes (Bieber, 2018).

1.3. Stabilitocracy: Trading EU Membership for Stability

The EU has been one of the most important actors in the Western Balkans since the 1990s and has used a wide range of foreign policy instruments, including enlargement – possibly the EU’s most influential foreign policy tool – diplomacy, trade, financial assistance, and civilian and military missions. Nevertheless, despite this rather ambitious and multi-faceted Europeanisation process, the transformation of this post-conflict region has been slow. This can be primarily attributed to the democratic backsliding and intra-EU challenges, influential political domestic players, and inconsistent use of conditionality because of the stability-democratisation dilemma (Hartwell, 2021). Democratic backsliding in the EU, which eventually weakened the EU normative power, has had a detrimental impact on the democratisation trajectory in the Western Balkans. Furthermore, the decreased interest in expansion within the EU left the region without EU membership as the overarching end goal (Ferreira, 2022).

1.3.1. Western Balkans from Democracy to Stabilitocracy

The democratic decline or stagnation in the Western Balkan region did not receive the same amount of scholarly attention as democratic backsliding within the EU. This is mainly due to the fact that the region is in the process of Europeanisation, and the decline is not qualified as democratic backsliding due to the fact that these courtiers have yet to complete the transition to democracy (Rupnik, 2017). In the Western Balkans, democracy and effective government are still developing (ultimately). Freedom House reports that following significant advancement from 2004 to 2010, the average Democracy Score in the Western Balkans has been declining, as in Europe (Freedom House, 2016). None of the Western Balkan nations are currently regarded as fully developed democracies (Gehrke, 2020). As such, this democratic

stagnation occupies a grey zone comprising hybrid regimes rather than consolidated democracies, backsliding and gradually turning into competitive authoritarian regimes (Bieber, 2019). Western Balkan countries were introduced to the multi-party system in the early 1990s following the beginning of the break-up of Yugoslavia (Kmezic, 2020). However, instability - following the wars in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo - enabled the emergence of semi-authoritarian regimes which came to characterise the 1990s. The first signs of Yugoslavia's break-up triggered the EU's attention, highlighting its political ambitions towards the region and its broader ambitions. (Glaurdić, 2011). The Balkans thus once again became a geopolitical arena fought over by the EU alongside the US on the one hand and Russia.

Thus, during the early 1990s, while states in the Western Balkans could hope for support from the international community in promoting peace and stability, Euro-Atlantic integration was not on the horizon, nor did the domestic political elites think about this during the run-up to the wars leading to the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Bieber, 2019). In the first decade of the 2000s, they witnessed a gradual democratic transformation of the region and a new political will amongst the ruling powers to endorse political and economic reforms in light of the unique possibility of EU integration (Bieber, 2018). During this democratisation period, autocratic parties were excluded from power until they demonstrated that they had undergone internal reform. During this period, scholarship on the Western Balkans assumed that the region was experiencing a somewhat delayed transformation from authoritarian to democratic regimes (Ibid). However, this window of opportunity was not used by the international community as it was more focused on cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the case of Serbia. In states under international tutelage (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo), it was highly focused on establishing cooperation with international administrators (Bieber, 2019). More critical and nuanced approaches toward democratisation in the region are relatively recent; these approaches flesh out the difficulties inherent in democratic consolidation in the Balkans, mostly comparing it to other regions sharing similar conditions (Mujanovic, 2018). Having not reached the overarching goal of democratic transformation, by the late 2000s, the democratisation process began to stagnate, and elements of competitive authoritarian regimes re-emerged. The reverse trend reflected all key indices of democracy, starting from the curtailment of freedom of speech, patterns of institutional capture, and robust state control by the ruling party/elite (BiEPAG, 2017).

The overarching goal of EU membership has widely sponsored the democratisation process in the Balkans. As previously mentioned, the EU has been a significant factor in the Western

Balkans since the 1990s and has used a wide range of foreign policy instruments, including enlargement—possibly the EU’s most influential foreign policy tool—diplomacy, trade, financial assistance, and civilian and military missions – what is in literature known as structural diplomacy (Keukeleire, 2003; Keukeleire, Justaert and Thiers, 2009; Keukeleire, Fonck and Métais, 2015). Although the EU has been heavily involved in the Western Balkan countries since 1999, there has been a slow process of Europeanization due to several factors, including the communist legacy and the failure to break with the past, flimsy institutions, weak judicial systems, and problems with post-conflict societies (Vachudova, 2006; Mungiu-Pippidi, van Meurs and Gligorov, 2007; Petrovic, 2022). Despite this rather ambitious and multi-faceted Europeanisation process, the transformation of this post-conflict region has been slow. This can be primarily attributed to the democratic backsliding and intra-EU challenges, influential domestic players, and inconsistent use of conditionality because of the stability-democratisation dilemma (Nechev, 2016).

In the Western Balkans, the EU’s already flawed approach is impaired because of the disputed statehood as a legacy of Yugoslav wars and the probability for the tensions of the past to flare up. Secessionist movements, debates over national identities, contested borders, ethnic conflicts, issues with reconciliation, and poor governance capacities that several governments in the Western Balkans are dealing with (Börzel, 2011). The EU in the Western Balkans has had two ambitions since the beginning of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), which was launched in 1999 (EU General Affairs Council, 1999). The first is stability, and the second is the integration (Elbasani, 2008), which exacerbated the security-democratisation conundrum between stabilisation and state-building and democratisation and institution-building. The EU has contributed to stabilising undemocratic and corrupt governments rather than their transformation by giving effective governance a higher priority than democratic governance for security concerns (Börzel, 2014, 2016). According to Börzel and Lebanidze, two conditions must be met for the EU to apply democratic conditionality consistently. There must be no stability-democratisation paradox, and pro-democratic reform alliances must exist. Without both factors, the EU is likelier to maintain the status quo than to operate as a transformative force that favours stability provided by autocratic leaders (Börzel and Lebanidze, 2017). Thus, despite reforms supported by the EU, there is a growing concern about oligarchisation and authoritarianism in the Western Balkans (Lasheras, 2016). Thus, the EU’s stability-democratisation impasse significantly impacts the region’s ability to reform.

Though partially successful in the CEE region, EU membership conditionality has been replicated in the enlargement process toward the Western Balkans. However, applying the same conditions for democratisation in the Western Balkans is problematic given the differences between the CEE and the Western Balkans relating to the legacies of past conflicts and the current complex relations created by open bilateral disputes, involving even contested statehood (Freyburg & Richter, 2010). Given these complexities, the membership perspective of the Western Balkan countries is more elusive, the negotiation process is lengthier, and the fundamental dynamics remain the same (Schimmelfennig, 2008). Moreover, according to Töglhofer and Wunsch (Töglhofer & Wunsch, 2011), in the case of the Western Balkans, there is a less consistent application of EU conditionality, mainly due to the tendency for instability in the region with implications for the EU (Solioz, 2020). Henceforth, in the context of the EU integration process, the term stabilocracy is a useful means by which to distinguish the pattern in Western Balkans from cases such as the democratic backsliding used to refer to EU member countries facing a democratic crisis and countries led by semi-authoritarian regimes (Bieber, 2018).

1.3.2. The Emergence of Stabilocracies in the Western Balkan

Albeit ill-defined, ‘Stabilocracy’ reflects the complexities of democratic transformation through EU conditionality. Moreover, it is used to depict how the EU trading off genuine democratic reform for stability helped the state capture, leading the region toward a hybrid status quo. There is a causal relationship between stabilocracy and state capture in the Western Balkans (Richter and Wunsch, 2020; Vachudova, 2018). The term Stabilocracy was first introduced by Srdja Pavlovic in 2017, aiming to illustrate the EU integration process through a simple trade-off: reforms in exchange for stability with a focus on Montenegro (Pavlovic 2017). The policy of stabilocracy has been widely used by the US administration and includes targeting the right ‘partner for dialogue’ to negotiate with and reach deals in many conflicted regions worldwide; according to Pavlovic, stabilocracy has long been a guiding principle in US foreign policy. This is best reflected in the case of Chile during Pinochet and Iraq during Saddam Hussein’s reign in the 1980s. During the Cold War, this type of transaction has characterised Western assistance and support for non-democratic regimes around the for decades. This support included the exchange of stability for external lenience on democracy matters (Bieber, 2018). In the post-Cold War period, the best example related to the Western Balkan region was negotiating with Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic (Pavlovic. 2017).

The post-Cold War context of stabilitocracy takes place in the framework of the EU integration process. In this case, stabilitocracy comprises a more comprehensive, more complex term based on how the relations between EU and Western Balkans countries are developed. The Western Balkans' specificity derives from its proximity to the EU and the pre-accession conditionality. This is particularly important given the fact that the governments of the six Western Balkan countries have strong incentives to foster democratic reforms; these incentives are more substantial than those for the countries inside the EU (Hungary and Poland) and countries more distant from the EU geographically and in the process of the EU integration process, such as Turkey (Bieber, 2018). According to Florian Bieber, in South-East Europe (SEE), maintaining stability has overtaken the democratisation process. This has created a solid basis for the illiberal elites to develop and consolidate their power. Being perceived as partners of the EU integration process of a post-communist region, the 'strong men' of the Western Balkans have been supported by the EU. As such, stabilitocracy represents the nexus between authoritarian regimes claiming to support the EU integration process and the strategic, externally-driven support which serves as the primary source of legitimacy for these regimes (BiEPAG, 2017). Accordingly, stabilitocracy enabled the West – in this case, the EU – to preserve its Europeanisation rhetoric of promoting European values such as democracy and free, fair, and transparent elections (Bieber, 2018; BiEPAG, 2017; Pavlovic, 2017).

Further, the West can maintain the discourse of promoting the rule of law, an independent judiciary, human rights, and the fight against corruption and organised crime. On the other hand, stabilitocracy enables the local partner – in this case, the stabilitocrats – to establish a façade democracy to tick the EU requirements boxes (Zweers, 2019). The establishment of a façade of democracy serves as a cover for free but unfair elections, the diminished role of parliament, the criminalisation of the political arena, the ratification of laws aimed at eliminating political competition, undermining the political opposition, and using the resources of the country for the benefit of the leader, the political party in power, and their closest associates (Pavlovic 2017; Fruscione 2019).

According to Pavlovic, one of the core features of stabilitocracy is the avowal of Western Balkans political elites to protect and promote Western/EU values during the accession process (Pavlovic, 2017). This dedication to protecting values and democratisation benefits both the domestic regimes - taking advantage of regional specificities, the potential for instability, and their geopolitical importance - claiming to preserve and sustain the West's security, military, economic, and related interests in their respective countries. In return, the local political elites

or autocrats receive political support from their international strategic partners to rule their countries however they see fit (Bieber, 2018). Additionally, the pro-Western approach adopted by some of the Western Balkan countries – such as the recognition of Kosovo by North Macedonia and Montenegro, the support for sanctions against Russia by Montenegro, and the delicate balancing of support for the West and Russia by the Serbian government – have further contributed to tendencies within the West to turn a blind eye towards democratic stagnation and the shift towards authoritarianism (Bieber, et al., 2017).

Western Balkans stabilitocracies develop and thrive in the margins of the EU integration process while establishing clientelist structures, increasing their control of the media, and eroding the rule of law. However, the key element in this transactional relationship is the ability of the local elites to claim to be uniquely able to provide pro-Western stability in the region (Bieber & Kmezic, 2017). Hence, stabilitocrats often provoke, manufacture, and induce crises to prove they are a force for regional stability. Usually, these crises are used to generate internal political crises leading to early elections. The threat of a potentially renewed ethnic conflict in the Western Balkans continues to linger. Targeting the EU's eagerness to keep the region stable and to yield results from its good neighbourly relations approach, Western Balkan autocrats consistently stoke the flames of conflict in the region. In the case of Kosovo and Serbia, for instance, in 2017, a train painted in the colours of the Serbian flag and the slogan 'Kosovo is Serbia' in 21 languages set off from Belgrade to northern Kosovo with the intention of triggering conflicts (Delauney, 2017). The Brussels Dialogue has been seen as a critical process in maintaining regional stability. The EU has praised both Kosovar and Serbian political elites engaged in the process for their commitment to solving one of the region's most prolonged standing disputes. However, the securitisation of the dialogue and the slow progress of normalisation of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia placed the EU under fire for 'trading off' genuine progress in the Dialogue against stability in the Western Balkans (Emini & Stakic, 2018).

According to Besnik Pula, the new generation of Balkan autocrats differs from those of the 1990s. These new autocrats do operate through the use of a similar strategy – domestically (Pula, 2016), they rely on a tried and tested formula that makes their constituency entirely dependent on state-controlled job sources primarily by using public administration as a tool to create this dependency (Perry & Keil, 2018). On the other hand, the autocrats operate internationally by praising the West and not openly defying the EU in their foreign policy in contrast to their predecessors. However, there have been cases – especially in Serbia – in which

different narratives have been managed, especially after the refusal to comply with EU sanctions against Russia after the war in Ukraine. These new autocrats have mastered leveraging the region's geopolitical complexity, mainly by exploiting the perceived urgency amongst the EU to contain the negative influence of Russia, China, and Turkey in the Western Balkans (Bieber & Tzifakis, 2019). This rise of geopolitics is intentionally fuelled and promoted by autocrats who have entered the EU integration process for strategic reasons and not due to a commitment to transform and reform their countries (BiEPAG, 2017). This EU approach towards the local autocrats led to a situation in which the EU ceased to hold the local autocrats accountable; as long as they delivered stability by closing borders and keeping the region peaceful, they were deemed trusted partners in the process. In this regard, the EU policymakers have been willing to disregard corruption and downplay the rise of autocratic rulers. Further, the EU supported and encouraged the emergence of authoritarian leaders until they exceeded the EU's control (Bieber & Kmezic, 2017).

According to Richter, the stability-orientated approach of the EU has gradually weakened its credibility; the inconsistent application of the EU conditionality due to conflicting objectives from the idea of the EU has weakened the credibility of the EU and has created circumstances in which the domestic actors fake compliance, undertake partial compliance or active non-compliance with the EU's conditions (Töglhofer and Wunsch, 2011; Richter, 2012). Thus, the EU integration process might lose its core constituency, undermining the image of the EU in the region as an external actor. The EU's transformative leverage in the Western Balkans was much weaker than in Central and Eastern Europe before EU accession (Noutcheva, 2009).

According to Bieber, not all Western Balkan countries exhibit the same patterns of stabilitocracy. A more individual, country-by-country approach shows that the extent of the autocratic rule varies, but the regional autocrats draw similar patterns. All six Western Balkans countries share a similar genesis of the problem, which is related to their incomplete transformation from communism to democracy, which in turn makes the already weak institutions more likely to be exposed to political pressure. Furthermore, the extreme polarisation between the government and the opposition and the high level of distrust among political elites followed by boycotts further contribute to the weakening of the institutions (WFD, 2019).

1.3.3. Stabilitocracy Leading to Competitive Authoritarian Regimes and State Capture

The democratic transformation triggered many debates among scholars on different patterns and nuances of democracy. The grey zone ‘in-between’ following the transition has been labelled differently by scholars, starting from semi-authoritarian regimes defined by (Ottaway, 2003) and competitive authoritarian systems defined by (Lewitsky & Way, 2010). As a result of the rise of a regional ‘stabilitocracy’ in the Western Balkans, weak democracies with autocratically minded leaders have been established in the region. These leaders govern through informal patronage networks and claim to provide pro-Western stability in the region (BiEPAG, 2017).

Semi-authoritarian regimes represent a rather interesting category because they are defined by what they are not. These regimes are neither autocracies nor consolidated democracies but unwieldy and represent a mixture of elements of both (Gerschewski & Schmotz, 2011). Semi-authoritarian regimes are characterised by democratic elements such as a constitution outlining a clear separation of powers, presidential and parliamentary elections, and citizens enjoying some degree of freedom (Olcott & Ottaway, 1999). These regimes ensure that the parliaments and judiciary are powerless. At the same time, they are formally committed to citizens’ empowerment and power sharing. By using the fear of instability, they succeed in diminishing pressure for democratisation (Ibid). Semi-authoritarian systems are very stable over time in terms of power allocation; in general, the citizens do not perceive overt government interference, and for those seeking democratisation, the situation is merely deemed to be the status quo or stagnation (Lyall, 2011). Similarly, Marina Ottaway (Ottaway, 2003) holds that a defining feature of ‘semi-authoritarian’ regimes is that ‘they are carefully constructed and maintained alternative systems.’ Further, such regimes need to be distinguished from other transitioning regimes which aim at installing democracy and those that fail in doing so.

Similarly, terms such as competitive authoritarianism are used to describe political regimes deriving from ‘stabilitocracy’ in the Western Balkan region. For example, as (Lewitsky & Way, 2010) state:

Civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power but in which incumbents’ abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents. Such regimes are competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power. Still, they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favour of incumbents.

Stabilitocracy and state capture have a causal relationship. However, in the Western Balkans, it is unique as it involves internal and external factors; the EU is one of the key external actors profoundly linked to the internal functioning of the Western Balkan countries through the EU integration process. Bieber continues to define the pattern of authoritarianism in the Western Balkans: 'The regimes in the Western Balkans are not consolidated democracies becoming hybrid regimes with authoritarian features, but a move toward more authoritarianism within the sizeable grey zone where most countries find themselves' (Bieber, 2020a). Furthermore, Bieber identifies the eight key mechanisms of authoritarian regimes in the Western Balkans: it starts with the constant state of crisis (stabilitocracy cycle dominant in the Brussels Dialogue); the dynamics of stabilitocracy; the influence of illiberal external actors, mainly Russia and to some extent China; state capture and weak institutions; weak opposition and civil society; strong leaders tightening their authoritarian grip; nationalism and populism; and loyal media (ibid).

Stabilitocracy in the Western Balkans failed to complete democratic transitioning but also created captured states. The term 'state capture' was first used by the World Bank (Hellman, et al., 2000) to describe the process by which groups and individuals came to exercise control over government decision-making in post-communist states. According to Wunsch and Richter, EU conditionality failed to counter state capture through the Copenhagen Criteria effectively. Still, it has involuntarily entrenched informal networks in the Western Balkans and enabled them to strengthen their grip on power. (Richter and Wunsch, 2020; Vachudova, 2002; 2018). By choosing stability over democracy in the region, the EU has undermined its credibility and values, facilitated the process of state capture, and helped Balkan autocratic leader tighten their grip (Perry and Soeren, 2018; Wunsch, et al., 2019).

IN 2019, the European Commission Country Reports made a critical juncture by admitting to the presence of elements of state capture in all six Western Balkan countries (European Commission 2019). Competitive authoritarian regimes govern informally by controlling every segment, starting from state institutions, media, and civil society. Weak institutions are the main tool for authoritarian regimes to retain their power. Bieber listed the key elements defining state capture in the Western Balkans; the list is topped by manipulation of elections by the ruling elites, capturing the media and control of civil society, punishing political opponents or diminishing their role by decreasing their power, keeping the Euro-Atlantic narratives while decreasing the rule of law and weakening institutions internally (Bieber, 2015). Similarly, according to Richter and Wunsch, the solid top-down approach imposed through EU

conditionality in the Western Balkans countries has stifled domestic deliberation and gradually weakened institutions ensuring accountability, creating how the ruling political elites have silenced the opposition (Richter & Wunsch, 2020). On the other hand, the ‘progress’ in the EU integration process has generated remarkable support for the ruling elites; as a result, the Western Balkan countries are stuck in the ‘state capture trap.’ This situation leads to stagnation of the democratisation process and the inability to implement reforms.

1.4. Conclusion

The crisis of democracy is a game changer re-shaping the EU’s normative power. Elements and patterns of democratic backsliding, which are more pertinent in the case of the current EU member countries such as Hungary and Poland, have dominated the recent studies on democratic backsliding. Similarly, there is a growing understanding of the ineffectiveness of the democratic transformation process through EU conditionality – this is mainly due to the tendency of EU members to slide into so-called illiberal democracies or hybrid regimes. Similarly, many scholarly articles depict the patterns of semi-authoritarian regimes and elements of state capture.

The democratic crisis triggered fears about the sustainability of the EU following the rapid expansion. The intra-EU crises have lowered the appetite for enlargement among EU member states. The decrease in the EU’s normative power and lack of interest in further expansion had a detrimental impact on the Western Balkans. The EU’s stability-democratisation dilemma has been further enhanced. The loss of leverage on the EU’s side decreased the chances of democratic transformation in the region. In such cases, the EU is likely to incline toward a status quo in which merely the absence of an active conflict is a success. This longing for stability has led to the emergence of the concept of ‘stabilitocracy,’ which, in its most straightforward way, is described as a trade-off between stability in exchange for reforms.

There is a lack of significant extant literature on stabilitocracy with a specific focus on how the regimes deriving from the stability approach and the EU’s wounded credibility have shaped one of the most crucial international negotiation processes undertaken by the EU. Moreover, while the literature on stabilitocracy is dominated by extensive work on the impact of the stability approach in enlargement, minimal work has been done to analyse the stability approach in the EU foreign policy ambitions on conflict management.

The literature clearly defines democratisation by conditionality, which is crucial for the case study, which combines enlargement and EU foreign policy ambitions in conflict management.

Democratisation by conditionality is an essential starting point for the literature review because it is the core of the EU's leverage in the Western Balkans. Enlargement is a foreign policy tool that aims to complete the regional democratisation jigsaw and serves as a geopolitical and stability tool. This provides the EU with what is known in the literature as the transformational normative soft power that has contributed to the third wave of democratisation.

Indeed, the stabilitocracy concept, as defined by Pavlovic and Bieber, has been developed in the context of the rule of law, the phenomenon of state capture in the Western Balkans, and the impact the external actors – in this case, the EU – play in facilitating and involuntarily supporting the establishment of authoritarian regimes. However, the concept of stabilitocracy, albeit widely used, remains ill-defined in the context of this approach's impact on the good neighbourly relations component – more specifically, the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia under the guidance of the EU. Moreover, Pavlovic explains stabilitocracy as a foreign policy tool widely used by the US after the Second World War – mainly in Latin America and the Middle East – but it does not deconstruct it in relation to the EU's role as the facilitator in the Brussels Dialogue between Kosovo – Serbia.

Henceforth, as is elaborated in the next chapter, this thesis deconstructs the role of the EU as a transformative power and mediator. Furthermore, it analyses how the EU, from the positioning of prompting democracy from the expansion approach to enlargement, lost its leverage, gradually shrunk, and promoted resilience as a way to be able to adapt to new challenges. The next chapter analyses the EU's normative power trajectory from expansion to stability. It paves the way for the analysis of the EU's ambitions for a unified foreign policy. This serves as a solid basis for the case study, which looks directly into the impact of stabilitocracy on the EU's ability to fulfil the ambition to lead in conflict management through democratisation and EU membership.

Chapter II: The EU: From a Normative and Transformative Power to a Resilient Actor

2.1. Introduction

This chapter deconstructs the endurance of the EU as a transformative power, focusing on its enlargement, democratisation, and stabilisation processes. As already emphasised in Chapter I, the EU exercised significant transformative power in Central and East Europe (CEE) between 1989 and 2004 (Grabbe, 2006). In addition to the democratisation mission, the EU project also served as a catalyser in resolving bilateral disputes and facilitating reconciliation – between Germany and Poland, for instance – after the fall of Communism through the Europeanisation process (Opiłowska, 2017; Lang, et al., 2017). Thus, positioning the EU as the key actor exercising transformative power in shaping the CEE countries since the fall of communism and, in the process, making a significant contribution to the effectiveness of the Third Wave of Democracy (Börzel & Lebanidze, 2017). The expansion of the EU through the normative soft power, which also has been successfully utilised as a coercive bargaining power in the EU membership process, has widened the EU. Also, it has resulted in the EU being one of the most successful external influences promoting the third wave of democracy and thereby transforming its neighbourhood (Wunsch, 2015). This tailored approach channelled through the ‘Europeanisation’ process imposes the EU’s norms and methods, known as the conditionality approach, to the perspective of EU countries (Dimitrova et al., 2016; Tulmets, 2007).

As argued in the previous Chapter, though the enlargement process and conditionality approach can be considered a success story, those countries that joined the EU failed to understand that the vital transformation would not occur simply through ‘EU membership’ itself but rather the ‘process’ of EU-led democratisation (Grimm, 2019). The fragility of the so-called ‘new democracies’ following the evolution of ‘democratic backsliding’ among new and aspiring EU member states indicates flaws in the enlargement methodology and a lack of political will and power by the EU member states to play the normative and transformative role (Petrova, 2011; Gora and Wilde, 2020). Furthermore, the premature accession of Romania and Bulgaria, the democratic relapse in the CEE, the financial crisis of 2008 (Zahn, 2013), the refugee crisis (Lehne, 2016), and the recent enlargement stalemate coupled with the debates over internal EU

reforms precipitated by Brexit (Balfour, 2020) have exhausted the EU's political capital with intra-EU challenges, thus diminishing the role of the EU as a global actor.

The transformative mission of the EU appears to have fallen short of its key objectives, with the almost ineffective incentive-based approach of conditionality and democratisation by integration and the EU's lack of political power to produce the desired results in the Western Balkans. (Keil, 2013) Because of the failure to replicate the 'success' in the CEE – the enlargement trajectory has severely declined (Zhelyazkova, et al., 2018). The slow progress in the Western Balkans and the relapse of democracy in the CEE have impaired the role of the EU as a transformative and normative power. Furthermore, it challenged the role of the EU as a global player and questioned the ability of the EU to promote liberal values (Howorth, 2010).

This chapter focuses on the evolution of the EU from the primary transformative power expanding and promoting democracy to an actor seeking resilience as it struggles to deal with the debate over the deepening and widening of the EU. The main focus is on the EU's approach towards the enlargement process in the Western Balkans – an attempt to replicate the success in the CEE countries – and the role of the EU not only in the local democratisation process but also in the effort to build stability in a rather complex post-conflict region. The timeframe begins with the first summit formally launching the EU's ambitions and willingness to expand in the Western Balkan region, the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit. It deconstructs the main events, such as the accession of Croatia – the only former Yugoslav country that has managed to become a member of the EU since 2003 – that were presented as confirming the credibility of the EU's Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) and giving the perception that EU membership can be achieved by following the enlargement template. Furthermore, the chapter analyses the EU's approach toward enlargement in the Western Balkans, highlighting that the stability and security approach overshadowed the importance of initiating domestic reform, thereby seriously jeopardising democratisation. Finally, I critically analyse the attempts to create a new impetus in 2018 through the Western Balkans Enlargement Strategy (EC, 2018) and the changes made to the enlargement methodology aimed at keeping the region closer for geopolitical purposes; I argue that by prioritising the stability of the EU – through alleviating risks stemming from the region – the EU has largely failed to promote EU values and democracy.

2.2. The Road to the Thessaloniki Summit: Securitisation and Europeanisation of the Western Balkans

More than a decade before the Thessaloniki Summit, the instability in the Western Balkans, especially the fragility of former Yugoslavia, was listed as the primary security concern for the EU. During the Inter-governmental Conference (IGC) in Maastricht in 1991 (EC, 1992), EU member states saw the looming crisis in the former Yugoslavia as a challenge and a unique opportunity to showcase its power internationally and ability to execute a unified foreign policy. The ambitions of the EU to play a role as a global actor were showcased by Douglas Hurd (UK Foreign Secretary 1989-1995) in his statement: 'I want you to know that the EC is determined to build up the place and the role of the 12 in world affairs' (Hurd, 1992). While this was a rather vague statement, it indicated the ambitions of the EU to play a significant role as a foreign policy actor globally and not to undertake a specific response to what was happening next door in the Balkans. This would be the first test of the EU's actorness in foreign policy and security and its ability to emerge as a global power after the Cold War.

The former Yugoslavia held a relatively privileged position with the EU. First, it was strategically and geopolitically important, situated between the East (Warsaw Pact) and the West (NATO and EU). The neutrality of Yugoslavia during the Cold War was crucial for the West (Glaurdic 2011). Second, the existing economic and trade links enabled the former Yugoslavia to establish solid economic relations with the EU (Commission of the European Communities 1976). Before the crisis, the EU's presence in the region was mainly manifested through funds and loans aimed at developing the region's infrastructure (EC, 2003). Although the EU effectively provided economic resources, it failed to prevent the regional aggression and consecutive wars that raged for almost a decade. The inability of the EU to take a leading role in the region without the US' direct involvement has been seen as a failure of the EU to set out clear expectations to act; as a result, it was quickly judged to have failed its very first task as a foreign policy actor (Dover, 2005). This was later credited with leading to the formulation of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) in 2000.

The EU foreign policy and security portfolio was further sharpened in the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, which was a cornerstone in shaping the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). It paved the way for establishing the European External Action Service (EEAS) under the authority of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) (Union, 2007). This would become the leading institution representing the EU in the world (Rodt & Wolff, 2012). This development

is further deconstructed as it plays a crucial role in determining how the EU is seen globally and because of the leading role the EEAS would take in 2011 to solve the Kosovo – Serbia dispute.

In the 1990s, while the EU struggled to find a way to prevent the Yugoslav wars, the U.S. took the leading role within NATO and led decisive military interventions in the region. It was anticipated that the US would reduce its role in the region after the intervention in Kosovo in 1999 (Simon, 2007), thus leaving the EU to lead the reconstruction process. This would leave it to the EU to take the lead in the peacebuilding process alongside other international stakeholders and introduce the democratisation process, thereby offering transformation through enlargement. As Jacques Poos Field (Hamilton, 2008) stated, the EU got its famous 'hour of Europe' moment as it was given a chance to set the region straight.

The first indication of the EU's enhanced role in the Western Balkans was seen in Macedonia and the role that the EU played in conflict resolution – facilitating the so-called 'Ohrid Agreement' – albeit in cooperation with the U.S. (Pearson, 2002) followed by the first-ever EU peacekeeping mission in the region, EUFOR Concordia (EEAS, 2015). Another vital agreement brokered by the EU in the region was the agreement between Serbia and Montenegro in 2003, known as the 'Solana Agreement 2003', which created a loose pseudo-confederation (Keane, 2004). This arrangement, however, would not prevent the Montenegrin government from pursuing independence in 2006 (Deloy 2006), negotiated by Miroslav Lajčák on behalf of the EU (Roberts, 2002). Further, the EU's assumption of leadership in the Althea police mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2003 confirmed the EU's ambitions and ability to take up the challenge and lead the post-conflict transition of a region in Europe (Rodt, 2011). The belief in a united Europe, the emerging power of the EU, the influential role of the EU in transforming through enlargement, and the sporadic but solid success of the EU in the region paved the way for the EU to formalise the long-anticipated step of offering the prospect of membership to the Western Balkans region as a later stage in 2003 (Bendiek, 2004).

The fate and trajectory of the region's EU membership were closely linked to the security and stability of the EU. Therefore, the Balkan region has been viewed through a security lens, as was reflected in the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS). The ESS was formulated and endorsed by Javier Solana, who served as the ninth NATO Secretary General (1995 to 1999), the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and Secretary General of the Council of the European Union (1999-2009) (Grevi, 2009). The Western Balkans were listed as pivotal to the EU's foreign policy. Of all the regions of geographic and

strategic importance, the Western Balkans was considered a major priority for the EU as specifically outlined in the ESS (Quille, 2004). The document explicitly highlighted the absence of a rapid and effective decision-making culture within the EU in the case of the Western Balkans in the 1990s and vowed to create a strategic culture in the future to create rapid and robust decision-making in response to crises (Keane, 2010). Once again, the region would be the testing ground for the new and comprehensive security strategy set out in the ESS.

Enhancing the military and police presence of the EU in the Western Balkans did not mean a complete departure from the EU's traditional role and emphasis on soft power. Hence, the following section deconstructs the EU's soft power approach towards the Western Balkans through enlargement. Specifically, it looks at how EU membership for the region was framed, in tandem with the Copenhagen Criteria, to facilitate and accelerate democratic reforms and promote good neighbourly relations, focusing on solving the remaining bilateral issues left over from the Yugoslav wars (Anastasakis, 2008; Hillion, 2016).

2.2.1. The Thessaloniki Summit: Democratisation and Europeanisation of the Western Balkans

It was assumed that the collapse of the Milosevic regime in the former Yugoslavia and Tudjman's regime in Croatia marked a triumph for the pro-EU and progressive politicians, thus paving the way for the EU accession of the region (Subotic, 2011). With the EU accession emerging as the top foreign policy priority in all countries in the Western Balkans, the 2000 Zagreb Summit reflected this wave of optimism. The Zagreb Summit ushered in a new era in EU ties with the region (Butkovic & Samardzija, 2014). This would later be fully materialised in the Thessaloniki Summit 2003, which framed and formalised the EU perspective towards the Balkans.

Thessaloniki will send two important messages to the Western Balkans: The prospect of membership in the EU is accurate, and we will only regard the map of the Union as complete once you have joined us. We in the European Commission will do all we can to help you succeed. But membership must be earned. It will take the sheer hard work and applied political will of those in power in the region. How far you proceed along the road towards European Integration and how fast, will be up to you (Patten, 2002).

The period from the Zagreb Summit (2000) to the Thessaloniki Summit (2003) marked a spike in the EU's normative power. As the EU braced for its most significant single expansion in

2004, Europe's political and economic map of the EU was expected to be redrawn (ESI, 2003). The geopolitical division set by the 'Great Powers' 60 years before at the Yalta Conference was expected to end with the membership of eight central and eastern European countries: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, with Malta and Cyprus scheduled to join later. This expansion would heal the east/west division, thus making the EU a triumphant and powerful global actor (Sedelmeier, 2014). Albeit of similar geopolitical importance, the Eastern part of the Balkans – Bulgaria and Romania, both parts of the EU integration process since 1993 when they signed the Europe Agreements – did not join the bloc (Phinnemore, 2009). Perceived as laggards within the Eastern enlargement group, Bulgaria and Romania fell short in delivering on crucial reforms; economic and political instability in the mid-1990s had a detrimental impact on their readiness and institutional capacities to lead the integration process (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2017). Enlargement toward Romania and Bulgaria took place only in 2007 and is considered to have had a detrimental impact on the EU's conditionality policy, its effects, and the ability of the EU to absorb countries prematurely. The effects of enlargement on Romania and Bulgaria will be elaborated on in the next section, as it marks a critical turning point in the EU's normative power and willingness for expansion.

While integration was happening in the eastern neighbourhood, the EU launched the so-called Regional Approach in the Western Balkans (Anastasakis & Dzelilovic, 2002). The Regional Approach included a set of conditions relating to the rule of law, respect for democratic principles, human rights, minority rights, economic reforms, and regional cooperation; this was a far-fetched goal and was already facing a multi-frontal crisis (Voskopoulos, 2001; EC, 1997). Standing on the cusp of what was not only a large wave of EU enlargement but also a victory for democracy, there was a growing fear that the Western Balkan region would be left in the margins of the new and integrated Europe. As the debate over the 'big bang enlargement' was ongoing, the EU formalised the EU perspective for the Western Balkans; it was the region's most significant milestone in the EU integration process (Islam, 2003). The Thessaloniki Summit in 2003 marked the first formal attempt by the EU to embrace the Western Balkans and prioritised building a partnership between the EU and the Western Balkans (Meurs, 2003). A future within the EU was presented to the Western Balkan countries; Kosovo was included, albeit it was still under international tutelage.

Though the EU's policies and strategies for the region were set out in the Stabilization Association Process (SAP) in 1999 and amplified by the Zagreb Summit in 2000 and

Thessaloniki Summit in 2003 (EC, 2000), there was immense hesitation amongst member states towards the accession of the Western Balkan region. This highlighted the differentiated approach of the EU toward the Western Balkans in comparison to the ten countries due to join in 2004. The Western Balkans was a post-conflict region, and the wars in the region had a detrimental impact on the economy, resulting in poorly functioning institutions and a large number of disputes over issues such as territory, ethnic minorities, and borders (Amato, 1999). As such, the decision to have an open-door policy towards the Western Balkans meant the EU shouldered significant responsibilities. The core question for the EU remains relevant: how to contribute to setting the region straight, facilitate stability and political transformation, and ensure socio-economic progress through one mechanism – the EU membership conditionality (Balfour & Stratulat, 2011). Thus, the EU approach to the region was designed to be launched using first the policy of construction, followed by multi-frontal development to shape the countries and make them fit for EU membership. In order to pursue such goals, conditionality – the EU’s most powerful instrument in its efforts to reform the potential candidate countries – remains essential as a source of leverage (Anastakis & Bechev, 2003).

Given the complexities of the Western Balkans, the EU faced a difficult task in implementing the integration project; this was further complicated by it also having to deal with resistance from the EU member states with a lukewarm approach towards the region. As a result, there was an imminent risk that, instead of catching up with the other regions in the EU neighbourhood, the Western Balkans would stay caught up, rendering the goal of integration and the promise of stabilisation that comes with EU integration even more distant. Many scholars (Hoxhaj, 2020; Marovic et al., 2019; Kmezcic, 2020; Strelkov, 2016; Dzihic et al., 2018; Richter and Wusch, 2020; Bieber, 2018) have agreed that unless the EU and the countries in the region tackle these problems, the region risks slipping into a vicious cycle in which instability would constantly put the democratisation process in jeopardy and consequently the process of the EU integration.

2.3. (Un)Sharpening the Toolbox: Introducing Enlargement Toward the Western Balkans

The formalisation of the EU perspective for the region in the Thessaloniki Summit for the Western Balkans marked a significant shift from the region’s ad-hoc crisis management style to a more long-term and integrationist approach (EC, 2003). Being already present through various Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSDP) missions aiming to contribute to post-

conflict management in the region, the EU utilised its ‘soft power’ mechanisms to induce the Western Balkan countries to implement the necessary reforms. Thus, achieving full stabilisation of the region while strengthening economically and politically with the ultimate promise of EU integration. Accepting the limitations and ambiguities of its operation, the instrument of conditionality linked to full EU membership is considered an effective tool in strengthening domestic commitment to the democratisation process and the region’s transformation (Zuokui1, 2010).

Each region required a tailored approach to deal with the most pressing issues impeding the EU integration process. In the case of the Western Balkans, the EU introduced a unique approach that tackled the two most significant challenges in the framework of the EU integration process: the democratisation process of the region and stabilisation through good neighbourly relations (Veljanoska, et al., 2014). The SAP took place in Thessaloniki in 2003. Still, it was initially launched in 1999, and it is an EU policy toward Western Balkans specifically established aiming to bring the region to the EU but also progressively stabilise and foster regional cooperation (European Commission 2003). From the region’s perspective and the EU’s multilateral approach, the SAP focused on regional cooperation in politics, economics, and security (Economides, 2008). All countries in the process of EU membership application have an Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU (Phinnemore, 2003). These agreements regulate the EU Acquis – all laws and regulations to be harmonised with the EU – other areas of cooperation in trade, industry, environment, transport, customs, and other relevant fields specified in the agreement (Kramer, 2004). In the case of the CEE countries, these agreements were called the Europe Agreements and included formal and structured cooperation between the EU and all CEE countries and governments (Bardi, et al., 2002). In the framework of this new incremental transformational strategy, the countries in the region were subject to a multi-dimensional framework fostering economic and political development alongside enhanced regional cooperation (Anastasakis, 2008). All these elements are underpinned by the prospect of full membership in the EU when the region fulfils the criteria set by the EU. The Stabilisation Association Process (SAP) embraced all countries of the former Yugoslavia and Albania. As one of the region’s most significant EU flagship initiatives, the SAP was designed to contribute to the post-conflict needs of the region (Elbasani, 2008). Thus, it emphasised the need for the EU to secure its south-eastern borders by explaining the security and stability approach of the EU towards the region. On the other hand, as explained earlier in the section, the SAP has also been designed to bring the region closer to the EU and

used by the EU to facilitate the region's progressive rapprochement and integration into the EU (Gordon, 2009).

EU integration and regional cooperation are intrinsically intertwined. Thus, the EU approach to the Western Balkans has employed the CEE approach to create cooperation models similar to the Visegrad Four⁹ (Pridham, 2008). Through the SAP, the EU aims to encourage countries of the region to strengthen their cooperation across a wide range of areas, including security cooperation, which represents one of the most complex areas of cooperation in a post-conflict region. A specific component of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) funds is dedicated to regional cooperation and cross-border programmes, fuelling the idea of regional cooperation in the region (Minic, 2013). The SAP has been designed to act as a mechanism for upgrading EU relations with individual countries. Moreover, the SAP contains multidimensional elements aiming to transform the region and finish the long overdue democratic transitions in all Western Balkan countries (Djurovic & Jacimovic, 2014).

The SAA contains the same content as the European Agreements used in the previous enlargement processes. However, two differences are present: the sections on Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) - a component that has changed based on the lessons learned from previous enlargement processes - and the regional cooperation component, which is of vital importance in a post-conflict region such as the Western Balkans (Gordon, 2009). Given the region's complexities, each signatory country would move forward in the EU integration process individually, thus preventing laggards from dragging back the entire region. The first country to sign the SAA was the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2003,¹⁰ followed by Croatia; the cycle was completed thirteen years after the launch of this instrument when Kosovo signed the SAA in 2016. The SAA for the Western Balkans includes a thick JHA chapter designed to enforce the rule of law and strengthen judicial institutions (Trauner, 2007). Thus, the SAA is also built on the Copenhagen political criteria; once a country enters the EU integration process, it must adopt and implement all EU legislation. This is known as the *Acquis Communautaire*, which ensures that candidate countries adopt EU laws, regulations, court decisions of the EU. Moreover, the EU uses its screening mechanisms, such as annual progress reports to oversee the implementation of the reforms which move the country forward in the EU integration process. The country can move through various stages based on the degree to

⁹ Visegrad Region refers to Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary

¹⁰ It officially changed its name to North Macedonia under the auspices of the Prespa Agreement signed in 2019 between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece.

which the requisite reforms have been carried out. This mechanism has been developed to enable the countries to move forward based on their merits and progress. Thus, allowing the EU to establish individual relations with each candidate country (Elbasani, 2008).

In the process of redefining the approach toward the Western Balkans, the Community Assistance for Reconciliation, Development, and Stabilization (CARDS) was designed as the main instrument of financial assistance for the Western Balkans. However, this was replaced by the IPA in 2007. This programme has prioritized support for justice, freedom, and security issues. In addition, the new approach included the shift of responsibility for the countries of the region to the Directorate General (DG) for enlargement from the DG for External Relations.

Overall, EU conditionality in the Western Balkans comprises the following elements:

- The general Copenhagen criteria – political, economic, and *Acquis Communautaire* – applied to all candidate and potential candidate countries;
- The 1997 Regional Approach and the 1999 SAP;
- Country-tailored conditions to be met before entering the negotiation phase and conditions arising out of the SAAs and the CARDS framework;
- Conditions related to individual projects and the granting of financial aid, grants, or loans;
- Conditions arise from peace agreements and political deals (e.g., UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and the Dayton, Ohrid, and Belgrade agreements);
- Miscellaneous: includes issues that come up during the negotiations and have not been formally covered by the EU in any negotiation chapters. In the case of the Western Balkans, this includes the open bilateral issues between the potential candidate country with another regional country or an EU member state (Anastakis & Bechev, 2003).

At the Thessaloniki Summit, the EU confirmed its ambitious project for integrating the Western Balkans by formally declaring that ‘the future of Western Balkans is within the European Union’ (Belloni & Brunazzo, 2017). Thessaloniki occurred at a time of EU euro-enthusiasm and expansion; the latter confirmed the EU’s status as a transformative and normative power, which sparked the ambition for enlargement in the Western Balkans (Denti, 2014).

Almost two decades after Thessaloniki, the situation is less encouraging. Only one country from the region has made it to the EU; Croatia became a member in 2013. The enlargement process has proceeded in the last decades and has yet to have significant results. The factors behind the slow pace of integration are multi-dimensional, deriving from challenges and limitations in the EU and the Western Balkans countries (Kühne, 2014). The following section focuses on EU conditionality in the Western Balkans, aiming to deconstruct the reform approach and the desired interlink with stability – the latter being highly prioritised by the EU, fearing a potential return of the legacy of wars in the region.

2.3.1. EU Conditionality vis-à-vis Statehood Limitations and Instability in the Western Balkans

Political conditionality is one of the most powerful instruments through which the EU has sought to foster democratic transformation. However, this partnership came with conditions; the EU adopted an incentive approach that set precise requirements to be met to make the collaboration effective (EC, 2003). Widely known as ‘the carrot and stick approach,’ the conditionality approach provided the EU with unique, controlling mechanisms through which it could impose the consolidation of democracy on a country before it was awarded a promised advantage (Ethier, 2003). The country wishing to join the EU could also be sanctioned if it failed to comply with the requirements set by the EU. The need to meet the political criteria was firmly specified as the core of EU conditionality in the so-called Copenhagen criteria.

Moreover, the EU has explicitly specified that particular aspects of political conditionality are non-negotiable, including a pluralist democracy, strengthening the rule of law, separation of powers, freedom of speech, independent civil society and media, and respect for human and minority rights (Zhelyazkova, et al., 2018). The criteria continued to be specified and detailed as each country required a tailor-made approach. For instance, the fight against organised crime and corruption in the Western Balkans became part of the core political conditionality agenda. Political conditionality gained even more importance in 2000 due to tackling the more demanding and challenging transformation required in the post-conflict countries in the Western Balkans (Ibid).

EU political conditionality¹¹ is effective only when applied through the ‘carrots and sticks’ approach and strictly linked to a real and credible process of accession into the EU. Yet, in the case of the Western Balkans, this support has not been offered with the same political enthusiasm as previously provided to the CEE countries (Kramer, 2004). For instance, the strict application of the EU carrots and sticks approach has only been conclusively implemented in

¹¹ The political conditionality – broadly defined as *acquis politique* – includes commonly accepted political standards. Namely, what a candidate country agrees to adopt when entering the EU integration process, including political standards, norms, and practices. The *acquis communautaire*, on the other hand, is closely intertwined with political conditionality. (James Ker-Lindsay, et al., 2017) It essentially promotes the legal framework, body of laws, agreements, declarations, and resolutions. It takes place under strictly structured negotiations on distinct chapters (35 in the case of the Western Balkans following the lesson learned with Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia), and voluminous legal texts of more than 80,000 pages. This process provides the EU with all mechanisms to undergo regular screening to assess the level of preparedness of the countries aspiring to EU membership and whether the country has met the criteria spelt out in the Copenhagen criteria (Kmezic, 2020).

the case of Croatia's accession to the EU; the EU has generally been less effective in applying the political criteria, and thus it has failed to reproduce the success of Croatia with other countries in the region. There has been a slight increase in governance effectiveness under the structured influence of the EU. However, the level of democratic transformation in the region is stagnating at best and, in some cases, even backsliding (Kmezić & Bieber, 2017).

Though strictly structured in chapters, the EU political conditionality oscillates between the non-negotiable principles that require adoption and implementation and a more adaptive approach toward political conditionality based on the local environment and the security situation. The latter would be detrimental to the EU's policy towards the region by blinding the EU to the necessity of adopting stringent political conditionality to keep the region stable (Kmezić & Bieber, 2018). Although, on paper, the EU advocated for rigorous conditionality, claiming that the region should be politically, economically, and technically ready before joining the EU. A statement from the 2005 European Commission, for instance, firmly states the merit-based process of integration in which all Western Balkan countries will be rewarded when successfully delivering on reforms and sanctioned when failing to do so:

The EU must remain rigorous in demanding fulfilment of its criteria but fair in duly rewarding progress. Aspirant countries can only proceed from one stage of the process to the next once they have met the conditions for that stage. Moreover, the Commission is prepared to recommend the suspension of progress in case of a serious and persistent breach of the EU's fundamental principles or if a country fails to meet essential requirements at any stage (EC, 2005).

Regarding reforms and conditionality, the EU applied the same toolbox as the ones in previous enlargements. The prolonged enlargement process towards the Western Balkans shows that the toolbox might not as well be flawed, but it might not fit the situation in the region. While the transformation trajectory of the CEE has been more steady and the democratisation through Europeanisation took place at a faster pace, the Western Balkans remain 'borderline cases of transition (Elbasani 2011). The situation in the Balkans after the 1990s limited the EU's ability to recreate the CEE countries' success. It is a strategic flaw from the EU's side not to be able to sharpen the toolbox and tailor it to the post-war situation in the Western Balkans, with countries lacking institutional capacities to undergo costly and ambitious reforms needed for EU membership.

Three factors severely impact the effectiveness of the EU's normative power in the region: *Firstly*, the key obstacle seriously limiting the EU's conditionality and normative power is the domestic veto players and the lack of political will of the Western Balkan countries to commit

to reforms. In the CEE but also the case of Croatia, according to Börzel, the domestic actors showed immense political support for reforms. In the case of CEE, the domestic consensus among political elites in their ‘return to Europe’ narrative diminished all potential internal veto players and anti-EU movements. Moreover, the Copenhagen Criteria was perceived and treated as a continuation of what already these countries had started in the ‘Velvet Revolution’ in 1989. Hence, the enlargement toolkit worked effectively due to the solid internal support. In this case, the EU only provided the financial, political, and technical assistance to shepherd the countries through the reform process and achieve the EU membership at a faster pace. In the case of the Western Balkans, the EU’s main challenge was to exercise its normative soft power while dealing with countries that do not necessarily share the same enthusiasm and willingness for deep reforms to fit into the EU. The public support but also the political elites in the Western Balkans do not fully support and comply with EU norms and values (Interview 11, 2023). For instance, in a region daunted by the past, the issues of minorities in the Copenhagen Criteria clash with the nationalist beliefs. The EU membership has been conditioned in the beginning with the extradition of war to the ICTY (Mendelski 2012; Boduszynski 2012; Stojanovic 2012). However, the EU’s reforms and conditionality does not resonate with the strong legacies of the past, which severely diminish the legitimacy and the normative power of the EU (Elbasani 2012). However, in this case, it is important to make a difference between the public opinions and the political elites in the Western Balkan countries. According to the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) study, the Western Balkan countries – apart from Serbia, which remains more sceptical – the public opinion in the Western Balkans remains pro-EU membership (Stratulat et al. 2020).

Secondly, the EU conditionality has met the institutional and statehood limitations of the countries in the Western Balkans. Undergoing serious and demanding EU reforms requires a very sustainable and robust system. Western Balkan countries lack the capacity to undergo multi-sectoral reforms despite the EU assistance in implementing the reforms. While most of the Western Balkan countries have progressed somewhat in implementing the reforms (EC 2022), the actual progress and sustainable democratic resilience were very difficult to establish. For instance, in the case of the Western Balkans, Kosovo, in addition to needing assistance to implement the reforms, it also required direct EU involvement in the state-building process. On the other hand, there is the case of Serbia, considered one of the most consolidated systems in the Western Balkans, having the administrative and institutional capacity to deliver, thus increasing the odds for more accessible and smoother implementation of the EU reforms.

However, in the case of Serbia, the link with the ICTY – the extradition of the war criminals – the minority issues, and the case of Kosovo have diverted the EU capital from installing a strong democratic regime in Serbia despite the already promising institutional infrastructure (Stojanovic 2012).

Thirdly, the Western Balkans is a more challenging region for the EU, mainly due to the transition in the case of former Yugoslavia through war and redrafting of the borders produced a fear of instability in the region with detrimental consequences for the EU. This called for the EU to exercise the role of conflict management in addition to democratisation. The disputes legacy of the Yugoslav wars has seriously limited the EU's ability to focus on democratic reforms. The latter is even considered to be the main factor driving the EU stability approach in the Western Balkans. In the case of the Western Balkans, numerous factors contributed to enhancing the stability approach. The EU was entangled in the political developments after Kosovo's independence, which took place after the Thessaloniki Summit and required a new approach towards not only the act of independence but also the reaction of Serbia. The EU stability approach has been even more emphasised in the case of the Brussels Dialogue. As is further elaborated in the next chapter, the dialogue facilitated by the EU linked the political criteria of EU integration with the stability and normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia (International Crisis Group, 2021). This situation and the lack of readiness from the EU side to deal with such complex political issues created the perfect circumstances for the old ruling elites to disrupt the democratic transformation trajectory, return to public life and establish authoritarian regimes. All these challenges did not allow the EU to use the incentives and procedures created for the CEE countries, which effectively reached the goal of democratisation (Denti, 2014).

All these obstacles to designing an approach that would fit the Western Balkans situation and the lack of ability to sharpen the enlargement toolbox to get effective results in democratisation and EU membership of the region have been followed by a series of crises which impacted the EU's willingness to expand. Furthermore, it decreased its ability to exercise its normative power. This is further elaborated in more detail in the next section.

2.3.2. EU Conditionality Vis-à-vis External Illiberal Actors

Quite often, the EU has faced severe limitations in relation to implementing political conditionality when faced with these challenges. It has shown a willingness to undermine its non-negotiable criteria in the interest of security and stability, to keep the region in the EU

integration process, create a pro-European critical mass, and remain a relevant external actor in the region and challenge Russian, Turkish, and lately Chinese influence (Reljic, 2014; Bieber and Tzifakis 2019). This has affected its effectiveness and the consistency of its assessment and undermined its role as a transformative power in the region. It has led to asymmetric approaches and competitive feelings among different countries in the region – creating the perception that the more a country has the potential to generate instability, the further it advances in the EU integration path (Nechev, 2020). The EU's 'stability over reforms' approach is evident in the occasional relaxation of political conditionality in the interests of security in the Western Balkan region and Europe in general. For instance, security was the main catalyst for advancing European integration for some candidate countries. Geopolitical reasons – mainly a response to Russia's influence and propelled by the circumstances created in the aftermath of the Kosovo war – pushed the EU to initiate the Helsinki invitation in 1999 to start accession talks with Bulgaria and Romania. Unfortunately, both countries were not ready, and their path toward EU membership was halted due to a deep internal political and economic crisis (Noutcheva & Bechev, 2008).

The increase of regional stabilitocracy – a concept deconstructed in the previous chapter – has led to the establishment of weak democracies or democracies on paper, enabling the 'strong man' of the Western Balkans to tighten their authoritarian grip. Thus, the EU's approach has (un)intentionally supported political systems, which are governed through informal networks and clientelism, that are pro-EU on paper and claim to be agents of stability (Richter, 2012).

The stability approach or stabilitocracy wasn't triggered solely by the events in the Western Balkans. For instance, a chain of events related to the enlargement of the EU has had a detrimental impact on the future enlargement process and further divided the EU on the issues of 'deepening' and 'widening'. External crises and challenges within the Union have reshaped the EU in the Western Balkans, generated enlargement fatigue, and re-structured EU integration methodology to keep the region tied to the process through the status quo, which keeps the enlargement on hold (Patel, 2019).

2.4. Rethinking Enlargement: From Transformational Power to Agent of Resilience

The narrative of enlargement as an effective foreign policy tool with significant importance for the democratic transformation of the aspiring countries started by the end of the 1990s. This approach was heralded as successful long before the fifth round of expansion took place,

bringing in post-communist countries through a rigorous transformation process (Toshkov, 2017). However, each enlargement triggered two streams of debate. Firstly, the need for the EU to adapt to significant expansion of the EU borders and the necessity to adjust and reform internally – the deepening component (Kelemen, et al., 2014). Secondly, the challenges of bringing so-called ‘new democracies’ greatly impacted how the enlargement narrative developed (Ahrens et al., 2005; Patel, 2019). The latter has changed the rules of the game for future enlargements. Enlargement scepticism continued growing, even among members and stakeholders who have traditionally advocated for enlargement (Kelemen, et al., 2018). As a result, the discourse on enlargement became more lukewarm, pointing out the challenges brought by enlargement instead of heralding it as a significant triumph of the EU. The ‘big bang’ redefined the enlargement process – which was detrimental for the enlargement process toward Western Balkans – and challenged the internal functioning of the EU (Bürkner, 2020).

Moreover, a series of events of a broader scale has showcased the lack of preparedness and the limited capacities of the EU to react – this was reflected during the economic crisis 2008. The following section elaborates on some key events which have had a detrimental impact on the EU’s normative power, hence the decreased appetite for enlargement. This is important as it creates the circumstances in which the EU embraces and promotes the stability approach in the absence of the “golden carrot” of enlargement. Under this arrangement, the Western Balkans would not be good enough to join the EU, but it would rather be a status quo which would contain some level of stability in the region. Thus, the situation will unlikely relapse into violent conflicts like the 1990s.

2.4.1. The Bulgaria and Romania Effect on Enlargement

The EU has expanded in six¹² rounds. The fifth round included the much-discussed enlargement of Bulgaria and Romania – the so-called ‘coda’ enlargement in 2007. Many concerns have been raised about both countries’ accession; the integration of Bulgaria and Romania at a premature stage of democratisation is considered a politically and geopolitically driven process in response to Russia’s influence in both countries (Surubaru & Nitoiu, 2020). The debate revolved around the effectiveness of the EU’s political conditionality; a mechanism widely considered successful in democratisation. Regarding political conditionality concerns, before

¹² 1st round 1973: Denmark, the Republic of Ireland and the UK; 2nd round 1981: Greece; 3rd round 1986: Portugal and Spain; 4th round 1995: Austria, Finland and Sweden; 5th round, 1st part, 2004: Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia; 5th round, 2nd part, 2004: Bulgaria and Romania, and 6th round 2013: Croatia.

and in the run-up to accession, both Bulgaria and Romania were subject to strict criteria – at least on paper. As a result, a series of changes have been adopted to consolidate a sustainable democratic system. These changes included reforms in human rights, the rule of law, and elements required to ensure a free market economy.

The stability over conditionality approach was evident in the case of Romania and Bulgaria. Due to the geopolitical rivalry with Russia, the EU has applied the stability approach. The trajectory of EU membership for Bulgaria and Romania reflects the contested nature of the EU political conditionality and the EU's inability to implement the criteria and reforms needed for EU membership (Dimitrova, 2010). The accession of Bulgaria and Romania has led to questioning the effectiveness of Europeanization through conditionality and the EU's ability to democratise candidate countries (Noutcheva and Bechev, 2008). After Bulgaria and Romania's case, the EU added further detail to the rule of law requirements by establishing Chapters 23 and 24 dealing with the rule of law, justice, and home affairs (Papadimitriou and Gateva, 2008). This mainly occurred after concerns were raised over the lack of rule of law, high levels of corruption, and organised crime in these two countries (Dimitrov & Plachkova, 2020). The EU's experience with Bulgaria and Romania impacted how the EU countries after that perceived enlargement towards the Western Balkans, with some fearing that it would further undermine the integrity of the EU (Bugajski, 2010).

2.4.2. The Crisis of Democracy within the EU: The Relapse of the CEE

Indeed, the premature enlargement toward Bulgaria and Romania raised doubts about the application of EU conditionality, however the CEE's democratic relapse raised new questions about the viability of democracy in the event of enlargement and the achievement of transformation. As the EU was facing a multi-frontal crisis, the enlargement incorporating the CEE countries in 2004 – previously heralded as a success – was showing its first signs of what in literature is known as democratic backsliding or illiberal democracies (Biermann, 2002). As argued in the previous chapter, the EU is witnessing a significant decline in democracy and a deterioration in the rule of law in several EU member countries known as the 'new democracies' (Kratochvíl and Sychra, 2015). The EU values and its founding principles are at risk, as the EU is no longer a union uniting like-minded democratic countries. Following the concerning levels of democratic backsliding in Poland, the EU invoked Article 7 of the Treaty on the European Union in 2017. Likewise, Hungary was listed as a hybrid regime and no longer a democracy in the Freedom House 2020 report (Mos, 2020).

There are two reasons behind the inability of the EU to prevent or react more vocally toward democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland (Fleming, et al., 2020). First, the failure to trigger Article 7 as the major decision-making in this regard stems from the fact that the EU Council member states needed more time to react to this worrying trend. Second, while member states recognise the risks posed by democratic backsliding, especially the rule of law, their fear of external threats has led them to tolerate this behaviour (Nanopoulos & Vergis, 2019). Fearing more internal divisions and a potential east and west divide within the EU, the EU has thus inadvertently created an environment conducive to the ‘new authoritarianism’ to thrive. This trend has been cited by sceptics claiming that the EU’s enlargement toward Eastern Europe has been a strategic mistake (Balfour & Stratulat, 2015). The inability to prevent further democratic backsliding has had a detrimental impact on the image of the EU as a transformative power (Sata & Karolewsk, 2020).

2.4.3. The Impact of the Euro Crisis on Enlargement

The economic crisis which hit the Eurozone in 2008 called into question the very survival of the EU. In its efforts to save the single currency, the EU risked jeopardising what was widely seen as the most successful collective governance system (Moravcsik, 2012). The economic crisis took place after the transformation brought through the successful Eastern transformation with the ‘big bang’ in 2004 and ‘coda’ in 2007, increasing the number of EU countries to 27. However, the newcomers were not an issue of concern when it came to the unprecedented economic crisis which devastated the economies of Greece, Portugal, the Republic of Ireland, Spain, and Italy (Zahn, 2013). The German intervention to recover Greece through the infamous ‘bailout’ has increased the hostility amongst the more developed EU countries toward admitting unstable democracies and weak economies into the EU. While minimal mechanisms exist to sanction the member states, the aspiring countries – in this case, Western Balkan countries – have been affected by the growing aversion toward countries deemed a potential political and economic burden for the EU (Bieber & Kmezic, 2016).

The economic crisis paralysed the process of enlargement. Firstly, the EU was previously widely seen as an attractive financial giant. Thus, the impact of the crisis stripped away one of the core incentives deemed worth the ‘sacrifice’ of transformation. With the end goal losing much of its lustre, the willingness of the candidate countries to deliver on the requisite reforms decreased. For instance, the accession of Croatia in 2013 was met with muted celebrations by the citizens as the EU was undergoing many challenges internally, mainly driven by the financial crisis (Interview 7, 2022). Secondly, enlargement fatigue went from a merely sporadic

discursive presence to a determinative part of enlargement politics at the EU level. However, the negative discourse toward enlargement was invoked more within the member states and less at the EU level and included a desire to halt or slow down the enlargement process (Panagiotou, 2012).

2.4.4. The Effects of Brexit

Many believed it was very unlikely that the Brexit referendum would result in the UK leaving the EU (Oliver, 2016). While the public debate within the UK was focused on the political implications for the UK after leaving the EU, Brexit also had an immense impact on the international functioning of the EU and weakened its global role (Bulmer & Quaglia, 2018). The foreign policy and security of the EU have been impacted the most, given that the UK and France have played a leading role in both fields (Whitman, 2016). Additionally, if the UK performs well outside the EU, it might trigger the same movements in other EU member states. Lastly, given the leading role previously played by the UK in pushing the EU's enlargement in the Western Balkans, Brexit has meant the region has lost a vocal advocate (Bieber, 2019; Belloni and Brunazzo, 2017).

2.4.5. The Future of the EU Vis-à-vis Enlargement

For decades, the EU has tried to widen and deepen in parallel. Quite often, these two groups – the deepening favouring focus on internal reforms of the EU and the widening of the EU favouring the enlargement of the EU - have navigated around each other, creating the perception of rivalry (Bonvicini and Comelli, 2013; Klaus Patel, 2019). There are debates among scholars who reject the idea of the trade-off between widening and deepening. Instead, they see both going hand in hand. Thus, these two processes are somewhat interlinked and complement one another (Ulgen 2012). Each widening wave – a more horizontal process of the EU enlarging toward new countries/regions – called for adaption to create the absorbing capacities within the EU to be fully functional under newly created circumstances (Kelemen, Slapin, and Menon 2014). However, this section will not delve into theories and academic debates on deepening and widening but will look at how this impacted the enlargement appetite among the EU countries.

One of the biggest disappointments in deepening the EU was the French and Dutch referendum rejecting the 'European Constitution' in 2004 (Broughton 2004). This event was sobering not only because it provided a more negative vision for the future of the EU but also because it sent worrying signals about enlargement, albeit it was not an issue in the referendums. Almost

two decades later, during which mainly cosmetic changes took place, the Conference on the Future of Europe (CofE) was launched very ambitiously, aiming to bring a new vision for the EU and Europe (Wolff et al. 2022; Fabbrini 2020). This process brought no significant changes, apart from a French-led initiative, the European Political Community (EPC), which still in 2023 remains a half-baked idea building on the French idea to divide the EU in the core and periphery (Scazzieri, 2023). This is very important for the Western Balkans for two reasons: *first*, the French insist on depending before widening – thus keeping the region in the waiting room for an unforeseeable amount of time; *secondly*, the EPC constitutes an idea which can park the Western Balkans region in the periphery, thus placing the region in the latter which can potentially put enlargement in the backseat (Wolff et al. 2022; Mucznik, 2022; Ganzle, 2022; Marciaq, 2022).

2.5. From Expansion to Resilience: The Impact of Diminishing Normative Post on Western Balkans

The EU faced a multi-frontal crisis, so it prepared to respond to the new circumstances. In 2016, the EU published the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), which aimed to set the tone on numerous issues of interest for the EU, focusing on foreign policy and security. The starting premise of the document is crisis, uncertainty, and complexity (Barbé and Morillas, 2019; Zandee, 2016). In contrast to the ESS adopted in 2003 by Solana, in which the document began with the phrase ‘Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free’, in 2016, the EUGS started with the following: ‘We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat. Our European project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity, and democracy, is being questioned (EUGS, 2016).

The increasing threats and uncertainty turned an EU with expansive ambitions into an actor seeking to maintain its existence; thus, resilience became the buzzword. The EU called for multilateral efforts to increase its ability to respond to multi-dimensional crises. The Western Balkan region was afforded a special place in the EUGS, proving that the EU views the region from a security and stability point of view (Frontini, 2016). The EU called for resilience in the Western Balkans and sought to establish cooperation in the security field to improve its capacity to respond to internal and external threats. In the EUGS, resilience represents the ability to prevent, respond and recover from crises and potential shocks (Bendiek, 2016). Resilience means adapting, transforming, and reforming (Techau, 2016). Thus, though once a transformative power reshaping regions through membership conditionality, the EU has

become willing to adapt to survive both the internal challenges – namely the rise of authoritarianism and populism within the EU (Smith, 2017) – as well as external threats, especially the increased influence and presence of Russia and China in some EU countries as well as in the Western Balkan region. More than a decade after Thessaloniki, this altered, more cautious approach would reshape the EU’s enlargement agenda toward the Western Balkans (Ferreira, 2020).

The enlargement fatigue towards the Western Balkans was explicitly confirmed in 2014 by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, who stated that there would be no enlargement until 2019 during his mandate while he downgraded the enlargement portfolio in the new Commission (Zweers, 2019). Although he stated the obvious – it was clear that no country in the Western Balkans would be ready to join the EU by 2019 – the region’s reaction has been somewhat concerning (Mtchedlishvili, 2018). Fearing a backlash from the Western Balkan countries – caused by the fact that they would lack the willingness to deliver on the requisite reforms once made aware that enlargement was not on the horizon – the EU launched multiple high-level mechanisms to keep the enlargement agenda alive (James Ker-Lindsay, et al., 2017).

Trying to maintain a presence in the Western Balkan, in 2016, returned to its root policy – regional cooperation. The Berlin Process was launched at the German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s initiative and focused on enhancing regional cooperation between countries and gradually included member states sharing keen interests in the region (Marciacq, 2017; Emini, 2017). When the Berlin Process concluded its second phase, it resulted in regional-level initiatives, which mildly contributed to enhancing regional cooperation. However, the Berlin Process was not intended to serve as a substitute for the already existing EU enlargement agenda in the Western Balkans. It did not provide an impetus to the enlargement process in the region (Griessler, 2020). Instead, its primary focus is promoting regional cooperation and establishing a common regional market (Djolai 2022).

As Juncker was concluding his mandate as the President of the European Commission in 2018, the EU launched: ‘The Enlargement Strategy toward Western Balkans’ in February 2018, which was heralded as the ‘new Thessaloniki’ (Stanicek, 2020). The Strategy bound the enlargement process in the Western Balkans to a specific timeframe. According to the Strategy, the two frontrunners – Montenegro and Serbia – would be part of the EU by 2025, followed by North Macedonia and Albania, which were foreseen to have significantly advanced in the EU integration process. In contrast, the future looked grim for the so-called laggards in Kosovo

and Bosnia and Herzegovina (EC, 2018). As the outlier, Kosovo was seen only in the Kosovo – Serbia Dialogue framework and the SAA.

In contrast, its advancement in the EU integration process would only occur when the circumstances allow. The latter depended on the decision of the five non-recognizers (Spain, Romania, Slovakia, Cyprus, and Greece), potentially unlocking Kosovo's right to formally apply for EU membership formally (Noutcheva, 2020). The Strategy, albeit aiming to end the enlargement fatigue, is a document published by the EU Commission but did not get the endorsement of the EU Council – the main decision-making body in which member countries make significant decisions on the future of the EU, specifically on enlargement (Fouéré, 2019). Another critical element in the document was the timetable; while having a set year of accession made enlargement seem natural for the Western Balkans, this created expectations that the EU might not be able to fulfil. Moreover, assuring that Serbia and Montenegro would be part of the EU by 2025 has potentially meant that the level of political will to deliver on the requisite reforms will decrease as the enlargement process could be taken for granted by the frontrunners (Grievesson, et al., 2018).

Facing a severe stagnation in the enlargement process – the rise of authoritarianism in the region, the increased presence of other external actors such as Russia and China. Furthermore, with the increased tensions among Western Balkan countries (Kosovo - Serbia) and between regional countries and the EU (North Macedonia with Greece and Bulgaria), France initiated re-shaping the enlargement methodology. The French have proposed re-structuring the enlargement process – structured into 35 chapters – into seven phases (Prelec and Delevic, 2019). The first phase would be focused on one of the most pressing issues, the rule of law. Each phase would require the involvement and approval of the EU member states. The methodology change halfway through the enlargement process has been widely criticised for intentionally creating possibilities for EU member states to block an aspiring country (Tilev, 2015). This fear is, of course, triggered by the three-decade-long blockage of North Macedonia by Greece over the name dispute and recently Bulgaria's veto towards North Macedonia due to a dispute over the Macedonian language. The change in methodology has been considered ineffective as the EU constantly undermines the political criteria as it prioritises stability (Interview 9, 2022).

Furthermore, it does not address EU member states' lack of political will for enlargement. While facing stagnation and evident difficulty in applying the new enlargement methodology, the idea of staged accession loomed on the horizon, gradually providing another approach to

enlargement by sector. Thus, the EU approach toward the Western Balkans is being sharpened to provide a way out for the stagnate enlargement toward the region (Bieber et al. 2019).

Lastly, the war in Ukraine, which resulted in the securitisation of the Western Balkans, as well as the decision of the UE to grant the candidate status to Moldova and Ukraine, has created a new window of opportunity for the Western Balkans. While it has emphasised the longing for stability, the EU has provided some tangible carrots in the Western Balkans. The candidate status for Bosnia and Herzegovina (Preussen, 2022), the accession negotiation for North Macedonia and Albania (Casert, 2022), and the visa liberalisation for Kosovo (European Council, 2023) – albeit not an EU integration process has sent positive signals for enlargement. However, this merely indicated a more substantial EU normative power for reforms. However, it has instead increased expectations in the region that moving the enlargement ladder using the stability card is still possible.

2.6. Conclusion

The findings in this chapter indicate that the role of the EU as a transformative power has been seriously challenged in the past decade. Moreover, the transformative and normative power of the EU has been gradually fading as the EU has faced multi-frontal crises.

Enlargement is one of the European Union's most successful foreign policy initiatives. It encompasses evolving accession conditions and principles through which the EU actively prepares the candidates with the view to transform them into member states. However, the inability to manage the significant expansion through internal reforms and structuring, paired with externally driven challenges, contributed to the overall failure of the EU to reproduce the 'success of the CEE countries in the Western Balkans' (Richter & Wusch, 2020). Moreover, the EU's overriding preference for stability in the region has meant that it has not been able to properly implement the political criteria through which it would transform the countries in the region as they prepare for full EU membership.

The failure of the EU to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law inside the Union and in its neighbourhood regions – some of which were part of the EU integration process for decades – has already been widely acknowledged (Levitz & Pop-Eleches, 2009). Decades after launching the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (Dandashly & Noutcheva, 2019), the EU is surrounded by authoritarian regimes, captured states – a problem bluntly stated in EU reports – and unstable regions (Dandashly & Noutcheva, 2019). Internally, the EU is facing a crisis regarding its values due to democratic backsliding, with some EU members – Hungary

and Poland - listed as hybrid regimes by Freedom House (Csaky, 2020). This has pushed the EU to use Article 7 – the suspension of a member’s right to vote on EU decisions – the so-called ‘nuclear option’ as it represents the most critical sanction that the EU can use against member states (EU, 2012) This procedure has been initiated against Hungary, which has been accused of breaching the EU’s core values (Halmai, 2018).

In addition to the challenges within the Western Balkan region, the economic crisis in 2008 severely hit the EU, which significantly impacted its approach towards enlargement, while the democratic backsliding within the EU and Brexit has severely weakened the EU internally. These elements have turned the EU from a transformative power into a resilient actor seeking to adapt to survive its various internal and external threats pragmatically. The new circumstances and the decreasing power of the EU as a global actor have significantly impacted the enlargement process. Due to its inability to justify the enlargement fatigue and capacity to deliver on the promises of a European future for the Western Balkans made in 2003, the EU has created side mechanisms such as the Berlin Process and has changed the enlargement methodology. Yet, without a genuine approach toward the political criteria and the reforms required for membership, all these initiatives will have a lukewarm effect. As shown in the last section of the chapter, the EU’s approach risks contributing to the further consolidation of the authoritarian regimes in the Western Balkans and, thus, diminishing the prospects for enlargement. This chapter reflects an essential element that showcases the differences between the 2003 approach, in which the EU would not be complete without the Western Balkan being a part of it, to a phase during which the EU has been exploring many alternative ways to enhance cooperation with the region without it being part of it. As for the region, the presence of other actors, such as Russia, China, and Turkey, has challenged the EU’s position as the only alternative for the region. The next chapter will summarise the EU’s role as a mediator, which, in the case of the Western Balkans, is deeply connected with the conditionality and the ability of the EU to exercise normative power.

Chapter III: The EU as Mediator: Negotiating Normalization through the EU-Facilitated Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia

3.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the EU's role in conflict management through negotiations, specifically in the context of the Western Balkans and the Brussels Dialogue. The chapter examines how the EU's conditionality has developed in the case of the Brussels Dialogue by combining the Copenhagen criteria, which were formally introduced to the region during the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, with the EU's foreign policy goals that have evolved through the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. The EU enlargement policy towards the post-conflict Western Balkans apart from the reform agenda articulated through the Copenhagen Criteria and conflict management (Smith, 2005; Mirel, 2018), embarked the EU on a new challenging mission by requiring its parallel involvement on two complex tracks. This chapter illustrates how the EU's ambition to address the Kosovo-Serbia dispute within the framework of the EU integration process has posed significant challenges to the EU's role as a negotiator. It has also profoundly impacted what is widely recognised as the EU's most effective mechanism of soft diplomacy, namely conditionality through which it exercises its transformative and normative power (Dimitrov et al., 2019; Belloni, 2009). The Kosovo-Serbia issue, widely known as a highly contentious bilateral dispute, has presented the EU with a unique opportunity to test its capabilities in conflict mediation. This situation also offers a favourable context for the EU to effectively link its membership criteria set in Copenhagen with its foreign policy ambitions to strengthen its global actorness further. Ultimately, a successful resolution of the Kosovo – Serbia dispute would bring much-desired stability, thus enabling the EU to achieve its goal in the region (Bono, 2010; Matias, 2018; Russell, 2019).

The previous chapter has presented in detail an examination of the EU's normative power and enlargement as a foreign policy instrument. It furthermore explored the consequences and the declining trajectory of the EU's normative power and how it has a detrimental impact on the countries seeking transformation through the EU integration process. In this chapter, I shift my focus to another role undertaken by the EU, namely conflict management through mediation, namely presenting its ambitions to solve the Kosovo-Serbia dispute. Additionally, I look at how

the EU's ambitions in international mediation have become an integral part of the enlargement toolkit and are being applied to countries in the accession or pre-accession phase. The analysis further examines how, despite facing early signs of declining normative power and a series of internal crises, the EU undertook an exceptionally ambitious mediation role. This is particularly important because the part of the EU in conflict management and mediation heavily relies on the EU's normative power and the prospects of enlargement as the ultimate goal.

When the EU assumed the role of mediator in the Kosovo-Serbia dispute, it was not an unfamiliar issue for the EU as an entity and its member states. Several EU member states had already been involved in diplomatic endeavours to resolve the crisis. These diplomatic efforts carried out during the Vienna Negotiations to determine the final status of Kosovo involved individual EU member states that had already become familiarised with the complexities of the dispute (Bolton and Visoka, 2010). However, the Brussels Dialogue is an entirely EU-led process with the EU External Service (EEAS) in the driving seat, albeit supported by the EU apparatus and the member states. This was also the first test of the EU's common foreign policy and security and the EU's ambitions in conflict mediation. This new role in international mediation presented a significant test for the common foreign and security policy. This area has long been a subject of intense debate among EU member states. These states have historically been cautious about transferring such responsibilities to the EU (Lehne, 2022).

Against this background, this chapter provides an overview of the EU's efforts to solve one of the most persisting open disputes from the Yugoslav wars. The journey to solve this dispute is deeply rooted in the political ambitions of the EU in the 1990s following the violent break-up of the former Yugoslavia. It continues to persist after almost three decades. The first part of the chapter charts the efforts of the EU to prevent the Yugoslav wars. As the EU gradually recognised the importance of peace and stability in its immediate neighbourhood during the 1990s, significant political efforts were made to become a key player in the successful management and prevention of conflict in the region (Bergmann, et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the failed EU efforts to prevent the Bosnian and Croatian wars through diplomatic means, and the EU faced severe criticism regarding its diplomatic failure (Blank, 1996; Andreatta, 1997). After the Yugoslav wars, the region became a testing site for the EU to improve its role and capacities in conflict prevention (Juncos and Blockmans, 2018; Bergmann, 2019). The second section of this chapter presents the EU's most extensive political efforts to integrate the Western Balkan region into the EU – through the Europeanization process – and gradually reach the overarching goal of stabilisation. This is manifested through the Brussels Dialogue, which is a

central part of the chapter and digs deep into what is, to date, the most significant EU effort in the region, namely the facilitation of the Kosovo – Serbia Dialogue. I scrutinise the EU approach in the Brussels Dialogue both in the technical and political phases, as well as the link between the reforms manifested through the Copenhagen Criteria –and the stability approach manifested the good neighbourly relations and stability element which has been placed at the centre of the focus on the Western Balkans.

3.2. The EU’s Role as a Mediator in Peace Negotiations

The EU’s attempts to take a leading role in international mediation in the Western Balkans are closely linked to the breakup of Yugoslavia, which alerted the EU about the importance of stability in its neighbourhood (Becker, 2017). These conflicts in its close vicinity pushed the EU towards becoming involved in conflict management (Lavdas, 1996), though it was diplomatically unprepared to undertake serious efforts to prevent the wars (Anderson, 1995). The 1990s marked the *first phase* of the EU mediation activities; between 1991 and 1994, the European Community (EC) - which later became the EU we know today - made the first attempts to play an active role in the mediating negotiations to prevent the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia (Jopp, 1994). The first endeavours in mediation were concluded with the Brioni Agreement between Croatia, Slovenia, and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, signed on 7 July 1991 with political sponsorship of the EC/EU (Bradford, 2000; Wagner, 2003). The Agreement was brokered under the facilitation of the EC/EU Troika mission composed of foreign ministers from Italy, The Netherlands, and Luxembourg (Caruso, 2007).

Furthermore, this initiative was supported by Austria under the auspices of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), pushing this mechanism to increase its involvement in Yugoslavia’s affairs (Cohen, 1999). However, the Brioni Agreement proved to be a quick fix but rather unsustainable solution as it only comprised the cease-fire arrangement, which led to the withdrawal of the Yugoslav People’s Army from Slovenia – known as the ten-day war but not prevent the wars to follow in Yugoslavia (Lucarelli, 2000). The EC/EU approach toward a Yugoslavia on the verge of dissolution was to apply the recognised international principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-determination to its internal and external borders (Väyrynen, 1997). According to the Brioni Agreement, negotiations would solve the situation in Yugoslavia.

A new situation has arisen in Yugoslavia that requires close monitoring and negotiation between different parties: - negotiations should begin urgently, no later than August 1st, 1991, on all aspects of the future of Yugoslavia

without preconditions and based on the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter for a new Europe (in particular respect for Human Rights, including the rights of peoples self-determination in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and with the relevant norms of International Law, including these relating to the territorial integrity of States) (Brioni Declaration, 1991).

However, implementing the Brioni Agreement was seriously challenged shortly after the EC/EU was preparing to negotiate the break-up of Yugoslavia (Touval, 2002). The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina started to deteriorate rapidly. The EC/EU and the United Nations (UN) attempted to address the conflict by initiating the 'International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia' (Szasz, 1995). The conference included all conflict parties and was held in London on 26 August 1992. The negotiation process lasted for almost two years until 1994. The EC/EU and the UN attempted to finalise the negotiations with a comprehensive peace agreement (King, 1993). One of the most prominent proposals was the so-called Vance-Owen Plan proposed by the mediators David Owen (EC/EU) and Cyrus Vance (UN) (Kelly & Baker, 2013). The plan set out the principles for the forthcoming negotiations in Geneva, and the first principle stated the following: Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be a decentralised State. The Constitution shall recognise three constituent peoples and a group of others, with most governmental functions carried out by its provinces (Ramcharan, 2000). The plan, albeit signed by all parties in 1994, was rejected by the Bosnian Serbs through the referendum held in the Serb-held territories in Bosnia (Andreatta, 1997). The EU briefly took over the administration of Mostar in July 1994, EU Administration of Mostar (EUAM) due to the Washington agreement, which resolved the conflict between Croats and Bosniaks. This was an unprecedented situation for the EU, marking its first involvement in such a capacity under the CFSP (EUAM, 1996). Furthermore, the negotiation breakdown in 1994 also marked the end of EC/EU efforts to mediate the Yugoslav wars. This also led to the complete withdrawal of the EC/EU from attempts to take the lead in international conflict management (Lucarelli, 2000). Thus, in the Dayton Agreement, the EU played a marginal role.

The withdrawal of the EC/EU did not occur only as a result of the lack of success and relatively poor performance in managing and preventing the Yugoslav wars but also because the EC/EU was in the process of consolidating internally and further institutionalising the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Lehne, 2004). The Amsterdam Treaty (European Communities, 1997) set the ground to establish the institutional framework by creating the common strategy, the institutional structure, the position of the Secretary General of the Council responsible for the CFSP, and the Unit for Policy Planning and Early Warning as the

situation was deteriorating in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, followed by the case of Kosovo in 1999. The EU fell under the political shadow of the U.S., albeit as part of NATO, the EU has immensely supported the military campaign followed by the peace-building process (Daalder & O'Hanlon, 2000).

The EU has established its institutional framework in conflict management and gained significant importance in international mediation only in the past decade. The Lisbon Treaty has set the foundation for a stronger EU in the world by setting up the institutional framework for a common EU foreign policy and security but also a unified approach to international affairs. The initiative to develop the EU common foreign policy and security integration took shape in the post-Lisbon period in the 1990s. However, the institutional setting and infrastructure to implement it saw a drastic change only in 2009 (Edwards, 2006). The Kosovo and Yugoslav crises drove this historic shift from the 1990s to 2009 structure (Interview 2, 2021). The new institutional structure, firstly aimed at creating cooperation and synergy between the EU's key pillars, gives the EU a voice globally. The EU External Action Service (EEAS) was established in 2009. The EEAS works closely with the EU Commission-based structures - the Directorate Generals (DG) such as the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), Working Party of Foreign Relations Counsellors (RELEX), and the DG International Partnerships (INTPA) – former DG International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) (Hadfield, Manners, and Whitman, 2017). Furthermore, it is designed to tap into various EU sources but also of the member states, including diplomacy, defence, development aid, and intelligence (Batora and Spence, 2015; Crowe, 2008). Given this broad mandate, the EEAS coordinates the EU's common foreign approach to crisis management (European Union External Action, 2016; Batora and Spence, 2015; Weston and Mérand, 2015).

Immense efforts have been made to implement the new institutional framework that the Treaty of Lisbon created since it was enacted in December 2009. For the purpose of this thesis, the role of the High Representative/ Vice President (HR/VP) is vital as it has led the Brussels Dialogue since 2011. The new setup has triggered debates among member states fearing a loss of control over foreign policy and security in favour of the EU institutions. The new decisive role assigned to the High Representative and European External Action Service (EEAS) (Kostanyan, 2014) in the framework of the Lisbon Treaty has further emphasised this position (Council of the European Union 2009; Gündüz and Herbolzheimer, 2010). Additionally, the EU assumed a role in international mediation. This ambition has been materialised with the

Council of European Union adopting the ‘Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities’ (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006; Council of the European Union, 2009). This concept document was further sharpened in 2020 with the Concept of the EU Peace Mediation (Council of the European Union, 2020). This document has set the basic principles but also lays down the EU leverage and elements of structural diplomacy which can be applied to strengthen the role of the EU in mediation. It specifically foresees the EU involvement in leading mediation at the track 1 level, even in cases of armed conflicts. The EU only intervenes upon invitation and highlights the importance of the parties in retaining ownership of the outcome of the talks. The EU leverage in the concept document is unfolded through elements of structural diplomacy – not enlargement specifically as an ending goal – and the leading process is envisaged to take place through strategic partnerships (ibid). These concept documents aim at establishing a systematic approach for the EU in international mediation, thus strengthening the role of the EU in the world. Following this ambition, the EU has engaged in different forms in Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Georgia, Kosovo - Serbia, Mali, Syria, and Yemen. Among all these international endeavours, the Brussels Dialogue is a direct ‘at table’ process which employed not only mediation efforts but also it is applied on countries in the enlargement process (pre-accession and accession phase) (European Union External Action Service, 2021).

3.3. Putting the Foreign Policy and Security Structure into Test in the Western Balkans

A vast number of studies look at the role of the EU in conflict resolution. Strategically, the EU approach in conflict resolution is done mainly through contractual relations with conflicting parties. This usually takes place through the EU enlargement process and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (Coppieters *et al.*, 2004; Diez *et al.*, 2006; Blockmans *et al.*, 2010). The Brussels Dialogue offers a unique case study which explores not only the enlargement toolkit in the EU’s foreign policy but also the role of the EU in international negotiations combined (Niemman and Bretherton, 2013; Thomas, 2012). This thesis focuses on the EU's engagement in conflict management through mediation by using structural diplomacy but also integrating and interlinking the mediation process with enlargement in the case of the Brussels Dialogue. The case becomes even more relevant as it takes place in parallel with the EU’s ambitions to establish and sharpen its role in mediation. While the EU was preparing to embark on a new ambitious journey in conflict management and mediation in 2009, a new reality was already created in the Western Balkans. The Declaration of

Independence of Kosovo in 2008 not only created new political circumstances but also immediately heightened tensions, alerting stability in the region but also in the EU (Toshev & Cheikhameguyaz, 2005). The Declaration of Independence followed a failed international negotiation effort from 2005 – 2007. Albeit a process of negotiations led by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), EU member states were closely engaged in the process through the contact group (U.S., Russian Federation, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy) (Weller, 2008). The UNSC advised the Contact Group to support the Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo, the former president of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari (Sewer, et al., 2007). Serbia rejected the deal, and the UNSC was divided on the issue. In September 2007, high-level officials from the Contact Group, UN, EU, and NATO met in New York to discuss the Kosovo Status Process. This meeting followed earlier attempts, including submitting a proposal accepted by Kosovo but rejected by Serbia. To further negotiation efforts, a Troika was established to facilitate discussions between the parties, with a report due by December 2007. Troika was composed of the U.S., Russia, and the EU. Troika held extensive negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia for 120 days as mandated but did not manage to bridge the gap between parties (U.S. Department of State, 2007). Consequently, the so-called Ahtisaari Plan 2008 (Ahtisaari, 2008) led to Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. However, the conflict with Serbia over Kosovo's final status persisted. Further negotiations were looming on the horizon, again under the auspices of the UNSC. On 9 September, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted without a vote a resolution welcoming 'the readiness of the EU to facilitate a process of dialogue between the parties (UNSC, 2010).

Increasingly side-lined or lacking the capacity to deal with conflict management in the course of the Yugoslavia wars, the EU was provided with a chance to re-appear on the diplomatic scene with the new role of the facilitator of the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia (Rod & Wolff, 2012). The EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, thus became a litmus test for the newly founded EEAS – playing the role of the EU Foreign Ministry mainly in charge of coordinating the EU presence in the world. This became even more complex and challenging due intra-EU differences toward Kosovo because of the five non-recognizing EU member states (Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Slovakia, and Romania) (Esch, 2011). Without a unified foreign policy toward the final status of Kosovo, the EU had to explore creative ways to engage and formalise relations with Kosovo (Mutluer & Tsarouhas, 2018). Diplomatic challenges in this situation placed additional pressure on the EEAS and the HR/VP. The success of their efforts would directly impact the credibility of the institution, the EU as a whole, the political

influence it holds, and the diplomatic effectiveness of its member states (Interview 2, 2021). Hence, the EU faced significant political risks as it embarked on the daunting task of mediating the intricate process in the Western Balkans (Esch, 2011). These risks stemmed from the lack of a unified approach among its member states, which are instrumental in shaping the political influence of the EEAS. Moreover, the EU was concurrently undergoing institutional consolidation of the EEAS while shouldering the weight of previous mediation attempts in the region, which had yielded somewhat mixed outcomes (Molina & Sorroza, 2013). The intra EU divergences in relation to Kosovo are further elaborated in detail in Chapter V.

The Brussels Dialogue as a process is a unique case in which the EU is the sole mediator in the negotiations process – at least formally – although the U.S. approach has been proactive in providing political power and support. In contrast to other cases in the region, such as the Greece – North Macedonia name dispute (Nimetz, 2020). For instance, the EU in the Kosovo – Serbia case formally operates with no other third party formally directly involved in the negotiations. Another element of crucial importance that further contributes to the uniqueness of the process is the fact that the EU is facilitating the dialogue while both Kosovo and Serbia are aspiring for EU membership; thus, both countries are in the pre-accession or accession phase (Lehne, 2012). Following the end of the war in 1999, the EU became increasingly influential in Kosovo and Serbia by offering political and economic integration and, ultimately, membership. Whereas in Kosovo, the EU has an extensive presence also through the biggest Common Defence and Security Policy (CSDP) mission, namely EULEX - the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (Muharremi, 2010). All these elements have been considered strategic for the EU as the facilitator of the dialogue, further increasing its political leverage and structural diplomacy in the process while pushing the countries to deliver effectively.

3.3.1.Launching the EU-Facilitated Dialogue

The European Union is ready to facilitate a dialogue process between Pristina and Belgrade. This dialogue would be to promote cooperation, achieve progress on the path to Europe and improve the lives of the people. The process of dialogue in itself would be a factor for peace, security, and stability in the region (European Union 2010).

The basis for the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia came in 2010 following the International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion stating, '*Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate any applicable rule of international law.*' (ICJ, 2010) After the failed attempt to contest Kosovo's statehood in the ICJ, Serbia increased efforts to continue negotiations to keep Kosovo status open to another internationally led process. In accordance

with the EU member states, Serbia proposed a UN resolution which would call for another round of talks between Kosovo and Serbia, this time focusing on normalising relations between both countries after tensions following Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. The successful adoption of Resolution 64/298 paved the way for the EU-facilitated dialogue initially aimed at normalisation between the two parties (Bajrami, 2013). The dialogue aimed to be a factor for peace and stability in the Western Balkans, which the EU highly prioritised. The launch of the Brussels Dialogue in 2011 marks yet another attempt to solve the dispute and normalise relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Over a decade after UNSC Resolution 1244 ended Serbian rule in Kosovo and only three years after Kosovo's declaration of the independence. The Brussels Dialogue aimed not only at the normalisation but also a speedy EU integration path for Kosovo, Serbia, and the Western Balkan region. This perspective has been formally offered to the Western Balkan countries in 2003 during the Thessaloniki Summit as explained thoroughly in Chapter 2 (United Nations General Assembly, 2010).

Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008 completely reshaped the reality as elaborated in the previous Chapter (Lozancic, 2008; Biden, 2008). The declaration of independence caused a significant increase in tensions between Kosovo and Serbia (United Nations Security Council, 2008). Kosovo is still officially considered a breakaway province for Serbia and dozens of states – including five EU member states. Until the Kosovo – Serbia dispute is solved, both countries will not be able to join the EU, and for Kosovo, the UN and NATO as well (Esch, 2011). One of the significant challenges Kosovo faces in its international trajectory and in establishing its position in the Brussels Dialogue is the lack of recognition from the five non-recognizing EU member states (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain). This lack of recognition has a detrimental effect. The lack of unity toward Kosovo provided Serbia with the primary and most influential bargaining chip in the Brussels Dialogue, the asymmetrical approach by the EU towards Kosovo. Thus ultimately turning the Brussels Dialogue into a process which impacted Kosovo's capacities to function internally and establish bilateral and multilateral relations while gaining diplomatic recognition (Zupančič and Pejič, 2018).

The Brussels Dialogue was launched with the aim of normalising the situation in Kosovo after its independence. Its immediate goal was to restore a certain level of stability on the ground. The Brussels Dialogue had to respond to the tensions arising in the northern part of Kosovo, precisely due to the destruction of border crossing points 1 and 31 between Serbia and Kosovo, which occurred as a protest against Kosovo's declaration of independence and the subsequent

international recognition (ICG, 2011) Thus, it was launched into an intensifying and tense situation when Kosovo attempted to regain control of the northern region through a police operation in 2011. This operation marked Kosovo's initial effort to shatter the fragile status quo in the north (Prelec, 2008). As the tensions risked further escalation, NATO intervened through the KFOR mission in Kosovo, taking back control of the crossing points (NATO, 2011). Given the circumstances that emerged, the EU had to take prompt action to handle an ongoing conflict effectively (Interview 1, 2021). At this stage, the focus was not primarily on normalising relations between Kosovo and Serbia but on addressing a new situation created by local Serbs who strongly reject recognising the Kosovo authorities and statehood and Kosovo authorities intervening to take control of its borders. Consequently, the process also tackled Kosovo's statehood and internal functioning aspects.

3.3.2. Destination Normalisation: What is the End Goal of the Dialogue?

The rocky start of the dialogue and the ambiguous interpretation of 'normalisation' triggered much debate among academics and practitioners. Normalisation is a broad and ambiguous concept which can include myriad issues between the two parties (International Crisis Group, 2013). The Brussels Dialogue, launched to normalise relations between Kosovo and Serbia, was characterised by a lack of well-defined guiding principles and a specific timeframe. The initial strategy of this process was to resolve the most prominent bilateral dispute in the region by offering EU membership as an incentive. Differently from the Vienna Negotiations regarding the final status of Kosovo, the Brussels Dialogue claimed to address open issues, which incrementally would lead to completing what derived from the Vienna Negotiations (Bergmann, 2018).

For Kosovo, normalisation had a different definition from the EU (Emini and Stakic, 2018). The Brussels Dialogue emerged as a crucial negotiation process for Kosovo, with the potential to resolve the longstanding issue with Serbia and achieve mutual recognition as the ultimate objective. This dialogue commenced following significant milestones, including Kosovo's declaration of independence, diplomatic recognition from numerous countries, and a favourable opinion from the ICJ, strengthening Kosovo's international standing. Therefore, opposing voices coming from the opposition in Kosovo have consistently emphasised that the Vienna negotiations, the Ahtisaari Plan, and the ICJ have already extensively addressed the debate on Kosovo's final status (Shehu, 2017). Consequently, the EU-facilitated dialogue

should not be perceived as a process that offers a definitive solution for Kosovo's status but rather as a means to address significant issues that would unlock the EU perspective while effectively resolving bilateral concerns. This approach aligns with the principles of fostering good neighbourly relations, as observed in similar disputes in the region (Interview 10, 2022). Despite the initial reservations about engaging in another political negotiation process with Serbia, Kosovo found itself in a weak position in relation to the EU and the international community. Kosovo's weak standing was evident in its lack of recognition by five EU member states, which made it vulnerable and increased the EU's influence in the negotiation process (Visoka, 2017). Conversely, the EU held significant leverage over Kosovo due to its status under UNSC Resolution 1244, with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) actively involved in Kosovo's institutional framework. Furthermore, including the United Nations (UN) and EU, coupled with strong support from the U.S., created a political environment in which it was nearly impossible for Kosovo to reject entering this process (Interview 10, 2022).

When the Brussels Dialogue was launched, the primary objective of Kosovo in engaging in the normalisation dialogue was to secure full recognition of its independence from Serbia and achieve comprehensive international recognition of its statehood. In Kosovo, 'normalisation' and the end goal of the Brussels Dialogue have taken many forms throughout the years depending on the political elite in power, which, to a certain extent, showcases the divergent expectations toward this process internally (Chris van der Borgh, Puck le Roy, and Floor Zweerink, 2019). With the initiation of the Brussels Dialogue at the UN General Assembly (Cakolli, 2020), Kosovo anticipated the dialogue would pave the way for its membership in the UN. However, despite Serbia's opposition, Kosovo faces additional challenges due to the lack of recognition by key members of the UN Security Council, namely Russia and China, making UN membership elusive (Stradner, 2020; Centre for Inclusive Governance, 2017). NATO membership has also often been entertained as an idea of the Brussels Dialogue output. At the EU level, through the Brussels Dialogue, Kosovo was hoping for a potentially softened approach of the five EU non-recognizers. The softening/changing of the approach of the non-recognisers would unlock Kosovo's EU membership perspective and solve one of the biggest challenges in diplomatic recognition progression (Morina, 2022).

For *Serbia*, the normalisation of the EU-facilitated dialogue, apart from being part of the EU integration process, was yet another mechanism to keep the Kosovo issue open internationally – especially after the opinion of the ICJ stated that the declaration of Kosovo's independence

did not violate international law (International Crisis Group, 2010). The Brussels Dialogue is a process which enables Serbia to keep the Kosovo final status open, thus 'negotiable'. Serbia's trajectory was entirely in a different direction from that of Kosovo. In the Brussels Dialogue, Serbia continued to reject the Ahtisaari Plan and gradually built the narrative of regaining Kosovo rather than progressively accepting and recognising Kosovo (Medović, 2022). By entering the Brussels Dialogue as a process, Serbia sought to avoid the pressure to recognise Kosovo outright but rather engage in a process from which it would benefit politically. Thus, the normalisation of relations with Kosovo through the EU-facilitated dialogue was heralded by Serbia as politically beneficial for many reasons. First, it would open another process in which the final political status of Kosovo would be a subject of negotiations, a satisfying victory after the ICJ opinion, which was considered a defeat for Serbia; second, it provided a strong bargaining chip in relation to other illiberal external actors in the Western Balkans such as Russia which traditionally used the Kosovo-Serbia issue to confront the West in the region (Interview 8, 2022); third, the Brussels Dialogue would serve as a means by which to play the stability card and consolidate Serbia's position as a provider of stability in the region (Emini, 2022; Żakowska, 2016).

Furthermore, the position of Serbia was already more favourable than Kosovo; the position taken by the five non-recognising member states weakened the role of Kosovo and undermined its EU perspective (Ker-Lindsay & Armatolas, 2017). For Serbia, the normalisation of relations with Kosovo is a precondition for the country's membership in the EU – integrated into Chapter 35 (EU Commission, 2015) in the accession process. However, this Chapter does not explicitly require recognition of Kosovo, thus taking the pressure off Serbia in the process (European Western Balkans, 2015; Ioanita, 2015).

Being a security concern standing between a violent and frozen conflict, the potential destabilisation of Kosovo would cause serious security concerns in the Western Balkans and the EU. For the EU, the interest was stability and reducing tensions on the ground; thus, it saw the normalisation within the conflict resolution lens, thereby turning strength into the overarching goal of the process (Malazogu & Todoric, 2011). The launch of the dialogue has been widely regarded as a success by both the UN and the EU, as it effectively reopened communication channels and fostered cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia. The relations between the two parties had been severely strained and stagnant since Kosovo's declaration of independence, leading to a period of tensions fearing escalation. However, the launch of the dialogue managed to break the impasse and create an environment conducive to dialogue and

cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia (Shepherd, 2008). The EU-facilitated dialogue was set to focus on resolving issues between Kosovo and Serbia in the new post-independence reality, concentrating initially on resolving practical problems rather than sensitive symbolic matters.

The EU saw this process as an opportunity to establish itself as a global actor in conflict management. The newly formed EEAS sought a prominent role in successfully showcasing its effectiveness within the EU (towards member states) and demonstrating the EU's global influence (Interview 1, 2021). Resolving the longstanding dispute between Kosovo and Serbia presented a unique chance for the EU to fulfil these aspirations (Esch, 2011). Moreover, the EU had the opportunity to utilise its normative power and leverage to promote democratic reforms, effectively addressing both the Kosovo-Serbia dispute and preparing the countries, particularly Serbia at that point, for potential EU membership. This approach allowed the EU to simultaneously achieve two objectives: resolving the ongoing conflict and advancing the necessary reforms for EU integration, thereby accomplishing multiple goals through a single initiative. Thus, in 2011, when the EU initiated the Brussels Dialogue, it strategically adopted an incremental approach that deliberately offered a way to gradually solve the dispute without causing political fissures, leading to both parties deciding to leave the process. As such, it avoided negotiations around recognising Kosovo as an independent country. Instead, the dialogue focused on addressing urgent technical issues between Kosovo and Serbia, with the aim of gradually normalising relations between the parties. Thus, the Brussels Dialogue began as a technical dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia (Rrahmani & Belegu, 2023). The EU assumed responsibility for a complex process, relying primarily on its political leverage derived from the enlargement process. It placed trust in the limited existing political will of the parties to take ownership of the dialogue, even though their commitment was initially minimal and lacked long-term engagement (Gashi & Novakovic, 2017).

3.4. Brussels Dialogue: Incrementalism by Introducing Technicalities First

The launch of the technical phase of the Brussels Dialogue took place amidst heightened tensions in the northern part of Kosovo and strained relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Thus, bringing parties to the negotiating tables was already considered an immense diplomatic achievement in Brussels. Under these circumstances, getting a consensus among parties on a shared negotiation agenda was highly unlikely. The EU lacked diplomatic experience to lead

processes of this kind. Most of the negotiation processes¹³ around that time were held alongside the U.S. with the latter even taking a leading role (Ashton, 2023).

The technical phase marked the first phase of the dialogue, which covers the period from 2011 – 2013. Albeit called a technical dialogue, the issues covered were extremely sensitive and political (Lehne, 2012). This phase has been launched without a clearly defined roadmap or timeframe of negotiations for the EU-facilitated process, nor was there a clearly articulated objective for the dialogue beyond normalization. Thus, as explained in the previous section, parties just created their own strong expectations toward the process. The minimal objective was to start tackling issues which would help the countries navigate around each other. What the EU aimed at reaching with its incremental approach was to create a process which would lead to a consensus though labelled as technical, would gradually lead to Serbia accepting Kosovo or de facto recognition of the new reality in Kosovo (Russel, 2019). The decision to label the dialogue as ‘technical’ served multiple purposes. In addition to fostering confidence-building measures between Kosovo and Serbia, it aimed to provide a means for EU member states, particularly those that did not recognize Kosovo, to circumvent political disagreements concerning Kosovo. reflects the step-by-step strategy of the EU as a mediator: the objective was the gradual normalisation of the two sides’ relations, without prejudice to the two parties’ positions on status, and achieving progress for both in their respective EU path (European Union, 2013).

According to Robert Cooper, the process of reducing the political to technical was a process that was possible only by gradually breaking down different aspects of political issues into technical matters, which would potentially ensure tangible and real progress in the dialogue (Cooper, 2015). The technical dialogue’s main challenge was converting the immensely sensitive issues into a process that – at least – looked technocratic. Looking at how the technical process has been heralded and structured, it was aimed at producing interim agreements rather than offering a comprehensive settlement. This is reflected in the fact that these intermediate steps are not even referred to as agreements or treaties but as ‘conclusions’ to the talks. These agreed conclusions were not even well defined and offered no specific details (Gashi, et al., 2017).

¹³ During the same time and under Catherine Ashton, the EU participated in negotiations with Iran and between Russia and Ukraine after the heightened tensions after the annexation of Crimea.

Prior to entering the political phase of the Brussels Dialogue, which was characterised by a change in chief negotiators, numerous sensitive issues were addressed through negotiations. These included crucial topics such as freedom of movement, regional cooperation, the rule of law, and other significant elements that are integral to the EU integration process for both Kosovo and Serbia, as well as for the wider region (Visoka, 2017). All topics chosen in the framework of the technical dialogue were aimed at directly impacting the lives of the citizens in Kosovo. Thus, the issues were not directly laced with symbolism or explicitly linked to statehood (Emini & Stakic, 2018).

Taking place within the timespan of two years, the technical dialogue managed to conclude agreements of crucial importance. The language and crafting of the documents were highly technocratic (Visoka, 2017). Furthermore, the EU applied the strategy and tactic in the dialogue - constructive ambiguity – to gradually build the momentum for the parties to move to a more advanced level of negotiations, including political issues (Bieber, 2015; Doli, 2019). The topics that were initially discussed included pressing issues that were causing problems for the citizens of Kosovo. One of the first agreements to be negotiated and discussed was the freedom of movement of people and goods; these were extremely limited and on hold after the declaration of independence, which marks a period from which Kosovo had started issuing documents as the Republic of Kosovo rather than UNMIK under the 1244 Resolution. The agreement reached on this matter included mutual recognition of ID cards and driver's licenses but was accompanied by a sign of non-recognition of the statehood by Serbia. This agreement did not have the Kosovo passport, which was considered to be directly linked to the statehood of Kosovo. This element was added on it was later agreed upon in 2023. Thus, the incremental trajectory of the freedom of movement started in 2012 with IDs and concluded with recognition of passports in 2023. At later stages, this agreement included removing the barricades near the Mitrovica Bridge, which ethnically divided the city (Freedom of Movement, 2011). The agreement on customs stamps– which is closely related to the agreement on freedom of movement – marked the end of the trade embargo and greatly assisted the efforts to control and end the smuggling of goods between Kosovo and Serbia. Despite the absence of statehood symbols on the stamps, they facilitated trade and ensured freedom of goods between Kosovo and Serbia. Serbia accepted the idea of a “stateless” Kosovo without explicit state symbols. This approach was seen as the only feasible way to implement the agreement successfully. This agreement paved the way for legal trade between Kosovo and Serbia and cooperation in the broader region in the framework of the Central European Free Trade Agreement Area

(CEFTA), thus gradually diminishing the role of UNMIK acting as an intermediary (Agreement on Customs, 2011).

The agreement on the *civil registry and cadastre*, albeit considered a technical issue, was an extremely important step forward. This agreement included the return of land and civil registers to Kosovo (taken by Serbian authorities in 1999). Albeit not receiving the level of attention as the other agreements, it has gradually contributed to developing reliable civil registry and cadastre records in Kosovo (Agreement on Cadastral Records, 2011; Agreement on Civil Registry, 2011). The agreement on the *recognition of diplomas* was intended to impact the lives of the citizens directly. Serbia rejected the reference to the Republic of Kosovo in the degrees after 2008. The agreement was designed to regulate this issue with the intermediation of the European University Association. This would be a milestone for the Albanian minority from South Serbia studying in Kosovo, and it also mattered for the Serbian minority in Kosovo (Agreement on Recognition of Diplomas, 2011). These elements were renegotiated in the Brussels Arrangement 2023, failing to be implemented for over a decade.

Though written in technical language and under the auspices of the technical dialogue, the political impact of the agreements signed in Brussels was significant in marking the first steps toward extending Kosovo's authority in northern Kosovo. For instance, the agreement on *integrated border/boundary management (IBM)* set the administrative border between Kosovo and Serbia. Albeit ambiguous in the language, given that the border applies to the Kosovo side and the boundary applies to Serbia, which still considers Kosovo a constituent part – has been considered as a de-facto demarcation (Interview 1, 2021; Interview 2, 2021). It also signifies the de-facto recognition of Kosovo's territorial integrity – even more importantly, after the border crossing points 1 and 31 were burned following the declaration of independence in 2008 (ibid). However, establishing the joint border crossings in the north foresaw it being staffed by EULEX as the only authority considering it was a contested crossing point (Integrated Border/Boundary Management, 2011). This creative ambiguity by the EU created the circumstances for the negotiation process to continue. Still, it could not resolve different views on the boundary/border that were not merely semantic (Gashi, et al., 2017).

Another agreement of similar sensitivity was the *Agreement on Regional Representation and Cooperation*, signed with the purpose of enabling Kosovo to engage with regional bodies without being blocked by Serbia (Żornaczuk, 2012). This included the process of becoming a member of numerous regional organisations as a participating party, gradually replacing the representation by UNMIK. This would consist of Serbia's promise not to block Kosovo's

membership in regional cooperation mechanisms. Still, it did not include a broader perspective, such as the EU or international multilateral cooperation mechanisms. However, this point was addressed in 2023 with the Brussels arrangement, which expanded this point to all international organisations (EEAS, 2023). On a negative point, for Kosovo, the so-called footnote agreement has been considered a step back rather than a step closer to its international consolidation. The agreement required Kosovo to use the following qualifier: *'This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence'* (Regional Representation and Cooperation, 2012). Kosovo's request to include a reference to the Declaration of Kosovo Independence was endorsed. The declaration remained limited to the ICJ's opinion on Kosovo's declaration and Resolution 1244. Through this agreement, Serbia managed to soften what in relation to Kosovo has been considered its biggest defeat – the ICJ opinion on Kosovo (Lepore, 2012).

This agreement, alongside the arrangement regarding the *exchange of liaison officers* sitting in the EU mission/delegation in both countries, was considered a step towards establishing direct diplomatic communication between Kosovo and Serbia (Exchanging Liaison Officers, 2013). This point of the agreement made it back on the agenda in 2023, when the Brussels arrangement took place. The language, however, had been more explicit, referring to the *exchange of permanent missions sitting at the government* buildings and not the EU (EEAS), 2023). This, however, at the time of writing, has not been implemented. This agreement gradually contributed to the transition from the technical dialogue to the political dialogue, thus marking the end of what is known as the technical dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. This period also marked an essential phase in the EU integration of Serbia, standing on the verge of the candidate status to be granted by the European Council.

The table below illustrates the rounds of talks under the auspices of the technical dialogue and the number of agreements reached between Kosovo and Serbia.

Table 1 Technical Dialogue: Rounds of Negotiations

Rounds of negotiations	Date	Issues Negotiated between Kosovo and Serbia (KDI, 2021)
1st round	8-9 Mar 2011	Cadastres, Civil Registry, CEFTA, customs stamps, and free trade
2nd round	28 Mar 2011	Cadastres, civil registry, custom stamps, energy and electricity, telecommunication
3rd Round	15 Apr 2011	Freedom of movement, mutual recognition of university diplomas, and all issues from the first two rounds
4th Round	17-18 May 2011	Missing persons, cultural heritage, and university diplomas
6th Round	2 Sep 2011	Cadastres, custom stamps, telecommunications
7th Round	21-22 Nov 011	University diplomas, crossing points and border management, telecommunications, electricity, Kosovo's regional representation
8th Round	Nov -2 Dec 2011	Crossing points and border management, Kosovo's regional representation, telecommunications
9th Round	22-25 Feb 2012	Kosovo's regional representation, crossing points, and border management

Table 2 List of Signed Agreements (Technical Dialogue)

LIST OF AGREEMENTS SIGNED (KDI, 2021)		
AGREEMENT	DATE	ISSUES AGREED
FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT	July 2011 June 2015 August 2015 August 2022 March 2023	Both sides agree that respective citizens should be able to travel freely. Therefore, the Agreement includes the regulation of documents such as identity cards, driver's licenses, license plates, and car insurance. Vehicle Insurance 25 June 2015 Mitrovica Bridge 25 August 2015 IDs without white document 27 August 2022 Recognition of Passport March 2023
CUSTOM STAMPS	September 2011	This facilitates the end of the trade embargo. Serbia agrees to accept Kosovo stamps, while ensuring freedom of movement of goods as envisaged in the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA).
CIVIL REGISTRY BOOKS	July 2011	Parties agree on the scanning, copying, and certifying of all available civil registry status books. Serbia agrees to make copies of the documents and hand them over to EULEX, appointed to facilitate the process.
CADASTRE	July 2011	Serbia agreed to return the civil registry status books to Kosovo authorities.
Recognition OF UNIVERSITY DIPLOMAS	July 2011	Both parties agree on reciprocal recognition of university diplomas. The European University Association (EUA) agrees to undertake the process.
INTEGRATED BORDER/ BOUNDARY MANAGEMENT	February 2012	Parties agree to set up common crossing points using the EU model of IBM. Furthermore, parties agree not to display any state symbols in order to remain as neutral as possible. The neutrality status neutrality toward Kosovo is further emphasized in the ambiguity of the agreement in which the boundary would apply for Serbia – which does not recognize Kosovo as an independent state, and the border would be used for Kosovo, which has recognized the border set in 2008.
REGIONAL REPRESENTATION AND COOPERATION	February 2012	The 'Footnote Agreement' guarantees regional representation for Kosovo. Kosovo's name to appear with an asterisk referencing UN Security Council Resolution 1244 – a rule applied for the countries which have not recognized Kosovo's independence and the ICJ decision on Kosovo independence applied for the recognizers. Serbia agrees not to hinder Kosovo's efforts to participate in regional initiatives.
ENERGY	September 2013	Parties agree that the energy transmission authorities – KOSTT from Kosovo and EMS from Serbia – sign an Agreement to regulate transmission operators.
TELECOM	September 2013	Parties agree that the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) will allocate the three-digit code, replacing the existing ones in Kosovo (from Serbia, Slovenia, and Monaco).

3.5. Elevating the Brussels Dialogue from Technical to Political

As the political sensitivity of the so-called technical issues between Kosovo and Serbia reached a critical point by 2012, the technical dialogue was running its course. Although the EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia successfully produced several technical agreements over two years, the tensions between both parties remained high. Over the course of two years, the process had considerable deadlocks; it was evident that with a more significant political settlement, the implementation of the technical agreements would be concluded. As the process was running out of “easy” issues to negotiate and implement, the more sensitive issues were stalled, and the politicisation of the process was becoming inevitable. The politicisation of the dialogue was present even during the technical phase (Interview 10, 2022). The technical solutions framed in the process of the dialogue were almost redundant due to political obstacles. As the dialogue was being promoted as an instrument for improving daily life and normalising the process, the issue of recognising Kosovo was the ‘elephant in the room’ (Interview 2, 2021; Interview 5, 2022). Seemingly, the Brussels Dialogue and enlargement at this point had reached a plateau, thus, the room for manoeuvre was severely decreasing.

In 2012, recognising the increasing momentum to use the leverage on the parties involved, the EU decided to elevate the dialogue from the technical level to the political level. This transition occurred in line with the dialogue agenda, and the European Council (EC) specified four conditions that Serbia needed to fulfil to advance to the next phase of EU integration. This alignment effectively integrated the Brussels Dialogue with the broader EU enlargement process. Like 2011, when the dialogue was launched upon the formal application of Serbia to join the EU, the next step in the process was taken to facilitate the EU agenda of Serbia. Transitioning from the technical to political phase occurred simultaneously with the EU opening the accession negotiations with Serbia (European Commission, 2022). The conclusions of the EC listed the following issues: a) the implementation of agreements reached under the auspices of the Brussels dialogue, b) the dismantling of the Serbian judiciary and police parallel institutions operating in Kosovo, c) increasing transparency in relation to the funds spent for Kosovo, d) increased cooperation with the EULEX mission in Kosovo (EULEX, 2014). All these elements created a solid basis for the topics which would later be included in the political dialogue.

Moreover, this opened a phase in which one of the most sensitive topics between Kosovo and Serbia would be discussed: the issue of the northern part of Kosovo, a territory beyond the control of the Kosovo authorities. From October 2012 to June 2013, the negotiations advanced

to a higher political level, with the participation of the heads of state of Kosovo and Serbia. In 2013, the EU made its first breakthrough by shepherding the parties to sign the so-called historic Brussels Agreement. As elaborated in the next section, the Brussels Agreement tackled sensitive political issues, predominantly focusing on Kosovo's potential to extend its authority in the northern part of Kosovo and dismantle the Serbian-sponsored parallel institutions in Kosovo. This phase has persisted up until the time of writing. Over a decade later, in 2023, at the highest political level, Kosovo and Serbia reached a verbal agreement known as the Brussels Arrangement 2023, reached in February 2023.

Additionally, an Action Plan for implementing this Brussels Arrangement was agreed on in March 2023, respectively. The political phase of the dialogue did not entail a clear delineation of topics, as it included rounds of negotiations to refine the technical agreements' details further. One of the extensively negotiated agreements is the Freedom of Movement, signed in 2011, which saw elements being renegotiated in 2015, 2022, and 2023. Similarly, agreements on diplomas and energy underwent negotiations in 2012, 2023, and 2012 2022, respectively. The implementation of these agreements, along with the lack of political commitment to do so, paired with the incrementalism, which always required parties to return to the negotiations table to add more elements to the existing agreements, has often sparked tensions between the parties and has influenced how the EU's role as the facilitator of the process is perceived. This aspect is explored in the following chapter, which evaluates the reality on the ground as a result of the Brussels Dialogue.

3.5.1. Deconstructing the Brussels Agreement: Juggling between Normalisation and Recognition

The substantive talks between Kosovo and Serbia took place in the sixth round of the negotiations between February and April 2013. A breakthrough came in April 2013 when the parties signed what has then been considered a historic agreement containing fifteen points that addressed some of the most politically sensitive and controversial issues (Barlovac, 2012). The so-called Brussels Agreement of 2013 has been considered the end of the "trajectory of normalisation" - an important milestone in the dialogue process - and, simultaneously, a very important turning point for the EU integration path of Kosovo and Serbia. Apart from the normalisation between the parties, the agreement was a remarkable win for the EEAS. On the day the agreement was signed, on 19 April 2013, former European Commission President José Manuel Barroso stated: 'This is a historic day for Serbia-Kosovo relations, for the entire Western Balkans region and the European Union' (Vilanova, 2016). The key breakthrough in

the Kosovo–Serbia Dialogue was the ‘*First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations*’. The Brussels Agreement is the agreement that all parties see as the primary outcome and culmination of this negotiation process in Brussels (European Commission, 2013). The reactions toward the April 2013 Brussels Agreement were somewhat mixed. While the international community welcomed it as a breakthrough, opposition parties in both Serbia and Kosovo challenged it and its content for various reasons that are deconstructed in the next section.

Constructive ambiguity had been flagged as one of the key issues challenging implementing the agreements signed in the technical phase. This time, however, the issues tackled were susceptible, including governance and control in the northern part of Kosovo and the EU integration process for both countries, hailed even before the agreement was made public (Hartwell, 2020). The Brussels Agreement signed in 2013 contained politically sensitive points that needed more clarity in the content and more political capital invested from the EU side to ensure its full implementation (Szpala, 2016). The agreement points have stipulated rules and steps to set the framework for normalisation, albeit written in vague terms and using the ambiguity strategy in a way similar to the case of the technical agreements (Kartsonaki, 2020).

Most of the points – six out of fifteen – directly addressed the status of the northern part of Kosovo (First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations, 2013), a Serb-dominated area in Kosovo that has not only an increased level of inter-ethnic tension but also a high presence of Serbian parallel institutions sponsored by the Serbian Government. The six points of the agreement explicitly regulated the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo (Local Elections/Establishment of Serb-majority Municipalities, 2013). Albeit not providing details in relation to its statute and without listing its competencies –it was agreed that this process would take place at a later stage (Interview 6, 2022). These elements in the agreement were considered crucial given that Serbia, in principle, accepted the presence of Kosovo authorities in the northern part of Kosovo, which would later be integrated into the constitutional order of Kosovo. On the other hand, Kosovo would grant more autonomy at the local level to the local Serbs (Lehne, 2013). This level of autonomy was foreseen to be provided by establishing the Association/Community designed explicitly for the Serb-dominated municipalities in the north and south of Kosovo. Even though the Association/Community took considerable space in the agreement, its structure and political power were not well-defined and were purposefully left ambiguous (Beha, 2015). The additional powers – the autonomy – were not defined in detail,

and the legislative and executive competencies of the Association/Community were also not well defined – leading to political tensions in Kosovo in relation to the potential additional layer of the government being created with this agreement (Troncotă, 2018).

Apart from the fact that its competencies were merely defined and left to the parties to negotiate in other rounds, the dual naming of Association/Community used throughout the agreement constituted an element of constructive ambiguity, demonstrating the different interpretations Serbian and Kosovar sides had on the competencies of this institution (Gashi, et al., 2017). This technique, albeit used before in less politically sensitive issues, had a detrimental effect on the implementation of this agreement in the case of the Association/Community, given the opposing stances of the parties. The ambiguity allowed the Kosovo side to refer to the Association as a non-government organisation (NGO). In contrast, for the Serbian side, it is a Community, thereby referring to it as a part of the formal structures of Kosovo's governance – an autonomous entity (Visoka, 2017). Following the initial agreement reached in 2013, the need for further clarification arose, leading to the 2015 agreement between Kosovo and Serbia on the General Principles/Main Elements of ASM/CSM (*General Principles/ Main Elements of ASM/CSM*, 2015). The content of this agreement generated considerable debates in Kosovo, with concerns raised about the potential emergence of a Republika Srpska-like scenario, which could lead to internal dysfunction within the country (BPRG, 2017). The forthcoming chapter delves into the practical implications of this agreement, providing insights into how the Brussels Agreement influenced the actual situation on the ground.

The Association/Community made a comeback on the agenda in 2023. Article 7 of the Brussels Arrangement reached in 2023 states the following:

Both Parties commit to establish specific arrangements and guarantees, in accordance with relevant Council of Europe instruments and by drawing on existing European experiences, to ensure an appropriate level of self-management for the Serbian community in Kosovo and the ability for service provision in specific areas, including the possibility for financial support by Serbia and a direct communication channel for the Serbian community to the Government of Kosovo' (EEAS, 2023).

The Association/Community element in the agreement is considered one of the most controversial parts of the EU-facilitated dialogue, which still needs to be implemented. This element of the Brussels Agreement 2013, 2015, and 2023 has put the entire dialogue process on hold and plunged Kosovo into a deep political crisis. The next chapter, focusing on the reality on the ground, further deconstructs the complexities of this element and the political sensitiveness around it, which its implementation stalled.

The multi-frontal crises following the Brussels Dialogue after the Brussels Agreement of 2013 - elaborated more in Chapter IV - have had two significant impacts on the process. Firstly, while elements of the Brussels Agreement (2013) had been implemented, the Association/Community part had significantly stalled the process, becoming a source of significant tensions between the parties; secondly, it prevented the EU from continuing its diplomatic engagement in paving the way for the final comprehensive legally binding agreement that it was heralding immediately after signing the Brussels Agreement in 2023.

There have been sustained attempts to create new momentum after the EU completely lost control of the process in 2020 following U.S. involvement during the Trump Administration, which is analysed in detail in Chapter V. However, the Russian War in Ukraine creates urgency, heightening the instability and completely securitising the Western Balkans – specifically the Brussels Dialogue, a soft spot between Russia and the West (Stradner, 2022). This period heightened the stabilitocracy game, even to the point of beyond the EU's control.

The Russian aggression in Ukraine and the return of the Biden Administration in the U.S. have created a new momentum in enlargement, respectively, in a new impetus in the Brussels Dialogue. This positive shift in enlargement policy has increased the EU's leverage on the ground. Still, most notably, the alignment of the EU and the U.S. in pressuring both Kosovo and Serbia to return to the negotiating table led to a renewed Brussels Agreement/Arrangement in February 2023 (EEAS, 2023). However, with the extensive pressure and leverage on the ground, paired with the sense of urgency as well as the collaboration of two powerful actors, the EU and the U.S., backed by key member states such as Germany and France, the Brussels Arrangement 2023 provided a lukewarm starting point for negotiations instead of the expected end of the process with a final comprehensive legally binding agreement. According to the HR/VP Josef Borrell, the document verbally agreed by both parties provided a solid basis for further negotiations. As expected, the Association/Community made a comeback ten years after the Brussels Agreement of 2013 and is currently the most challenging issue between Kosovo and Serbia. The latter even conditions the signing of the final agreement on establishing the Association/Community.

In general, the Brussels 2023 document summarises the previous agreements reached in the technical and political phases of the Brussels Dialogue. The need to emphasise the importance of gaining political commitment to implement the past agreements comes mainly as pressure on Kosovo to deliver on the Association/Community. As illustrated in the table below, in some fields, the Brussels 2023 agreement, albeit maintaining points agreed from the past, offered

mild but ambiguous elements which could be read as a moving one step closer to Serbia’s de facto recognition of Kosovo. Although the parties immediately followed up with an agreed action plan for the implementation of the Brussels 2023 document (EEAS, 2023), it remains uncertain, at the time of writing, whether the agreement in Brussels will provide immediate positive results. It is seen as a document paving the way for a long and challenging negotiation process requiring immense political engagement and shuttle diplomacy, as stated by the HR/VP Josef Borrell. (EEAS, 2023)

The following tables provide the round of negotiations and agreements reached in the political phase, the text agreed in 2023 and offers a comparison with previous agreements reached in the technical or the political phase of the Brussels Dialogue. It, furthermore, intends to illustrate that the EU’s (unchanged) incremental and ambiguous strategy has shown severe limitations after ten years of negotiations and effectively halted progress towards solving the open issue between Kosovo and Serbia.

Table 3 Political Dialogue: Rounds of Negotiations

POLITICAL DIALOGUE (KDI, 2021)		
1st Round High-Level Political Dialogue	October 2012	Displaced persons, return of Serb-owned property, protection of cultural heritage, crimes, and human organ trade
2nd (Informal) Round	November 2012	Implementation of the IBM agreement, construction of the Nis-Merdare-Pristina highway
3rd Round	December 2012	Implementation of the IBM agreement, improvement of bilateral relations
4th Round	January 2013	Customs on crossings, Serbian funded ‘parallel institutions’ in Northern Kosovo
5th Round	February 2013	President Jahjaga and Nikolic meet for the first time
6th Round – 9th Round	February 2013 April 2013	Status of the Serb majority communities in Northern Kosovo, integration of Kosovo Serb security structures and judicial authorities into the Kosovo security and judicial structures
10th Round	April 2013	Status of the Serb majority communities in Northern Kosovo, integration of Kosovo Serb security structures and judicial authorities into the Kosovo security and judicial structures, bilateral relations

Table 4 List of Signed Agreements (Political Dialogue)

FIRST AGREEMENT OF PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE NORMALISATION OF RELATIONS 19 April 2013 (KDI, 2021)	
ASSOCIATION/COMMUNITY OF SERB MAJORITY MUNICIPALITIES IN KOSOVO – GENERAL PRINCIPLES/MAIN ELEMENTS	The parties agree to establish an association of the 10 Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo. Municipalities to have full competences in areas such as economic development, health, education, and urban and rural planning
ESTABLISHMENT OF FOUR SERBIAN MUNICIPALITIES IN THE NORTHERN PART OF KOSOVO	The Dialogue legally establishes the municipalities of Mitrovica North, Zvecan, Zubin Potok, and Leposavic.
JUDICIARY	The Agreement foresees the integration of Serbian judges and prosecutors into the Kosovo justice system, working in accordance with Kosovan law. The details include specific positions appointed on the basis of the ethnic composition of the municipalities in the north.
POLICE	The parties agree that the only law enforcement officials in the northern part of Kosovo are the Kosovo police. Former police officers working in parallel structures are to be integrated into the Kosovo police. The parties agree that there will be a separate police commander for northern Kosovo and that the ethnic composition of the Kosovo police would reflect the demographics of Kosovo.
SECURITY	The Agreement also envisages the integration of members of the so-called Civil Protection Corps into Kosovo's institutions.

Table 5 Comparison between the 2023 Arrangement with the Previous Agreements

Brussels Arrangement 2023	Present in Previous Agreements	Added in 2023
Article 1		
The Parties shall develop normal, good-neighbourly relations with each other on the basis of equal rights.	Yes	
Both Parties shall mutually recognise their respective documents and national symbols, including passports, diplomas, licence plates, and customs stamps.	Yes – Technical Dialogue (2011-2013) Licence plates Diplomas Customs Stamps IDs License Plates	Acceptance of Passports National Symbols
Article 2		
Both Parties will be guided by the aims and principles laid down in the United Nations Charter, especially those of the sovereign equality of all States, respect for their independence, autonomy and territorial integrity, the right of self-determination, the protection of human rights, and non-discrimination.	No	Respect for Independence Autonomy Territorial integrity Self-determination
Article 3		
In conformity with the United Nations Charter, the Parties shall settle any disputes between them exclusively by peaceful means and refrain from the threat or use of force.	Yes	
Article 4		
The Parties proceed on the assumption that neither of the two can represent the other in the international sphere or act on its behalf.	Yes – Technical Dialogue (2011-2013) Kosovo participates on its own account and speaks for itself at all regional meetings.	In the International sphere
Serbia will not object to Kosovo’s membership in any international organisation.	Yes – Technical Dialogue (2011-2013) 2011-2013: Regional Initiatives (Footnote Agreement)	In any International organisations
Article 5		
Neither Party will block, nor encourage others to block, the other Party’s progress in their respective EU path based on their own merits. Both Parties shall respect the values referred to in Articles 2 and 21 of the Treaty of the European Union.	Yes – Technical Dialogue (2011-2013) Brussels Agreement 2013 It is agreed that neither side will block, or encourage others to block, the other side’s progress in their respective EU path.	Both Parties shall respect the values referred to in Articles 2 and 21 of the Treaty of the European Union.
Article 6		
While the present Agreement constitutes an important step of normalization, both Parties will continue with new impetus the EU-led Dialogue process which should lead to a legally binding agreement on comprehensive normalization of their relations.	No	
The Parties agree to deepen future cooperation in the fields of economy, science and technology, transport and connectivity, judicial and law enforcement relations, posts and telecommunications, health, culture, religion, sport, environmental protection, missing persons, displaced persons and other similar areas through the conclusion of specific agreements.	No	Brussels Arrangement 2023 led to an agreement on missing persons.
The details will be agreed in additional agreements facilitated by the EU-led Dialogue.	Yes	

Article 7		
Both Parties commit to establish specific arrangements and guarantees, in accordance with relevant Council of Europe instruments and by drawing on existing European experiences, to ensure an appropriate level of self-management for the Serbian community in Kosovo and the ability for service provision in specific areas, including the possibility for financial support by Serbia and a direct communication channel for the Serbian community to the Government of Kosovo.	2013: Association/Community of the Serbian Majority Municipalities 2015: Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo—general principles/main elements	
The Parties shall formalise the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and afford strong level of protection to the Serbian religious and cultural heritage sites, in line with existing European models.	Previously existed - Constitutional Court of May 2016 in Kosovo – unimplemented.	
Article 8		
The Parties shall exchange Permanent Missions. They shall be established at the respective Government’s seat.	Yes – Technical Dialogue (2011-2013) The liaison offices located inside the premises of EU delegations	The liaison offices shall be established at the respective Government’s seat.
Article 9		
Both Parties take note of the EU’s and other donors’ commitment to establish a special investment and financial support package for joint projects of the Parties in economic development, connectivity, green transition and other key areas.	No	
Article 10		
The Parties shall establish a joint Committee, chaired by the EU, for monitoring the implementation of this Agreement.	An implementation committee will be established by the two sides, with the facilitation of the EU.	Monitoring the Implementation of the Agreement
Both Parties confirm their obligation to implement all past Dialogue agreements, which remain valid and binding.	No	
Article 11		
Both Parties commit to respect the Implementation Roadmap annexed to this Agreement.	No	

3.6. Conclusion

The chapter’s main findings emphasise the EU’s efforts to take a leading role in stabilizing the Western Balkans. The EU engagement in the region dates from the 1990s when the first events indicating a violent break-up of Yugoslavia took place. The failure of the EU to prevent the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina put on hold the EU’s efforts to engage in the region. However, as the EU common foreign policy initiative took shape and deepened, the foreign policy tools gradually became more sophisticated, thus paving the way for the EU to return to the region after the Kosovo War in 1999.

The post-war phase saw a more proactive engagement by the EU to reconstruct the region and offer a new perspective through the EU integration process. The EU used the already successful methodology and approach applied in the previous enlargement process to use the soft power of conditionality to transform the region. However, one of the most challenging tasks for the EU was the reform agenda clashing with the overarching goal of stabilisation through good neighbourly relations. In this context, the initiation of the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia

in 2011 presented a distinctive chance for the EU. It allowed the EU not only to reaffirm the effectiveness of the conditionality approach but also to assume a prominent position in international negotiations. This was an opportunity to demonstrate what the EU failed to achieve in the 1990s: its effectiveness in foreign policy and security matters in third countries.

This chapter has examined one element of the EU's approach by de-constructing the role and the strategy of the EU in successfully facilitating the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia – a process delegated by the UNSC – immediately after the ICJ decision on the legality of Kosovo's independence. I focused on how the EU attempted to manage the dialogue through the two-fold strategy: 1) structuring it in two parts – the technical and the political dialogue – until the parties are considered ripe enough to talk about sensitive political issues such as the recognition of Kosovo by Serbia; 2) the constructive ambiguity which was considered a solid strategy to make the agreements more acceptable and implementable by making them ambiguous. This created obstacles later in the implementation process, which are analysed in detail in the upcoming chapter. More importantly, the findings show how the EU strategically linked the Copenhagen Criteria with good neighbourly relations to increase its leverage as the mediator while transitioning from the technical to the political dialogue. However, this also created space for the parties to engage in the vicious cycle of stabilitocracy in which the trade-off between the reforms and stability seriously challenged the role of the EU as the mediator. This is further discussed in the next chapter, which elaborates on the situation on the ground and analyses the dynamics of the dialogue and the EU conditionality in the case of Kosovo and Serbia.

Chapter IV: Reality on the Ground: Securitization and the emergence of stabilitocracy in the Brussels Dialogue

4.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses how the pursuit of the stability approach in the Brussels Dialogue has shaped the reality in Kosovo. The Brussels Dialogue was launched in 2011, only three years after Kosovo declared independence. Kosovo was still under supervised independence by the International Civilian Office (ICO), ending in 2012 (U.S. State Department, 2008). Hence, the Brussels Dialogue is one of Kosovo's most important post-independence processes, with multi-dimensional effects alongside the state and institution building. This chapter examines the impact of the Brussels Dialogue on Kosovo's state-building trajectory, both internally and in terms of its foreign policy aspirations. Specifically, it explores how the Brussels Dialogue influenced Kosovo's progress in establishing itself as a state, shaped its internal dynamics, and affected the government's efforts to extend and consolidate its authority in the predominantly Serb-inhabited northern part of the country. Despite Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, a significant portion of the Serb community in the north of the region refused to integrate into the Kosovo system. The Brussels Dialogue's normalisation explicitly targeted this issue by designing agreements to find acceptable solutions for the local Serbs in Kosovo.

Furthermore, the Brussels Dialogue also had implications for Kosovo's engagement in the international arena. One notable aspect was the impact on Kosovo's diplomatic recognition and its pursuit of full membership in multilateral cooperation mechanisms, which were essential foreign policy objectives for Kosovo since the declaration of independence. These processes were seen as crucial for strengthening Kosovo's international statehood. Lastly, the chapter examines the trajectory of the Brussels Dialogue, initially aimed at the normalisation of relations, but which eventually became a complex issue with implications for security and stability in the region and the EU. Thus, become one of the main processes fuelling the EU's stability approach in the region.

The first part of the chapter analyses the EU's incremental approach in the dialogue, leading to slow progress and lack of implementation of the agreements. Constructive ambiguity is the main obstacle in implementing the agreements and the failure to keep the parties engaged in the process. Moreover, the chapter analyses the EU's conditionality, the "carrot and stick"

approach, the mechanism to reward and sanction both parties for the lack of political will and ability to implement the agreements signed in Brussels effectively. The second part looks at the state-building trajectory and the ability of Kosovo to consolidate internally in terms of extending its presence in the northern part of Kosovo and integrating local Serbs into the Kosovo system. Externally, the chapter analyses how the Dialogue impacted Kosovo's process of obtaining diplomatic recognition and membership in multilateral cooperation mechanisms, such as the EU integration process.

The last part of the chapter focuses on the role of the EU in the Dialogue, specifically, how the EU membership card served as the key driving force engaging both parties in the Dialogue and keeping them in the EU integration process. Falling in the domain of good-neighbourly relations strongly interlinked with the EU integration conditionality of both Kosovo and Serbia, this chapter examines the EU's stability approach as facilitator/mediator.

4.2. Normalisation through Constructive Ambiguity and Incrementalism: The (Lack of) Implementation of the Brussels Agreements

The previous chapter has looked at the launch of the Brussels Dialogue by exploring its trajectory from the technical phase to the political phase. While reaching or signing the agreement has been heralded as a success, the actual implementation and impact on the ground show a different side of the story. The limited implementation of the agreements inspired the local autocratic leaders to turn the Brussels Dialogue into their leverage, thus gradually developing stabilitocracies.

The EU's incremental approach, as discussed in the previous chapter, initially facilitated the initiation of the process but ultimately fell short of generating the necessary momentum for the parties to reach a final comprehensive agreement as anticipated by the EU. Another strategic deficiency of the EU, which had adverse effects on maintaining 'stabilitocracy,' was constructive ambiguity. Constructive ambiguity is a common strategy in international legal documents, driven by the intricate nature of negotiation processes, conflicting positions and interests, and limited time constraints. Ambiguity cannot be avoided in drafting sensitive documents that will be implemented in specific contexts. Scholars, such as Jupille (2007), describe ambiguity as 'incomplete contracting,' wherein the vague provisions of an agreement prompt policy actors to engage in further negotiations to establish formal rules at a later stage (Jegen and Mérand, 2014). This was initially the idea behind the EU's use of this approach,

aimed at finding a compromise and achieving fruitful negotiation outcomes, which has been extensively debated, with many critiques highlighting its shortcomings. From 2011 to 2023, ambiguity has been strategically employed in the negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia. It aims to serve as both a trust-building measure and a means to lay the ground for the eventual final comprehensive agreement that would have legally binding status. This constant use of ambiguity fell short of creating an environment conducive to reaching a mutually acceptable resolution (Zweers et al., 2022). Despite the negotiations lasting over a decade, the final agreement between the parties has not been reached. In fact, in 2023, after the Brussels Arrangement, the parties declared to embark on a new phase of the negotiations, which will be long and challenging. The forthcoming analysis delves deeper into the Brussels Agreement to analyse the negative repercussions of the EU's employment of constructive ambiguity.

By aiming to build up momentum leading to the final agreement, the EU's constructive ambiguity created two opposing narratives that hindered the desired compromise for a final comprehensive legally binding agreement and undermined trust-building between the parties. While providing short-term success in a transactional form, the long-term impact of ambiguity was detrimental to the negotiation process (Interview 10, 2022). The use of constructive ambiguity as a strategy in the EU-mediated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has had two main facets. Firstly, there is ambiguity regarding the *legal status of the agreements* reached. While Kosovo considers the Brussels Agreement legally binding and ratified by the Kosovo Assembly, Serbia does not give it the same legal weight. As the facilitator, the EU does not consider itself a direct signatory party. This ambiguity has created a situation where Kosovo must implement the agreement while Serbia maintains a more comfortable position with less direct pressure. Secondly, there is ambiguity in the *language* used in the agreements. For example, establishing Serbian municipalities in the north of Kosovo is referred to as both an "Association" and a "Community" with different connotations for each party. Additionally, the term 'Integrated Boundary/Border Management' is interpreted differently by Kosovo and Serbia, with Kosovo viewing it as a border and Serbia as an administrative line within the country (Visoka and Doyle, 2016).

The EU has intentionally chosen this ambiguity to avoid polarisation and politicisation of the issues and to provide space for both parties to justify the agreements to their domestic audiences. However, constructive ambiguity has faced criticism for undermining the EU's role as a facilitator. It has also led to challenges in implementation, the lack of transparency, and limited support from the public, hindering the intended normalisation process. Overall, the

EU's constructive ambiguity strategy in the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has had both intended and unintended consequences, shaping the dynamics of the negotiation process and its outcomes. It embedded gaps and differences between the parties, leading to the lack of implementation of the agreements and triggering tensions, which ultimately jeopardised the process.

4.2.1. Association of Serb Majority Municipalities: The Breaking Point of the Brussels Dialogue and Heightening of Stabilitocracy

The Association/Community is the element of the Brussels Agreement, which seriously challenged the already fragile state of the Brussels Dialogue. It not only brought serious negotiation obstacles for the EU but also had a detrimental impact on Kosovo.

Among all the issues that the Brussels Dialogue aimed at addressing between Kosovo and Serbia, the establishment of the Association/Community has emerged as a susceptible matter. This issue stemmed from Kosovo's objective to dismantle the parallel institutions maintained by Serbia, which posed a challenge to Kosovo's statehood and authority on the one hand, and to Serbia to ensure that the Serbs in Kosovo would get a special status, even in the form of autonomy. To find a compromise or middle ground, the institutions were restructured to align with the Kosovo system, essentially undergoing a process of redesigning (Naggy, 2014). The version of the Agreement in 2013 only included the broad sphere of elements agreed between the parties, leaving the details to be thrashed out later when the parties are read (Rashiti and Prelec, 2015). This agreement again proves another case in which both parties have embraced the EU's constructive ambiguity. Much of the content of the agreement on Association/Community remained to be done and negotiated between parties at a later stage.

Table 6 ASM as signed in 2013 and General Principles 2015. The Constitutional Court decision on the ASM 2015

Table 6 ASM as signed in 2013 and General Principles 2015. The Constitutional Court decision on the ASM 2015

2013	2015
<p>ASM would be composed of the same bodies as already existing Associations of Kosovo Municipalities similar to the existing one for municipalities led by Kosovo Albanians:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>An Assembly</i> • <i>A President</i> • <i>A Council</i> • <i>A Board</i> • <i>An administration</i> • <i>A complaints office.</i> 	<p>Accordingly, once established, ASM will be able to: propose amends to the legislation and other relevant regulations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initiate or participate in the proceedings before competent courts, including the Constitutional Court, against any act or decision from any institution that affects ASM exercise of powers. • have its own budget based on the funds as a result of the contribution of members, incomes generated from the services provided, transfer from central authorities or contributions, grants and donations from associations and organizations- international or domestic, as well as Serbia. • to have its own symbols and coat of arms, in accordance with Kosovo law; and • to have its own statute. (EEAS, 2015)
<p>The Court found that the principles are not entirely in compliance with the Constitution, respectively that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objectives, structural organization, budget, support and general provisions of the Association, go beyond the Kosovo constitutional standards of local self-governance. • The right of legislative initiative is exclusively provided to the President of the Republic of Kosovo, the Government, the deputies of the Assembly or to at least ten thousand citizens. • Association/Community cannot be vested with full and exclusive authority to promote the interests of the Kosovo Serb community in its relations with the central authorities. ('Constitutional Court Case Nr K0130/15', 2015) 	

While certain aspects of the Brussels Agreement were viewed as beneficial for Kosovo's statehood and its efforts to enhance control over its territory as it foresaw the dismantling of the Serbian parallel institutions in Kosovo, the provision regarding the establishment of the Association/Community sparked significant political confrontations, particularly involving the opposition led by Vetëvendosje (Self-determination movement) (Fazliu and Butcher, 2015). The latter used the word 'Zajednica'¹⁴, to refer to the Association/Community, a label to indicate the political ambition of Serbia to separate Serbs from Albanians in Kosovo. This also aimed at projecting Association as a Serbian-led project to divide Kosovo internally.

Following the political and societal turmoil triggered by the 2013 ill-defined agreement on the Association/Community, the General Principles (2015) further added to the existing discontent towards the Association/Community (EEAS, 2015). From 2014 – 2020 Kosovo went through one of the most notorious political crises. The concerns over the Brussels Dialogue in general but for the Association/Community clause heightened when the opposition became vocal about

¹⁴ Zajednica is a Serbian word community.

it. According to Vetëvendosje Movement, this clause crossed the ‘red lines’ and it goes beyond the biggest political compromise Kosovo made by accepting the Ahtisaari Plan. This opposition led to a petition against the Association/Community which the Kosovo citizens massively supported.

Meanwhile, as the political turmoil in Kosovo reached unprecedented levels, the opposition, backed by increasing public support, intensified their protests against the Association/Community agreement. The opposition employed tactics such as boycotting parliamentary sessions, utilising teargas to disrupt parliamentary sessions by obstructing the ruling coalition’s decision-making process. The opposition managed to gather approximately 18,000 signatures on a petition, prompting President Ahtifete Jahjaga (Gashi, 2015) to refer the matter to the Constitutional Court for review (Popova, 2015). In 2015, the Constitutional Court published an opinion on the case declaring that elements of the General Principles violate the constitutional spirit (for more detail consult the table above). This opinion, however, has been considered an ‘ambiguous judgement’ which allowed each political party to interpret the Agreement according to their political stance and pre-established views. Moreover, it is important to note that the Decision of the Constitutional Court is not legally binding, and it does not state that the text directly violates the Constitution but rather the spirit of the Constitution. The reason behind the lack of implementation of the Association/Community agreement stems from the persistent political instability in Kosovo. The governing coalition, which initially endorsed and signed the agreement, encountered an unfavourable political climate that blocked the establishment of the Association/Community. The importance of the Constitutional Court decision increased significantly with Vetëvendosje Movement coming to power. With a growing political presence, particularly in opposition to the Brussels Dialogue and the Association/Community agreement, Kosovo’s new Prime Minister, Albin Kurti, stated in 2023 that the implementation of the Association/Community would not be based on the General Principles (2015) but rather strictly be established based on the Constitutional Court’s opinion. This attitude ultimately downgrades the Association to a local non-governmental organization, subject to the regulations outlined in the Law on Freedom of Association (‘Constitutional Court Case Nr K0130/15’, 2015). The Association/Community, he argued, cannot create another layer of governance in Kosovo with executive powers which will repeat the ‘Republika Srpska’ scenario in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a modality which disrupts the internal functionality of Bosnia and Herzegovina since the end of the war (Kurti Interview with Deutsche Welle, 2021). Despite Kurti’s resistance, especially toward the implementation of the

Association/Community point of the Brussels Agreement, in the 2023 agreement in Brussels Kurti has formally taken ownership and committed to establishing the Association/Community in some form. The agreements' Articles 7 and 10 refer directly to not only committing to establish the Association/Community but also to implement all agreements which have not been implemented so far.

Aware of a vast majority of unimplemented agreement reached in both phases of the Brussels Dialogue, the EU explicitly drafted Article 10, according to which: 'Both Parties confirm their obligation to implement all past Dialogue agreements, which remain valid and binding.' (EEAS, 2023). Whereas the EU, eager to make an explicit commitment of Kosovo to implement the Association/Community, further de-constructed its form and ensured political will to pave the way for its establishment in the Article 7:

Both Parties commit to establish specific arrangements and guarantees, in accordance with relevant Council of Europe instruments and by drawing on existing European experiences, to ensure an appropriate level of self-management for the Serbian community in Kosovo and ability for service provision in specific areas, including the possibility for financial support by Serbia and a direct communication channel for the Serbian community to the Government of Kosovo. (EEAS, 2023)

While this document only sets the basis for further negotiations, shuttle diplomacy is needed to ensure the continuation of the process, which will lead to its implementation. The Government of Kosovo has already established a working group on drafting the statute of the Association/Community to be presented in Brussels. The draft proposal provided by the Government of Kosovo was unacceptable by Serbia. On the other hand, the working group of Kosovo Serbs formerly endorsed by the Hoti Government drafted a proposal which was not only completely disregarded by Kurti by being considered unacceptable, but the Prime Minister of Kosovo immediately dismissed the team. At the time of writing, Kosovo has not yet managed to provide a draft statute on the Association/Community, at least not a public document which would be serving as a basis for further negotiation. Simultaneously, there has been a noticeable escalation of political pressure from both the EU and the U.S. directed at Kosovo. This pressure notably intensified in June 2023 when the EU introduced certain 'measures' against Kosovo. These actions were taken in response to what the EU perceived as a lack of constructive engagement by Kosovo in the Brussels Dialogue. However, these measures seemingly disregarded Serbia's role in the process. This situation has sparked debates about the EU's approach to appeasing autocratic regimes. It has raised questions about the EU's response to

the substantial anti- Vučić protests in Serbia and its reluctance to impose sanctions on Russia, even two years after the war in Ukraine.

Additionally, this approach seemed to downplay the attack on Banjska in Kosovo in September 2024, which the EU itself considered a terrorist incident involving Kosovo. Intriguingly, one of the prominent figures previously associated with the Serbian List, closely connected to Vučić Milan Radoičić, played a leading role in this operation (Reuters, 2023). Amid mounting external pressure from EU and U.S. on Kosovo to establish the Association/Community whose impact on the country's statehood remains uncertain, Vučić leveraging this situation to his advantage. He insists that the establishment of the Association/Community must be a prerequisite for finalising any agreement with Kosovo. This approach allows Vučić to buy time domestically, strengthening his authoritarian control and utilise this for the December 2023 elections in Serbia, while also presenting himself as a partner in the Brussels Dialogue, thus maintaining a positive image with Western stakeholders.

4.3. From Normalisation to Exchange of Territories: The Game of Stabilitocrats

As noted in Chapter III, since the launch of the Brussels Dialogue in 2011, the EU-mediated process had brought limited progress on the technical issues (mainly agreements signed in the first phase of the Brussels Dialogue. However, the process could have been on the questions and issues at the core of the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia. The avoidance of the 'elephant in the room' and the hope to get through it using the incremental approach paired with ambiguity ill-served the EU as a strategy in facilitating this process. By the time the parties reached a stage where they were deemed politically prepared to tackle more core political issues, including addressing the situation in the northern part of Kosovo, several factors had already eroded the likelihood of achieving a significant breakthrough in the process. These factors contributed to the growing dissatisfaction toward the EU, particularly on the Kosovo side, followed by a lack of trust and a diminishing perception of EU credibility within the process (Interview 5, 2022). Thus, it created gaps which were pursued by the local autocrats, to challenge the process by keeping the Brussels Dialogue an open-ended process and a bargaining stability chip toward the EU.

Though the EU heralded the Brussels Agreement (2013) as a milestone and a historic achievement. This section focuses on further de-constructing the trajectory from the indented 'normalisation' to securitisation of the process, illustrating how the process became trapped in

the vicious cycle which gave birth to the idea of a land swap between Kosovo and Serbia as a potential solution in the process. It focuses on the role of the two presidents in the Brussels Dialogue, Hashim Thaçi of Kosovo, and Aleksandar Vučić of Serbia as the two ‘stabilitocrats’ not only monopolising their position in the process but also used the Brussels Dialogue to consolidate their power internally as the chosen partners of the EU to lead their countries toward a final solution. The post - 2013 period marks one of the phases during which stabilitocracy was strengthened as a result of the consecutive tensions while the little progress reached in the framework of the Brussels Dialogue started to collapse.

The technical level agreements of the Brussels Dialogue have been considered successful to a certain extent; however, their implementation took place using a “pick and choose” approach by both parties. A considerable number of agreements remained partially implemented as the parties chose to implement the elements more conveniently for their domestic political agenda, leaving parts of agreements unimplementable (as displayed in the table in the annex), thus jeopardising the entire outcome of the process. Additionally, the parties rarely signed the agreements to change the situation on the ground but merely to progress in the EU integration process, the so-called box-ticking approach (Interview 1, 2021). This is one of the key factors behind the halted progress in the implementation. Furthermore, the lack of implementation of agreements at the early technical phase has had a detrimental impact in terms of confidence building between the parties. As the implementation of the agreements depended on the goodwill of the political elites or specific leaders in Kosovo and Serbia rather than having a clear action plan and timeframe which would ensure the effectiveness of the agreements reached, the Brussels Dialogue was facing multi-frontal crises (Interview 5, 2022; Interview 11, 2023). This gradually led to turning the reform agenda and EU transformative model to a transactional one where short-term goals such as stability had taken precedence over the democratic transformation of the countries.

The political elite in Kosovo favouring the Brussels Agreement - including the Association they had voted for in the Assembly - undertook the initial steps to implement it. The judicial system and the security apparatus would be two significant steps toward consolidating statehood in the north and strengthening the rule of law in a somewhat problematic part of the country (Erjona Popova and Morina, 2018). As the integration of the Police was gradually taking place with the facilitation of the international presence (OSCE and EULEX), the judicial component of the agreement was more challenging to take off. These elements, albeit successfully implemented to some extent after the Brussels Agreement, the tensions in the northern part of Kosovo led to

the complete disintegration of the local Kosovo institutions operating in the northern part of Kosovo. In December 2022, members of the Kosovo Police in the northern part of Kosovo collectively resigned from their positions, the Kosovo municipalities in the north were dissolved, and the local Serbs completely boycotted the new elections organised in 2023. Thus, it sends a daunting message about the future integration of the local Serbs and the four municipalities in the northern part of Kosovo in the Kosovo system.

4.3.1.Land Swap between Kosovo and Serbia as a Final Solution(?)

The peak of stabilitocracy during the Brussels Dialogue was the ‘land swap’ idea, during which it encountered a series of simultaneous crises, significantly straining the process. As the facilitator, the EU faced challenges in actively engaging due to the EU election in early 2019 (European Parliament, 2019). The lack of assertive leadership from the EU in Brussels and limited involvement from member states pushed the process to a critical turning point. The prevailing narrative that Serbia should benefit from the dialogue, previously associated with the enlargement process since 2011, was severely disrupted by enlargement fatigue. Moreover, the reform process in Serbia was not progressing, thus seriously challenging the pace of Serbia's integration path to a large extent (Keil, 2018). The Brussels Dialogue has been launched with the idea of ‘getting something in return’, a transactional approach designed to convince the parties to compromise with each other in the process (Interview 9, 2023). This logic mainly applied to Serbia, which should be given something in return for the potential recognition of Kosovo. However, de jure recognition by 2018 had been ruled out as a possible outcome (Shala, 2020).

As the Brussels Dialogue faltered, Kosovo and Serbia engaged in a series of political crises which led to numerous conflicts in northern Kosovo. As the EU lacked leadership and could not invest political capital in the process, many other alternative actors loomed on the horizon. The stabilitocrats were playing a game, feeding each other's narrative. In Kosovo, if something needs to be done in Brussels Dialogue, it only reaches its effect if it is done through interventions in the northern part of Kosovo (Interview 5, 2022; Interview 10, 2022). This game further needed the response of Vučić, who effectively used the situation in its favour. This is the so-called destabilise to stabilise the game. This game escalated with the Trump Administration in the picture. During the Trump Administration, the trans-Atlantic crack in relation to Kosovo peaked by significantly altering the direction of the Brussels Dialogue by taking it out of the hands of the EU, thus creating a parallel process and further fuelling

stabilitocracy (Peel and Mehreen Khan, 2018). This is further elaborated in the next chapter, which focuses on the critical geopolitical actors in the Western Balkans and the Kosovo–Serbia dispute. As the crisis was ongoing, the debate over potential alternatives outside the Brussels Dialogue framework pointed to an option traditionally advanced by Serbia. Still, it had been ruled out by Kosovo and its strategic partners (Bami and Dragojlo, 2020).

While the EU lost control over the Brussels Dialogue, many ideas on how the final solution should look like were taking place in parallel processes. One of the most debatable was in 2018 when the stabilitocrats strike with the idea of a land swap – which would include border changes between Kosovo and Serbia, presumably impacting the northern part of Kosovo and the territory of southeast Serbia (in the municipalities inhabited by the Albanian minority in Serbia) – was mooted during the tenure of Serbian President Zoran Djindjic in 2003. Considered an abrupt policy shift for Serbia, Djindjic was committed to bringing Serbia close to the EU and predicted the Kosovo issue would only prologue Serbia’s path toward the EU, which at that time was making speedy progress (Naegele, 2003). However, Djindjic's vision was a rather difficult solution for Kosovo; he suggested the following: I would like ‘to see Kosovo as a federation’ of the two parts, based on the UN-proposed model for Cyprus. Such an arrangement should include ‘a civilised form of population transfer’(Radio Free Europe, 2003). Djindjic’s plan was halted when Serbian extremists assassinated him in March 2003 for his reformist agenda and the determination to strengthen rule of law (Cvijic, 2021). But Djindjic’s proposal resurfaced sporadically during the Brussels Dialogue; in 2011, the three-point plan proposed by Stephan Lehne outlined a proposed compromise: first, a boost in development for Serbia and accelerated EU membership at the cost of recognition; second, Serbian recognition to be traded for the establishment of the autonomous districts for Kosovo’s Serbs and Serbia’s Albanians; third, to return the land and make it an integral part of the final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia (Lehne, 2009).

Other alternatives, such as the ‘Good Friday’ peace accord and the model of South Tirol, have been entertained but did not gain traction in the debate over the form of the final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia (2022). Although sporadically, another model that has been considered was the 1972 model of the two Germany. This allowed West Germany not to recognise de jure East Germany but to maintain relations, and both agreed not to block each other internationally. According to Wolfgang Ischinger, this idea would pave the way for both to move into the EU and deal with technicalities, not the core issue (Shkreli, 2013). This idea – albeit coming from a member state that continuously contributed to the Brussels Dialogue –

was not supported in Serbia and was rejected in Kosovo. The two Germany (East and West) were united at the end of the Cold War, and in Kosovo, the option of uniting in any form with Serbia was not unacceptable (Weber and Bajrami, 2018).

In March 2018, in a meeting with high-level U.S. representatives, Vučić stated that Serbia would compromise on Kosovo but not for a ‘humiliation of its own people’ (Dragojlo and Isufi, 2021), thus building the narrative on potential land swap to end the dispute over Kosovo statehood. In August 2018, the Brussels Dialogue took a critical turn; sharing the high-level public panel on Western Balkans, Thaçi and Vučić openly admitted to having been considering the possibility of territorial exchange or land swap as the potential solution – an idea never formally considered in the framework of the Brussels Dialogue. The idea has been presented as a joint solution based on which the two parties projected as part of the final agreement (Gray and Heath, 2018). This caused a shock in Kosovo; a President without any prior consultation with the political elite or the public in Kosovo has admitted considering a plan that for Kosovo has been a ‘red line’ and known to be desirable to Serbia. Furthermore, it would reverse the situation before 2000 when Kosovo was placed under international protectorate. At the same time, Thaçi stated his readiness to push for an unconventional agreement, Vučić – the ‘strongmen of the Western Balkans’ – brought up potential destabilisation as a threat to the region and the EU. Vučić, talking about the final solution or a possible war, stated the following:

The current status quo is a ‘frozen conflict’. Someone one day will de-freeze it and then we’d have a war. And none of us wants a war. I am just an ordinary man trying to influence in a way that I can keep peace and tranquility (Rettman, 2018; Zivanovic, 2018)

The Albach forum opened a new debate on the Brussels Dialogue and opened a divide between the EU in Brussels, the U.S., and some EU member states; this would be perceived as the first open transatlantic crack about the process.

President Thaçi defended the land swap idea in Kosovo by heralding it as the only feasible solution to end the dispute and complete the statehood jigsaw. In public appearances, Thaçi constantly stated that the land swap was a solution to the status quo eroding Kosovo’s statehood (Tcherneva, 2018). This idea would not only give Kosovo recognition by Serbia - albeit never having been confirmed formally by the Serbian side - but also would give Kosovo land from Serbia which Albanians inhabit.

Internally, the land swap idea triggered immense debates and political turmoil in Kosovo. First, the idea had not been discussed in Kosovo as Thaçi did not coordinate with the Prime Minister or the other members of the Government. This idea had not been debated with his former political party (PDK), which was one of the government coalition partners, nor had this issue been put for a debate in the Assembly. There was a lack of transparency; it was unclear what the content of the idea was; it only provided hints on exchanging the northern part of Kosovo around Mitrovica North with towns in southeast Serbia around Preshevo Valley. Integration of the Kosovo Serbs and the Brussels Agreements implementation was put on hold as the future of the Brussels Dialogue was seriously questioned (Interview 5, 2022).

The consequences of this agreement have been considered multi-dimensional. First, and most importantly, for the EU, it directly threatens the stability of the region. The land swap or any potential border changes will have a significant domino effect in already destabilised and dysfunctional Bosnia and Herzegovina and potentially in North Macedonia. In general, it would pave the way for those who believe there is ‘unfinished business from the 1990s’ in the Western Balkans to seek territorial solutions (Dempsey, 2018). Second, the land swap alternative did not explore the implications of this solution on the Kosovo Serbs residing in the southern part of Kosovo – which enjoy some degree of integration in the Kosovo system.

Furthermore, it would require the Ahtisaari Plan to be reviewed – particularly the part on the political rights of the Serbian minority in Kosovo – such as the double majority and reserved seats in the Assembly because of the decrease in the percentage of the Kosovo Serb population as a result of this agreement (Rossi, 2018; Sewer, 2018). Third, this solution would undermine the idea of Kosovo as a multi-ethnic state established on liberal values, a state in which minorities are guaranteed their rights and offered inclusion rather than a solution imposing blatant ethnic-driven exclusion. Lastly, the solution did not derive from a deliberative process. Thus, it did not enjoy popular support. As such, it was not only challenging to implement, but it would also not be sustainable and potentially trigger conflicts in Kosovo (Bajrami, 2018).

The land swap idea had been implicitly embraced by the HR/VP Frederica Mogherini and the Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn, both seeking a significant breakthrough and success at the end of their mandate (Barigazzi, 2018). France, led by President Emmanuel Macron, expressed mild interest in the Western Balkans and declared that it supported any idea coming from and accepted by the parties. On the other hand, Germany, led by Angela Merkel – afraid of the domino effect in Bosnia and Herzegovina and concerned more about the stability of the region – had been vocally against the land swap (Caliva Sergio, 2018). With the EU

member states deeply divided about the form of the final solution between Kosovo and Serbia, facing a crisis of trust and cooperation between the EU institutions in Brussels (EU Commission and EEAS) and the member states, the EU and the member states lacking vision about the region and the enlargement process, going through elections on the EU level, the Brussels Dialogue was entirely out of control leaving a leadership gap to be filled by the U.S. special envoy for the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue (Pancevski and Hinshaw, 2018). Fearing a threat to stability, Germany took a leading role bypassing the EU in Brussels led by Mogherini and Hahn, mobilised other EU member states that opposed the idea and called for a Berlin Summit in June 2019, and tried to encourage France to reach the same level event with all Western Balkans leaders in Paris in the fall of 2019 (DW, 2019). By kicking the EU out of its process, Germany attempted to derail the agreement, thus preventing it from taking place in the margins of the EU. The land swap idea highlighted the division between the Trump Administration and Germany; the Trump Administration, under its leadership of the process in 2019 – 2020, brokered three agreements between Kosovo and Serbia – one even taking place at the White House and signed by President Trump (Muharremi, 2021). The relations between the critical geopolitical actors are further deconstructed in the upcoming chapter.

The land swap idea did not come to fruition. Still, the impact of this idea floating around for almost two years had a detrimental impact on the progress of the Brussels Dialogue and the agreements reached within the framework of this process. One of the reasons this solution was not concluded with an agreement is the political constellation and the strong opposition internally leading to institutional, constitutional, and political crisis in Kosovo (Simić, 2018). The following section examines the quest to find a ‘constructive’ government that fits the Brussels Dialogue.

4.4. Political and Country Transformation vis-à-vis Brussels Dialogue

Three sets of challenges have immensely affected the state-building trajectory in Kosovo. The internal one is dominated by the debate about what kind of state Kosovo aspires to be; the regional one is mainly driven by the good neighbourly relations pushed by the EU; and the international is one of the biggest concerns which is related to finding its way in and international order which was in constant geopolitical change.

Being structured based on the Ahtisaari Plan, Kosovo – in contrast to other former Yugoslav states – is not defined by the ethnic composition of the country, albeit more than 90 per cent are of Albanian ethnicity (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2011). Kosovo is officially a multi-ethnic state¹⁵. Designed by the international actors involved in the process, Kosovo was set to be guided by the principles of non-discrimination and equal protection under the law for all communities as set out in the Constitution ('Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo', 2008). The Ahtisaari Plan foresaw a vast array of rights for non-majority communities. Annex II of the Ahtisaari Plan and Chapter I and III of the Constitution of Kosovo treat the rights of constitutionally recognised communities in Kosovo, including and specifically the political rights – starting from the reserved seats in the parliament (out of 120 seats, 20 are reserved for the non-majority communities – 10 for Serbs and 10 for the rest) (Ahtisaari, 2008). Within the government, at least two ministerial portfolios are reserved for non-majority communities. In addition to this, Ahtisaari introduced the double majority principle, which applies when voting on legislation of vital importance to the non-majority communities or changing the constitution of Kosovo (Ahtisaari, 2008). This gradually shifted the Brussels Dialogue from the foreign policy domain treated in the margins of the foreign policy into a deeply integrated process in the internal affairs which gradually imposed obstacles on its ability to be a functional state.

Internally, the implementation of the Ahtisaari Plan has been challenging for the newly established state as it built its institutions from scratch. One of the biggest challenges was the accommodation of the Serb community, who not only refused to accept the Ahtisaari Plan – though it provided them with extensive rights - but also the Government of Kosovo. The Serbian community backed by the Government of Serbia created parallel institutions in Kosovo which retained the Serbian education system – curricula of the lower education and the University of North Mitrovica – the healthcare system, the social and pension system, the currency, the courts, civil protection/security, even municipalities (Montanaro, 2009). The presence and influence of the Serbian Government in Kosovo has been further cemented through the major local Serbian party – the Serbian List/Lista Srpska (SL) – which remains the only political party representing the Serbs in the Kosovo institutions. The SL is essentially completely controlled by the ruling party in Serbia – the Serbian Progressive Party – led by the President Vučić.

¹⁵ The recognised ethnic groups in Kosovo: Albanians, Serbs, Bosniaks, Ashkali, Roma, and Gorani

The Brussels Agreement of April 2013 represented a pivotal juncture in the political dynamics of the political representation of the Kosovo Serbs. For the first time since 2001, it enabled the establishment of coherent and cohesive political parties representing Serbs across the entire Serb-populated territory of Kosovo, represented by the SL.

Initially perceived to incorporate Serb political representatives from the northern part of Kosovo who were opposed to integration and to give a voice to local Serbs in the Brussels Dialogue, the Belgrade-initiated initiative closely aligned with the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) ultimately served as an extension of Serbian authoritarianism. It furthered the stability agenda of Vučić, particularly in the northern part of Kosovo (Koha Ditore, 2017). The SL evolved into an official political party in 2017 and enjoyed unwavering support from Belgrade. It is widely regarded as a proxy entity of the Belgrade regime. Consequently, in the years following the Brussels Agreement, through local elections in 2013 and 2017, as well as parliamentary elections in 2014, 2017, and 2019, the SL gradually solidified its influence and thoroughly reshaped the political landscape of Kosovo Serbs, effectively monopolising it and linking it directly to Belgrade. Other political parties or their members either aligned with the SL or faced political intimidation due to various pressures and electoral setbacks. Kosovo Serb politicians who did not align with the SL were labelled as ethnic traitors, further hindering the de facto integration of Serbs in the Kosovo system. A daunting event was the assassination of Oliver Ivanović, a Kosovo Serb politician, in 2019. The vice president of the SL, Radoičić, was among those indicted for his murder. Ivanović had sought to bridge differences between the Serb and Albanian communities in Kosovo. Radoičić had been perceived as a stability partner in northern Kosovo, despite his prior involvement in the "civil protection" activity that challenged Kosovo's authority in the north. He was also instrumental in mobilizing local Serbs when needed to generate instability in northern Kosovo, serving Vučić's stability agenda (Mujanović, 2023; Eror, 2023).

In 2021, Radoičić was sanctioned by the US for his involvement in significant criminal activities, including the murder of Oliver Ivanović and the Banjska Monastery attack in September 2024. Wounded in the operation, considered a terrorist attack even by the EU, Radoičić found refuge in Serbia and continued to be protected by the Vučić regime. This operation aimed to challenge Kosovo's authority in the north and had a more detrimental and dangerous agenda to destabilise Kosovo and the region (O'Carroll & Borger, 2023).

Although Radoičić is no longer part of the SL, Belgrade's support for the dominant Serbian political party in Kosovo provides another form of leverage over Kosovo. This party remains closely tied to the SNS. Currently, it holds all ten seats reserved for the Serbian minority in the Kosovo parliament and all ten mayorships in Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, effectively dominating institutions in these areas. The SL maintains its monopoly on political representation for Serbs through voter intimidation, as well as pressures on opposition candidates and their families (Radosavljević & Ničić, 2021).

Once considered, even by the EU appeasing the stabilitocracy game, as a factor for integration, the Serb List played a pivotal role in the recent boycott of local elections in Kosovo. Furthermore, it led to the institutional boycott of Kosovo Serb police officers serving in the north in December 2022, putting pressure on Kosovo and the EU and regressing the progress achieved in the Brussels Dialogue. The Serb List continues to obstruct the integration of local Serbs in Kosovo, this time by exerting pressure on new police officers from the Serbian community who have joined the Kosovo Police in the northern municipalities, as they have been subjected to threats originating from various Serbian online platforms (Bami & Stojanovic, 2022).

Therefore, Serbian state structures perform essential statehood tasks in the territory of Kosovo to undermine Kosovo's statehood, most effectively in the northern part of Kosovo. Thus, a large portion of the agreements signed in the framework of the Brussels Dialogue do not deal with the relations between Kosovo and Serbia but rather concern one area in Kosovo, the unintegrated northern part of Kosovo. This also turned the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia into a dialogue about the internal functioning of Kosovo (Capussela, 2016).

For instance, the Brussels Agreement obliged Serbia to dismantle parallel institutions operating in Kosovo, but the legal ambiguity created space for Serbia to not deliver in this regard. The first step was ensuring that the municipalities in the north run by the Serbian parallel institutions would be gradually integrated in the Kosovo system (Rashiti and Prelec, 2015). The agreement has not only created a legal basis for the establishment of four municipalities in the north such as Mitrovica North, Zvečan, Zubin Potok and Leposavić but also foresaw the abolishment of the parallel municipalities run by the Serbian government. The agreement also paved the way for the first local elections run by the Kosovo authorities to be organized in Kosovo with the direct assistance of the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission in Kosovo (Local Elections/Establishment of Serb-majority Municipalities, 2013). In the local

elections held in 2013, though formally within the Republic of Kosovo, the logo of state symbols did not appear in the ballots designated for the local Serbs in Kosovo. In parallel to the political participation for Serbs in Kosovo, the Government of Serbia continued to organize Serbian elections in Kosovo until April 2022. In April 2022, the Serbian triple elections were not allowed to be organised in the territory of Kosovo without the formal request by Serbia addressed to the government of Kosovo. This decision did not prevent the participation of the Serb citizens in Kosovo holding Serbian citizenship in the elections, but rather requested the voting to take place following the rules for out of country voting instead. This decision has been criticised by the Quint¹⁶ members in an official statement (UK Government, 2022)

Another important element of the agreement showcased the security approach of the EU aiming to deliver on the rule of law in the northern part of Kosovo. The points that required the dismantling of Serbian parallel structures - security, policing, and justice structures - aimed to pave the way for Kosovo authorities to extend their presence and gradually work on consolidating and strengthening the rule of law in the north. Thus, it was aiming at the overall removal of the Serbia-run institutions in Kosovo. From the security and rule of law perspective, three points of the agreement have been dedicated to the integration of the police officers' part of the Serbian Ministry of Interior and the Civil Protection units to the Kosovo Police (Brussels Agreement/Police, 2013). Recognising the Kosovo Police as the sole law enforcement institution in the north has been considered a milestone given the level of sensitivity. Similarly, the Judicial (Brussels Agreement/Judicial 2013) component occupied a large scope of attention. The regulation and the activity of judicial bodies and courts in the north of Kosovo set out the basis for the establishment of the Kosovo judicial system in the north. Though the Brussels Agreement foresees a gradual integration of these important institutions into the Kosovo-run system/framework, the integration has been partial leaving the process halfway completed as the dialogue has stagnated leading to uncertainty and instability in the north. Serbia continues to exert influence in Kosovo through the costly and complicated network of the parallel structures/institutions it maintains with the justification of the lack of implementation of the Agreement on the Association/Community of the Serbian municipalities (Beysoylu, 2018). In 2022, all the progress reached as a result has been shattered. The decision of the local Serbs to collectively leave the Kosovo institutions has caused regress in the already limited results reached in the timespan of ten years. The decision of the Kosovo Serbs to leave the Kosovo

¹⁶ Members of the Quint: France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Policy, the local municipalities, and the boycott of the extra ordinary municipal elections organised in the framework of the Kosovo system has sent strong indication that the situation is going back to the status-quo prior to the 2012. Thus, limiting further achievements in the Brussels Dialogue despite the heavy shuttle diplomacy involvement of the EU and the US. As the moment of writing, in May 2023, the situation escalated in the northern part of Kosovo. This not only froze the functionality of already fragile local institutions in the north but also activated the KFOR mission as per 1244 for the first time in after war Kosovo taking full responsibility for security in the north (Begisholli and Isufi, 2023). Internally, this situation is a regress for Kosovo to a situation of pre 2012 status-quo which predicts not only an unstable phase but also risk of further internal deterioration of the political situation.

Externally, during the first two years after Kosovo declared independence, over sixty countries recognized Kosovo; today the figure is 117 according to the Kosovo's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Without full international recognition Kosovo remains an 'unfinished project'. The ICJ decision (2010) advisory opinion, did not provide a boost in international recognition; for instance, Spain remains equally sceptic even after the ICJ decision. The Brussels Dialogue (2011) further complicated Kosovo's quest for international diplomatic recognitions and membership in multilateral cooperation mechanisms. The pressure to recognize Kosovo from Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain was alleviated with the Brussels Dialogue ongoing (Newman and Visoka, 2018). For instance, Greece, Slovakia and to some extent Romania have developed communication with Kosovo without formal recognition. These countries have constantly used the Brussels Dialogue as the only process that would persuade them to consider diplomatic recognition for Kosovo, however, they did not offer any guarantee for recognition by the end of the process (Interview 14, 2022; Interview 11, 2023).

As Kosovo was seeking diplomatic recognitions, Serbia launched a de-recognition campaign – similarly to the China versus Taiwan case. Serbia has managed to reduce the number of recognitions for Kosovo – the number remains unclear – and further strengthened its narrative on changing the reality on the ground. Moreover, it reduced Kosovo's ability to gain membership in multilateral mechanisms as most of them require two-thirds majority for membership such as in the case of Kosovo's failure to join UNESCO in 2015 (Guardian, 2015) and Interpol in 2018 (RFE/RL, 2018). Regional integration for Kosovo remained elusive despite being sponsored predominantly by the EU and the Footnote Agreement that Kosovo had signed to pave the way for regional integration. Serbia continued its destructive approach toward Kosovo – in some cases using Republika Srpska within Bosnia and Herzegovina to

block Kosovo regionally. On the other hand, Kosovo imposed tariffs on imports from Serbia as a means to implement trade reciprocity (100%) tariffs on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, clearly violating the rules of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) (CEFTA, 2006).

Even the re-engagement of Kosovo in the Brussels Dialogue in 2023, for instance, did not manage to have a political impact on the non-recognisers. The Kosovo Government has repeatedly requested that the agreement contain specific points which indicate a softened approach of the non-recognisers. The EU special representative for the Brussels Dialogue has made efforts to ensure support from the non-recognisers. However, the reality on the ground shows no indication of the Brussels Dialogue impacting the political decision of the individual member states, not even the case Greece or Slovakia which are considered soft non-recognisers (Interview 14, 2022; Interview 11, 2023).

4.4.1.Brussels Dialogue as a Source of Political (in)Stability in Kosovo

Since 2008 when the process of state and institution building started, the governments in Kosovo still needed to finish their full four-year mandate; between 2014 and 2021, Kosovo had seven governments. The political instability and deep polarization are a phenomenon deeply connected with the events occurring in the framework of the Brussels Dialogue. While Kosovo changed governments, power rotated between the same parties that were in power or shared the power in coalitions. The PDK of Hashim Thaçi remained in power for the most extended period, with Thaçi in different positions, such as the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the President. Thus, he was a stable leader backed by a relatively strong political party.

The Brussels Dialogue was accompanied by severe political crisis and turmoil in Kosovo. The political instability started with the Agreement of 2013 signed by Hashim Thaçi, marking the first event triggering consecutive political crises resulting in snap elections and the ousting of five governments from 2013 – 2020. Shortly after signing the Brussels Agreement in 2013, Thaçi initiated a no-confidence motion that ousted the government he was leading. This left the implementation of the Brussels Agreement and the General Principles (2015) to be signed by the upcoming Prime Minister of Kosovo, Isa Mustafa of the Kosovo Democratic League (LDK), governing in coalition with the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and Thaçi as his deputy and foreign minister of Kosovo. This stripped Thaçi of the responsibility to implement the agreement he negotiated and keep his party in the governing coalition until the president's

office could complete his political cycle. Thus, immediately after being elected as the President of Kosovo in 2016 amid protests and teargas in the Assembly, Thaçi once again ousted the government, leading the country to yet another snap parliamentary election in 2017 (Bytyci, 2017).

In 2017, both Kosovo and Serbia held elections, while nationalist narratives prevailed, and the implementation of the agreements was significantly impacted. In January 2017, Vučić inaugurated the train connection from Belgrade to Mitrovica North. The Russian-made train was heavily decorated with large images of Serbian Orthodox religious icons from famous monasteries in Kosovo, with messages reading ‘Kosovo is Serbia’ in various languages (BBC News, 2017). Vučić aimed for the train to enter Kosovo, but the special police units in Kosovo barricaded the north in cooperation with the NATO mission in Kosovo (KFOR). This event almost sparked another conflict between Kosovo and Serbia while the Brussels Dialogue was expected to resume. The EU heavily depended on the political will and the stability provided by Vučić and Serbia, which is considered the only country in the Western Balkans with the power to destabilise the region (Karnitschnig, 2016). Thus, perpetuating the (in)stability cycle, which is present and even more relevant to date (2023).

With the elections upcoming in both countries in 2017, the implementation of the agreements predominantly depended on whether the newly elected leaders would embrace the new reality. The Brussels Dialogue was thus put on hold. In Serbia, the election only cemented Vučić’s already strong position internally; in Kosovo, the 2017 election saw Vetëvendosje emerge as the single largest party, doubling its results from the 2014 election. Dissatisfaction with the outcome of the Brussels Dialogue led to decreased electoral support for the PDK and LDK. However, at the eleventh hour, a grand pre-election coalition between PDK-AAK-NISMA has once again kept the old ruling elite in power by joining forces against the emerging power of Vetëvendosje (Avdyli, 2017). At this point, for the international community in Kosovo, it was crucial to have a government committed to implementing the Association Agreement and remaining a partner in the dialogue (EEAS, 2017). Thus, the EU searched for the ‘political stability’ that Vučić was establishing in Serbia, regardless of the democratic backsliding and elements of state capture that the EU Commission bluntly mentioned in its country reports for Serbia and Kosovo. Following the elections, President Thaçi of Kosovo and President Vučić of Serbia reengaged in the negotiations. The Brussels Dialogue moved to the presidents’ level with Thaçi and Vučić deemed constructive partners best equipped to lead the process (Kosova Democratic Institute KDI, 2018).

Dissatisfaction was mounting within the EU and Serbia regarding Kosovo's delayed establishment of the Association/Community. The possibility of establishing the Association increased dissatisfaction in Kosovo towards President Thaçi and the unstable Government (Morina, 2018). The government was constantly facing the political blackmail of the Serbian List, threatening to boycott Kosovo institutions (Popova and Gashi, 2018). On the other hand, the opposition gaining more public support was strongly opposed to establishing the Association. (International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies, 2018). Endemic levels of corruption as assessed by the EU country report 2018 (EU Commission, 2018), by the corruption perception index of Transparency International (in 2018 Kosovo from 85 moved to 93, decreasing by 37 points) (Corruption Perceptions Index - Kosovo, 2018), further increased the pressure on the political elite in Kosovo.

While the EU attempted to resume the Brussels Dialogue with Thaçi and Vučić, tensions were increasing in northern Kosovo. The assassination of Oliver Ivanović – a prominent Serb politician speaking up against organised crime and for reconciliation within Kosovo – in 2018 marked another crisis in the process (MacDowall, 2018; Morina, 2018). This put the Brussels Dialogue on hold as the lack of rule of law and limited access of the Kosovo authorities in the north called for EULEX involvement without any particular result in the investigation. As the tension was mounting in Kosovo, the Government of Serbia was organising meetings with Kosovo Serbs to gather inputs for the Brussels Dialogue. In March 2018, the unapproved visit of Marko Djuric, who was leading the Office for Kosovo within the Government of Serbia, led to his arrest by the Special Police of Kosovo. Even though his arrest took place in the northern part of Kosovo, he was dragged through Pristina as a show of power in response to Serbian intrusion in the northern part of Kosovo (MacDowall, 2018). The tensions in the northern part of Kosovo, the inability to resume the Brussels Dialogue and the lack of implementation of the Brussels Agreement, made the integration of the north into the Kosovo system even more distant (Deutsche Welle, 2018)

4.4.2. The Quest to Find a Government that Fits the Brussels Dialogue

Each election process/cycle in Kosovo had one buzzword: the Brussels Dialogue. The EU viewed all events through the lens of the Brussels Dialogue; essential documents such as the Enlargement Strategy for the Western Balkans in 2018 mentioned Kosovo predominantly about the Dialogue and the importance of paving the way for EU integration for Serbia (European Council, 2018) Thus, every election process resembled a mission to find a constructive partner

to stay committed to the Dialogue. The importance of reforms was constantly overshadowed by the need to implement the Brussels Agreement and engage in the Brussels Dialogue (Isufi, 2019).

From 2018 to 2020, Kosovo's political elite was highly divided, leaving Kosovo without a unified voice in the Brussels Dialogue. During this period, the Brussels Dialogue was stalled, leaving a gap for the U.S. to take control of the process (Rettman and Krasniqi, 2020). President Thaçi established his line of representation alongside the U.S., running a parallel process (Bergmann, Cicarelli and Lamond, 2020). A government side-lined by the President pushing for an acceptable alternative for Kosovo pushed Haradinaj to introduce the 100% tax as a trade embargo against Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sopi and Morina, 2019). This event raised tensions with Serbia and put the negotiations on hold. Haradinaj called it 'emergency brakes' to stop the land swap idea (BBC Hardtalk with Haradinaj, 2018). Internally, Kosovo was highly polarised in relation to the Brussels-led Dialogue or even the parallel one facilitated by the representative of President Trump (Delauney, 2018). The fall of 2019 would find Kosovo – once again - without a government when Prime Minister Haradinaj resigned after being sent an invitation for questioning by the Special Court (Parliament, 2020). Kosovo plunged into another political crisis and another election process, leaving the President as the only legitimate representative of Kosovo, enjoying his mandate and the right to represent Kosovo internationally (BBC News, 2019; Reuters, 2019).

The quest was to find a government which would be constructive in the Dialogue with Serbia and close the deal. The elections of 2019 reflected the disappointment of the citizens of Kosovo toward parties ruling with questioned legitimacy from 2017 to 2019. The government would be formed by two parties holding diametrically different positions toward the Brussels Dialogue; it was difficult for the LDK under whose leadership the General Principles (2015) had been negotiated, thus bringing the Association to its final form (Szpala, 2016), to rule with Vetëvendosje which rejected the same deal by using teargas in the Assembly to disrupt its work while debating this deal (Delauney, 2015). It took nearly three months to form the government led by Albin Kurti (Emini, 2020a), who was immediately put under pressure to lift the 100% tax toward Serbia and resume negotiations with Serbia regardless of the need to stabilise the country after years of political crisis internally and missed opportunities to work on the democratisation and reforms (Conley and Saric, 2021).

In the quest to find a government fit to continue the Dialogue with Serbia, the pressure on the new government of Kosovo increased. Kosovo continued to have two diametrically opposing

tracks on the Dialogue. President Thaçi pursued the idea of a land swap in a process under the facilitation of the Trump Administration through the Special Envoy for Kosovo – Serbia Dialogue, Richard Grenell (Joseph, 2020). This phase marked an unprecedented increase of the role of stabilitocrats in the Brussels Dialogue, with both Vučić and Thaçi being the chosen ones to pursue an agenda that, albeit unclear, was considered to have the potential to destabilise the entire region.

On the other hand, Kurti is trying to build a process from scratch, disregarding the previous agreements and the reality on the ground shaped by the Brussels Dialogue (Parrock, 2020). Kurti was reluctant to join the negotiations led by the U.S. exploring the alternative, so he openly rejected (RTK, 2020; Bami and Isufi, 2020). The EU had already completed the election cycle and appointed Miroslav Lajčák as the special envoy for Kosovo - Serbia Dialogue (European Council, 2020). Lajčák was a partner for Kurti because of his opposition to the land swap idea threatening the stability of the EU. However, it was rejected openly by Thaçi, who questioned the suitability of the former Slovak Foreign Minister because he came from a non-recognising country (Prishtina Insight, 2020). This marked the first explicit fissures between the EU and President Thaçi – once considered a partner in the dialogue.

When Kurti came to power, immense political pressure followed – mainly led by the U.S. and the EU – to lift the 100% tax against Serbia and pave the way for the Brussels Dialogue to resume (Mehmetaj, 2020). Though Kurti lifted the 100% tax and replaced it with full reciprocity against Serbia – this option was not considered good enough to convince Serbia to travel to Washington DC to finalise the agreement with Kosovo (RFE/RL's Balkan Service, 2020). Under pressure from the U.S., Kosovo's governing partners were divided on how Kosovo should treat the U.S. requests. Thus, under a Thaçi-led initiative and with the support of the U.S. Embassy in Kosovo, on the 25th of March 2020, the Government was ousted for not being a 'good partner for Dialogue' only after 50 days after coming to power (Economist, 2020). Instead of elections – because of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions but also using the Constitutional Court decision, which gives the right to form the government to whichever party or coalition that has the majority, the LDK entered into coalition with AAK, NISMA and the Srpska Lista, President Thaçi mandated Avdullah Hoti to form the government (EU Commission, 2020; Office of the President of the Republic of Kosovo, 2020).

The new government, paired with President Thaçi, brought together the old ruling elite, part of the Brussels Dialogue, in different phases. Hoti was a partner for Thaçi and ready to support the agreement facilitated by the U.S and negotiated by Thaçi and Vučić (Emini, 2020; Walker

et al., 2020). As the parties were preparing for the Washington Agreement to take life, under serious fears and uncertainty of what the agreement would have for content, the Kosovo Specialist Chambers published an indictment against President Thaçi, leading to his resignation and his detention in The Hague (*BBC News*, 2020; Kosovo Specialist Chambers, 2020). President Thaçi - the leader in the process who had the institutional memory in the Brussels Dialogue and also led Kosovo through the U.S. negotiated phase was out of the game (Pineles, 2020).

Hoti, as the Prime Minister of Kosovo, was the next leader considered a partner showing political will to sign the agreement negotiated by Thaçi. Thus, in September 2020, the Washington Accords were signed in the White House (International Crisis Group, 2021; Fetahu, 2021; Morina, 2020; Bechev, 2020). The agreement and its content are further elaborated in the next chapter, which deconstructs the role of the U.S. in the process. Hoti also resumed the Brussels Dialogue through two video conferences, under the initiative of President Macron of France Government (Kosovo Government/ Office of Prime Minister, 2020) and the EU Special Envoy for the Kosovo – Serbia Dialogue albeit without a clear timeframe and objectives (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2020; Lorne Cook, 2020).

Since Hoti's government was considered illegitimate by the Vetëvendosje, it sent a request to the Constitutional Court to review its mandate (Constitutional Court, 2020) – especially about the mandate of one member of the parliament who voted for the Government and who was convicted of a crime and thus his mandate should have been discontinued (Braun and Tërnavë, 2021). The Court ruled the new government was unconstitutional, and new elections were called for in February 2021. More than 50 per cent of Kosovo's electorate supported Vetëvendosje (Central Election Commission, 2021), giving the party complete control of the Assembly, the Government, and the Presidency in coalition with Vjosa Osmani from the Guxo party. Kosovo has established a new political elite which did not include any parties that have governed since 2000 and were previously active in the Brussels Dialogue (Bami and Isufi, 2021).

Since becoming Prime Minister, Kurti has been criticised for building the narrative that there is no urgency to work on the Brussels Dialogue. Though his government has been working on internal reforms, the Brussels Dialogue is a priority for the EU and his lack of political will to engage in the process and implement the agreements signed has led his government to be cast as an unconstructive party in the process (Ilse, 2021). This makes the new government

vulnerable to pressure and threatens the country's political stability. Since the first meeting between Kurti and Vučić in July 2021, the Brussels Dialogue has faced multiple crises and has not made any significant progress.

Despite initially stating that the Brussels Dialogue was not a top priority for his government, Kurti found himself thrown into this process. As a political figure who strongly opposed the concept of 'stabilitocracy' and criticised the approach of Thaçi and Vučić in the negotiation process, Kurti sought to establish his stance as well as new rules. However, several challenges were associated with his involvement in the Brussels Dialogue. Firstly, his opposition portrayed him as destructive and accused him of making unrealistic demands on Kosovo's behalf since the start of the Brussels Dialogue in 2011. This criticism was used against him during the negotiation process. Secondly, while in opposition, Kurti had promised not to meet with Vučić unless Serbia recognised Kosovo and was held accountable for war crimes. However, he engaged in the negotiation process without securing recognition, failing to deliver on expectations and promises made to his electorate. Thirdly, Kurti lacked previous experience and involvement in the process. Although this signalled a fresh start, his government inherited agreements that he was then responsible for implementing, such as the Association/Community, even though it went against his own political will. For the West, eager to find a government compatible with the Brussels Dialogue, a political leader considered destructive in the past was posing many challenges. A similar atmosphere was also detected in Serbia, with Vučić facing the unknown as a new counterpart from Kosovo was taking over the process. Hence, his appointment faced a lukewarm reaction, with some fearing the complete failure of the Brussels Dialogue.

During his involvement in the Brussels Dialogue, Kurti faced significant pressure regarding establishing the Association/Community. However, Kurti had a different agenda. As certain agreements, such as those concerning IDs and car registration plates, were approaching their expiration dates, there was a call for their renegotiation. Despite requests from the EU and the U.S. to postpone the decision on imposing reciprocity, Kurti took a firm stance against Serbia's imposition of reciprocity, leading to two escalations of the situation in northern Kosovo. This was surprising, particularly for the U.S. leadership, as they were not accustomed to experiencing friction with the Kosovo Government, especially regarding matters related to the Brussels Dialogue. Kurti's defiance sparked internal debates, resulting in lukewarm bilateral relations between Kosovo and the U.S. In response, the U.S. refrained from holding high-level bilateral meetings with Kosovo until Kurti demonstrated commitment to the Brussels Dialogue.

In his efforts to establish a position in the northern part of Kosovo and actively participate in the Brussels Dialogue, Kurti followed the footsteps of his predecessors by playing the stability card. Two consecutive police interventions took place in the northern part of Kosovo, leading to erecting barricades and causing a roadblock, paralysing the infrastructural links between the north and the rest of Kosovo. This led to immediate mobilisation by the EU and NATO. NATO reaffirmed its commitment to providing security in Kosovo based on its mandate security by Resolution 1244, while the EU engaged in shuttle diplomacy to bring the parties together for negotiations. The war in Ukraine heightened the sensitivity and securitisation of the Kosovo-Serbia issue, increasing the desperation of the EU and the U.S. for stability in the Western Balkans. With international media speculating about the possibility of another war in Europe, the response to the situation on the ground became more robust. Several meetings between Vučić and Kurti took place, and the first breakthrough occurred in 2022 with the agreement on IDs and a temporary postponement of the issue regarding car registration plates. In 2023, driven by security concerns, the EU and the U.S. succeeded in getting Kurti and Vučić to reach an agreement known as the Brussels Arrangement in February 2023. Subsequently, an action plan was formulated and agreed upon in Ohrid in March 2023. At the time of writing, negotiations between the parties involved occur amid relatively calm conditions on the ground.

Meanwhile, Kosovo organised local elections in the northern part of the country intending to replace mayors who had resigned in protest against the treatment by the Government of Kosovo. However, the local Serbs boycotted the elections, resulting in the election of Albanian mayors in the northern four municipalities. This reversal of progress made in the Brussels Dialogue triggered protests and heightened tensions in northern Kosovo. The decision by Kurti to intervene in the north allowed Vučić to divert attention from one of the major political crises in Serbia - the large-scale protests against his rule and state capture. In May 2023, as Vučić faced significant demonstrations in Belgrade, tensions escalated in the north, leading to one of the most severe security crises, with KFOR/NATO troops being attacked by protesters. These further heightened tensions and securitised the Brussels Dialogue, resulting in increased pressure from the U.S. and the EU on Kosovo to de-escalate the situation while turning a blind eye to Vučić's autocratic rule and his blatant use of the Kosovo issue to divert public attention from the protests. In September 2023, a significant escalation in tensions unfolded, primarily triggered by the attack on Banjska Monastery in northern Kosovo. This incident not only heightened concerns regarding the presence of informal armed Serbian forces in Kosovo but also raised the spectre of a potential conflict, as reports indicated the movement of the Serbian

army near the Kosovo border. Intensive negotiations are currently underway between Kosovo and Serbia, with the objective of addressing a critical security gap and persuading the Kosovo government to engage constructively in the negotiation process. Meanwhile, the EU has continued to display a degree of leniency toward Serbia, making efforts to accommodate its requests in the hopes of averting similar situations in the future.

4.5. Brussels Dialogue: the EU Integration Avenue for Kosovo and Serbia

The EU's role in helping facilitate the Brussels Dialogue clearly illustrates how the promise of EU integration can drive conflict resolution. The Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia represents one of the most unique cases in which promoting good neighbourly relations and settling bilateral disputes became a much-emphasized precondition for enlargement. The European Commission, for instance, made it unequivocally clear: 'The EU cannot and will not import bilateral disputes and the instability they can entail' (European Commission, 2019). This attitude of the EU and its member states was emphasised initially in 2011 when the EU facilitated the dialogue aiming at normalisation between the parties and promoting stability in the region. Moreover, the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia seriously impacts the progress of the two countries and the entire region toward the EU.

After Serbia showcased its interest in joining the EU through its formal membership application, the EU strategically used the dialogue to motivate Serbia to enter the formal dialogue under the auspices of the EU. Thus, since 2011, instead of the EU integration reform framed as the Copenhagen Criteria – the Brussels Dialogue became an important avenue through which the EU has set the pace of EU integration for Serbia. The first decision to formally link the Dialogue with the EU integration process was taken in 2011. In October 2011, the EU Commission recommended giving the status of the candidate country to Serbia. However, the positive opinion granted by the EU Commission did not get the support of the EU Council, which – under the influence of Germany – postponed the decision to open accession talks with Serbia for 2012 (European Commission, 2012). Germany pushed the decision to grant the candidate status to Serbia until it formally included the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia into the EU conditionality package for both countries.

Before granting the carrot of 'candidate status', the EU conditioned Serbia with a set of deals signed between Kosovo and Serbia in the framework of the technical dialogue. These agreements include sensitive issues such as the Integrated Border/Boundary Management and

the so-called footnote agreement, which regulated the representation of Kosovo in the regional fora. As a reward for its constructive approach to Serbia, the EU officially granted candidate status to Serbia in spring 2012 (Blagojevic, 2017). This transaction gradually overshadowed the importance of democratic reforms and the Copenhagen criteria. The next milestone in Serbia's EU integration path occurred in 2014, immediately after the Brussels Agreement in 2013, which was considered a historic moment for the EU and the Western Balkans. The decision to open accession negotiations for Serbia in 2014 further emphasised the fact that the EU has gradually conditioned the EU accession for Serbia with a visible and sustainable improvement in relations with Kosovo (Bobić, 2016).

The link between the conditionality through reforms and the good-neighbourly relations element further deepened as Serbia moved further with the accession negotiation process and opened structured cooperation in the framework of the EU integration process. The opening of accession negotiations with Serbia paved the way for cooperation between the EU and Serbia in what was then structured in 35 Chapters. Each Chapter contained detailed reforms covering a wide range of issues requested by the EU to be fulfilled by Serbia. Solving the issue with Kosovo occupied Chapter 35, which is listed under 'the other issues.' This chapter includes miscellaneous issues that might arise during the negotiations but are not covered under any other negotiating chapter. Kosovo is also discussed in Chapters 23 and 24, which are crucial for the rule of law and justice reforms from the perspective of regional security cooperation (Milačić, 2020).

Similarly, the Brussels Agreement has been perceived as a turning point unlocking Kosovo's path toward the EU, providing a strong positive impetus to the EU integration process for Kosovo. Nevertheless, the trajectory of Kosovo toward the EU after the Brussels Agreement was not similar to that of Serbia; the Brussels Agreement did not unlock the EU perspective for Kosovo to the same extent as for Serbia. In the case of Kosovo, progress was seriously hampered by the fact that Kosovo does not enjoy full international statehood recognition. Even though the EU is leading a dialogue process between Kosovo and Serbia, its position in relation to Kosovo remains complex due to the lack of recognition by the five EU non-recognizers. Furthermore, due to the lack of coherence and alignment amongst EU member states toward Kosovo, the EU is not in a position to formally demand that Serbia recognise Kosovo. This creates significant obstacles in the EU integration process for Kosovo, not only creating the

perception of power asymmetry but also making the EU integration process formally impossible for Kosovo.¹⁷

Despite these differences in the approach toward Kosovo, the EU has managed to find a way to at least sign the Stabilisation Association Process with Kosovo. The Brussels Agreement created a solid basis for the negotiations between Kosovo and the EU, aiming to sign the Stabilisation Association Agreement (SAA), which is considered to be the first concrete and contractual step in the path toward EU integration. This was the ‘road map’ for Kosovo’s European Integration tied to the immensely complex process of normalization of relations with Serbia (Dessus, et al., 2017). Hence, marking the first linkage between the reforms related to Copenhagen criteria with the good neighbourly relation element. The SAA for Kosovo, however, was made possible through yet another creative ambiguity strategy of the EU; aiming to bypass the five non-recognizers, the SAA for Kosovo was agreed to be signed in 2015 by the EU acting as a separate legal entity as provided in the term of the Lisbon Treaty, instead of having the SAA approved by each individual member state. This, once again, created a quick fix easing the situation, but failed to find a sustainable long-term solution and address the elephant in the room – the recognition issue.

Due to the five non-recognizers and following the conclusion of the SAA, the Council stated:

None of the terms, wording or definition used in this Decision and the attached text of the Agreement, nor any recourse to all the necessary legal bases for the conclusion of the Agreement, constitute recognition of Kosovo as an independent State, nor does it constitute recognition by the individual Member States of Kosovo in that capacity where they have not previously taken such a step (European Commission, 2016).

In the case of both Kosovo and Serbia, the Brussels agreement was believed to have provided an impetus in the EU integration process, thus speeding up the integration trajectory. While this was expected to be the case, implementing the Brussels Agreement and the prioritization of stability over reforms by the EU created opportunities for the local elites to engage in a stabilitocracy cycle (Djolai & Nechev, 2018).

4.6. Conclusion

The findings of the chapter show the multi frontal impact that the Brussels Dialogue has had on shaping reality on the ground. The Brussels dialogue has impacted on the internal

¹⁷ Kosovo cannot formally apply for EU membership due to legal obstacles caused by all EU member states' lack of full recognition.

functioning of the country and gradually turned the process – once again – into a negotiation about the final status of Kosovo and not orientated towards the normalization of relations between two equal parties at the table.

The reality on the ground was that the Brussels Dialogue was not focused on the normalization of the relations between Kosovo and Serbia, but rather a conflict prevention exercise designed to prevent the parties from returning to the conflict of the 1990s. With the EU lacking a clear time frame, basic principles, and clear goals in the process, the parties have engaged in stabilitocracy, thus engaging in state capture using the EU tools and an EU led process. The EU incremental approach and the constructive ambiguity did not lead the process toward a desirable and acceptable end. On the contrary, it further polarised the parties by feeding completely and diametrically opposing attitudes and narratives.

The research findings demonstrate that the Brussels Dialogue faces a significant limitation due to the approach of the EU which relies on constructive ambiguity. This approach has made it challenging to implement the agreements signed in Brussels and has provided an easy justification for the lack of implementation, often due to a lack of genuine political will to engage in the process. Instead of fostering trust, this approach has allowed the parties involved to develop different narratives for their respective constituents and claim success in the process. The lack of transparency and inclusivity in the process has given leaders the opportunity to establish themselves as the sole “partner” in the Dialogue, promoting autocratic tendencies and obstructing democratic reforms, which contradicts the EU’s mission in the Western Balkans. Despite a decade of utilising the same strategy without clear and tangible results, the normalization process has resorted to exploring risky alternatives, such as the potential land swap, albeit unofficially within the framework of the Brussels Dialogue.

The Brussels Dialogue has interfered with the state-building process in Kosovo causing significant challenges, categorized into three main sets. Firstly, there are internal challenges revolving around the impact that the agreements reached in the Brussels Dialogue impact the internal functioning of Kosovo. Secondly, it looks at the regional challenges which arise from the emphasis placed by the EU on fostering good neighbourly relations among countries in the region. Lastly, there are international challenges stemming from Kosovo’s need to navigate within a rapidly changing international order characterized by geopolitical shifts. The Brussels Dialogue contributed to the limitations Kosovo has faced in consolidating its international status by channelling its fate through Serbia. Likewise is the case of Kosovo’s European Integration.

The implications of the Brussels Agreement especially the elements on the Association/Community have had a detrimental impact on shaping reality on the ground. In Kosovo, the political crisis caused by these agreements has halted almost all relevant political processes within the country. Facing consecutive political crisis as a result of the events taking place in the Brussels Dialogue, the reform agenda of Kosovo was seriously interrupted. In the meantime, the corrupt political elites used the Brussels Dialogue to increase their political influence internally. It furthermore shows how the EU and the U.S., facing the internal crises and instability in Kosovo struggle to find a partner for dialogue, especially after 2020 and Prime Minister Kurti rising to power. The stability cycle, whoever did not end with Kurti. The chapter shows how a series of tensions taking place in the northern part of Kosovo has triggered attention and engaged the EU and U.S. shuttle diplomacy aiming to change the course of the Brussels Dialogue from conflict prevention mode to active constructive negotiations. Lastly, the chapter looks at how the parties, despite being in the process for more than a decade, did not manage to engage in the process genuinely and instead used it for a ticking box exercise to fulfil the criteria for EU membership; this is more relevant in the case of Serbia which is in the accession negotiations phase.

Chapter V: Clashes of the Titans and Kosovo's (un)Finished Statehood

5.1. Introduction

The Brussels Dialogue is part of the geopolitical plan the EU has pursued in the Western Balkans since the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003. As a process facilitator, the EU was positioning itself as a broker but also exercising its power in the Brussels Dialogue through the tools provided in the normative and transformative power framework.

This chapter looks at the geopolitical aspects of the Brussels Dialogue as a driver of stabilitocracy. The first part of the chapter exclusively focuses on the relations between EU institutions and the member states, especially those with a keen interest in the Western Balkans and the enlargement process. It tries to deconstruct the member states' role in building and strengthening the leverage of the EU in the Brussels Dialogue as a facilitator of the process. The second part of the chapter looks more at other external actors involved in the region, which is one of the main factors contributing to further strengthening the EU stability approach. In this case, a significant focus is given to the role of Russia as an illiberal external actor providing support for the autocratic leaders in the Western Balkans (mainly Serbia) and directly threatening the stability of the region and, hence, the EU. It is important to deconstruct the role of Russia due to its political efforts to challenge not only the EU but also NATO and the U.S. and UK presence in the Western Balkans.

Moreover, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine (which also started with the occupation of Crimea in 2014) heightened fears of a domino effect in the region – Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina being the security soft spots. Furthermore, the importance of the region's stability for the EU further increased, especially fearing the lack of political capital to respond robustly to the war in Ukraine and simultaneously simmering conflicts in the Western Balkans. While not the primary focus of this chapter, it is crucial to deconstruct the role of China. This is necessary due to China's position in the UN Security Council, where it holds the right to exercise veto power, raising concerns about using it toward Kosovo due to the potential parallel between Kosovo and Taiwan. China has made substantial investments in fostering strong bilateral relations with Serbia, particularly in the economic and military domains.

Consequently, this has increased Vučić's geopolitical leverage in the Brussels Dialogue, particularly regarding the role of the U.S. It is worth noting that the U.S. views China as a top foreign policy priority due to an outstanding rivalry between the two nations.

The role of the other illiberal external actors is essential due to their detrimental impact on the overall political performance of the EU in the Brussels Dialogue and its ability to effectively lead the process. In addition, this research examines the involvement of the U.S. and the UK in supporting the EU during the process. Moreover, it highlights specific periods in which the lack of alignment between Western actors (EU and U.S.) adversely affected the Brussels Dialogue.

5.2. The Complex Relations between the EU and the Member States in the Brussels Dialogue

This is the geopolitical Commission that I have in mind, and Europe urgently needs (Von der Leyen, 2019)

Common foreign and security policy is a rather complex issue to be discussed between the EU and the member states (SWP, 2022). As explained in Chapter III, member states have been very reluctant to transfer their foreign policy and security competencies to the EU, specifically the EEAS (European Union External Action Service) Field (EU Commission, 2022). To further add to the complexity of the EU's role in the region, the enlargement portfolio was of interest to several member states. Enlargement towards the Western Balkans, specifically, has enjoyed the support from only some member states sharing a keen interest in the region. The member states interest in the region is predominantly driven by their foreign policy interests, a fear of instability – especially for the member states geographically close to the region – and predominantly due to the promise made in Thessaloniki in 2003 (EU Commission, 2003) but with a limited political will to pursue that agenda (Vogel, 2018).

The success and effectiveness of the EU in the Brussels Dialogue are strongly linked to the enlargement agenda and the trajectory it took from 2003. Furthermore, it depends on the political support that the EEAS – the institution that formally leads the Brussels Dialogue Kosovo and Serbia (Lehne, 2007) – receives from the member states to push for a more effective process of negotiations, more ownership in the process, and more pressure toward the parties to implement the agreements signed in the Brussels Dialogue (Kosovo 2.0, 2020).

One of the main limitations of the EU in the Brussels Dialogue, which significantly contributed to strengthening the stability approach in the process, is the *five non-recognisers among*

member states. As explained in detail in Chapter III, Kosovo is a difficult case to process for the EU, which, since 2008 sought to offer a membership perspective to a country which is only recognised by some EU member states. The declaration of independence, although under the auspices of the Ahtisaari Plan and its international supporters (mainly the U.S. and the EU), caused division among member states, especially among the five non-recognizers (as displayed in the table in the annex Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain) (Bieber, 2015). In this regard, Kosovo became one of the most complex issues to deal with in the framework of the enlargement. As I have already elaborated in Chapter III, the EU efforts in the Brussels Dialogue are seriously hampered by disagreements among EU member states about Kosovo's status (Nezaj, 2015). The lack of unanimity in the Council vote and the lack of recognition by all member states prevented Kosovo from membership application, making Kosovo the only country in the Western Balkans formally out of the membership path (Koeth, 2010). This has provided a significant advantage to Serbia, which the autocratic regime has strongly used to solidify its stabilitocracy game. Furthermore, the membership perspective offered to Serbia was more tangible than the perspective for Kosovo, which will be offered a perspective only when the political circumstances in the EU allow, which is itself contingent on Serbia's consent. This approved and confirmed the power asymmetry between Kosovo and Serbia, further fuelling the EU's lukewarm approach toward Kosovo (Elbasani, 2018). The EU has failed to persuade the non-recognizers to alter their stance or even at least to guarantee recognition of Kosovo by the end of the process (Interview 12, 2022; Interview 14, 2022). The EU had been unable to promise a change of approach among the non-recognizers. Although, in 2019 the EEAS was led by Joseph Borrell of Spain (Borrell Josep and Von der Leyen, 2019) who appointed Miroslav Lajčák of Slovakia (EU Council, 2020) to lead the Brussels Dialogue. In Kosovo, this news was read in two ways – as an opportunity for Kosovo to communicate and give non-recognizers ownership in the process, but on the other hand, it raised eyebrows on further deepening the power asymmetry in the Brussels Dialogue (Brajshori, 2019; Weber and Vogel, 2020).

Non-recognisers are not the only obstacle; there has also been a need for more interest on the part of the EU to push the process forward. The visa liberalisation process is the best example of the EU's reluctance towards Kosovo. The process of visa liberalisation for Kosovo and highlights the challenges and delays faced by the country in achieving this goal (Nechev and Emini, 2022). Despite meeting the requirements set in the roadmap, Kosovo faced difficulties obtaining visa-free travel to the Schengen zone. The EU member states resisted granting visa

liberalisation despite positive assessments and recommendations from the EU Commission (EU Commission, 2018) and the EU Parliament (EU Parliament, 2018). This lack of coordination among EU institutions and member states revealed a lack of trust. Finally, in 2023, the decision for visa liberalisation was finalised, but Kosovo will only enjoy visa-free travel from January 2024, which is significantly later compared to other countries in the region. The decision regarding visa liberalisation for Kosovo was finalised in 2023 despite Kosovo fulfilling the conditions outlined in the roadmap in 2018. Starting from January 2024, citizens of Kosovo will have the privilege of visa-free travel to the Schengen zone, which is twelve years later compared to other countries in the region that were granted this right. The decision to grant visa liberalisation to Kosovo was influenced by the pressure exerted due to the granting of candidate status to Ukraine, Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, solely based on geopolitical considerations. Failing to deliver visa liberalisation to Kosovo after fulfilling the criteria would severely undermine the already weakened leverage of the EU in the country and its conditionality policy (Interview with Think Tank Expert and Academic/ Greece, 2022; Think Tank Expert/ Slovakia, 2022)

The league of autocrats, Orbán and Vučić further heightened the autocratic partnership and the position of Serbia in the Brussels Dialogue. One of the key factors contributing to the concept of "stabilitocracy" in the Brussels Dialogue is the alliance formed between autocratic leaders. The close partnership between Vučić and Orbán has significantly impacted the interactions between the EU and Serbia. With Hungary holding veto power within the EU, it has become challenging for the EU to act regarding Serbia in terms of measures in relation to the state capture and lack of rule of law in the country¹⁸. Since taking over the European Commission's Neighbourhood and Enlargement (DG NEAR) portfolio in 2019, Olivér Várhelyi has further solidified Serbia's position. The partnership between leaders like Vučić and Orbán, who face criticism for the erosion of democratic principles, can potentially undermine EU values and credibility (Popovic, 2023). This situation has become more pronounced following Russia's aggression in Ukraine. In this context, Serbia and Hungary have fostered their relationships with Russia and have been hesitant to participate in sanctions against Russia fully, although Hungary has to some extent. This partnership, particularly from Orbán's point of view, challenges Western countries in their internal negotiations within the EU

¹⁸ This has been more prevalent during the debate over Serbia's reluctance to impose sanctions on Russia after the war in Ukraine.

(Čačić, 2021). On the other hand, for Vučić, this partnership has provided valuable leverage in the accession process. Hungary continues to support EU enlargement, but its motivation lies more in aligning with autocratic regimes to bolster its position within the EU, rather than a strong commitment to promoting democracy through enlargement in the region (Stojanovic, 2021).

The role of key EU member states, particularly *Germany and France*, in the "stabilitocracy" approach should be assessed in the context of EU enlargement. As far as Germany is concerned, it's important to note its active stance in promoting the enlargement agenda and its support for the Brussels Dialogue behind the scenes. Germany's role can be divided into the Angela Merkel era and the current Olaf Scholz government. During Merkel's tenure, there was a focus on Serbia due to its perceived potential to destabilise the region. This emphasis on stability was evident during discussions of the land swap idea in 2018. Despite concerns about the rule of law in Kosovo, cooperation with the government of Ramush Haradinaj increased during this time. Haradinaj, a vocal opponent of the land swap idea, received implicit praise from Merkel for opposing it (Interview with Think Tank Expert / Germany, 2022).

In contrast, the EU's agenda for other Western Balkans countries remained somewhat peripheral. Merkel attempted to tackle bilateral disputes in the region through the Berlin Process, however, despite the efforts, it did not deliver on the Brussels Dialogue. The Scholz government has attempted to shift this focus but has encountered challenges in changing the established dynamics that have been in place since 2013. On the other hand, France has been a relatively quiet member state in the Brussels Dialogue and EU enlargement in general. Known for its scepticism toward enlargement, France has had limited involvement in the Western Balkans. In the context of the Brussels Dialogue, in 2018, France was one of the member states showing implicit support of the land swap idea as long as the involved parties endorsed it. During this period, Germany tried to lead in the Brussels Dialogue and encouraged France to engage in bilateral discussions to address the crisis. France is engaging its high calibre amid tensions between Kosovo and Serbia. President Emmanuel Macron hosted a meeting between Kosovo and Serbia during the European Political Community (EPC) meeting in Chisinau in June 2023, albeit he failed to do so in the Granada Summit in October 2023 due to heightened tensions on the ground (Davies & O'Caroll, 2023; Aarup, Caulcutt, & Vinocur, 2023). Germany and France have been pushing the Brussels Dialogue toward finalisation by endorsing the French–German Plan. In October 2023, Macron and Scholtz hosted a joint meeting with the

EU facilitators in Brussels to back the process politically. This process remains ongoing at the time of writing.

Similarly, this concerning level of distrust among the EU institutions and the member states exists in the case of the Kosovo – Serbia issue. This was more pertinent and clearly reflected during 2018-2019 when the land swap idea was tested as an alternative solution. The implicit support of the EU, namely the Directorate General for Enlargement and the EEAS, pushed Germany and to some extent, France to take the driving seat in the Brussels Dialogue and wait for the new EU institutions to get full control of the process only when the stability of the EU had been challenged through the land swap idea (Interview 9, 2023). This trend continues with the non-recognisers who, despite the EU taking the lead in the process, there was no sign of softening their approach toward Kosovo due to the outcomes in the Brussels Dialogue.

Conversely, *the Netherlands* stands out among member states for its emphasis on upholding the rule of law and implementing reforms rather than prioritising stability. The Dutch government adheres to the motto "strict but fair." However, when significant decisions are made within the EU, the Netherlands often abstains from voting or expressing a clear stance, as exemplified by its approach to visa liberalisation for most Western Balkan countries (Spöri, T. et al., 2023).

The dynamic between the EEAS and the DG NEAR plays a crucial role in determining the success of the Brussels Dialogue. It is essential to examine the leadership of the EU from 2014 to 2019 and its significance in the context of the Brussels Dialogue and the broader enlargement process. This period witnessed the leadership of key figures, including European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP) Federica Mogherini, and Johannes Hahn, who served as the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (Interview with Former EU Official, EEAS, 2022).

During this time, Jean-Claude Juncker, known for his controversial decision, announced a pause in the enlargement process, which cast doubt on the prospects for enlargement during his presidency. This decision profoundly impacted the EU's ability to exert influence in the Western Balkans. Simultaneously, the post-2013 situation in Kosovo and Serbia presented significant challenges in implementing the Brussels Agreement. In response to the deteriorating situation on the ground, particularly in Kosovo, Mogherini adopted a more assertive approach in what can be described as a "stabilitocrats game". Despite numerous attempts by the Kosovo

Assembly to challenge this stance, Mogherini insisted that President Thaçi should maintain the representation of Kosovo in the Brussels Dialogue. The dialogue process had become insular, primarily involving President Vučić of Serbia and President Thaçi of Kosovo, with no clear agenda. During this period, there was a looming suggestion of a potential land swap between Kosovo and Serbia, which was implicitly supported by Mogherini and Hahn, partners in the dialogue. However, this situation underwent a shift with the intervention of Germany and the occurrence of EU elections in 2019 (Interview 9, 2022)

The EU's leadership after 2019 has been perceived as intricate concerning enlargement and has posed challenges for Kosovo. The line-up of EU leaders included European Commission President Ursula von Der Leyen, HRVP Joseph Borrell, and Oliver Vaheyi serving as the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. Miroslav Lajčák led the Brussels Dialogue, making it an interesting combination of EU leaders.

In 2019, a significant challenge was how to respond to the Trump Administration's involvement in the Brussels Dialogue, while the concept of stability remained a persistent issue due to the idea of 'land swap'. To address this, the EU established the position of Special Representative for the Brussels Dialogue, though there needed to be a clear strategy for guiding the process.

While the EU Commission was fulfilling its "geopolitical" role, partly triggered by the conflict in Ukraine, the Brussels Dialogue leaned more toward a cycle of stability and conflict management. The enlargement process faced challenges due to a new methodology still in development and the idea of staged accession without a clear agenda for the Western Balkans. The Brussels Dialogue is being led by representatives from countries that do not recognise Kosovo, deepening the power asymmetry. Additionally, the DG NEAR was led by a Hungarian representative from a country with a strategic partnership with Serbia, often aligned with autocratic practices. Ukraine and Moldova became part of the enlargement package, while the Western Balkans remained in a status quo favouring autocratic regimes. The EU received praise for not opening another conflict front in the Balkans and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Despite the EU's claims of placing more emphasis on the rule of law, Serbia's leader, Vučić, received appeasement from the EU as they sought to bring Serbia closer to the West. These dynamics have detrimental impact on the Brussels Dialogue which is seriously being jeopardised by the EU lack of cohesion but also the inexistence of the clear enlargement perspective. In the absence of the latter, the local autocrats feeding on nationalism and populism continue to play their stability game while tightening their authoritarian grip. Securitisation of

the Western Balkans does not allow reform agenda, rather focusses on the strong leader who promise short-term stability.

5.2.1. The Crisis of Values and Enlargement Fatigue

Our union was in danger of sleepwalking from one crisis to another without waking up.... the European Union (EU) was plagued by a ‘polycrisis’ (Juncker, 2018)

The issue of stability gains even more relevance when instability hits the EU internally. The need to reform the EU internally has been long on the agenda which also was reflected through the Conference on Future of Europe (CoFoE) (EU Parliament, 2022; Martins, 2018). Democracy in the EU member states has been challenged by highly critical political forces, which are even hostile towards what is generally known as the EU values (Youngs, 2022). The rise of far-right parties has been affecting democracy in some EU member states, thus the EU does not represent a group of ‘like-minded- countries sharing democratic values’ (Quentin and Mirja, 2022). As argued in Chapter III, the democratic backsliding of Hungary and Poland has seriously tested the internal stability of the EU. The Viktor Orbán style of leadership has made it possible to create partnerships between autocrats. Declared a hybrid regime by the Freedom House, Hungary has tempered enthusiasm for enlargement, given the fact that it proved to the EU that even EU membership does not necessarily guarantee a stable democracy and democratisation of the country (Interview 5, 2022). Hungary is a country with immense interest in the Western Balkans; in 2019 it insisted on leading the enlargement portfolio, which only formally included the Western Balkan countries in 2019. The appointment of Oliver Varhegyi as the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement raised many eyebrows in the region, mainly in relation to the crisis of values in Hungary and the message that it might send to the region (Javor, 2019). The autocratic leaders such as Viktor Orbán, Milorad Dodik, and Aleksandar Vučić did not shy away from using their close ties with Putin to increase their power and further threaten the stability of the EU internally and within the region the EU was seeking to expand into (Interview 4, 2022). In the Brussels Dialogue, this provided Vučić with more leverage and power, especially toward Kosovo, which had been struggling to maintain its bilateral ties with the EU countries (Interview 10, 2022).

Enlargement fatigue towards the Western Balkans is yet another important aspect to look at. Had enlargement worked effectively, the EU would have a stronger leverage on the parties and, thus, a better position as the dialogue facilitator. The lack of an enlargement agenda has made the EU more prone to accept autocratic leaders merely offering the maintenance of the status quo. The absence of enlargement has created gaps for the local elites to engage in stability

games, taking advantage of the EU's lack of political power and leverage. The Brussels Dialogue almost completely depends on the enlargement process's success and effectiveness. The multi-frontal crisis, discussed in Chapter III, shows how the EU turned from promoting expansion into an actor desperately seeking resilience, thereby putting enlargement on the backseat.

In 2013, with the signing of the Brussels Agreement, the Western Balkans exhibited some degree of democratic resilience. The EU held significant influence and effectively employed its normative and transformative capabilities, albeit at a somewhat measured pace.

A series of enlargement crises have severely impacted the trajectory of the Brussels Dialogue. Jean-Claude Juncker's statement (2014) on no enlargement until 2019 has raised concerns about the detrimental impact of "enlargement fatigue". Juncker's announcement has sent the wrong message and undermined the credibility of the EU's accession process. Enlargement fatigue threatened the EU's successful foreign expansion policy, which hinges on conditionality and, thereby, the EU's position in the Brussels Dialogue. The credibility and consistency of the EU in this process are paramount, as countries must be certain that fulfilling conditions will lead to accession.

As the impact of enlargement fatigue became increasingly noticeable in the region, the ongoing discussion regarding the change of the enlargement methodology, initiated by France and endorsed by many EU member states and EU institutions, added an additional layer of complexity to the already intricate enlargement process in the Western Balkans. The endeavour introduces a new methodology was largely perceived as a political manoeuvre by the EU and its member states, who seemed hesitant to advance the region's accession process. This hesitation raised questions about the commitment to Western Balkan integration and the effectiveness of the proposed changes (Zweers *et al.*, 2022)¹⁹. Furthermore, it highlighted the power asymmetry that allows EU member states to block the enlargement process anytime it fits their domestic political agenda – even outside of the enlargement framework (Morina, 2022; Interview 13, 2023). Furthermore, without a clear enlargement perspective, the EU pursued the idea of staged accession. The concept of staged accession to the EU for Western Balkan states is a potential solution to revive EU integration incentives and address concerns

¹⁹ This was further illustrated when North Macedonia changed its name to resolve the dispute with Greece in an attempt to make it to the EU. Despite this the EU did not unblock its EU path due to the Bulgarian veto thus sending the message that even if Western Balkans states deliver on the requirements asked of them the EU is not ready to further their accession (Bechev and Marusic, 2020).

of existing EU member states. The staged EU accession model for the Western Balkans outlines a structured four-stage path to full EU membership. In the first stage, Initial Accession, aspiring countries harmonise their legal systems with EU standards, with limited funding. The Intermediate Accession stage sees more demanding conditions, increased funding, and a larger role within EU institutions. New Member State status, the penultimate stage, requires meeting stringent conditions 100% funding and offers the possibility of Schengen and the Euro. Finally, Conventional Membership provides full participation in EU policies and institutions. This model aims to address the concerns of candidate and EU member states, offering a gradual integration path while bolstering the EU's credibility and consistency in the enlargement process.

Staged accession serves as a potential solution to alleviate enlargement fatigue and address the concerns of existing EU member states. However, as this concept is still in its early development, its precise implications for the Brussels Dialogue remain uncertain. There is a risk that the involved parties, particularly Serbia, may exploit the ambiguous boundaries between the different stages and the associated political constraints until the final stage, which encompasses complete integration. This exploitation may lead to delays in the Brussels Dialogue while allowing these parties to maintain the status quo from a security perspective and tighten their authoritarian control, all while enjoying substantial access to EU funding.

5.3. The Role of the U.S. and the UK: Internalised External Actors in the Brussels Dialogue

The role of the U.S. and the UK has been extremely important in the Brussels Dialogue. Albeit internalised external actors in the Brussels Dialogue, the role of both is assessed from the ally's perspective serving as a support for the EU in the process (Pierce, 2018). The U.S. has traditionally been an actor of immense importance in Kosovo, supporting the dialogue in the background. The UK, on the other hand, started the Brussels Dialogue as part of the EU and with their representative being the key person in the so-called technical phase of the Dialogue. However, at a rather critical point during the Brussels Dialogue, the UK entered the Brexit process which not only had an impact on the support the Brussels Dialogue would receive but also significantly weakened the EU internally (Belloni and Brunazzo, 2017).

Looking closer at the role of the U.S. and its interests in the Western Balkans, the U.S. lessened its engagement with the region after the declaration of the independence for Kosovo in 2008 and did not manage to successfully implement constitutional reforms in Bosnia and

Herzegovina (Interview 4, 2022). During the Obama Administration, the U.S. left it to the EU to continue the transformation of the region through its normative power and the EU enlargement process. The Obama – Biden Administration directed U.S. foreign policy towards different regions, trusting the transformation of the Western Balkans to the EU. A return of the U.S. in the Western Balkans took place during the Trump Administration during 2018 - 2020 when the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia became part of the administration's foreign policy activities mainly reflected through negotiations and agreements in the Middle East. In the Western Balkans, the U.S. foreign policy during Trump Administration has been pursued through Vučić and Thaçi as partners for dialogue (Interview 9, 2023). This period marked a very sensitive phase in the transatlantic relations. The EU member countries and the U.S. held opposing attitudes toward the final deal between Kosovo and Serbia. Although the land swap idea had been heralded during this period, Kosovo and Serbia signed an agreement related to air, road, and rail travel between the two countries facilitated by Richard Grenell – the U.S. special envoy for Western Balkans. Furthermore, in 2020 the Washington Accords were signed in the White House in the presence of the President Trump (Stanicek, 2021). This agreement provided Kosovo with recognition from Israel with the condition that Kosovo establishes an Embassy in Jerusalem. Thus, clearly showing the signs of foreign policy goal pursued by Trump framing it as support for Israel. This decision caused a clash with the EU which held a different attitude towards this issue. The election of President Biden, increased hopes for a more constructive and aligned approach with the EU in the region – especially more political power to push things to the right direction in the Brussels Dialogue – different from the Trump Administration (Joseph, 2021). The 2020 U.S. elections were widely perceived as a pivotal political moment in the U.S. involvement in the Western Balkans. This was present particularly in Kosovo due to multiple factors. Among the two U.S. presidential candidates, Donald Trump and Joe Biden, the latter was seen as a ray of hope for fostering the normalization of transatlantic relations. The existing divide between the U.S., the EU, and EU member states had detrimental and considerable political consequences for the Brussels Dialogue. Biden's election generated optimism not only for improving diplomatic ties between the U.S. and EU but also for adopting a more predictable approach to resolving the Kosovo-Serbia dispute. The aspiration for a resolution that did not encompass a 'land swap' between Kosovo and Serbia was of greater significance. Joe Biden, a leading and prominent political figure of the 1990s and former vice president during the Barack Obama Administration (2009-2017), has been considered to possess valuable insights into the political complexities surrounding the Kosovo-Serbia issue. His significant involvement in the U.S. engagement in the former Yugoslavia his

personal ties²⁰ to the region heightened the expectations toward his administration in relations to the Western Balkans.

The return of a more familiar and predictable form of U.S. engagement in the Western Balkans has been widely welcomed. The hopes for an aligned U.S. approach with the EU was seen as the first positive step. Biden's multilateral and Euro Atlantic approach in the Western Balkans was expected to give a political boost and support to Miroslav Lajčák who was struggling to revitalise the Brussels Dialogue (Tcherneva and Morina, 2021). The most significant initial political step taken by the Biden administration entailed sending the letters to the President of Kosovo, marking her election in 2021, and to the President of Serbia, on the Serbian National Day in the same year. These letters highlighted the robust connections between the United States and both Kosovo and Serbia, bluntly expressing the anticipation for active participation in the Brussels Dialogue and the pursuit of a resolution which would result in 'mutual recognition'. The appointment of Christopher Hill (U.S. Embassy in Belgrade, 2022), a prominent political figure involved in the Yugoslav crisis, as the U.S. Ambassador to Serbia, along with Gabriel Escobar, who had previously served as a diplomat in Serbia and serves now as the Deputy Assistant Secretary overseeing policy towards the countries of the Western Balkans (U.S. Department of State, 2021a), created the perception of prioritization and a dedicated focus on solving the Kosovo-Serbia issue. This decision signalled the engagement of highly calibre diplomats with an impressive track record, emphasizing the level of prioritisation placed on effectively managing the complexities surrounding Kosovo and Serbia. This constellation of political representatives created expectations for high level U.S. engagement and also it anticipated that the U.S. would display no tolerance towards democratic regression in Serbia, particularly in light of President Biden's initiative to launch the Democracy Summit as a proactive measure to safeguard democratic principles (U.S. Department of State, 2021b).

These expectations failed to materialize due to various factors. *Firstly*, while the Biden Administration expressed support for the Washington DC accords signed in 2020 under the Trump Administration, there was a lack of a clear plan on how to effectively implement or build upon the existing provisions. The U.S. maintained strong political backing for one aspect

²⁰ Biden also shared the personal connection developed through his son Beau Biden's service in Kosovo after the war makes his election a pivotal moment for Kosovo. Beau Biden has served in Kosovo after the war during 1998-1999. He was engaged in helping to train local judges and prosecutors for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In 2016, the Biden family attended the ceremony unveiling a memorial to Beau Biden. In 2021, the President of Kosovo honoured his son with a presidential medal (Reuters, 2021).

of the DC accords, namely the Open Balkans concept, which was politically initiated by the Serbian President. However, Kosovo displayed scepticism in joining this initiative, as it remained focused on the Common Regional Market (CRM) already established through the Berlin Process. Despite this, the U.S. exerted pressure on Kosovo to participate in the Open Balkan²¹ initiative while simultaneously offering political support. This is the only point of the DC accord which is widely pushed by the U.S. at the time being (Interview 4, 2022). **Secondly**, the U.S. administration placed considerable emphasis on repairing transatlantic relations, perceiving the Kosovo-Serbia issue as a European issue, and closely aligning with the EU's approach in the Brussels Dialogue, which was already characterized by immense weaknesses. Gabriel Escobar, while extending political support to Miroslav Lajčák, continued to advocate for the narrative of 'normalisation' within the Brussels Dialogue, without introducing any strategic changes to move away from the incremental approach that had already showcased significant shortcomings (Interview 9, 2023). Both the U.S. and the EU persisted in exerting greater pressure on Kosovo to implement the agreement on the Association/Community, while failing to present a comprehensive strategy for effectively resolving the dispute in the long term. This stance is further exemplified in the recent op-ed authored by Derek Chollet, Counsellor of the U.S. Department of State, and Gabriel Escobar, which underlines the urgency of establishing the Association/Community (Chollet and Escobar, 2023). During the second term of the Kurti Government, the U.S. has significantly intensified its pressure on Kosovo, leveraging its extended political influence. This was primarily driven by Kurti's lack of political will to fulfil the obligations set in the Association/Community agreement. The U.S. demonstrated this pressure by expressing an immense unwillingness to engage and collaborate with Prime Minister Kurti unless he showcased a clear political will to initiate the process of establishing the Association/Community. **Thirdly**, while Kosovo was being heavily pressurised to accommodate Serbia's political conditions to engage in the final stage of the Brussels Dialogue, the U.S. continued Vučić's 'stabilitocracy' game already embraced by the EU. No significant pressure has been made to address the growing concerns for state capture in Serbia and be vocal for democratic principles that both EU and U.S. are professing, the latter even through a global initiative such as the Democracy Summit. This stabilitocracy pattern was best described by Majda Ruge who stated the following:

²¹ Open Balkan is a regional initiative established by Serbia, North Macedonia, Serbi, and Albania, committed to reinforce the regional cooperation and connectivity. At the moment three countries (North Macedonia, Albania, and Serbia) lead and develop the initiative, which has an open-door policy, especially for the other WB countries, such as Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (Government of North Macedonia, 2022).

Western governments consistently treat Belgrade as the indispensable player on the major questions facing the Western Balkans. Whatever the issue at hand, Serbia's president, Vučić, is the first person they call. Part of this is understandable: power in Serbia is concentrated with Vučić, who has accrued considerable control to himself (Ruge, 2023).

Lastly, the Russian aggression and full-scale invasion of Ukraine provided a political momentum for the West to exert political pressure on Serbia's President Vučić for aligning with Russia. Furthermore, it created a solid opportunity to have a clear plan toward the Kosovo – Serbia issue while using its leverage strategically toward both countries. Instead of being vocal about the support of Serbia for Russia or the support Vučić for Putin, both the EU and the U.S. continued to support Vučić trying to accommodate his political needs. The EU and U.S. continue perpetuating the illusion that the Kremlin's presumed lack of political capital to deal with the Western Balkans, will create a conducive environment to turn Serbia towards the West. Consequently, the EU and U.S. maintain their support for Vučić in the Brussels Dialogue by accommodating his demands, such as introducing a 'verbal agreement' format in the negotiation process (Interview 11, 2023).

Owing to the escalation of the situation entertaining the 'land swap' idea during the Trump administration, the trend of having political appointees for the Western Balkans and Kosovo – Serbia issues, as well as the circumstances created by the war in Ukraine, the EU, U.S. and the UK securitised the Brussels Dialogue and the region in general. Following the EU and U.S., the UK has appointed a special envoy for the Western Balkans – a representative with military background and extensive experience in the Western Balkans (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 2021). The UK tried to provide (Interview 3, 2021) its political support and use its leverage toward Kosovo, however its role in the Brussels Dialogue remains marginalised since the Brexit .

5.4. Russia as the Main Driver of Stabilitocracy: Meddling with the EU through the Kosovo – Serbia Dispute

The Russia factor is very important to de-construct not only in trying to understand its impact on the Brussels Dialogue, but also in the statehood trajectory of Kosovo. Starting from the NATO intervention, Vienna negotiations leading to the declaration of independence for Kosovo, and its destructive albeit indirect role in the Brussels Dialogue (mainly through its strong partnership with Serbia), Russia has been the key driver behind the stability approach adopted by the EU in the Western Balkans (Petrovic, 2022; Scekic, 2014).

To understand the role of Russia in the Brussels Dialogue it is important to look at the events around the Vienna negotiations, specifically in 2007 (Weller, 2008) when Russia pulled out of the process making it clear that it aligned with Serbia (MacDonald, 2007). In 2007, Russia not only left the Vienna Negotiations, but Putin also gave a speech which changed the geopolitical balance in the world, the unipolar order that favoured Kosovo's independence. In the speech at the Munich Conference Putin's openly presented Russia's opposition to the post-Cold War world order: "I consider that the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world" ('Speech delivered at the MSC 2007 by the President Vladimir Putin, 2007). When asked specifically about the case of Kosovo and Serbia during the same event, Putin made it clear that any proposal that is imposed and 'humiliates' the other party would lead to 'a dead end' ('Speech delivered at the MSC 2007 by the President Vladimir Putin', 2007). Following this speech, Putin started taking actions which indicated his intentions to dismantle the structures designed to maintain peace in Europe after the Cold War. In the Western Balkans, the Kosovo – Serbia issue would served as a playground to meddle with the EU, NATO, and the U.S. After failing to get Serbia and Russia on board with the Ahtisaari Plan, clearly it would not make sense for the next negotiations process between Kosovo and Serbia to take place under the auspices of the UN due to the presence of Russia and China which clearly barricaded their positions against Kosovo (Interview 13,2022. Russia was, however, more directly invested in the process due to its interests in the Western Balkans but also saw this as an opportunity to challenge the West. The next negotiations process between Kosovo and Serbia was set to take place under the auspices of the EU, to avoid direct involvement from Russia and China. This also provided the opportunity for the EU to be the main actor in the Western Balkans in both a geopolitical and transformational way. The Brussels Dialogue was expected to take place in a more controlled and successful environment which would be capable of replicating the success of the negotiations with the Central Eastern European (CEE) countries. However, the Brussels Dialogue took place under different geopolitical circumstances in which the EU normative power was more limited and not as effective as in the CEE.

The role of Russia in the Brussels Dialogue has significantly contributed to the securitization of the process. Unfinished business from the 1990s – such as Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina – has turned the region into a fertile ground for fomenting instability. Specifically, the Brussels Dialogue has been used strategically to create international pressure on the EU as a facilitator of the Brussels Dialogue by providing Serbia with a solid leverage over the EU and halting the democratic transformation of Serbia. Hence, the influence of Russia in

strengthening the stabilitocracy approach should be seen through the lens of Russia – Serbia relations (Interview with 13, 2022).

Another important element to look at is the events in the Eastern Partnership region. The relations between Russia and the EU worsened as a result of the situation in Ukraine deteriorating, especially after the Maidan protest in 2013 when Ukraine was striving to sign the EU- Ukraine Association Agreement. Furthermore, with the annexation of Crimea, Russia not only cemented the need for stability in Europe, but it also provided Putin’s regime with yet another parallel to be drawn with the NATO intervention in Kosovo.

While Ukraine was trying to pursue EU and NATO membership, in 2013 Kosovo and Serbia signed the Brussels Agreement which would pave the way for Serbia to formalize the accession negotiations and Kosovo signed the Stabilization Association Agreement (SAA). Both these steps were perceived to be landmark agreements in resolving the dispute and as a victory for the EU in the region. The first test for Serbia after opening the accession negotiations with the EU was to progressively align its foreign policy positions toward third countries with the EU (European Union, Foreign and Security Policy, 2022). The alignment of Serbia is discussed in the framework of Chapter 31 ‘Foreign, Security and Defence policy’ of the accession negotiation (European Parliament, 2020). In 2014, the EU imposed sanctions against Russia in response to the Russian annexation of Crimea. Serbia was invited to join as a country formally in the negotiations for accession. Serbia used different arguments to avoid this alignment (Armakolas *et al.*, 2021). Legally, only when a country becomes an EU member is it obliged to align, but the candidate countries try to align to show commitment in the process (Bechev, 2014). Instead of imposing sanctions against Russia, Serbia hosted President Putin on an official visit to Belgrade, during which Putin also attended a military parade to further emphasise the security aspects of cooperation during a very delicate stability moment for the EU. During the parade, Serbia made strong statements in support of Russia while flirting with the EU. After this event, it was clear that Serbia would continue with its neutral approach between the West and Russia (Glaurdic, 2011). By not aligning with the EU, Serbia continued to increase the importance of Russia’s levers in the country (Novaković, 2020). Russia strengthened its bilateral cooperation with Serbia in the security sector by building the – now infamous – ‘Russian Humanitarian Centre’ in Nis close to the border with Kosovo, which triggered accusations that it was creating an espionage centre (Marija Zivanovic, 2017). Among all these, the biggest common denominator which further strengthened the partnership between

Serbia and Russia is the issue of Kosovo, more specifically Serbia's reliance on the veto right of Russia in the UNSC (Samorukov, 2019).

Russia's destructive role has provided Serbia with solid leverage over the EU as it is widely used as a tool for exercising political pressure towards the EU. The dispute between Kosovo and Serbia has created gaps for extended Russian influence and obstacles in the EU integration process for Kosovo and Serbia by directly obstructing its democratisation as part of the EU membership process (Stanicek, 2022; Simić, 2008). Politically backing Serbia in relation to Kosovo, Russia represents one of the biggest political challenges for Kosovo to thrive in the international arena. Russia's permanent position and veto power in the UN Security Council continue to play a detrimental role in Kosovo's positioning in the international arena, especially in the UN membership (Viceré, 2019). The Serbian strategy in strengthening partnership with Russia against Kosovo is best described in the following statement by the Serbian Assembly Committee on Kosovo and Metohija chair Milovan Drecun: "We need Russia to strengthen us with the Americans because when Russia puts its weight behind us, the Americans know that no solution can pass without its consent" (Vuksanovic, 2019). For Serbia, Russia was a leverage in relation to the Kosovo issue, which would be used during the Brussels Dialogue and the EU integration process (Semenov, 2016).

On the other hand, Russia sees Kosovo as an opportunity to create geopolitical entry points in the Western Balkans. For Russia, Kosovo is a West (U.S. and, to some extent, an EU project). Thus it can be used as a bargaining chip for the activities of Russia (Mirel, 2022) in Ukraine and Georgia. Moreover, it provides a solid mechanism to undermine the role of the EU in the region.

Albeit not formally part of the Brussels Dialogue, Russia played the role of supporter to Serbia as much as the U.S. did for Kosovo. Russia backed Serbia in blocking Kosovo from getting UNESCO membership in 2015 (Collaku, 2015). The same scenario repeated in the case of INTERPOL in 2018 (Batrawy and Stojanivoc, 2018). These international debacles undermined Kosovo's project to join international mechanisms. Internally, during incidents initiated by the stabilisers in Kosovo and Serbia – the latter always has the political backing of Russia. For example, the recent escalation in tension in the northern part of Kosovo in 2021 mobilised the Russian Ambassador in Serbia to visit the border between Kosovo and Serbia where the tensions escalated, sending messages that Russia would back Serbia should there be military intervention in Kosovo (Samorukov, 2022; Davies, 2022; Maja Zivanovic, 2017).

Thus, Russia has played a massive role in securitising the Brussels Dialogue and hijacked the EU's attempts to solve the dispute through membership. In addition, it showed that Serbia, backed by Russia politically, can be a strong force against the West. Vučić and Putin's partnership in relation to Kosovo has been quite solid; regular meetings – even in the form of consultations – have taken place to assure Russia that its demands are being reflected in the approach of Serbia toward Kosovo in the Brussels Dialogue (Rudic, 2017). A minor hiccup in Serbia–Russia relations occurred as the land swap idea surfaced. However, this crisis has been managed by Vučić, who travelled to Moscow in 2018 to assure Russia that the Kosovo dispute would not be solved without Russia's engagement in the power trade-off (Zivanovic, 2018).

Through the extended partnership with Serbia, Russia has managed to not just meddle with the West in the Western Balkan region, but it also achieved the following: *first*, prevent or halt the EU enlargement process in the region; *second*, it diverted the democratisation process of the region. Serbia, for instance, despite being a frontrunner in the EU integration process, has been declared a hybrid regime by the Freedom House; *third*, it managed to divert attention from its agenda in the Eastern Partnership region (EaP) – mainly Ukraine and Georgia; *fourth*, it used the region to 'bounce' back and challenge the post-Cold War order and gradually return in the world of geopolitics (Interview 7, 2022).

The EU has taken steps and launched initiatives to oppose Russian activities in the region. To stop Russia effectively penetrating the region through hybrid warfare, the EU in its Global Strategy (EUGS) has not only included the region but called for resilience toward third-party actors (Nechev and Trauner, 2017). The EU that once used the term 'expansion' called for 'resilience' clearly sending messages relating to a power struggle in the Western Balkans. The EU has also established a particular unit to counter Russian propaganda in the Western Balkans, known as the StratCom Western Balkans Task Force (EEAS Stratcom, 2021) in the framework of the European External Action Service within the European Strategic Communication Task Force in 2017 (Lange, Nechev and Trauner, 2017). However, the task force was not enough to address the challenges coming from Russia through the Kosovo – Serbia issue.

The more effective and successful the Russian influence became, the EU, instead of pushing for reforms and using the leverage it has in the region, continued to support Vučić hoping that his regime would become an ally of the West, move Serbia toward the EU membership and solve the issue with Kosovo through the Brussels Dialogue (Kraemer, 2022). Thus, it will provide stability in the Western Balkans, the stability that the EU had been aiming to reach by decreasing Serbia's 'troublemaking' potential in the region. The EU supported a strong autocrat

in Serbia who was not only pursuing a disingenuous approach toward EU membership but, instead of solving the dispute with Kosovo, continued to contribute to maintaining the status quo – in relation to Kosovo – by perpetuating the threat of instability in the region (Vojvodic-Medic, 2021).

5.4.1. Ukraine War: Further Securitising the Brussels Dialogue

The war in Ukraine has changed the way the EU functions. The geopolitical EU Commission Von Der Leyen was aiming for finally came to life (EEAS, 2022; Rabinovych, 2022). The war in Ukraine showed how far Russia could go to showcase power internationally and created the fear of potential spillover in the Western Balkans (Fetahu, 2022). Russia continued to draw parallels between Kosovo and Ukraine – bringing the NATO intervention to invoke as justification for the annexation of Crimea and its incursions in Luhansk and Donetsk (Saric and Morcos, 2022).

While the changed approach of the EU toward Russia in Ukraine created the expectation that the same approach would be used in the Western Balkans toward Serbia, the war in Ukraine has, in fact further cemented the stability approach of the EU and the West in the Western Balkans (Balfour, 2022). Two fronts and potential conflicts to erupt in Europe created a series of entry points for Russia and its strengthening position against the EU.

One of the potential scenarios after the Russian occupation of Ukraine was the pressure on Serbia to change the approach of 2014 and align with the EU in imposing sanctions against Russia. But, in 2022, in contrast to most of the EU countries – apart from Hungary – Serbia did not impose sanctions against Russia (Dunai, 2022; Reuters, 2022). While going through elections in April 2022, Serbia was reluctant to take a firm stance toward Russia – especially as public opinion is very pro-Russian. Apart from some decisions at the United Nations level in which Serbia did not stand by Russia, it did not take any serious actions against Russia (Stojanovic, 2022). Moreover, it continued extending cooperation – being the only country in Europe with direct flights to Moscow, with pro-Russian protests in Belgrade supporting the Russian aggression in Ukraine, and an announcement of a potential visit of Lavrov in Serbia, which received backlash from other regional countries (Dragojlo, 2022; The Guardian, 2022).

On the day the Russian aggression in Ukraine started, Miroslav Lajčák – the EU special envoy for the Brussels Dialogue stated: ‘It is about the time for the Western Balkan countries to show on which side they are on. The space to stay on the fence will be narrowing. He continued by

describing the current situation of the Belgrade–Pristina normalisation talks and the European Union’s overall mission and objectives in the Western Balkan region (Dobrai, 2022).

On the contrary, the war in Ukraine further strengthened the EU stability approach in the Western Balkans. In particular, it reinforced the need to seek stability with Vučić, who presents himself as a guarantor of stability in the Western Balkans and thus further increased his importance to the EU. Russia continued to remain a political actor challenging the region stability, and to prevent this, the EU should act promptly and be more proactive. With Vučić showing no political will to impose sanctions toward Russia, the need to maintain the status quo in the region continued to persist (Interview 9, 2023). The EU continues with mild statements to push Serbia to impose sanctions, but the party most pressurised to deliver on the Brussels Dialogue remains Kosovo. However, it has imposed sanctions on Russia. The EU continued to support and be reluctant to pressure Serbia out of a desperate need for stability in the region – even if it is fragile and short-term. In the case of the Brussels Dialogue, the EU has continued to nurture its incremental approach, albeit it only showed limited success in the past decade and is not a strategy to make a significant breakthrough in solving the dispute (Interview 10, 2022). Instead of dealing with the Western Balkans – a project started two decades ago as a response to the war in Ukraine the EU has granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova (European Council, 2022; Parker, Inwood and Rosenberg, 2022), triggering harsh criticism in the Western Balkans (Wunsch Gaarmann, 2022).

The war in Ukraine raised geopolitical fears not only toward Russia but also China. Tensions in Taiwan and the careful strategic alignment of China with Russia have triggered concerns in the Western Balkans, particularly the Brussels Dialogue. Chinese influence in Serbia has already been an issue of concern for the U.S. and, to some extent, for the EU. The DC Accords of 2020 included a clause which ensured commitment by both parties not to use 5G equipment from ‘untrusted vendors’ (Vladisavljev and Ruge, 2020). Albeit there was no reference to China specifically, this clause showcases the concerns over the Chinese-Serbian partnership. This is an irrelevant clause for Kosovo, which is not recognised by China and shares no bilateral cooperation of any kind to this date. During 2020, when the DC Accords were signed, China had made it the third biggest source of net foreign direct investments (FDI) in Serbia (6.61 per cent), following the EU (72.27 per cent) and Russia (11.21 per cent) (Vuksanovic, 2020). Serbia is of pivotal importance for China’s Belt and Road initiative. The energy investments are soaring (Vuksanovic, 2021) and the military sector even competing with Russia in this regard (Vuksanovic, 2022). The strengthened economic cooperation with China has triggered the U.S.

reaction to robust economic cooperation (The Office of the Serbian President, 2022) between Serbia and the U.S., focusing on energy diversification. Thus responding to Russia and China in this regard (Todorović, 2022). While there is no trace of the direct involvement of China in the Brussels Dialogue, there is growing fear that the Kosovo case might be exploited by China to directly challenge the U.S. in the Western Balkans and the UN Security Council by drawing parallels with the issue of Taiwan. On the other hand, China exploits the Kosovo case to fulfil its ambition for the Belt and Road Initiative and, thus, for its foreign policy ambitions. This further strengthens and enhances the political and geopolitical importance of Vučić, who effectively turned this situation into its own leverage and tool to strengthen its authoritarian grip.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter analyses the importance of understanding the geopolitical complexities surrounding the Brussels Dialogue and the need for the EU to navigate these challenges to strengthen its role and impact in the negotiation process.

As the findings in the chapter reveal, the role of the EU in this dialogue has faced significant challenges, primarily stemming from the complex relationships between EU member states that do not recognise Kosovo the lack of political investment from the EU member says in general to advance the negotiation process albeit it is one of the most significant international endeavours undertaken by the EU. The non-recognising EU member states have a detrimental impact on the Brussels Dialogue. One significant consequence is the need for a unified stance within the EU regarding Kosovo. The intra-EU divergent attitudes toward Kosovo have impeded the EU's ability to present a cohesive front and effectively address the Kosovo issue. This internal fragmentation has created immense asymmetry in the process, thus eroding the EU's influence and credibility in the negotiation process. The role of the U.S. and UK in the Brussels Dialogue has had positive and negative intervals. While considered external, both actors have been internally included and contributed to the process by offering much-needed political support to the EU. The 2018-2020 Trans-Atlantic crack was very close to having a detrimental impact on the future of the Brussels Dialogue. The renewed support of the U.S. and the UK through the special envoys has increased expectations for a more active and renewed Brussels Dialogue as it moved toward its final stage.

This chapter proves that although the Brussels Dialogue operates within the framework of the EU and not the UN, it is not immune to the influence of external actors, with Russia and China

emerging as particularly significant players. While Russia posed a challenging and disruptive force, China also played a detrimental role in the process. The Brussels Dialogue, namely Serbia, created favourable entry points for Russia to interfere with Western interests in the region. This interference not only negatively impacted Kosovo's international trajectory but also succeeded in undermining the EU's role and directly challenged the European integration process of the Western Balkans. Russia's involvement, primarily through its relationship with Serbia, created serious obstacles and hindered progress toward EU integration. China's detrimental role in the Brussels Dialogue should not be overlooked either. Its growing influence and engagement in the region have various consequences. China's actions and investments in Serbian, particularly in this case, have had implications for economic and strategic interests, further challenging the EU's only incentive remaining in the process, the financial incentive. Furthermore, it clashed with the U.S. strategic interests in the region. As a result, the geopolitical leverage of Vučić in the process increased to Kosovo's detriment.

The role of internal and external actors in the Brussels Dialogue has predominantly negatively impacted the effectiveness of the EU in the process. Furthermore, it turned the Western Balkans into a geopolitical arena where the clashes of the titans took place. The next chapter looks at the lessons learned and how the EU could have used the leverage and the political support of the U.S. to produce more tangible results and complete its mission to become a geopolitical global actor by also completing the democratisation process in the region without falling in the stability trap – a strategy successfully used by the Western Balkan autocrats.

Chapter VI: The Brussels Dialogue: Lessons Learned and the Future of EU as a Negotiator

6.1. Introduction

Enlargement represents one of the most effective geostrategic instruments of the EU. Alongside democratisation, each enlargement wave has had a geopolitical and stability agenda. In the case of enlargement toward Central and Eastern European countries, but also the case of Bulgaria and Romania – in addition to championing the third wave of democratisation, the EU enlargement process was geopolitical, seeking to gradually close avenues for Russia to extend its influence in Europe and turn the EU into a more relevant international actor.

Enlargement toward the Western Balkans – combining the Copenhagen criteria, the geopolitical agenda, and the stability element – was crucial for a post-war region. Stability is manifested in the good neighbourly component, which became an integral part of the enlargement criteria through the Stabilisation Association Process (SAP). As explained in Chapter II, the SAP was established in 2003 during the Thessaloniki Summit in the Western Balkans, aiming to stabilise and bring the region closer to the EU (*Stabilisation and Association Process*, 2003). In parallel to the Thessaloniki Summit 2003, the EU's ambitions as a conflict manager took shape in the post-Lisbon era, as explained in Chapters III and V. The EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was established in the early 2000s, and the crisis in Yugoslavia drove it. The Yugoslav wars directly challenged the EU's goal for strategic autonomy and its ambitions to become a global player. Thus, since 2003, enlargement, geopolitics, and stability have been the key components of the EU approach in the Western Balkans, and the Brussels Dialogue tests the EU's ability to navigate all these elements through EU-structured diplomacy.

The Brussels Dialogue is a unique process that represents the duality of the EU enlargement as a toolkit and the EU foreign policy ambitions. The study of this case becomes more relevant as it takes place while both countries are in the accession phase. This thesis and this chapter analyse how focusing on stability – and thus overshadowing democratic reforms – shaped the region, the EU, and its role as a global actor. Since 2011, the EU has overseen the Brussels Dialogue, aiming to solve the open dispute between Kosovo and Serbia. The Brussels Dialogue represents the best case study for an analysis of EU conflict management using the concept of structured diplomacy involving a collaborative process, which increases the likelihood of a

favourable environment to work with sustainable outcomes. However, the Brussels Dialogue became one of the critical processes in which stability overshadowed the EU reforms as part of the conditionality, vividly illustrating the EU's willingness to trade off stability for reforms. As elaborated in Chapter IV, the reality is that the EU stability approach in the Brussels Dialogue has explicitly impacted the EU's ability to exercise its role in negotiations. On the other hand, the flexibility the EU has shown toward the conditionality it once created has significantly decreased its leverage as a negotiator.

As the entire thesis examines the limitations of the EU stabilitocracy approach in the Brussels Dialogue, this chapter elaborates on how the EU could have better used its structural diplomacy to make the Brussels Dialogue a success story for the EU and the region. The stabilitocracy-driven approach used in the case of the Brussels Dialogue impacted the leverage and the political power of the EU as an agent of change in the Western Balkan. Thus, the second part focuses on what the EU could have done to prevent the emergence of stabilitocracy in the region, particularly what strategising elements could have made the enlargement toward Western Balkans and the Brussels Dialogue a success story. Lastly, this chapter analyses how stabilitocracy in the Brussels Dialogue defines the role of the EU as a global player, its role in future negotiation processes, and other enlargement endeavours. This became relevant in 2022 when the EU formalised the perspective for Ukraine by granting the EU candidate status. This decision was taken based on geopolitical and security grounds. Like the Brussels Dialogue, the EU's role in Ukraine has been placed into the enlargement framework. This process will further test the EU's experience gained in the Brussels Dialogue in yet another critical case for the stability and security in Europe.

6.2. Turning Negotiation Tables: What Could Have Been Done to Make the Dialogue a Success Story?

The role of mediator/facilitator in the Kosovo-Serbia conflict formally launched the EU foreign policy ambition in conflict management. This role is strategically interlinked with enlargement, which represents yet another foreign policy tool of the EU. The enlargement process provided a unique platform for the EU to access both countries' political systems and arrangements. Financially, Kosovo and Serbia continue to receive development funds and assistance through the EU pre-accession mechanisms, making the EU a financially competitive external power in the region. Additionally, the launch of the Brussels Dialogue offered the EU another avenue to exercise its leverage on both parties, thus further increasing the EU's chances for success. In

Kosovo, the EU presence was even more structured following the deployment of the EULEX Rule of Law Mission in 2008, which enjoyed executive powers for a certain period. Therefore, these elements enabled the EU to consolidate its position in the Brussels Dialogue with substantial leverage and ability to transform both countries while providing a solution to one of the most outstanding bilateral issues in the Western Balkans.

As Chapters III and V elaborated, the EU's limitations in the Brussels Dialogue are internally and externally driven. The internal constraints derived from the lack of a common foreign and security policy, the limited willingness amongst all member states to invest political capital in the Brussels Dialogue, the divergent attitude toward enlargement, the lack of ownership, and the status-neutrality of the EU toward Kosovo has further amplified the power asymmetry. Most importantly, the limitations of the EU derived from the lack of utilisation of the institutional capacities and the arsenal of the EU security and foreign policy structures. Externally, its limitations were shaped by external illiberal powers such as Russia. Regardless of the extent of the limitations, as the first case of structural diplomacy, the Brussels Dialogue has all the necessary ingredients for success. The multi-layered EU presence in both countries provided access to all relevant segments. Thus, this section offers a scenario in which the EU could have yielded success by successfully shepherding the parties toward the final solution and effectively maintaining its leverage toward both countries.

6.2.1. Strategizing before the Launching of the Brussels Dialogue

Before embarking on the negotiations of the Brussels Dialogue, one of the first steps should have been a decision by the EU member states on diminishing intra-EU divergences toward Kosovo. As elaborated in Chapter V, engaging with the parties on track-one diplomacy requires the robust political support of all member states. It also requires strong leadership from the EU side and a balanced approach toward Kosovo and Serbia. Furthermore, the EU institutions leading the dialogue and the member states must understand the immediate history of the conflict and demonstrate an increased willingness to invest heavy political and strategic capital to maximise the effectiveness of the EU in the process (Interview 7, 2022). One of the biggest persisting problems in relation to Kosovo derives from the non-recognising member states, Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain. The second tier of challenge shaping the role of the EU as a negotiator comes from the somewhat divergent approach of the EU institutions toward Kosovo. Neutrality toward Kosovo was formalised in 2008 following the decision to declare Kosovo's independence when the EU Council adopted the conclusions in which it acknowledged the new reality on the ground with the declaration of independence and left the

decision on diplomatic recognition to the individual member states (Council of the European Union, 2008). Both these limitations have been elaborated thoroughly in Chapter V.

The EU formula to alleviate these limitations was to side-line intra-EU divergences concerning Kosovo by delegating the Brussels Dialogue to the EEAS and the European Commission. In theory, this prevented the member states from direct clashes with each other – especially the non-recognisers - and provided a solution to communicating with Kosovo, albeit via the neutral status mode. However, while this “creativity” allowed the EU some margin for manoeuvring, it seriously damaged its credibility and leverage in the long run, thus minimising its ability to make a significant breakthrough. More concerningly, it deepened the power asymmetry toward Kosovo and significantly strengthened the role of Serbia in the process. Thus, for the EU to build a strong position as a negotiator, ensuring political consistency and establishing a power symmetry toward both parties, addressing these persisting limitations was imperative. Furthermore, it would later define the trajectory of the Brussels Dialogue, hence its ability to yield success in the process (Interview 12, 2022).

Addressing the discrepancies characterising the EU’s official stance and rhetoric toward Kosovo would have been a game changer in the Brussels Dialogue. Before committing to the leading negotiations position in the UN, the EU could have used the ICJ opinion concerning Kosovo’s declaration of independence and persuaded the non-recognisers to soften their approach toward Kosovo. After 2008, this was the most diplomatically favourable momentum for the EU to act. The decision of the ICJ could have been convincing enough for the non-recognisers that there would be no parallels drawn between Kosovo and the potential separatist movements in their countries. The inability to persuade all member states to have a unified approach toward Kosovo exposed the EU to one of the most significant vulnerabilities. Creating this internal cohesion, albeit challenging, would have sent a stark message about the political power of the EU in the process. Making the non-recognisers part of bilateral issues between Kosovo and Serbia is legally challenging. Hence, trying to achieve this goal as part of the final deal with Serbia is unlikely (Interview 14, 2022).

The EU’s approach to this issue could have been two-fold. It could have aimed to convince the soft non-recognisers such as Greece, Slovakia, and Romania to provide full diplomatic recognition to Kosovo after the ICJ opinion. On the other hand, it could have pushed the non-recognisers toward making tangible steps in relation to Kosovo’s status but on a separate track from the Brussels Dialogue. Thus, avoid interlinking the ‘normalisation’ process with Serbia under the auspices of the Brussels Dialogue with Kosovo’s foreign policy trajectory and

international recognition. Ensuring support from all member states, especially the non-recognisers, for the Brussels Dialogue should have been an important strategic starting point for the EU and still should guide the EU going forward. **Firstly**, it would establish a negotiation process based on equality between the two parties; this is imperative to ensure an effective negotiation process and a strong position for the EU as a facilitator. A unified and coherent EU in relation to Kosovo would have avoided creating the power asymmetry between the parties. Thus, it would have prevented Serbia from assuming a more advantaged position. Giving power to Serbia to this extent diminished the EU power in the process and incentivised Serbia *not* to solve the dispute. If the Brussels Dialogue continues in its current form, diplomatic recognition by five EU member states will remain elusive, as will the EU perspective on Kosovo (Interview 11, 2023). **Secondly**, this would avoid undermining the existence of Kosovo internationally, its diplomatic recognition, and ability to join regional and international cooperating mechanisms to depend on Serbia and the Brussels Dialogue. This dependency further empowered Serbia's position toward Kosovo by restricting Kosovo's existence in the international arena (Interview 10, 2022). **Thirdly**, getting all member states on board in relation to Kosovo's ambitions for EU membership would allow Kosovo to apply for membership formally and legally on an equal footing with Serbia. Formally opening the EU integration for Kosovo would also increase the EU's leverage in the Brussels Dialogue and create a similar political environment for both parties (Interview 9, 2023). At a minimum, the non-recognisers should accept and support the EU integration process for Kosovo. The new circumstances and the formal ambitions of the EU toward Ukraine and Moldova have created momentum for tangible steps in relation to Kosovo as well. Non-recognisers cannot and should not hide behind Serbia. This momentum should be used by the non-recognisers to change their attitude toward Kosovo and formalise its EU membership perspective.

In addition to the unified approach to Kosovo, the ***strong support by member states and a clear link to the enlargement*** are imperative for the success of the negotiation process. In Chapter III, I deconstructed how the EU identified the Brussels Dialogue and its role in conflict management as a foreign policy ambition. The mandate given by the UN General Assembly paved the way for the EU to build on its ambitions to interlink enlargement with foreign policy and solve one of the most notorious open disputes in the region. However, a negotiation process of this level needs the robust support of all member states, not only those sharing a keen interest in the Western Balkans (Interview 7, 2022). One of the vulnerabilities of the Brussels Dialogue, as explained in Chapter V, is the fact that solving the Kosovo – Serbia dispute, as well as the

enlargement process in the region, remains a priority only for a limited number of EU member states, mainly those sharing foreign policy interests in the region or nearby. Furthermore, as elaborated in Chapter III, the EU's internal and external challenges severely impacted the EU's appetite for enlargement, consequently leading to the decrease of the EU's normative soft power.

EU member states have delegated the Brussels Dialogue to the EEAS, which was a test for the new institutions. However, these institutions needed solid political support, a tangible linkage to the enlargement process led by the EU Commission, and a delegated special representative to deal with the Western Balkans and the Brussels Dialogue. In 2011, the technical phase and in 2013, the political phase was negotiated by the High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP). Keeping the Dialogue at the HR/VP level ensures it remains at a relatively high political level, but at the same time, the annexations of Crimea and the nuclear crisis with Iran occurred; both processes were negotiated by Catherine Ashton on behalf of the EU in the position of the HR/VP (Ashton, 2023). Therefore, there was not enough political capital to build on immediately after the Brussels Agreement to push the countries to implementation and final deal. Thus, the appointment of a particular person to deal with the Brussels Dialogue, which only happened in 2020, should have been a decision taken in 2011 when the Brussels Dialogue was launched.

Furthermore, all member states could politically use the momentum for success. While countries like Germany engaged more actively in the Brussels Dialogue and insisted on integrating it in the enlargement framework for Serbia as part of Chapter 35, countries like the Netherlands and France could have been more rigorous in pushing for reforms and making a real tangible connection with enlargement. In this case, even by imposing sanctions for countries not implementing the agreements. For Kosovo, active political engagement was needed from the EU member states to get it formally. Allowing Kosovo to apply formally would be an excellent tool to utilise the EU leverage while pushing rigorously for reforms. Without these elements, the Dialogue became a process of fake threats, fake carrots, fake agreements, and engagement from all sides.

Active involvement of the EU member states at the higher political level took place sporadically and only when the stability of the region and the EU were at stake. A more proactive involvement of the EU member states took place in the 2018 launch of the land swap idea. Germany and France's involvement occurred at the highest levels with the former Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Emmanuel Macron. Evidently, it was a political

reaction is driven by stability. This event involved the Quint countries comprising three EU member states, Germany, France, Italy, and the US and UK - which are also very influential and hold regular briefings, especially when tensions flare up in Kosovo (Xhambazi, 2019).

Similarly, due to the geopolitical urgency created after the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the EU intervened through the French-German Plan, a plan drafted by the EUSR Miroslav Lajčák. (Interview 11, 2022; Mirosavljevic, 2023; Brzozowski, Taylor, and Gotev, 2022). Following the crisis and the war in Ukraine, Germany and France appointed two advisers to provide political power to the process (Zaimi, 2023; Taylor, 2022). In the case of both France and Germany, these concerns are solely driven by the need for stability. Furthermore, the efforts served mainly to maintain the status quo or whatever setting prevents active conflicts between Kosovo and Serbia. Even with the so-called French-German Plan, the EU still depends on the political power of the US to push the countries forward (Picciano, 2023; Haas, 2023).

Another important game-changing step would be clearly ***defining a long-term strategy plan, clear objectives, timeframe, and principles***. The EU has been criticised mainly for operating in crisis prevention mode, unable to lead, guide, and strategise in advance. In the case of the Brussels Dialogue, instead of engaging in a process aimed only at reacting to the northern part of the Kosovo crisis, as explained in Chapter V, it should have thoroughly prepared to enter a complex negotiation process. One of the first elements identified as a limitation negatively impacting the EU's role in the Brussels Dialogue is the lack of a strategic master plan (Interview 11, 2023). Thus, ***preparing a strategic document*** to set the basic principles of the negotiations, a timeframe, the precise objectives of the process, and a step-by-step plan that would lead to the recognition of Kosovo by Serbia. Developing this document and strategising before engaging 'hands-on' in the negotiations would demonstrate a strengthened position of the EU in the Brussels Dialogue, fully prepared to guide the parties toward a sustainable solution. This document would ***set the basic principles of the Brussels Dialogue***, clearly defining the rules in the process, especially the red lines. The need to have a set of fundamental principles agreed upon gained more relevance when the 'land-swap' idea was mooted, as explained in Chapter V, which created dividing lines between member states and the EU. Basic principles would mark the red lines in the process and define a set of topics that would gradually guide the parties toward a final solution within a particular timeframe. In addition, the basic principles document should have included ***the objective of the negotiations***, which continues to be undefined yet framed as 'normalisation.' A clearly defined objective in the Brussels Dialogue would reflect a vision of the EU for the future of the two countries and the region. In

Chapter IV, I noted that one of the most significant limitations in the Brussels Dialogue derived from the divergent understanding of ‘normalisation’. With normalisation as an overarching objective, the EU created serious gaps leading to misinterpretation. A precise, long-term, and short-term objective would significantly strengthen the role of the EU as a facilitator and its position concerning both parties. An agenda recognising Kosovo at the centre would be the only sustainable solution to the Kosovo – Serbia dispute and the entire region. As explained in Chapter V, this would add value to the Brussels Dialogue by reaching what the Vienna Negotiations could not without Russian interference.

Furthermore, a clear objective would make the Brussels Dialogue a time-bound process. It would positively contribute to finding common ground among the parties, thus preventing the creation of divergent expectations by the two parties. On the other hand, setting objectives that imply that the Brussels Dialogue will tackle everything, *but* the recognition of Kosovo by Serbia made the process open-ended and goal-less. Additionally, a *set timeframe* with specific steps clarified would have been a game changer. In times of global geopolitical shifts and challenges within the EU and globally, as explained in Chapter III, setting a timeframe for negotiations would be a solid strategy to build cohesion while the democratic resilience in the region was developing a positive trend. However, the EU did not have the political capital and will to play a long game. Moreover, other external crises exhausted the political capital of the EEAS to focus on the Brussels Dialogue. Crises such as the Annexation of Crimea in 2014 and The Iran Nuclear crisis in 2015 eventually took away the attention and political efforts needed to follow up on implementing the Brussels Agreement reached in 2013.

Moreover, a set timeframe would prevent the Brussels Dialogue from being an open-ended process from which the political elites in both countries have taken advantage by turning it into a tool for tightening their authoritarian grip, nurturing nationalist narratives, and using it for daily political consumption to maintain their power position. A time-bound process would avoid the election cycles in the EU, EU member states, the US administration changes, and elections in Kosovo and Serbia. It would prevent the political elites in both countries from using the elections as an excuse for a lack of engagement in the Brussels Dialogue or the lack of political will to implement the agreements. The protracted Brussels Dialogue negotiation process creates grievances among the population, which the political elites exploit – especially in Serbia. A time-bound process with clear objectives would have led the parties toward a solution sooner and prevented Serbia's intentional stoking of instability. Lastly, the EU should have *taken political ownership in the process; more* than a decade since the launch of the

Brussels Dialogue, the debate over the ownership of the process is still ongoing. The lack of expertise, experience, and inability to utilise the institutional mechanisms and the political leverage the EU has in the process all meant that the EU failed to take ownership of and full responsibility for the Brussels Dialogue, as explained in Chapter IV. While it is essential for the parties to engage genuinely, the EU must own the process and act according to its mandate.

Taking on full ownership would showcase the solid political power of the EU and create a strong position as a facilitator to demand implementation and dedicated commitment by both parties. It would also prevent the process from derailing, like during the Trump administration in 2019-2020, which created a parallel process led by the US ambassador in Germany, Richard Grenell (Mischke, 2019). This gap led to the EU losing control of the process and jeopardising the entire success – albeit limited - achieved until 2019 (Reimann, 2019). On the other hand, member states – excluding Germany and France - refused to engage actively and independently in the Brussels Dialogue, fearing confrontation with the U.S. and creating parallel processes or limiting the possibility of one member state taking control of the process, which could have a negative impact (Mappes-Niedek, 2020; Joseph, 2020).

Since most of the agreements in the Brussels Dialogue are imposed by the EU, which is in the driving seat and facilitated most of the agreement, maintaining the same level of ownership in the post-agreement period would be a game changer in the process. It would allow the EU to follow up on the implementation of the agreements and impose sanctions on parties that failed to follow up with implementation action plans and follow a strict implementation timeframe. (Gashi and Novaković, 2017) The EU used this multi-actor process to share responsibility but not necessarily the successes (Interview 9, 2022). Full ownership by the EU would enable the EU to claim victories when limited progress was reached but also own the failures and shortcomings. Furthermore, it would enable the EU to improve its strategy and take a firmer attitude toward the implementation process (Visoka and Doyle, 2016).

6.2.2.Strategising in the Brussels Dialogue: Drafting Sustainable and Implementable Agreements

There are elements that I have highlighted throughout the thesis that are identified as key problems in the EU approach to the Brussels Dialogue. The research shows that one of the key issues was the inability of the EU to ditch the Brussels House diplomacy, or ‘constructive ambiguity’, a strategy used by the EU in drafting the agreements between Kosovo and Serbia. That incremental approach was suitable as a starting point but could not bring negotiations to a conclusion. As detailed in Chapter IV, the research shows that constructive ambiguity does

not create a solid ground for implementing the agreements. On the contrary, it created more fissures between the parties (Visoka and Doyle, 2016; Ernst, 2014). Thus, the first intervention that the EU should have made was *to make constructive ambiguity time-bound*. Constructive ambiguity is a strategy the EU has mastered internally in a political environment of 27 member states that are part of the Union and navigate each other based on established rules (Franke, 2021; Santopinto, 2022). However, in a very different political environment evidencing open or frozen conflicts - as is in the case of the Western Balkans and the open issue between Kosovo and Serbia – this is a less effective strategy (Batora *et al.*, 2018). The one-size-fits-all approach did not fit the Brussels Dialogue. In the short run, tweaking the language was an easy shortcut to a short-term win for the EU and the illusion of success. In the long run, this strategy jeopardised the entire process, created fissures among the parties and contributed to a loss of credibility and trust in the EU (Novakovic, 2020).

Making ambiguity time-bound, drafting an agreement using precise wording, and developing action plans to follow up with implementation would have turned the tables around. Clear and precise language would prevent the parties from building different narratives domestically. It would require political elites to be realistic the goals of the process and the interim steps leading to the final deal (Interview 7, 2022). Furthermore, it would have avoided re-negotiation of the same agreements or elements of agreements as it happened with the freedom of movement agreement, energy agreement, and elements of the Brussels Agreement signed in 2013.

Giving up ambiguity would prevent the Brussels Dialogue from stalling; it would avoid the heightening of tensions between the two countries, mostly derived from divergent expectations. Furthermore, it would make implementation a more straightforward process to be monitored by the EU and independent civil society in both countries. This way, the parties would unlock their reward in the EU integration process only when the agreement is fully implemented and not on signing – which was the case with the Brussels Agreement in 2013. Ten years after the Brussels Agreement, in 2023, the EU tried to draft clearer texts in the two agreements reached in the framework of the French–German Plan. However, it continued using ambiguous language and failed to draft an action plan with a precise implementation timeframe. As a result, the action plan agreed upon in Ohrid has very unclear deadlines, which could again encourage parties to spiral into yet another bleak decade of negotiations.

Similarly, *abandoning the incremental approach after the technical phase of the dialogue* could avoid the attitude of reluctant, slow engagement and tackle the core problem rather than peripheral issues. It would have required the EU to define the endgame before or at the early

stage of negotiations instead of insisting on small steps via an incremental approach. As explained in Chapter IV, the EU incremental approach showed success - albeit limited - at the beginning of the process. Initially, it produced results and was heralded by the EU as an efficient approach that aims at gradually building trust while creating ripe conditions for the parties to, at some later stage, tackle the long-standing political issues (Scazzieri, 2021). However, this approach ultimately needed to end and focus instead on addressing the elephant in the room - the political status of Kosovo. Incrementalism by the EU did not offer a clear plan to guide the parties toward mutual recognition (Weber and Bajrami, 2020).

On the contrary, the EU, even over a decade since the launch of the process, refuses to tackle the recognition of Kosovo by Serbia. It continues to invest in interim steps in the name of de facto recognition, which continues to cement the current status quo. Further, it does not offer a solid plan on how these steps will lead to de-jure recognition.

By tackling the core of the dispute, the recognition of Kosovo, the EU would establish a conducive environment for the parties to solve other persisting issues on the bilateral level. Addressing the key issue between Kosovo and Serbia would prevent the ‘buy time strategy’ used by the political leaders to drag out the Brussels Dialogue while using it for domestic political purposes. Furthermore, it would prevent the Brussels Dialogue from serving as a tool for the local autocratic leaders to consolidate their power internally, tighten their authoritarian grip, and sophisticate the stabilitocracy cycle to gradually trap the EU in the trade-off of reforms and progress for stability.

Lastly, *increased transparency and inclusiveness* would ensure a sustainable negotiation process. The Brussels Dialogue was launched amid tensions following the declaration of Kosovo’s independence. This process enjoyed minimal support in Kosovo, which was thrown into another negotiation process after the lengthy Vienna Negotiations on the Final Status of Kosovo (Collaku, 2015). In Serbia, following the declaration of independence in 2008, the US Embassy was attacked, and there was strong resentment toward the West. While in the northern part of Kosovo, a new reality was cemented (Tzortzi, 2008). Despite the complexities on the ground, the EU could have used its capital to launch track-one negotiations and support track-two initiatives to create a conducive environment for the agreement to be acceptable to the broader public. The EU could utilise its presence in both countries to promote the benefits of the dialogue by engaging on track two and three of negotiations by working with the communities, especially the Serbian-inhabited areas subject to negotiations in the northern part of Kosovo (Interview 5, 20 2; Interview 5, 2022). Furthermore, it could urge the parties to

actively engage in public debates to give ownership to the communities. Clarity and transparency would positively change the perception toward the dialogue and prevent political elites in Kosovo and Serbia from using this process to fuel nationalist narratives in both countries.

Furthermore, at the EU level, being one of the essential mediation processes, the EEAS should have created a platform to publish news and documents online, ensuring minimal transparency standards. A transparent EEAS in the Brussels Dialogue would encourage Kosovo and Serbia to follow up on commitments. Increased transparency and inclusiveness would avoid resentment in both countries driven by the complete lack of trust triggered by the ambiguous content of the agreements and by the unwillingness of the EU and the parties to make the process as transparent as possible (Interview 9, 2022).

For instance, in the latest agreement reached in 2023, the EU had negotiated the documents for almost two years but published the agreed text only after the verbal agreement of both parties. Nevertheless, the published documents at least offer a glimpse of a base for negotiations and an action plan, making monitoring the implementation process more accessible for the EU and civil society in both countries. The EU is exerting more pressure on the parties to deliver, though this pressure remains mostly on Kosovo.

6.3. Turning Tables: How the EU could have Prevented Western Balkans Stabilitocracies?

The Western Balkans was the first post-war region to which the EU aimed to expand its influence. However, the EU's formalised ambitions and efforts to expand towards Ukraine and Moldova represent another political endeavour to reach a region with comparable complexities. It is important to note in this case that Ukraine is still a case of an ongoing war without a clear picture of how the country will look after it is over. The decision to formalise the enlargement process towards Moldova and Ukraine sparked numerous debates regarding the lessons learned from the Western Balkans and its two-decade journey in the enlargement process, which yielded limited results. This critical juncture in the EU's enlargement policy necessitates a comprehensive assessment of the lessons derived from its approach to the Western Balkans. This thesis has looked at the enlargement as a normative EU power as well as its ambitions in conflict management. It highlighted the EU's leverage but also limitations. Henceforth, the key lessons learned encompass the elaboration of the series of strategic decisions of the EU that

potentially could have made the Western Balkans enlargement a success story and ultimately avoid establishing stabilitocracies.

The first strategic step toward the Western Balkans would be understanding the complexities of a post-conflict region and sharpening *the EU enlargement toolkit for the Western Balkans* to fit the region's specific circumstances. This step would optimise the EU's influence in the Western Balkans; strategically, it would be crucial to reassess and update the existing EU enlargement toolkit. While the toolkit has proven effective in previous waves of expansion, especially in the Central Eastern European (CEE) countries, its application in the post-conflict region of the Western Balkans has showcased significant limitations over time (Bermeo, 2016). Unlike previous cases where aspiring countries demonstrated robust political will to join the EU and created a solid institutional infrastructure to fulfil the enlargement criteria, the Western Balkans face unique challenges related to past conflicts and a fragmented commitment to European integration. By acknowledging these limitations and considering the region's complex dynamics, the EU should have developed an updated toolkit that addresses the challenges of post-conflict societies while fostering genuine political will for EU membership. This approach would have facilitated a smoother and more effective progress towards European integration in the Western Balkans, ultimately enhancing stability, democracy, and regional cooperation. The EU enlargement toward the Western Balkans evidently required a robust involvement in conflict management. As such, the need for democratic reforms necessitates a tailored approach that combines enlargement with foreign policy objectives. In this case, both could have been launched simultaneously and at a faster pace (Interview 1, 2021).

Enlargement toward the Western Balkans requires an updated and refined enlargement toolkit, and a genuine and unwavering political commitment to enlargement must accompany it. The political ambition, originating from the EU, was primarily driven by the EU's geopolitical interests, as evidenced by the opening of the enlargement process towards the Western Balkans at the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003. Launching a robust enlargement agenda with the EU's strong normative power during the early 2000s could have had a transformative impact in the Western Balkans (Interview 1, 2021; Interview 7, 2022). To achieve this, the EU could have adopted a distinct approach in the Western Balkans, moving beyond viewing the process as a technical and bureaucratic exercise. Instead, it could have been recognised as a transformative mission to establish resilient democracies, thus surpassing the acceptance of a status quo that guarantees the absence of active conflict. Merely maintaining a fragile peace in the region is an insufficient political objective that the EU should not have settled for.

Dealing with a fragile security-wise region should not have weakened the importance of the EU conditionality. On the contrary, the EU should have ***strengthened its conditionality and enforce non-negotiable criteria***. Security and stability could only be guaranteed by strong and democratic governments in the region. Hence, in the EU's agenda, the short-run ambition should have been to establish solid democracies and not the stability provided by autocratic regimes. As such, the EU should have enhanced the effectiveness of conditionality by setting clear benchmarks and enforceable mechanisms to strictly monitor this process. A process that rewards the progress and sanctions the regress in democratisation (Interview 6, 2022). The EU should have persisted in demonstrating a solid commitment to its values and strictly held candidate countries accountable for meeting the agreed conditions. This would have maintained a strong EU leverage in the region instead of turning into an actor which is easily bent by the local autocratic regimes. By reinforcing its political power and leverage in the Western Balkans, the EU could have avoided the transactional approach and asserted its transformative power in enlargement. This would have safeguarded the EU's normative influence and underscored the long-term benefits of EU integration beyond geopolitical consideration by establishing democratic countries in the region, guaranteeing long-term stability and prosperity.

One strategic mistake in the region that allowed the regimes to build the anti-EU narrative is the lack of active ***communication of the conditionality and the benefits***. Thus, the EU could have communicated a clear and consistent message to the region and its citizens. This could have been done by articulating a clear and consistent message about the EU's values, expectations, and benefits of EU integration as a process. Tailor the messaging to address each country's and its citizens' specific concerns and aspirations by highlighting the tangible benefits of EU membership, including economic opportunities, increased mobility, and enhanced security. This way, the EU could have increased the demand for EU reforms by the citizens of the countries in the region and avoided the anti-EU narrative nurtured by the stabilitocrats in the region (Interview 1, 2021; Interview 2, 2021).

Another very important element to preventing the emergence of stabilitocracy is dealing with Serbia using a different approach. Given the strained nature of EU-Serbia relations and the evolving dynamics in the Western Balkans, it could be strategic to reassess the approach to *EU enlargement and recalibrate the EU's engagement with Serbia and the Brussels Dialogue*. The EU's approach in the Western Balkans remains immensely centred on Serbia. Indeed, Serbia strategically is one of the countries with the most significant potential and institutional

infrastructure to deliver on the reforms, but this was not the reason why the EU focused predominantly on Serbia. The geopolitical alignments of Serbia and its strategic partnership with Russia (later with China) have placed Serbia in the top priority geopolitically. Instead, the EU could have engaged in constructive dialogue to encourage Serbia to align its foreign policy with EU values and interests and develop targeted strategies to mitigate the influence of external actors. As such, the EU should not have shown flexibility on conditionality to accommodate the needs of local undemocratic elites.

Similarly, the foreign policy ambition in conflict management included addressing the Kosovo issue, thus putting Serbia at the centre of the EU's foreign policy agenda. The Brussels Dialogue has been integrated into the EU membership process, aiming to use enlargement as a "golden carrot" in the case of Serbia. Thus, disentangling *the Kosovo issue from the EU integration process* would ensure a clear and principled approach to the Serbia's EU membership process, namely its need to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria and complete its democratic trajectory. The EU could have engaged in separate, focused dialogues to address the complexities and sensitivities surrounding Kosovo, fostering a conducive environment for dialogue, but not at the expense of the actual democratic reforms. This would have been the key element preventing the EU from falling in the stability trap set by the Serbian political elites using Kosovo as a distraction to their shortcomings in the EU reforms. The open dispute between Kosovo and Serbia has laid bare significant vulnerabilities and flaws in the EU's approach to enlargement and foreign policy goals. This would have prevented the EU from largely engaging in the pursuit of short-term stability, even if artificially constructed, and ultimately avoid the significant long-term challenges by stalling the democratisation process and impeding EU enlargement. The EU's toleration of hybrid, semi-authoritarian regimes exhibiting autocratic tendencies especially in Serbia in exchange for regional stability and a perceived pro-EU orientation has set a worrying precedent. Other types of stabilitocracies have emerged in varying degrees across the Western Balkans, each taking on unique manifestations within their respective countries. For instance, Kosovo has attempted to mirror Serbia's behaviour in the Brussels Dialogue, leading to rivalry and instability, particularly evident in northern Kosovo. Montenegro at some point by nurturing the pro-Russia strategic alliance and enabling Chinese investments in the country.

Even in light of the concerning developments observed in all countries in the region and the emergence of stabilitocracies in the Western Balkans, the EU could have been *strongly more vocal against stabilitocracies*. It could have prevented the instances of state capture elements

and avoided undermining the importance of the enlargement criteria by making its conditionality negotiable. This would have prevented the local political elites in the region from viewing the enlargement criteria as flexible and subject to flexible interpretation. The EU's flexibility and tolerance toward the worrying lack of political will to implement the reforms turned the EU membership process from a transformational to a transactional one. Similarly, the EU could have held its standards consistently and unequivocally, irrespective of *geopolitical challenges considerations*. The EU should have been better at identifying, recognising and responding to the geopolitical competition and the influence of illiberal actors in the region, but not by bending its conditionality. The EU could have responded to the growing influence of illiberal actors by engaging in proactive diplomacy to counterbalance their influence.

Similarly, this could have been done by promoting the benefits and advantages of EU integration, which could have been done by communicating directly with the citizens of these countries, which would have maintained their demand for EU reforms. All these elements combined would prevent the process from becoming vulnerable to geopolitical aspects and unresolved bilateral issues in the Western Balkans. Lastly, *regional cooperation and integration* would not necessarily solve all the disputes in the region as the EU expected. Fostering regional cooperation initiatives that promote dialogue, trust-building, and economic integration among Western Balkan countries is a good addition. However, bilateral disputes cannot be solved only at the multilateral level. They should include a proactive bilateral engagement in parallel (Interview 7, 2022). This is extremely important as the EU is embarking on a region which shares a similar nature of bilateral disputes, such as the Eastern Partnership region.

6.4. Moving Away from Stabilitocracy: The Future of EU Enlargement

In Chapter IV, I analysed the reality on the ground and identified the flaws in the EU approach in the Brussels Dialogue, eventually leading to stabilitocracy. However, this section looks at the lessons learned from practising the stability approach in the Western Balkans and the key steps the EU should take to avoid it in future enlargement processes. The emergence of stabilitocracies and the EU's failure to establish democracies in the Western Balkans reflects on the current weak state of the EU and its normative power. The limited success in the Western Balkans also shapes the EU's approach in future enlargement processes and international

negotiations. The rise of stabilitocracies in the Western Balkans has created a situation in which member states find it relatively acceptable, aligning with their lack of political ambition for expanding into the region. However, suppose we assess the EU's normative power based on its ability to facilitate enlargement in the Western Balkans and its effectiveness in international negotiations, as demonstrated by the Brussels Dialogue. In that case, it becomes evident that significant shortcomings must be addressed in the future. Evidently, keeping the Western Balkans in a state of anticipation is considered an acceptable solution amidst intra-EU crises and significant disagreements regarding the EU's future and its ambitions for further expansion (Interview 11, 2023). However, nurturing a stability-oriented approach in the region has had detrimental effects on its democratic transition. Rather than fostering democratic resilience, the EU has inadvertently allowed an environment to thrive in which authoritarianism prevails, and autocratic leaders strengthen their control using the EU resources in the enlargement process. Consequently, the stability approach cannot be simply described as a trade-off between stability and reforms, as it reveals fundamental and structural flaws in the EU's utilisation of enlargement as a foreign policy tool and undermines its normative and transformative power.

The root cause of stabilitocracy boils down to the actual EU's willingness to exercise its normative power through enlargement and, most importantly, the definition of enlargement by the EU and the expectations of the candidate countries toward this process. As seen in the Thessaloniki Summit, the EU's response to the post-war Western Balkans resembles its approach towards Ukraine and Moldova, primarily driven by stability and geopolitics. The EU must view enlargement as a tool for democratic transformation rather than solely as a means of managing conflicts. Lessons drawn from the Western Balkans and the Brussels Dialogue highlight the significant role played by the stability approach in fostering authoritarian regimes, which directly contradicts the EU's original objective of promoting democratic values through enlargement.

Relying on non-democratic and autocratic leaders to maintain short-term stability in the region undermines the EU's normative power. It poses a significant obstacle to its ambitions in conflict management. By tolerating and endorsing 'stabilitocrats' in the Western Balkans, the EU risks sending a similar message to political elites in the Eastern Partnership region - Moldova, Ukraine, and potentially, Georgia. This, in turn, may encourage these leaders to prioritise geopolitical interests over democratic reforms or even contribute to creating pockets of instability, perpetually escalating the situation.

The EU's approach of treating *enlargement primarily as a tool for stabilisation* in times of crisis has led to a recurring pattern of granting candidate status to countries prematurely and in responsive mode – excluding the case of Kosovo, which is still in the process of application. This practice is risky as it can lead to countries facing significant stagnation when it comes to the actual implementation of EU reforms, as evidenced by the challenges experienced in the Western Balkans and Turkey. While it is crucial to establish a clear and predictable timeframe for the enlargement process, it is equally important to avoid setting unrealistic dates and expectations, as has been the case with past instances such as the Enlargement Strategy 2025 in the Western Balkans (Interview 10, 2022).

Ensuring internal cohesion and defining enlargement methodology are two imperative steps that would eventually break the pattern of establishing regimes that guarantee a stable status quo. First, the EU should ensure that all EU member states are on board with enlargement toward yet extending enlargement ambitions in another region that shares the same complexities with the Western Balkans. Albeit there is a pro-Ukraine sentiment to a large extent across the EU, there are countries like the Netherlands who, according to BiEPAG research do not believe that the war in Ukraine should accelerate the EU integration process toward Western Balkans or Ukraine (Cvijic *et al.*, 2022). Enlargement contains strategic steps which require the support of all member states. In the case of the Western Balkans, the sceptics created outstanding political obstacles even for issues outside of the enlargement framework, for example the case of Bulgaria toward North Macedonia (Interview 9, 2023). In addition to the political will, there is a need to define the enlargement methodology. The introduction of an ill-defined process initiated by France in 2018, known as the change of enlargement methodology, has not yet fully materialised (Prelec and Delevic, 2019). While the new methodology includes more sanctioning mechanisms by the EU towards countries regressing in EU integration reforms, it must address the lack of political will, the fading enthusiasm for enlargement among member states, and the overall diminished EU leverage in enlargement. This is imperative for the technical part of enlargement, which is crucial for Brussels to maintain a track record of implementation of reforms in the aspiring countries.

Furthermore, the EU should define its vision of enlargement. Enlargement in the EU has been put on hold as the EU has struggled with a series of consecutive crises, as discussed in detail in Chapter II of the thesis. The stagnation of the enlargement process can also be attributed to the need for more consensus and unanimity on foreign policy matters, a topic explored in Chapter V. Despite the internal disagreements. The EU has embarked on another enlargement

process involving Moldova and Ukraine. While this may signify a renewed impetus for the long-stalled Western Balkans enlargement, the candidacy of Moldova and Ukraine could potentially bring about significant changes to the EU's enlargement process. However, the specific detail of future enlargement remains unclear. The introduction of the European Political Community (EPC) by French President Emmanuel Macron has sparked a discussion on the future of the European Union (Marciaq, 2022). Although this initiative is still in its preliminary stages and requires further development, it has triggered a debate on the definition of Europe's core and periphery. While, at the time of writing, this debate has not directly clashed with the enlargement process, it highlights ongoing discussions regarding the future of enlargement in the Western Balkans and beyond. Additionally, various voices and initiatives advocate for restructuring the enlargement framework, such as the introduction of models like staged accession or a tiered membership process. However, both options fall short of offering full membership, diminishing aspiring countries' aspirations for complete transformation.

Enlargement has often been pursued to respond *to geopolitical shifts*, but it is crucial to keep old patterns focused solely on stability and geopolitics. The reliance on stabilitocracy, although providing short-term stability, has revealed weaknesses in the EU's ability to counter external actors like Russia. The geopolitical implications of stabilitocracy are discussed in detail in Chapter V, highlighting how the EU's limited enlargement efforts and weakened normative power have allowed Russia to exert influence in the Western Balkans, exploiting the shortcomings of the Brussels Dialogue. This pattern of stabilitocracy can also be observed in the Eastern Partnership region, particularly following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. The EU's approach during high-level negotiations involving Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus in 2015 demonstrated a similar prioritisation of stability. Led by Angela Merkel and François Hollande, the EU engaged with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in an attempt to find a solution after the Russian invasion of Crimea (Forsberg, 2016). However, this case illustrates the EU's inclination to uphold the status quo for the sake of stability (Jarábik, 2015). This negotiation process resulted in a short-term and unsustainable solution, as evidenced by the EU imposing heavy political and economic sanctions on Belarus in 2020 and Russia's continued aggression, culminating in a full-scale invasion in 2022 (Interview 4, 2022). The vulnerability of the EU and its key member states, particularly in dealing with external actors like Russia, has undermined the EU's aspirations to become a global actor.

Motivated by the conflict in Ukraine, the EU employed enlargement as a foreign policy tool to address the situation with Russia. Ukraine and Moldova were granted candidate country status, and the EU aimed to generate momentum in the Brussels Dialogue. Despite over a decade of unsuccessful attempts to resolve the Kosovo-Serbia issue through this dialogue, which exposed significant vulnerabilities in the EU's mission to pacify and democratise the region (Bechev, 2022), the EU has renewed its efforts to facilitate a final agreement. However, the EU's strategy has remained unchanged, with continued support for the autocratic leader in Serbia, who is perceived as capable of ensuring success and aligning strategically with the West while exerting immense pressure on Kosovo to compromise and accommodate Serbia's demands. Seizing the opportunity to bring Serbia closer to the EU and resolve the Kosovo-Serbia issue while Russia's attention is focused on the war in Ukraine, the EU has introduced the German-French plan in the Brussels Dialogue (Interview 11, 2023). In early 2023, the EU implemented two verbal agreements affirming a short-term stability approach. The EU's push for the French-German plan follows an incremental approach that could result in years of negotiations and regional stagnation. Instead of advocating for a change in the enlargement strategy that prioritises reforms, the EU has displayed significant flaws by partnering with autocratic leaders for the sake of stability. For example, Serbia has continued its trend of state capture and has declined to join the EU's sanctions against Russia. Consequently, the EU perpetuates the stability approach, even though it carries significant political costs in the long term (Interview 13, 2023). There is a concern that the EU may repeat the pattern observed in the Western Balkans when it comes to Ukraine's membership process, which poses an even more significant challenge for the EU. Unless there is a deliberate strategic shift and a well-defined plan to transition from crisis response and stability-focused approaches, there is a significant risk that Ukraine will experience a situation similar to that of the Western Balkans. Unless there is a strategic change and plan to move from crisis response and stability, there is a high risk of Ukraine mirroring the Western Balkans scenario.

6.5. Conclusion

This Chapter analysed the implications of the stabilitocracy approach in the region and how it will determine the future of the EU as a normative power and a global actor in conflict management. In addition, it offered an analysis of the situation in which the negotiation table turned and explored what could have been done to make the Brussels Dialogue a success story.

As elaborated in Chapter IV, the Brussels Dialogue has shown severe shortcomings in the past decade, significantly limiting the EU's leverage and chances for success. For the first time, this process involved the EU directly and combined the most powerful EU policy tools, such as enlargement and foreign policy ambitions. The Brussels Dialogue could have been a victory for the EU in conflict management, enlargement, and transformations of the region, thus maintaining its global actorness. The Brussels Dialogue – the first negotiation process of this nature – could have been a success with proper strategic planning. The starting step would be developing a document on basic principles, the timeframe of the dialogue, and clear objectives. As such, the first section lists crucial elements that should prevent the EU from settling with stability in the Brussels Dialogue. These elements include the avoidance of intra-EU divergences in relation to Kosovo, full support of all member states in the process proactively, a more robust foreign policy and security approach to the Brussels Dialogue, high political support for the EU institutions leading the process, as well as realistic, strict, and fair interlink to enlargement based on performance in implementation and not merely in signing the agreements. High-level leadership is imperative, especially after undertaking such a crucial negotiation process mandated by the UN, as Chapter III explains.

Most importantly, taking full ownership of the process by showing robust political power as a facilitator was an essential element that would have prevented the EU from falling into the stability trap provided by autocrats, as would avoiding constructive ambiguity as a strategy by making it time-bound. Moreover, the research shows that the EU missed the opportunity to bring about a resolution by giving up on the incremental approach and addressing the elephant in the room – the recognition of Kosovo by Serbia. The EU is deeply involved in both countries' internal affairs and is the biggest donor. Thus, the EU has the capital to utilise the track one, two, and three processes simultaneously to aim for greater sustainability of the Brussels Dialogue.

The willingness of the EU to turn a blind eye to democratisation put the region into a dangerous vicious cycle. Furthermore, it dashed the hopes of the Western Balkans countries and contributed to immensely decreasing the EU normative power and leverage. The second part of the chapter shows that the decrease in the normative power of the EU took place due to consecutive internal crises, which put the EU in a survival mode. However, failing to deliver on the Western Balkans immediately after Thessaloniki, while there was democratic resilience on the ground and willingness to join the EU, was a strategic mistake that led to building stabilitocracy in the region. The impact of the stability approach in the region stalled the

democratisation process. It exposed the weakness of the EU, which partnered with autocratic leaders for short-term stability. These leaders continue fuelling nationalist narratives and feeding anti-EU sentiments while collaborating with other illiberal actors, such as Russia, using the region to challenge the West. The Western Balkan leaders learned how to trade off the stability in bilateral disputes with neighbours or partnerships with other actors. As a result, the EU integration process for the region became transactional and not transformational. Thus moving the region away from the democratic transition and needed reforms for EU membership.

Stabilitocracy was not only detrimental to the region; the last section of the chapter confirms that the Brussels Dialogue has also negatively impacted the EU and its aspirations to maintain its normative power and place among the most globally relevant actors. The EU was supposed to build democracies that fostered the creation of strong autocratic leaders and build stabilitocracies that functioned like authoritarian regimes. However, the EU, in exchange for short-term stability, created long-term obstacles, thus limiting its ability to yield results in the region. Acceptance of stability in exchange for reforms showcases the intra-EU divergences and the uncertainty about the future of the EU and its foreign policy ambitions. Moreover, the Brussels Dialogue can impact the EU's future aspirations to deal with open and active conflicts. The war in Ukraine has accelerated the EU membership process. After receiving the EU candidate status in 2022, Ukraine will most likely be the next mission for the EU to solve using enlargement as a tool. Again, similarly to the Western Balkans, the EU's approach to Ukraine and Moldova was purely geopolitical and stability-oriented. However, the case of Ukraine also adds security elements, further complicating the EU's already limited political capital in foreign policy and security.

Conclusion: Beyond Stabilitocracy?

The thesis has contributed to advancing the academic understanding of stabilitocracy by refining our understanding of the concept through unique empirical evidence derived from an analysis of the Brussels Dialogue. By analysing the implications of the EU stability approach towards the Brussels Dialogue, this thesis provides unique insights and contributes to scholarly discourse on stabilitocracy. The case study offers a uniquely illustrative example of the EU's combination of enlargement policy, its aspirations for a unified foreign policy and security, and its ambitions to build a global profile in conflict mediation. Focusing on a process that has not been extensively explored, this research has shed light on the multifaceted challenges and potential implications of the EU's pursuit of stabilitocracy. In addition to the enlargement policy, this research has enhanced the academic understanding of the EU's role in international mediation. The findings of this thesis have significant implications for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners involved in conflict resolution, foreign policy, and EU studies.

Chapter Overview

Chapter I laid the foundation for the subsequent analysis by mapping existing knowledge on democratic backsliding/relapsing, stabilitocracy, semi-authoritarian regimes, and competitive authoritarian regimes in the context of EU integration. In this chapter, I reviewed and synthesised previous research on democratic transformation through EU integration and conditionality, as well as the challenges faced by the EU in the face of the unprecedented crisis of democracy present within the EU member states. The most important part of the chapter is the section that introduces the concept of stabilitocracy and its application by the EU, particularly in the case of the Brussels Dialogue.

This chapter analysed how the EU has traditionally exercised its soft power. I argued, however, that enlargement conditionality, which was one of the main tools to promote democratic values and practices – and had immense success in the past – is gradually diminishing. The emergence of democratic backsliding, illiberal democracy, and semi-authoritarian regimes has posed new challenges to the EU's foreign policy approach. Moreover, the crisis within the EU shaking its fundamental values has impacted the EU enlargement agenda and, thereby, its normative power. As such, this led to Stabilitocracy, prioritising stability over democratic principles.

This chapter provided a comprehensive literature review on stabilitocracy, exploring its various perspectives, forms, implications, and applications in the case of the Brussels Dialogue. By

doing so, I set the foundation for the subsequent case study that forms the main focus of this thesis. In addition, the chapter provided the necessary background information on previous research, the EU's approach to democratic transformation, the challenges posed by the crisis of democracy, and the concept of stabilitocracy.

Chapter II delved into the evolution of the EU from a normative and transformative power to a resilient actor. It highlighted the decreasing potency of the EU's normative power and its implications for the turn towards stabilitocracy, particularly within the context of the enlargement process in the Western Balkans and the EU's ambition to solve the Kosovo – Serbia dispute in the framework of the Brussels Dialogue.

This chapter explained how, initially, the EU was seen as a peace project driven by geopolitical circumstances and the goal of promoting stability while fostering democratisation. This was exemplified by including Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries through the EU's enlargement process. However, this chapter examined the underlying factors, such as the multi-layered crisis within the EU and the changing geopolitical order, behind the decrease of the EU's appetite to engage in the enlargement agenda and the evolving balance between stability and democratisation at the detriment of the latter, mainly when the EU laid the ambition to pair enlargement with establishing its role in conflict resolution through mediation and negotiations. This approach has led to the emergence of 'stabilitocracy' and reflects the changing dynamics within the EU and the way the EU navigates in its immediate neighbourhood. This shift raises questions about the emphasis on stability at the expense of the transformative aspects of EU membership.

Moreover, the chapter explored the specific mechanisms employed by the EU in the Western Balkans, such as the Copenhagen Criteria and the promotion of good neighbourly relations. These mechanisms aimed to foster democracy and regional cooperation in a post-conflict region, testing the EU's normative power to a large extent. The case study of the Western Balkans has shed light on the EU's role in the democratisation processes, conflict management, and peace negotiations. Moreover, it illustrated the EU's aspirations to take a leading role in these processes, highlighting its normative power and transformative potential in conflict-ridden regions.

By examining the factors shaping the EU's transition to an actor seeking resilience instead of an actor seeking expansion, particularly in the context of the enlargement process and engagement in the Western Balkans, this chapter contributed to the theoretical framework. It

provided a comprehensive understanding of the EU's role in contemporary global affairs. It shed light on the dynamics and priorities influencing the EU's shift from a normative and transformative power to an actor seeking resilience. This analysis enhances our understanding of the EU's role in promoting stability, democracy, and regional cooperation in complex and challenging contexts such as the post-conflict Western Balkans, which challenged the EU's unsharpened enlargement toolkit.

Chapter III examined the role of the EU as a mediator in international mediation and negotiation; it examined the trajectory of the EU's ambition to build on common foreign policy and security. More specifically, it analysed the transformation of the EU's foreign and security policy, driven by its involvement in the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s and the establishment of common foreign policy and security goals through the post-Lisbon Treaty phase in 2009 until 2020, when the EU further sophisticated its strategic toolkit on international mediation. Finally, the chapter delved into the EU's structured diplomacy approach, combining conditionality and the good neighbourly relations policy, both presented at the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit.

The Chapter focused explicitly on the Brussels Dialogue, which paved the way for the case study to be unfolded in Chapter IV. The EU's role as a mediator in the Brussels Dialogue holds significance for this thesis as it tests the EU's tailored approach towards the Western Balkans, combining enlargement and international mediation. It shows how the lack of experience and utilisation of its strategic leverage strengthened the concept of 'stabilitocracy' in Kosovo and Serbia. By exploring the technical and political phases of the Brussels Dialogue, the chapter has highlighted the link between the reform process based on the Copenhagen Criteria and the stability approach.

Using the Brussels Dialogue as a case study, the chapter showcased the significant limitations of the EU's soft transformative approach. It underlined the challenges faced by the EU's mediation role, mainly through the membership process as leverage in the Brussels Dialogue. The chapter provided a comprehensive analysis of the agreements reached from 2011 to 2023 – both the technical and the political phases, setting the stage for the subsequent case study, which explored the limitations and gradual entrapment of the EU in the stability trap within the framework of the Brussels Dialogue.

This chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of the EU's role as a mediator in international negotiations. It sheds light on the complexities of the EU's approach, the constraints of its soft transformative approach, and the necessity for a re-evaluation of its

enlargement methodology in the Western Balkans. The insights and analysis presented in this chapter pave the way for the subsequent case study, enabling a comprehensive examination of the limitations faced by the EU and its gradual entanglement in the stability trap in the Brussels Dialogue.

Chapter IV presented the case study by providing an extensive analysis of the Brussels Dialogue, focusing on exploring how a process that aimed to bring normalisation has been completely securitised, further strengthening the stability approach in relation to the Brussels Dialogue. In addition, the chapter sheds light on the limitations of the EU as a facilitator and its lack of experience and political power in effectively handling a frozen conflict with the potential for tensions to flare up.

The chapter examined how the EU fell short in sharpening its enlargement toolkit when applied to a negotiation process. Furthermore, it highlighted the key strategic shortcomings of the EU in the Brussels Dialogue. Firstly, it looked at the incremental approach employed in the Brussels Dialogue, which aimed to reach stability and normalisation through a series of small compromises. However, due to the lack of defined goals, this approach made the process open-ended and vulnerable to fuelling tensions between the parties. Moreover, the EU's constructive ambiguity, which initially aimed to maintain flexibility by keeping details of the agreement unclear and unsharpened until both parties are fully ready to implement the agreements, has failed to produce effective results. Instead, parties involved in the dialogue have used the incremental approach and constructive ambiguity as excuses to avoid implementing the initially agreed-upon agreements, thus undermining the progress of the dialogue.

Furthermore, the chapter examined the impact of the Brussels Dialogue on Kosovo's internal statehood and its ability to navigate internally and externally while engaging in negotiations with Serbia. Finally, the chapter has explored the complex trajectory of the Brussels Dialogue, which has oscillated between pursuing the overarching objective of normalisation and settling for agreements that provide marginal and artificial short-term stability. I argued that the EU's desire for stability guaranteed through the preservation of relationships with autocratic leaders led to the trap of stabilitocracy, in which meaningful reforms and democratisation have been almost wholly side-lined.

In sum, this chapter provided a critical analysis of the Brussels Dialogue, highlighting its limitations and the challenges faced by the EU as a mediator. Moreover, it examined the consequences of the dialogue on the ground, particularly regarding stabilitocracy and the trade-

off between stability and democratic principles. The insights and findings presented in this chapter contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the shortcomings of the EU's facilitation role and the complex dynamics at play in the Brussels Dialogue.

Chapter V looked at the role of the external actors, which pushed the EU even more toward the stability approach in relation to the Brussels Dialogue. This chapter provided an extensive analysis of the geopolitical aspects of the Brussels Dialogue and the complexities of the relationships between the various actors involved. In addition, the chapter emphasised the central role of the EU as a global actor in peacebuilding and negotiations while highlighting the importance of political power and consensus among member states in effectively navigating the dialogue.

The chapter demonstrated that the EU's ability to influence the Brussels Dialogue depends entirely on its member states' political will. It argues that the EU's main 'carrot' and only leverage in the process – enlargement, which depends on the individual member states' decisions – has significantly diminished the EU's political power in the dialogue. The lack of progress in enlargement has shifted the EU's primary goal towards stability in the region, leading to the acceptance of stabilitocracy as a dominant approach in the Brussels Dialogue and the wider Western Balkan region.

This chapter looked at the intra-EU limitations from the enlargement perspective and the member states' attitude toward Kosovo's statehood due to the five non-recognisers (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain). Thus, it identified the fundamental limitations constraining the EU – the divergent approach toward Kosovo – which deepened the power asymmetry, placing Kosovo at a disadvantage. Furthermore, I argued that the absence of unified and proactive political support from all member states hindered the External Action Service (EEAS) political power and ability to navigate the process effectively. This also includes providing political power to run the negotiations and give incentives for enlargement while closely monitoring reforms and the progress of democratisation.

Furthermore, the chapter explored the geopolitical role of Russia in the Brussels Dialogue and its influence on the region's stability. Russia's support for autocratic leaders in the Western Balkans, particularly in Serbia, has posed a direct challenge to the EU's normative power and the influence of the West. Russia's involvement as an illiberal external actor has had significant implications for stability in the region and has reinforced the stabilitocracy approach in the dialogue. The Brussels Dialogue opened the gate for increased Russian meddling with the West

in The Western Balkans. The local enablers, such as the President of Serbia, who has nurtured a robust pro-Russian narrative, have not only used it as leverage toward the EU in the process but also enabled Russia to advance its foreign policy ambitions in the region.

The Chapter looked at the active engagement of the U.S., which challenges ‘the hour of Europe’ almost four decades after the EU formally showed ambitions to set the region straight. The role of the U.S. – apart from the Trump Administration – is presented as that of an ally mainly utilising its leverage on Kosovo. This, however, calls into question the ability of the EU to independently lead a negotiation process solely relying on its strategic leverage, thus exercising its strategic autonomy in the Western Balkans.

In sum, this chapter shed light on the complex dynamics of the Brussels Dialogue, considering the interactions between member states and EU institutions and the influence of external actors such as Russia and the U.S. in the form of an ally. The findings highlight the complexities of navigating the dialogue and underscore the challenges faced by the EU in maintaining its normative power and promoting stability in the region. Understanding these geopolitical aspects is crucial to comprehending the broader context of the Brussels Dialogue and the EU’s preference for stability over democratic reforms.

The insights presented in this chapter contribute to a better understanding of the geopolitical dimensions at play in the Brussels Dialogue. Moreover, they pave the way for the last chapter, which elaborates on the implications of the stability approach in the Brussels Dialogue, the region, and the future of the EU as a global actor in conflict mediation.

Chapter VI provided an extensive analysis of the lessons learned from the Brussels Dialogue and their broader implications for the EU as a negotiator in global conflicts and its approach to similar situations in neighbouring regions, Ukraine being one of the most pressing issues at the time of writing. The chapter has explored these lessons in-depth and examined their impact on the EU’s global actorness as a normative and transformational power and its role in conflict mediation.

Firstly, the chapter emphasised the significant role of the Brussels Dialogue in shaping the EU’s global position in mediation. By analysing the EU’s approach and attempts to resolve the Kosovo-Serbia conflict, valuable insights have been gained into the EU’s strategies and tactics in dealing with other conflicts in the immediate neighbourhood and beyond through the proactive engagement of its structural diplomacy. This analysis has allowed for conclusions to

be drawn regarding the effectiveness and limitations of the EU's conflict resolution methods and their applicability to other cases.

The chapter also investigated alternative approaches the EU could have taken to succeed in the Brussels Dialogue without relying on the stabilitocracy approach. It explored how the EU's structured diplomacy could have been more effectively utilised and coordinated to steer the dialogue and facilitate the completion of the enlargement process in the Western Balkans. In a scenario-like situation, this analysis provides insights into potential adjustments in the EU's approach to enhance its effectiveness in conflict resolution and enlargement processes.

Furthermore, the chapter examined the impact of the EU's stabilitocracy approach in the Brussels Dialogue. The lack of progress in the enlargement process has affected the EU's ability to fulfil its foreign policy and security ambitions in the Western Balkans. It has implications for the future of the EU's normative and transformative power. The chapter's findings also extend to future cases that share similar elements, such as Ukraine, where democratic reforms, stability, and security components intersect. Furthermore, the case of Ukraine would similarly combine the EU's enlargement process with its foreign policy ambitions.

In sum, this chapter highlighted that the lessons from the Brussels Dialogue have far-reaching implications for the EU's research model and discussion. It provides valuable insights into the EU's global role, the impact of its policies, and alternative strategies that could lead to more successful outcomes in conflict resolution and the enlargement process. Considering these lessons and their broader implications, the EU can strengthen its negotiation approach, enhance its normative power, and contribute to peaceful resolution and stability, especially in regions with multi-layered presence through structural diplomacy.

Original Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis has provided a comprehensive analysis of the implications stemming from the EU's stability-orientated approach applied within the framework of the Brussels Dialogue. Through thoroughly examining the relevant literature, empirical data collected through qualitative research methods, and the case study analysis, the research has highlighted the complex dynamics at play in the EU's engagement in the Brussels Dialogue. The EU's emphasis on stability has led to compromises and concessions, which at times have clashed with the democratic principles the EU professes. This thesis confirms that the preference for stability over reforms has been detrimental to Kosovo and Serbia – and the Western Balkans region as

a whole – and to the EU’s democratisation agenda and its quest to become a global actor in conflict mediation processes.

The findings confirm that this case study is unique as it analyses the EU’s two main foreign policy tools, the enlargement as a foreign policy tool and its ambitions in conflict management through international mediation. The Brussels Dialogue proved to be a solid case study to enable a detailed scrutinization of the trade-off between the EU’s stated commitment to democratic values and its accommodation of authoritarian behaviour for short-term stability. Unfortunately, the EU’s emphasis on stability in the Brussels Dialogue has taken precedence over its commitment to democratic values. The findings reveal that this trade-off has inadvertently contributed to the emergence of what is known in the literature as ‘stabilitocracy’, namely the establishment of systems characterised by democratic transition stagnation and the increasing influence and consolidation of authoritarian regimes.

The thesis confirms the existence of limited literature specifically focused on the impact of stabilitocracy, especially in relation to the EU’s approach and behaviour in the Brussels Dialogue. Moreover, while there may be some existing literature on stabilitocracy in the context of EU enlargement, there is a shortage of research on its application in EU foreign policy ambitions related to conflict management through mediation. As such, this thesis stimulates further academic debate and informs policy discussions regarding the EU’s stability-orientated approach, its implications for democratic values and the EU’s status as a global actor.

To address this existing gap in the literature and feed the current debates, this thesis has firstly investigated how the stabilitocracy paradigm has influenced the EU’s role in international negotiations and its implications for the negotiation process; secondly, I examined how the EU’s perceived lack of credibility and solid normative power, predominantly resulting from the stabilitocracy approach, has influenced its leverage in the Brussels Dialogue. Thus, by analysing how the EU’s compromised credibility has affected its ability to engage in negotiations and shape outcomes effectively.

Four Debates

This thesis engages with and contributes to four existing debates:

Firstly, it addresses the debate on the concept of ‘stabilitocracy’ in the context of the Brussels Dialogue and its impact on the democratisation process in the Western Balkans. This debate explores the implications of the stability approach, resulting in stagnation in the democratic transition, potential democratic backsliding, and the emergence of authoritarian regimes. In the

context of the Brussels Dialogue and its impact on the democratisation process in the Western Balkans, the concept of ‘stabilitocracy’ emerges as a central point of debate. Stabilitocracy is a governance approach prioritising stability over democratic principles and institutions. This perspective suggests that maintaining stability is given precedence, even at the expense of democratic progress. The thesis argues that the EU’s emphasis on stability, particularly in the absence of enlargement in the Western Balkans region, has had detrimental effects on democratisation. By focusing primarily on stability, the EU has inadvertently obstructed the emergence and consolidation of democratic values and institutions in the region.

Furthermore, this debate explores the potential for democratic backsliding due to the stabilitocracy approach. Without a strong emphasis on democratic principles pushed by the EU, there is a risk that the progress already achieved in democratisation may erode or suffer setbacks, as was the case in the region during the last decade. The absence of enlargement as an incentive for democratic reforms led to decreased motivation to pursue further democratic reforms. Furthermore, it leads to a significant decrease in the EU’s leverage in the region.

This thesis has examined the concept of ‘stabilitocracy’ in a previously unexplored context, namely the Brussels Dialogue. By defining stabilitocracy comprehensively and providing unique empirical evidence, the thesis enhances the overall understanding of this concept and its practical implications for the EU as a normative power and for the democratisation process of the region, namely in the case of Kosovo and Serbia.

Secondly, the thesis addresses the effectiveness of the EU’s enlargement/conditionality approach in the Brussels Dialogue. This debate centres on evaluating the effectiveness of the EU’s enlargement/conditionality approach in the Brussels Dialogue. The thesis highlights the diminishing normative power of the EU, which has weakened its leverage in the mediation process. The debate delves into the consequences of this decline in normative power, including the EU’s diminished ability to incentivise democratic reforms, resolve conflicts, and facilitate successful international mediation.

This thesis has assessed the EU’s enlargement toolkit and its effectiveness in international mediation, particularly in post-conflict regions or with countries that exhibit a lukewarm approach towards enlargement, especially in the case of Serbia. Thus, the thesis contributes to the overall knowledge about the EU’s transformative power and its role in international mediation. It also sheds light on the power dynamics between EU institutions and member states in matters of strategic importance. Moreover, it offers insights into the EU’s effectiveness

and leverage in international mediation processes involving enlargement, paving the way for future cases such as Ukraine, which combines the security component with the enlargement process.

Thirdly, the thesis assesses the Brussels dialogue and the EU's utilisation of structural diplomacy and enlargement to gain actorness in mediation. This debate focuses on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue as a case study that showcases the EU's utilisation of structural diplomacy through enlargement. The discussion explores the effectiveness of this approach, assessing the impact of various instruments such as economic incentives, political conditionality, and institutional reforms. It also examines the implications of the EU's role as a mediator in solidifying its position in conflict management and the potential for replication in other regional contexts. Furthermore, the debate explores the implications of the EU's role as a mediator in the Brussels Dialogue. The EU aims to solidify its position as a key actor in regional conflict resolution by actively engaging in the conflict management process. The thesis analyses how the EU's involvement as a mediator has contributed to building trust between the parties, facilitating dialogue, and fostering sustainable agreements. It also investigates the challenges and limitations faced by the EU in its mediator role and identifies potential areas for improvement. Moreover, the thesis examines the potential for replicating the EU's structural diplomacy approach in other regional contexts. Finally, it explores the transferability of lessons from the Brussels Dialogue to different conflict situations within and beyond the EU's enlargement process.

This thesis contributed to the ongoing debate on the EU's role in conflict management by analysing the recently developed institutional infrastructure to engage in international negotiations. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the Brussels Dialogue, one of the largest EU engagements in international negotiations to date, this thesis contributes to the existing debate on the utilisation of its enlargement policy as leverage and as an incentive toward the parties involved in the negotiations process. The thesis examines various aspects of the Brussels Dialogue by analysing the challenges and opportunities of the EU's structural diplomacy, the shortcomings arising from the intra-EU divergences, the reluctance of member states to delegate foreign policy and security competencies to EU institutions, as well as the complexities involved in connecting the EU's leverage with specific rewards during the enlargement process. Moreover, the thesis critically assesses the lack of political will among member states to proactively and consistently support EU institutions in ambitious negotiation processes. It also contributed by conducting a thorough examination of the EU's negotiation

style and strategy in the Brussels Dialogue, drawing specific lessons from this process and providing recommendations for potential improvements. This analysis is particularly important for future EU endeavours in the Eastern Partnership region, which shares similar complexities to the Western Balkans and may require the EU to engage in conflict management and the resolution of outstanding bilateral disputes.

Fourthly, the thesis contributed to the debate about the EU as a global actor and its declining normative power and appetite for enlargement and the navigation around other external actors, such as Russia, in the changing geopolitical order. This debate centres on the EU as a global actor and highlights its decline due to internal challenges and changing geopolitical circumstances. The thesis argues that the crisis of democracy has significantly diminished the EU's normative power and willingness to pursue enlargement. The debate explores the consequences of this decline regarding the EU's ability to exert influence on the global stage, engage in effective multilateralism, and promote democratic values and norms. Additionally, it discusses the implications of the EU's shift towards resilience rather than enlargement as a defining feature of its role in international affairs.

It also contributes to the ongoing discussion on the EU's global actorness by analysing its long-term goals of achieving strategic autonomy and its ability to navigate relations with the United States in the Western Balkans, particularly since the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. Additionally, by looking at the way the EU acted in the Western Balkans, it examines how the EU has developed its global influence while dealing with other major powers like the United States, Russia, and, to a lesser extent, China. Using the Brussels Dialogue as a case study, the thesis enhances the debate on the EU's ability to form alliances and negotiate its role in the face of discussions around strategic autonomy and countering illiberal actors. By analysing the EU's navigation of the U.S. and Russia in the Brussels Dialogue, the thesis sheds light on the EU's strengths and weaknesses in diplomacy and negotiations. It also contributes to the understanding of Russia's detrimental influence, which pushes the EU towards stability-focused policies and undermines its democratic standing. Finally, the thesis examines the complexities of the EU's engagement with Russia in the Brussels Dialogue and discusses strategies employed to mitigate Russia's negative impact. This analysis paves the way for further discussions on the EU's ability to handle Russia in situations concerning Ukraine, Moldova, and potentially Georgia in the future. The thesis significantly contributes to the existing debate on the major geopolitical shift that challenges the EU's foreign policy and security ambitions while posing a threat to its normative power.

In addition to the contribution to the four debates noted above, this thesis has significantly contributed to scholarly knowledge by adopting a ‘bottom-up approach’ and leveraging my direct experience and understanding from the respective region. Furthermore, this unique perspective has enhanced the scientific contributions of the study by incorporating local perspectives and insights into the exploration of the concept of stabilitocracy.

In summary, this thesis contributes to scholarly knowledge by advancing our understanding of stabilitocracy, analysing the current international context in which the EU operates, and providing an empirical example that illuminates the EU’s stability-oriented approach and its implications within the Brussels Dialogue. Furthermore, the thesis has not only contributed to our understanding of the implications of the EU stability approach towards the Brussels Dialogue. Still, it has also extracted valuable lessons from the Brussels Dialogue case that can be applied to similar cases within the different regions of importance for the EU, namely the Eastern Partnership region – Ukraine and Moldova.

Further Research and Applications

Firstly, the research presented in this thesis offers a solid basis for future research that explores the dynamics of stabilitocracy in case studies other than the Brussels Dialogue. The EU’s approach to promoting stability through enlargement and addressing bilateral issues may differ in diverse geopolitical contexts. Further exploring the applicability and effectiveness of stabilitocracy in different regions would provide a comprehensive analysis of the EU’s foreign policy and security strategies.

Albeit flawed and with significant limitations, enlargement will remain a central foreign policy tool for the EU. This has been demonstrated by the formalisation of Ukraine and Moldova’s EU membership path by being granted EU candidate status in 2022. This decision of the EU member states and the overall political will to formalise its engagement in yet another region more politically complex than the Western Balkans strongly reaffirms the EU’s commitment to

its enlargement agenda and its ongoing pursuit of a common foreign policy and security framework.

The Yugoslav wars in the 1990s drove the Thessaloniki 2003 agenda; it is essential to note that the same pattern is evident in the EU's approach to Ukraine and Moldova. The war in Ukraine has served as a catalyst for the EU membership process, prompting Ukraine to become the next mission for the EU to address by utilising enlargement as a tool. Like the Western Balkans, it has been primarily driven by geopolitical and stability-oriented considerations. However, the case of Ukraine introduces additional security elements, further complicating the EU's already limited political capital in foreign policy and security matters. The thesis highlights that the EU's decision to pursue another enlargement process toward Ukraine, with an added security dimension, without reaching significant success in the Western Balkans, raises concerns about the EU's internal cohesion and its prioritisation of geopolitics, stability, and security over a reform agenda. This reactive behaviour, driven by geopolitics and security concerns rather than a comprehensive reform agenda, raises questions about the effectiveness and long-term implications of the EU's stability approach. As such, it is imperative for the EU to carefully navigate these complexities and ensure that the enlargement process in Ukraine and Moldova is not solely impelled by geopolitics and security concerns but also encompasses comprehensive reforms and a long-term reform agenda.

As for the EU's ambitions to solidify its role as a global actor in foreign policy through its ambition in international conflict mediation, the thesis recognises that the Brussels Dialogue, despite being the first case in which the EU engaged in the leading capacities of negotiations process in a post-conflict region, will certainly not be the last. The Brussels Dialogue has emerged as a crucial factor in shaping the EU's approach to addressing open and active conflicts. The research has demonstrated that the effectiveness and success of the Brussels Dialogue can significantly influence the EU's leverage and position in conflict resolution and democratisation processes. The EU is keen on pursuing its ambitions in international negotiations and mediation processes. Most of these processes will take place alongside its strategic partners. In the case of Ukraine – a country at war – but also Moldova with its internal issue relating to Transnistria, both part of a region of primary interest for the EU and formally in the EU integration process, the EU is in the process of taking the leading role to address security concerns while pushing for the reform agenda through enlargement and mediation. Thus, Ukraine and Moldova share significant similarities with the Western Balkans and the Brussels Dialogue, specifically regarding the persistent need for the EU to engage in both cases

through its structural diplomacy and utilising the framework of enlargement and international mediation.

The thesis confirmed the challenges of the EU's strategy to interlinking enlargement with its ambitions in conflict resolution through mediation. As demonstrated in the thesis, the EU's ongoing enlargement process in the Western Balkans and its performance in the Brussels Dialogue have encountered significant challenges and crises, leading to stagnation. Given these similar circumstances, it is highly probable that a similar pattern of settling for short-term stability, facing delays and crises in pursuing the reform agenda, thus jeopardising future enlargement endeavours. Furthermore, the thesis highlights the risk of Ukraine, Moldova, and other related cases following a trajectory similar to that of the Western Balkans. Without a strategic shift towards sweeping reforms and a proactive agenda, the EU risks repeating the pattern established in the Western Balkans. Lacking a clear plan on how to move beyond crisis response and stability, there is a high likelihood of Ukraine mirroring the scenario observed in the Western Balkans.

Secondly, a comparative analysis of the EU's stability approach in foreign policy and security using enlargement in the case of the Brussels Dialogue would be beneficial. The Brussels Dialogue, which aims to facilitate a peaceful resolution to the Kosovo-Serbia dispute, offers an interesting case study. Researchers can identify common trends, challenges, and potential improvements in the EU's approach by examining the similarities and differences between the application of stabilitocracy in the Brussels Dialogue and the context of Ukraine and Moldova.

Thirdly, this thesis offered an insight into the role of other external actors. As such, future studies should explore the impact and implications of stabilitocracy on the EU's relationships with other external actors. For instance, analysing the reactions and responses of significant powers such as Russia, the United States, or China to the EU's stabilitocracy strategy would provide a broader perspective on this approach's effectiveness and potential limitations. Finally, understanding how external actors perceive and engage with the EU's stabilitocracy could help refine and adapt the strategy to ensure its long-term viability.

Appendices

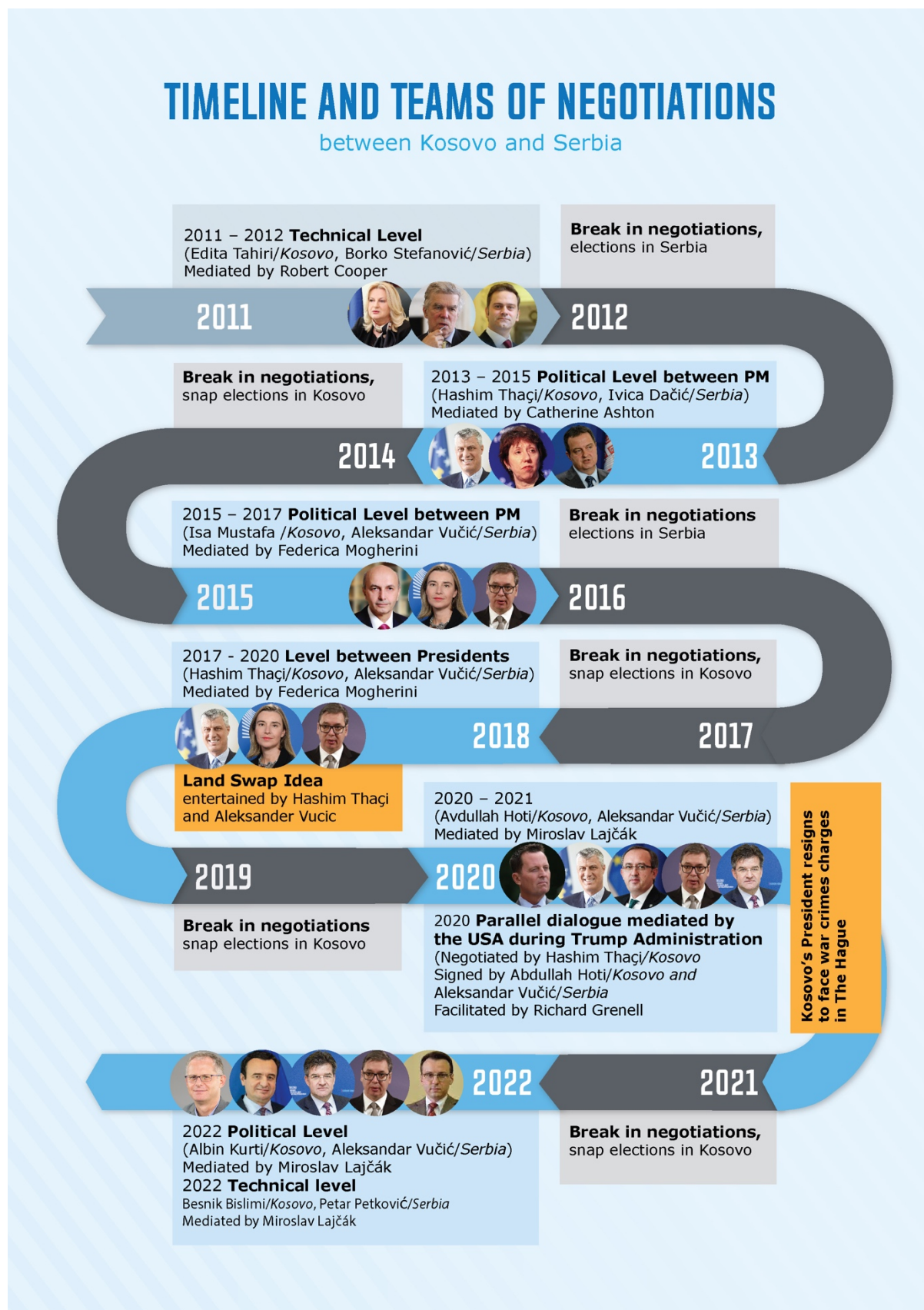


Figure 1 Timeline and teams of negotiations 2011-2023

LIST OF THE AGREEMENTS

reached in the auspices of the Brussels Dialogue and the implementation by April 2023

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT (2011, 2016, 2017, 2022, 2023)	LARGELY IMPLEMENTED
Recognition of the ID cards. ID cards can be accompanied by written 'entry/exit' documents. Kosovo opted not to apply 'entry/ exit' documents but has been considering it in the latest negotiations round in 2021-2022	Implemented
Recognize driver licenses. This is particularly relevant for Kosovo documents to be recognised in Serbia. The same logic of the ID follows in this case as well.	Implemented
Recognize Kosovo 'KS' car license plates, issued during the UNMIK period while Kosovo was under 1244	Implemented
Kosovo 'RKS' plates are replaced by Serbian temporary plates – stripping Kosovo from statehood symbols	Implemented
Residents in the Kosovo's north can register their cars in Kosovo's system without paying extra duties. ¹	Implemented
Recognize 'RKS' car plates and state symbols (RKS, SRB) are covered with white stickers.	Not implemented/ Still being negotiated
Recognition of the ID card without the written 'entry/exit' documents 2022	2022 update
Both Parties shall mutually recognise their respective documents and national symbols, including passports, diplomas, licence plates, and customs stamps.	2023 update
CIVIL REGISTRY BOOKS (2011)	IMPLEMENTED
Establish a fully reliable civil registry in Kosovo	Implemented
Serbia will offer scanned copies of the original civil registry books to Kosovo through EULEX	Implemented
EULEX will certify the copies and will hand over the documents to the Kosovo authorities	Implemented
CADASTRAL RECORDS (2011)	PARTLY IMPLEMENTED
Establish a fully reliable cadastre in Kosovo	Partly implemented
Serbia will offer scanned copies of the original Kosovo cadastre records to Kosovo	Partly implemented
INTEGRATED BORDER/BOUNDARY AGREEMENT (2011)	LARGELY IMPLEMENTED
Joint, integrated, single and secure posts will be located within a common area of IBM crossing points where both sides conduct respective controls. Projects on hold for political reasons and financial costs.	Partly implemented
A balanced presence of police and customs officers will be present	Implemented
No national symbols will be displayed in the crossing points.	Implemented
Kosovo and Serbia agree to construct permanent premises in crossings points. The European Commission will look at supporting financially the establishment of the IBM	Partly implemented
Both sides commit to harmonize their legislation, especially the IBM concept, in line with that of the EU.	Partly implemented
Both sides will exchange information to prevent criminal activities. This takes place informally or through EULEX and UNMIK.	Partly implemented
CUSTOMS STAMPS (2011)	IMPLEMENTED
Free movement of goods in accordance with CEFTA. The CEFTA agreement has been often violated by parties.	Partly implemented
Serbia accepts 'Kosovo Customs' stamp. Kosovo, not Republic of Kosovo, a stamp without state symbols.	Implemented
All accompanying documents must use 'Kosovo Customs' stamp.	Implemented
UNIVERSITY DIPLOMAS (2011, 2016)	PARTLY IMPLEMENTED
Recognize university diplomas issued by accredited higher education institutions (BA, MA, PhD) in Serbia and Kosovo.	Not implemented
Agree to recognize the diplomas of elementary, secondary, and vocational education.	Partly implemented
The European University Association (EUA) supported by SPARK, a Dutch NGO, will certify the university diplomas. ⁸	Implemented
According to a revised agreement revision of 2016, Serbian and Kosovo relevant institutions are in charge of certification directly.	Implemented
Kosovo and Serbia should adopt legislative changes to accommodate the agreement provisions.	Not implemented
REGIONAL REPRESENTATION AND COOPERATION (2012)	LARGELY IMPLEMENTED
Kosovo ⁹ is the only denomination to be used within the framework of regional cooperation. The footnote will read: "This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence."	Largely implemented
Kosovo ⁹ participates on its own account and speaks for itself at all regional meetings.	Partly implemented
The regional organizations referred in this agreement are intergovernmental organizations. "Regional meetings" includes meetings of these organizations. It also includes meetings with EU institutions in the context of the European agenda and meeting where the non-recognisers are present. Kosovo signed the SAA with this setting.	Implemented
The Parties proceed on the assumption that neither of the two can represent the other in the international sphere or act on its behalf.	2023 Update
Serbia will not object to Kosovo's membership in any international organisation	Not implemented
Neither Party will block, nor encourage others to block, the other Party's progress in their respective EU path based on their own merits. Both Parties shall respect the values referred to in Articles 2 and 21 of the Treaty of the European Union.	Emphasized in 2023

ASSOCIATION/COMMUNITY (2013, 2015)	NOT IMPLEMENTED
Kosovo agrees to establish an association of ten Serb-majority municipalities in the south and north Kosovo.	Not implemented
The Association/Community has an "overview" on areas of education, health, economic development and urban planning	Not implemented
The Association/Community is established according to the Kosovo law. But the Constitutional court has declared major points of the agreement are against the constitutional spirit.	Not implemented
Kosovo and Serbia agreed on a number of principles in 2015. This period defined more of the agreement signed in 2013	Not implemented
Both Parties commit to establish specific arrangements and guarantees, in accordance with relevant Council of Europe instruments and by drawing on existing European experiences, to ensure an appropriate level of self-management for the Serbian community in Kosovo and ability for service provision in specific areas, including the possibility for financial support by Serbia and a direct communication channel for the Serbian community to the Government of Kosovo	2023 Association / Community updated
INTEGRATION OF SECURITY STRUCTURES IN KOSOVO'S NORTH (2013)	PARTLY IMPLEMENTED
Kosovo Serb police officers (337) serving in Serbian system in the four Serb-majority north municipalities will be integrated into the Kosovo police.	Implemented
Members of Civil Protection (533) will be offered a place in equivalent Kosovo structures. Integration of civil protection members will be done in line with the Kosovo Law on Civil Service. However, the Civil Protection continues to be remained active in north Kosovo.	Partly Implemented
The 'observation points' in the north manned by Civil Protection members will be removed.	Implemented
INTEGRATION OF SECURITY STRUCTURES IN KOSOVO'S NORTH (2013)	REGRESS 2022
Kosovo Serb police officers (337) serving in Serbian system in the four Serb-majority north municipalities will be integrated into the Kosovo police.	Withdrawal of Serbian Members
Members of Civil Protection (533) will be offered a place in equivalent Kosovo structures. Integration of civil protection members will be done in line with the Kosovo Law on Civil Service. However, the Civil Protection continues to be remained active in north Kosovo.	Withdrawal of Serbian Members
The 'observation points' in the north manned by Civil Protection members will be removed.	Withdrawal of Serbian Members
ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PERMANENT MISSIONS	
Exchanging Liaison Officers 2013	Implemented
The Parties shall exchange Permanent Missions. They shall be established at the respective Government's seat.	2023 update

OTHER 2023 UPDATES	Updated 2023
The Parties agree to deepen future cooperation in the fields of economy, science and technology, transport and connectivity, judicial and law enforcement relations, posts and telecommunications, health, culture, religion, sport, environmental protection, missing persons, displaced persons and other similar areas through the conclusion of specific agreements.	2023
The Parties shall formalise the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and afford strong level of protection to the Serbian religious and cultural heritage sites, in line with existing European models.	2023
Both Parties take note of the EU's and other donors' commitment to establish a special investment and financial support package for joint projects of the Parties in economic development, connectivity, green transition and other key areas	2023
The Parties shall establish a joint Committee, chaired by the EU, for monitoring the implementation of this Agreement	2023

Figure 2 List of the Agreements Reached in the Auspices of the Brussels Dialogue and the Implementation by April 2023

Table 7 List of non-recognisers and level of cooperation with Kosovo

EU Member states Non – recognisers	Justification behind non-recognition	Diplomatic presence in Kosovo	Kosovo Diplomatic Presence	Recognition of Passports/ Documents	Support for Kosovo EU integration	Multilateral Cooperation	Would soften their approach if Kosovo – Serbia makes a deal
Cyprus	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)	No	No	Yes	Status natural – status positive in support of the EU integration process	Yes	Hard recognizer. Cyprus would not recognise Kosovo even if Serbia does.
Greece	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)	Yes Liaison Office accredited by the UNMIK	Yes in 2019 Kosovo opened the Economic and Commercial Affairs Office in Athens. In 2021 the office was upgraded to the Interests also incorporating the political interest on top of the economic cooperation	Yes	Supports EU integration and has solid bilateral relations	Yes	Yes
Romania	Fear of Kosovo serving as a precedent for the secession of the Land – a Romanian region inhabited by Hungarian minority and the status of Transnistria – the breakaway region.	Yes Liaison Office since 2004	No	Yes	Status neutral – predominantly supportive	Yes	Undeclared – heavily salient issue in the Romanian politics
Slovakia	Hungarian Minority in the South and Historical Friendship with Serbia	Yes Liaison Office	No Covered ad-hoc through the Embassy of Kosovo in Vienna	Yes	Soft non-recogniser Supports Kosovo's EU integration path	Yes	Decision heavily depends on the outcome of the Brussels Dialogue
Spain	Basque and Catalan Independence International Law on the decision to intervene in Kosovo and declare Kosovo's independence without UNSC support	No	No	No	No In some cases, Spain lobbied and blocked Kosovo's multilateral ambitions – apart from the SAA	Stranded – Spanish representatives are very unwilling to communicate with Kosovo	Unclear Decision depends on the outcome of the Brussels Dialogue

Bibliography

Aarup, S.A., Caulcutt, C. and Vinocur, N. (2023) *Sanction serbia's Vučić or I won't meet him, Kosovo's president says*, *POLITICO*. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/sanction-serbia-aleksandar-vucic-or-i-wont-meet-him-kosovos-president-vjosa-osmani-says/> (Accessed: 07 November 2023).

Agnes Batory, A; Krizsan, A; Kostka, J; Sitter, N; and Zentai, V. (2016) *Mapping Backsliding in the European Union*, Budapest: CEU Center for Policy Studies.

Ahrens, J., Hoen, H. W. and Ohr, R. (2005) *Deepening Integration in an Enlarged EU: A Club-theoretical Perspective*. *Journal of European Integration*, 27(4), pp. 417-439.

Ahtisaari, M. (2008) 'Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement'. United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Amato, G. (1999) *The Long-Term Implications of EU Enlargement: The Nature of the New Border*, Firenze: European Union Institute.

Anastasakis, O. (2008) 'The EU's political conditionality in the Western Balkans: towards a more pragmatic approach', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 8(4), pp. 365–377. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683850802556384>.

Anastasakis, O. and Bechev, D. (2003) 'EU Conditionality', *South East European Studies Programme*, European Studies Centre [Preprint].

Anastasakis, O. and Dzelilovic, V. B., (2002) *Balkan Regional Cooperation and European Integration*, London: The Hellenic Observatory The European Institute The London School of Economics and Political Science .

Anders, L.H. and Lorenz, A. (2021) 'Examining Illiberal Trends and Anti-EU Politics in East Central Europe from a Domestic Perspective: State of Research and Outline of the Book', in A. Lorenz and L.H. Anders (eds) *Illiberal Trends and Anti-EU Politics in East Central Europe*. Cham: Springer International Publishing (Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics), pp. 1–25. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54674-8_1.

Freeman, D. (2018) 'De-democratisation and rising inequality: The underlying cause of a worrying trend', *Global Society*, 32(3), pp. 344–364. doi:10.1080/13600826.2018.1459506.

Anderson, S. (1995) *EU, NATO, and CSCE responses to the Yugoslav crisis: Testing Europe's new security architecture*. *European Security*, 4(2), pp. 328-353.

Andreatta, F. (1997) *The Bosnian War and the New World Order Failure and Success of International Intervention*, Paris and Brussels: European Union Institute for Security Studies.

Armakolas, I; Chrzová, B, Čermák, P, and Grabovac, A. (2021) 'Western Balkans at the Crossroads: Ways Forward in Analyzing External Actors' Influence', p. 228.

Ashton, C. (2023) *And Then What? United Kingdom*: Elliott and Thompson Limited. Available at: <https://www.foyles.co.uk/book/and-then-what/baroness-catherine-ashton/9781783966349> (Accessed: 25 May 2023).

Atlantic Council (2023) 'Next Steps for the Dialogue: A decisive moment for Normalization between Serbia', Atlantic Council. Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/event/next-steps-for-the->

dialogue-a-decisive-moment-for-normalization-between-serbia-and-kosovo/ (Accessed: 18 May 2023).

Avdyli, N. (2017) U shpallën rezultatet zyrtare të zgjedhjeve, Kosovo 2.0. Available at: <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/kush-fitoi-zgjedhjet-ne-kosove/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Bajrami, A. (2013) Kosovo- Serbia Dialogue Windows of Opportunity or a House of Cards?, Prishtina :Group for Legal and Political Studies.

Bajrami, A. (2018) A Kosovo-Serbia land swap is ethnic cleansing by another name. Don't do it. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/17/kosovo-serbia-land-swap-ethnic-cleansing> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).

Bakke, E. and Sitter, N. (2019) Democratic backsliding in the European Union. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. Oxford University Press.

Bakke, E. and Sitter, N. (2022) 'The EU's Enfants Terrible: Democratic Backsliding in Central Europe since 2010', *Perspectives on Politics*, 20(1), pp. 22–37. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592720001292>.

Balfour, R. (2020) European Foreign Policy After Brexit. [Online] Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/82674> [Accessed 2020].

Balfour, R. (2022) Europe must not allow the momentum for expansion to slip, *Financial Times*. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/d542979e-032f-4917-ae8f-6d147764feac>.

Balfour, R. and Stratulat, C. (2011) The democratic transformation of the Balkans, Brussels: European Policy Centre EPC.

Balkan Policy Research Group (2017) The Association of Serb Municipalities: Understanding conflicting views of Albanians and Serbs. Prishtina: Balkans Policy Research Group.

Bami, X. and Isufi, P. (2021) 'Opposition Vetevendosje Movement Eyes Landslide Win in Kosovo Election', *Balkan Insight*, 14 February. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/02/14/opposition-vetevendosje-movement-eyes-landslide-win-in-kosovo-election/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Bami, X. and Stojanovic, M. (2022) *Belgrade-backed Kosovo Serb party to boycott local elections*, *Balkan Insight*. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/11/15/belgrade-backed-kosovo-serb-party-to-boycott-local-elections/> (Accessed: November 2023).

Bami, Xh. and Dragojlo, S. (2020) 'Land Swap Idea Resurfaces to Haunt Serbia-Kosovo Talks', *Balkan Insight*, 16 June. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/16/land-swap-idea-resurfaces-to-haunt-serbia-kosovo-talks/> (Accessed: 23 June 2022).

Barbé, E. and Morillas, P. (2019) The EU global strategy: the dynamics of a more politicized and politically integrated foreign policy. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32(5), pp. 753-770.

Bardi, L., Rhodes, M. and Nello, S. S. (2002) Enlarging the European Union: Challenges to and from Central and Eastern Europe: Introduction. *International Political Science Review*, 23(3), pp. 227-233

Barigazzi, J. (2018) Mogherini defends Kosovo border change talks, *POLITICO*. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/federica-mogherini-kosovo-serbia-defends-border-change-talks/> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).

Barlovac, B. (2012) 'Serbia Threatens 'EU vs Kosovo' Referendum', Balkan Insight, 19 September. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2012/09/19/serbia-may-hold-referendum-on-eu-vs-kosovo/> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).

Bashku, K. (2021) EU Ideas | The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue ten years on: What's next for Kosovo and Serbia? Available at: <https://euideas.eui.eu/2021/02/15/the-belgrade-pristina-dialogue-ten-years-on-whats-next-for-kosovo-and-serbia/> (Accessed: 18 May 2023).

Batora, J; Navratil, M; Osland, K; Mateja, P; and Morten, B. (2018) The EU and international actors in Kosovo: Competing institutional logics, constructive ambiguity and competing priorities. EUNPACK.

Batora, J. and Spence, D. (2015) Introduction: The EEAS as a Catalyst of Diplomatic Innovation | SpringerLink. Palgrave Macmillan. Available at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137383037_1 (Accessed: 17 February 2023).

Bátora, J., Navrátil, M., Osland, K. and Mateja, P. (2018) The EU and international actors in Kosovo: Competing institutional logics, constructive ambiguity and competing priorities, Brussels: EUNPAK.

Batrawy, A. and Stojanivoc, D. (2018) Kosovo's bid to join Interpol fails, in victory for Serbia, AP NEWS. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/12c2b452f3d644dcabe63bad05040783> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

BBC Hardtalk with Haradinaj (2018) Kosovo PM Haradinaj 'fully against' border changes - BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-europe-43230529> (Accessed: 30 June 2022).

BBC News (2017) Serbian train sparks escalation in tensions with Kosovo. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38625872> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

BBC News (2019) 'Kosovo PM Haradinaj resigns over war crimes summons', 19 July. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-49047355> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

BBC News (2020) 'Kosovo leader Thaçi in Hague detention over war crimes charges', 5 November. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54822789> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Bechev, D. (2006) Carrots, sticks and norms: the EU and regional cooperation in Southeast Europe. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 8(1), pp. 27-43.

Bechev, D. (2014) 'Russia sanctions: Balkan countries react', Southeast Europe at LSE, 31 July. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsee/2014/07/31/russia-sanctions-balkan-countries-react/> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

Bechev, D. (2019) 'Russia's strategic interests and tools of influence in the Western Balkans', Atlantic Council, 20 December. Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russia-strategic-interests-and-tools-of-influence-in-the-western-balkans/> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

Bechev, D. and Marusic, D. (2020) 'North Macedonia on the Threshold of Europe'. Atlantic Council. Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/North-Macedonia-on-the-threshold-of-Europe.pdf>.

Becker, J. (2017b) 'In the Yugoslav Mirror: The EU Disintegration Crisis', *Globalizations*, 14(6), pp. 840-850. doi:10.1080/14747731.2017.1330984.

- Begisholli, B. and Isufi, A. (2023) 'Live updates: New Protests in Northern Kosovo Against the Newly Elected Mayors', *Prishtina Insight*, 29 May. Available at: <https://prishtinainsight.com/live-new-protests-in-northern-kosovo-against-new-mayors/> (Accessed: 30 May 2023).
- Beha, A. (2015) 'Disputes over the 15-point agreement on normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia', *Nationalities Papers*, 43(1), pp. 102–121. doi:10.1080/00905992.2014.990367.
- Bellamy, R. and Kröger, S. (2021) 'Countering Democratic Backsliding by EU Member States: Constitutional Pluralism and 'Value' Differentiated Integration', *Swiss Political Science Review*, 27(3), pp. 619–636. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12448>.
- Belloni, R. (2009) 'European Integration and the Western Balkans: Lessons, prospects and obstacles', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 11(3), pp. 313–331. doi:10.1080/19448950903152177.
- Belloni, R. and Brunazzo, M. (2017) 'After Brexit: The Western Balkans in the European waiting room', *European Review of International Studies*, 4(1), pp. 21–38. doi:10.3224/eris.v4i1.02.
- Bendiek, A. (2004) *Europe's Conflict Resolution : The Stability Pact for South East Europe*, Annegret Bendiek. Available at: <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/c99ee89f-58df-4e16-a770-a8e089de2d2e.pdf> (Accessed: 07 November 2023).
- Bendiek, A. (2016) *The global strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security policy*. Available at: https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/comments/2016C38_bdk.pdf (Accessed: 07 November 2023).
- Bergmann, J. (2018) 'Same table, different menus? A comparison of UN and EU mediation practice in the Kosovo-Serbia conflict', *International Negotiation*, 23(2), pp. 238–257. doi:10.1163/15718069-23021156.
- Bergmann, J. (2020) *The European Union as International Mediator Brokering Stability and Peace in The Neighbourhood*. Springer International Publishing.
- Bergmann, J. and Niemann, A. (2015) 'Mediating international conflicts: The European Union as an effective peacemaker?', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 53(5), pp. 957–975. doi:10.1111/jcms.12254.
- Bergmann, J. et al. (1970) *Introduction: The EU as international mediator-theoretical and empirical perspectives*, Research Explorer The University of Manchester. Available at: <https://research.manchester.ac.uk/en/publications/introduction-the-eu-as-international-mediator-theoretical-and-emp> (Accessed: 07 November 2023).
- Bergmann, M., Cicarelli, S. and Lamond, J. (2020) 'Any Kosovo-Serbia Deal Needs the European Union', *Center for American Progress*. Available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/kosovo-serbia-deal-needs-european-union/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).
- Bermeo, N. (2003) *Ordinary people in extraordinary times: the citizenry and the break-down of democracy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Bermeo, N. (2016) 'On Democratic Backsliding', *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), pp. 5–19. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012>.
- Bernhard, M. (2021) 'Democratic Backsliding in Poland and Hungary', *Slavic Review*, 80(3), pp. 585–607. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2021.145>.

- Berridge, G.R. and James, A. (2003) *A Dictionary of Diplomacy*. Second Edition. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Beysoylu, C. (2018) 'Implementing Brussels Agreements: the EU's facilitating strategy and contrasting local perceptions of peace in Kosovo', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18(2), pp. 203–218. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2018.1474549>.
- Bieber, F, and Tzifakis, N. (2019) 'The Western Balkans as a Geopolitical Chessboard? Myths, Realities and Policy Options'. Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG).
- Bieber, F. (2003) 'Institutionalizing Ethnicity in Former Yugoslavia: Domestic vs. Internationally Driven Processes of Institutional (Re-)Design 1', *Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 2(2), pp. 3–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14718800308405130>.
- Bieber, F. (2011) 'Building Impossible States? State-Building Strategies and EU Membership in the Western Balkans', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63(10), pp. 1783–1802.
- Bieber, F. (2013) *EU Conditionality in the Western Balkans*, Routledge and CRC Press. Available at: <https://www.routledge.com/EU-Conditionality-in-the-Western-Balkans/Bieber/p/book/9781138109438> (Accessed: 28 May 2023).
- Bieber, F. (2015) 'The Serbia-Kosovo Agreements: An EU Success Story?', *Review of Central and East European Law*, 40(3–4), pp. 285–319.
- Bieber, F. (2015) Ten rules by a 21st-century Machiavelli for the Balkan Prince. [Online] Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsee/2015/02/07/ten-rules-by-a-21st-century-machiavelli-for-the-balkan-prince/> [Accessed January 2020].
- Bieber, F. (2015) The Serbia-Kosovo Agreements: An EU Success Story? *Journal Central and East European Law*, Volume 40, pp. 285-319.
- Bieber, F. (2017) Blog: Notes from Syldavia, Florian Bieber's Notes from Syldavia. Available at: <https://florianbieber.org/notes-from-syldavia/> (Accessed: 02 November 2023).
- Bieber, F. (2017) *EU Conditionality in the Western Balkans*. Routledge. Bieber, F., 2018. Patterns of competitive authoritarianism in the Western Balkans. *Politics*, 34(3), pp. 337-354.
- Bieber, F. (2017) What is a stabilitocracy? BiEPAG. Available at: <https://biepag.eu/article/what-is-a-stabilitocracy/> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).
- Bieber, F. (2018) *The Rise (and Fall) of Balkan Stabilitocracies*, CIRSD. Available at: <http://www.cirsd.org/en/horizons/horizons-winter-2018-issue-no-10/the-rise-and-fall-of-balkan-stabilitocracies> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Bieber, F. (2018b) 'Patterns of competitive authoritarianism in the Western Balkans', *East European Politics*, 34(3), pp. 337–354. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2018.1490272>.
- Bieber, F. (2019) *Ever Farther Union: Balkans and the Brexit*, New York: Freedom House.
- Bieber, F. (2019) *The Rise of Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bieber, F. (2020b) *The Rise of Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans*. Cham: Springer International Publishing (New Perspectives on South-East Europe). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22149-2>.

Bieber, F. and Kmezić, M. (2017) EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans in a Time of Uncertainty. Available at: <https://biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/EU-Enlargement-in-the-Western-Balkans-in-a-Time-of-Uncertainty.pdf> (Accessed: 02 November 2023)..

Bieber, F. and Kmezić, M. (2017) The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. An Anatomy of Stabilitocracy and the Limits of EU Democracy Promotion. [Online] Available at: <http://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/final.pdf> [Accessed March 2020].

Bieber, F. and Tzifakis, N., 2019. The Western Balkans as a Geopolitical Chessboard? Myths, Realities and Policy Options. [Online] Available at: http://biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/The_Western_Balkans_as_a_Geopolitical_Chessboard.pdf [Accessed January 2020].

Bieber, F., Prelec, T., Stratulat, C., Djolai, M., Majstorovic S., Kmezić M, Nechev Z, and Emini, D. 2019. 'Busting 10 Myths about EU Enlargement'. 2019. <https://biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/BiEpagBrosura.pdf>.

Bieber, F., Taleski, D. and Dimitrov, N. (2017) The Avoidable Return of Geopolitics in the Balkans. [Online] Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-avoidable-return-of-geopolitics-in-the-balkans/> [Accessed January 202].

BiEPAG (2017) The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. Authoritarianism and EU Stabilitocracy. [Online] Available at: <http://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/BIEPAG-The-Crisis-of-Democracy-in-the-Western-Balkans.-Authoritarianism-and-EU-Stabilitocracy-web.pdf> [Accessed December 2019].

Biermann, R. (2002). 'Stabilitätspakt und EU-Balkanpolitik: Von der Stabilisierung zur Integration?' *Integration*, 25(3), 210–225. [Online] Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24221286>.

Blagojevic, B. (2018) 'Serbia · public procurement review mechanism in the Republic of Serbia – Current State of Play and Main Challenges', *European Procurement & Public Private Partnership Law Review*, 13(3), pp. 245–251. doi:10.21552/epppl/2018/3/12.

Blank, S. J. (1996) *Yugoslavia's War the Problem from Hell*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press.

Blauberger, M. and van Hüllen, V. (2020) 'Conditionality of EU funds: An instrument to enforce EU fundamental values?', *Journal of European Integration*, 43(1), pp. 1–16. doi:10.1080/07036337.2019.1708337.

Blokker, P. (2023) 'Narratives of integration: A holistic approach to European legitimacy', *SSRN Electronic Journal* [Preprint]. doi:10.2139/ssrn.4357003.

Bobić, M. (2016). National Convention on the EU in Serbia – tangible result of sharing transition experience. *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, 25(3–4), 78–95. [Online] Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26591970>.

Bochsler, D. and Juon, A. (2019) 'Authoritarian footprints in Central and Eastern Europe', *East European Politics*, 36(2), pp. 167–187. doi:10.1080/21599165.2019.1698420.

Bogaards, M. (2018) 'De-democratization in Hungary: Diffusely defective democracy', *Democratization*, 25(8), pp. 1481–1499. doi:10.1080/13510347.2018.1485015.

Bohle, D. (2011) 'East European Transformations and the Paradoxes of Transnationalization', in *Transnational Europe: Promise, Paradox, Limits*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics), pp. 130–150. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230306370_8.

Bohle, D. and Greskovits, B. (2009) Poverty, Inequality, and Democracy (II): East-Central Europe's Quandary. *Journal of Democracy*, 20(4), pp. 50–63.

Böhmelt, T. and Freyburg, T. (2013) 'The temporal dimension of the credibility of EU conditionality and candidate states' compliance with the *acquis communautaire*, 1998–2009', *European Union Politics*, 14(2), pp. 250–272. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116512458164>.

Böhmelt, T. and Freyburg, T. (2017) 'Forecasting candidate states' compliance with EU Accession Rules, 2017–2050', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(11), pp. 1667–1685. doi:10.1080/13501763.2017.1348385.

Bolton, G. and Visoka, G. (2010) 'Recognizing Kosovo's independence: Remedial secession or earned sovereignty?', *SEESOX Southeast European Studies* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/recognizingkosovosindependence.pdf>.

Bono, G. (2010) 'The European Union and "supervised independence" of Kosovo: A strategic solution to the Kosovo/serbia conflict?', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 15(Issue 2), pp. 249–264. doi:10.54648/eerr2010018.

Bonvicini, G. and Comelli, M. (2015) Deepening and widening in European Foreign and Security policy. Available at: <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/deepening-and-widening-european-foreign-and-security-policy> (Accessed: 01 November 2023).

Borrell Josep and Von der Leyen, U. (2019) 'High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission'. European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/default/files/commissioner_mission_letters/mision-letter-josep-borrell-2019_en.pdf.

Börzel, T. (2016) 'Building member states: How the EU promotes political change in its new members, accession candidates, and Eastern Neighbors', *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, 8(1), p. 76. doi:10.22381/ghir8120164.

Börzel, T.A. (2014) The noble west and the dirty rest? Western democracy promoters and illiberal regional powers. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/13510347.2014.1000312?needAccess=trueandrole=button> (Accessed: 25 April 2023).

Börzel, T.A. (2016) When Europeanization Hits Limited Statehood: The Western Balkans as a Test Case for the Transformative Power of Europe. Available at: https://www.sfb-governance.de/en/publikationen/other-Working-Paper/B2_Boerzel_When-Europeanization-Hits-Limited-Statehood/index.html (Accessed: 25 April 2023).

Börzel, T.A. and Lebanidze, B. (2017) "The transformative power of Europe' beyond enlargement: the EU's performance in promoting democracy in its neighbourhood", *East European Politics*, 33(1), pp. 17–35. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2017.1280473>.

Börzel, T.A. and Schimmelfennig, F. (2017) 'Coming together or drifting apart? The EU's political integration capacity in Eastern Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(2), pp. 278–296. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1265574>.

- Börzel, T.A. and van Hüllen, V. (2011) 'Good Governance and Bad Neighbors?', Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, FB Politik- und Sozialwissenschaften, Otto-Suhr-Institut für Politikwissenschaft Kolleg-Forschergruppe [Preprint].
- Bradford, W. (2000) The Western European Union, Yugoslavia, and the (Dis)Integration of the EU, The New Sick Man of Europe. *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review*, 24(1).
- Brajshori, M. (2019) 'A road map for the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue', Atlantic Council, 3 October. Available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/a-road-map-for-the-kosovo-serbia-dialogue/> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).
- Braun, D. and Tërnavá, G.J. (2021) 'Parliamentary Election in Kosovo: Will the Victor also Become Prime Minister?' (Accessed: 25 April 2023).
- Bretherton, C. and Vogler, J., 2006. *The European Union as a Global Actor*. Second Edition ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- Brioni Declaration. (1991) [Online] Available at: <https://www.ucdp.uu.se/downloads/fullpeace/Yug%2019910712.pdf> (Accessed: 30 April 2023).
- Broughton, Andrea. 2004. 'European Council Fails to Agree on Constitutional Treaty'. Eurofound. 2004. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/article/2003/european-council-fails-to-agree-on-constitutional-treaty>.
- Bugajski, J. et al. (2010) *Western Balkans Policy Review 2010*, CSIS. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/western-balkans-policy-review-2010> (Accessed: 06 August 2023).
- Bugarić, B. (2019) 'Central Europe's descent into autocracy: A constitutional analysis of authoritarian populism', *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 17(2), pp. 597–616. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/moz032>.
- Bulmer, S. and Quaglia, L. (2018) 'The politics and economics of Brexit', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(8), pp. 1089–1098. doi:10.1080/13501763.2018.1467957.
- Bürkner, H.-J. (2020) 'Europeanisation versus euroscepticism: Do borders matter?', *Geopolitics*, 25(3), pp. 545–566. doi:10.1080/14650045.2020.1723964.
- Butković, H. and Samardžija, V. (2014) 'Challenges of continued EU enlargement to the western Balkans - Croatia's experience', *Economics and Business Review*, 14(4), pp. 91–108. doi:10.18559/eb.2014.4.840.
- Bytyci, F. (2017) Kosovo lawmakers dismiss government in no confidence motion | Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-politics-idUSKBN1861NX> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).
- Čačić, D. (2021) Vucic and Orban formalise their 'special relationship', www.euractiv.com. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/vucic-and-orban-formalise-their-special-relationship/> (Accessed: October 2023).
- Cakolli, E. (2020) Kosovo: Between universal non-recognition and 'derecognitions'. Available at: [https://www.kas.de/documents/286052/0/Policy+brief+20-09-13+Kosovo+Between+universal+non-recognition+and+derecognitions+\(Eng\).pdf/8245552b-5744-11b7-a1fb-429be14582c7?version=1.0&t=1610102495727](https://www.kas.de/documents/286052/0/Policy+brief+20-09-13+Kosovo+Between+universal+non-recognition+and+derecognitions+(Eng).pdf/8245552b-5744-11b7-a1fb-429be14582c7?version=1.0&t=1610102495727) (Accessed: 07 November 2023).

Caliva Sergio (2018) 'Land-swap deal: ideal solution or Pandora's box? | Vocal Europe', 18 September. Available at: <https://www.vocaleurope.eu/land-swap-deal-ideal-solution-or-pandoras-box/> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).

Capusella, A. (2016) Kosovo: Political evolution and the negotiations with Serbia, IEMed. Available at: <https://www.iemed.org/publication/kosovo-political-evolution-and-the-negotiations-with-serbia/> (Accessed: 07 November 2023).

Caruso, U. (2018) 'The Interplay Between Council of Europe, OSCE, EU and NATO. Available at: <https://pdf4pro.com/view/the-interplay-between-council-of-europe-osce-eu-and-nato-52d851.html> (Accessed: 07 March 2023). Casert, Raf. (2022) 'EU Starts Membership Talks with Albania, North Casert, R. (2022) EU starts membership talks with Albania, North Macedonia, AP News. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/albania-ursula-von-der-leyen-european-union-edi-rama-c302c3fb6329185f30e6952a906b201a> (Accessed: 07 November 2023).

Cassani, A. and Tomini, L. (2020) 'Reversing regimes and concepts: from democratisation to autocratization | SpringerLink', *European Political Science*, 19, pp. 272–287.

CEFTA (2006). Available at: <https://cefta.int> (Accessed: 16 April 2022).

Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) (2020) Russia's Weaponization of Tradition: The Case of the Orthodox Church in Montenegro. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/blogs/post-soviet-post/russias-weaponization-tradition-case-orthodox-church-montenegro> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Central Election Commission (2021) 'Parliamentary Elections Results Kosovo'. Available at: <https://kqz-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2.Rezultatet-sipas-subjekteve-politike-1.pdf> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Centre for Inclusive Governance (2017) 'Advancing Normalization between Kosovo and Serbia'. Available at: <http://www.cigonline.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Advancing-Normalization-Between-Kosovo-and-Serbia-1.pdf> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Chollet, D. and Escobar, G. (2023) 'Është koha për themelimin e Asociacionit të komunave me shumicë serbe, Ambasada e SHBA-së në Kosovë. Available at: <https://xk.usembassy.gov/sq/eshte-koha-per-themelimin-e-asociacionit-te-komunave-me-shumice-serbe/> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).

Chris van der Borgh, Puck le Roy, and Floor Zweerink (2019) *Coordinating international interventions in complex settings. An analysis of the EU peace and state-building efforts in post-independence Kosovo*. New York: Routledge.

Cianetti, L., Dawson, J. and Hanley, S. (2018) 'Rethinking "Democratic backsliding" in Central and Eastern Europe – looking beyond Hungary and Poland', *East European Politics*, 34(3), pp. 243–256. doi:10.1080/21599165.2018.1491401.

Cianetti, L., Dawson, J. and Hanley, S. (2018a) 'Rethinking "Democratic backsliding" in Central and Eastern Europe – looking beyond Hungary and Poland', *East European Politics*, 34(3), pp. 243–256. doi:10.1080/21599165.2018.1491401.

Cohen-Tanugi, L. (2016) Europe as an international normative power: state of play and perspectives - Groupe d'études géopolitiques, <https://geopolitique.eu/>. Available at: <https://geopolitique.eu/en/articles/europe-as-an-international-normative-power-state-of-play-and-perspectives/> (Accessed: 28 May 2023).

Cohen, J. R. (1999) Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) pushing this mechanism to increase its involvement in Yugoslav wars, The Hague: The Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.

Collaku, P. (2015) 'Kosovo's UNESCO Membership Bid Fails', Balkan Insight, 9 November. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/11/09/kosovo-unesco-membership-vote-11-09-2015/> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

Commission of the European Communities. 1976. 'Yugoslavia and European Community'. Commission of the European Communities'. Available at: http://aei.pitt.edu/8241/1/31735055282218_1.pdf. (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities. [Online] Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/cfsp/conflict_prevention/docs/concept_strengthening_eu_med_e_n.pdf [Accessed 2021]. Available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf> [Accessed 2021].

Conley, H.A. and Saric, D. (2021) The Serbia-Kosovo Normalization Process: A Temporary U.S. decoupling, CSIS. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/serbia-kosovo-normalization-process-temporary-us-decoupling> (Accessed: 07 June 2023).

Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo' (2008). Government of Kosovo. Available at: https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Kushtetuta.e.Republikes.se_.Kosoves-2.pdf.

Constitutional Court (2020) 'Decisions from the review session held on 21 December 2020', Constitutional Court, 21 December. Available at: <https://gjk-ks.org/en/decisions-from-the-review-session-held-on-21-december-2020/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Constitutional Court Case Nr K0130/15' (2015). Constitutional Court of the Republic of Kosovo. Available at: https://gjk-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/vendimet/gjk_ko_130_15_shq.pdf.

Cooper, R. (2015) The Philosophy of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. [Online] Available at: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2015/07/16/sir-robert-cooper-the-philosophy-of-the-belgrade-pristina-dialogue/> [Accessed 2021].

Coppieters, B. et al. (2017) Europeanization and conflict resolution: Case studies from the European periphery, Cambridge Core. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/slavic-review/article/europeanization-and-conflict-resolution-case-studies-from-the-european-periphery-bruno-coppieters-michael-emerson-michel-huyseune-tamara-kovzirdze-gergana-noutcheva-nathalie-tocci-and-marius-vahl-gent-netherlands-academia-press-2004-ii-258-pp-notes-bibliography-tables-maps-850-paper/7261D86B166BC96D164584568ED2D362> (Accessed: 07 June 2023).

Council of European Union (1997). Regional Approach to the countries of South-Eastern Europe: Compliance with the conditions in the Council Conclusions of 29 April 1997. [Online] Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:51998DC0618&from=EN> [Accessed December 2020].

Council of European Union (2012) Council conclusions on granting Serbia candidate status Search for available translations of the preceding link. [Online] Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/128520.pdf [Accessed 2021].

Council of European Union (2020) Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: EU appoints a new Special Representative. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press->

releases/2020/04/03/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-eu-appoints-a-new-special-representative/ (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Council of the European Union (1993) Conclusions of the Presidency. [Online] Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21225/72921.pdf> [Accessed 14 January 2020].

Council of the European Union (2008) 'General Affairs and External Relations - 2851st Council meeting'. Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/98818.pdf.

Council of the European Union (2020) 'Concept on EU Peace Mediation'. Council of the European Union. Available at: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/st13951.en20.pdf>.

Csaky, Z. (2020) Dropping the Democratic Facade, Freedom House. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2020/dropping-democratic-facade> (Accessed: 07 November 2023).

Cvijic, S. (2021) 'How the Virus of Criminal Authoritarianism Killed Zoran Djindjic', Balkan Insight. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/03/11/how-the-virus-of-criminal-authoritarianism-killed-zoran-djindjic/>. (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

Cvijic, S. et al. (2022) Strict, Fair and More Open Towards EU Enlargement! Dutch Public Opinion on EU Membership of the Western Balkans, BiEPAG. Available at: <https://biepag.eu/publication/strict-fair-and-more-open-towards-eu-enlargement/> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

Daalder, I.H. and O'Hanlon, M.E. (2000) 'The United States in the Balkans: There to stay', *The Washington Quarterly*, 23(4), pp. 155–170. doi:10.1162/016366000561277.

Dandashly, A. and Noutcheva, G. (2019) 'Unintended consequences of EU Democracy Support in the European Neighbourhood', *The International Spectator*, 54(1), pp. 105–120. doi:10.1080/03932729.2019.1554340.

Davies, C.B. and O'Carroll, L. (2023) *Macron and Scholz Urge Kosovo to hold fresh elections to ease Serbia tensions*, *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/02/macron-scholz-urge-kosovo-fresh-elections-ease-serbia-tensions> (Accessed: October 2023).

Davies, L. (2022) 'A 'hybrid offensive' in the Balkans? Russia and the EU-led Kosovo-Serb negotiations', *European Security*, 31(1), pp. 1–20. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2021.1948837>.

Debuysere, L. and Blockmans, S. (2019) 'Europe's Coherence Gap in External Crisis and Conflict Management', CEPS, 5 December. Available at: <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/europes-coherence-gap-in-external-crisis-and-conflict-management/> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

Delauney, G. (2015) Why Kosovo's opposition MPs are tear-gassing parliament - BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34986909> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Delauney, G. (2017) Train row almost pulls Kosovo and Serbia off the rails. [Online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38666279> [Accessed January 2020].

Delauney, G. (2018) 'Kosovo's army dreamers enrage their Serbian neighbours', BBC News, 14 December. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46551471> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Deloy, C. (2006) 'Referendum on Independence in Montenegro, 21st May 2006'. 2006. <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/eem/0520-referendum-on-independence-in-montenegro-21st-may-2006>.

Dempsey, J. (2018) Kosovo and Serbia are Talking About Redrawing Their Borders. It's a Terrible Idea., Carnegie Europe. Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/09/19/kosovo-and-serbia-are-talking-about-redrawing-their-borders.-it-s-terrible-idea-pub-77291> (Accessed: 30 May 2023).

Denti, D. (2014) The EU and the Balkans in Thessaloniki, 11 years later. What went Wrong?, Graz - Belgrade: Balkans In Europe Policy Advisory Group.

Dessus, Z., Rexha, A., Merja, A. and Stratulat, C. (2017) Kosovo's EU candidate status: a goal within reach?, Brussels: European Policy Center (CEP).

Deutsche Welle (2018) Kosovo: Serbia President Aleksandar Vučić condemns arrest of Marko Djuric | DW | 27.03.2018, DW.COM. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/kosovo-serbia-president-aleksandar-vucic-condemns-arrest-of-marko-djuric/a-43146555> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Deutsche Welle, (2021) Kurti Interview with Deutsche Welle. DW | 07.11.2021, DW.COM. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/sq/albin-kurti-sipas-kushtetut%C3%ABs-s%C3%AB-kosov%C3%ABs-nuk-mund-t%C3%AB-ke%C3%AB-asociacion-mbi-baza-etnike/a-59746032> (Accessed: 30 June 2022).

DG NEAR (2023) Steps towards joining, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). Available at: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/steps-towards-joining_en (Accessed: 24 April 2023).

Diamond, L. (2015) Facing Up to the Democratic Recession, *Journal of Democracy*. Available at: <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/facing-up-to-the-democratic-recession/> (Accessed: 24 April 2023).

Diamond, L. (2020) 'Breaking Out of the Democratic Slump', *Journal of Democracy*, 31(1), pp. 36–50. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0003>.

Dimitrov, G. and Plachkova, A. (2020) 'Bulgaria and Romania, Twin Cinderellas in the European Union: How They contributed in a peculiar way to the change in EU policy for the promotion of democracy and rule of law', *European Politics and Society*, 22(2), pp. 167–184. doi:10.1080/23745118.2020.1729946.

Dimitrov, N., Djolai, M. and Wunsch, N. (2019) Removing obstacles to EU accession: Bilateral disputes in the Western Balkans, Grez, Belgrade: Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG).

Dimitrova, A. (2002) 'Enlargement, Institution-Building and the EU's Administrative Capacity Requirement', *West European Politics*, 25(4), pp. 171–190. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/713601647>.

Dimitrova, A. and Kortenska, E. (2016) Enlargement as foreign policy in the Western Balkans: Has it reached its limits?. In: B. Steunenberg, W. Voermans and S. Van den Bogaert, eds. *Fit for the future: Reflections from Leiden on the functioning of the EU*. The Hague: Eleven International Publishing., pp. 265-290.

Dimitrova, A. and Pridham, G. (2004) 'International actors and democracy promotion in Central and Eastern Europe: The integration model and its limits', *Democratization*, 11(5), pp. 91–112. doi:10.1080/13510340412331304606.

Dimitrova, A. et al. (2016) Soft, normative or transformative power: What do the EU's communications with Eastern Partners reveal about its influence?, *The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries*. Available at: <https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/handle/fub188/21861> (Accessed: 07 September 2023).

Dimitrova, A., Boroda, M., Chulitskaya, T. and Parvan, T. (2016) Soft, normative, or transformative power? What do EU's communications with Eastern partners reveal about its influence? [Online] Available at: http://eu-strat.eu/?page_id=14[Accessed 2020].

Dimitrova, A.L. (2010) 'The new member states of the EU in the aftermath of enlargement: Do New European rules remain empty shells?', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 17(1), pp. 137–148. doi:10.1080/13501760903464929.

Dimitrova, A.L. (2010) 'The New Member States of the EU in the Aftermath of Enlargement: Do New European Rules Remain Empty Shells?', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 17(1), pp. 137–148. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760903464929>.

Dimitrova, A.L. (2018) 'The uncertain road to sustainable democracy: Elite coalitions, citizen protests and the prospects of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe', *East European Politics*, 34(3), pp. 257–275. doi:10.1080/21599165.2018.1491840.

Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (2020) Belgrade - Pristina Dialogue: Resumption with high-level videoconference on Sunday. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-resumption-high-level-videoconference-sunday-2020-07-11_en (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Djolai, M. and Nechev, Z. (2018) *Bilateral Disputes Conundrum: Accepting the Past and Finding Solutions for the Western Balkan*, Graz and Belgrade: Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group BiEPAG.

Djolai, Marika (2022) 'How to Capitalise on the Relative Success of the Berlin Process'. BiEPAG. 7 November 2022. <https://biepag.eu/blog/how-to-capitalise-on-the-relative-success-of-the-berlin-process/>.

Dobrai, C. (2022) *Budapest Balkans Forum 2022 | Külügyi és Külgazdasági Intézet*. Available at: <https://kki.hu/en/budapest-balkans-forum-2022/> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

Doli, D. (2019) *The International Element, Statehood and Democratic Nation-building Exploring the Role of the EU and International Community in Kosovo's State-formation and State-building*. s.l.:Springer.

Dover, R. (2005) 'The EU and the Bosnian Civil War 1992–95: The capabilities–expectations gap at the heart of EU foreign policy', *European Security*, 14(3), pp. 297–318. doi:10.1080/09662830500407770.

Dragojlo, S. (2022) 'Russia Voices Fury About Cancelling of Lavrov Visit to Serbia', *Balkan Insight*, 6 June. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/06/06/russia-voices-fury-about-cancelling-of-lavrov-visit-to-serbia/> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Dragojlo, S. and Isufi, P. (2021) *Kosovo-Serbia border dispute 'driven by internal politics' - Prishtina Insight*. Available at: <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-serbia-border-dispute-driven-by-internal-politics/> (Accessed: 30 June 2022).

- Dunai, M. (2022) Serbia's president Aleksandar Vučić rejects sanctions on Russia | Financial Times. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/0041d1a9-7fbd-4ea3-8176-e8b7d99e4a92> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).
- Durović, G. and Jaćimović, D. (2014) 'From stabilisation and association process to full membership of Western Balkans countries', *International Journal of Information Systems and Social Change*, 5(3), pp. 12–30. doi:10.4018/ijissc.2014070102.
- DW, D.W. (2019) Serbia, Kosovo agree to talks after Berlin summit – DW – 04/30/2019. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/serbia-kosovo-agree-to-talks-following-berlin-summit/a-48541196> (Accessed: 30 May 2023).
- Dzankic, J., Kiel, S. and Kmezic, M. (2018) *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans: a failure of EU conditionality?* Palgrave Macmillan,
- Economic Intelligence (EUI) (2019) 'Democracy Index 2019A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest'. [Online] Available at: <http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy-Index-2019.pdf&mode=wp&dcampaignid=democracyindex2019> [Accessed January 2020].
- Economides, S. (2008) *The Politics of Differentiated Integration: the case of the Balkans*, London: Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe
- Economides, S. and Ker-Lindsay, J. (2015) 'Pre-accession Europeanization': The case of Serbia and Kosovo', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 53(5), pp. 1027–1044. doi:10.1111/jcms.12238.
- Economist (2020) 'Albin Kurti's new start in Kosovo'. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/02/13/albin-kurtis-new-start-in-kosovo> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).
- Edwards, G. (2006) 'The new member states and the making of EU foreign policy', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 11(Issue 2), pp. 143–162. doi:10.54648/eerr2006014.
- Eeckhout, P. (2012) 'The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy after Lisbon: From Pillar Talk to Constitutionalism', in A. Biondi, P. Eeckhout, and S. Ripley (eds) *EU Law after Lisbon*. Oxford University Press, p. 0. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199644322.003.0013>.
- Eisen, N. et al. (2019) *The Democracy Playbook: Preventing and Reversing Democratic Backsliding*. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Ekiert, G. and Kubik, J. (1998) 'Contentious politics in new democracies: East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, 1989–93', *World Politics*, 50(4), pp. 547–581. doi:10.1017/s004388710000736x.
- Elbasani, A. (2008a) 'The Stabilisation and Association process in the Balkans: Overloaded agenda and weak incentives?', *SSRN Electronic Journal* [Preprint]. doi:10.2139/ssrn.1138185. Elbasani, A. (2018) 'State-Building or State-Capture? Institutional Exports, Local Reception and Hybridity of Reforms in Post-War Kosovo', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18(2), pp. 149–164.
- Elbasani, A. (2008b) 'EU enlargement in the Western Balkans: Strategies of borrowing and inventing', *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 10(3), pp. 293–307. doi:10.1080/14613190802493600.

Elbasani, Arolda (2011) 'EU Administrative Conditionality and Domestic Downloading: The Limits of Europeanization in Challenging Contexts'. SSRN Electronic Journal, November. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1956888>.

Emini, D. (2020a) 'A Kosovo Drama in Five Acts', Fridrich Ebert Stiftung, Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/17355.pdf>

Emini, D. (2020b) 'A weak prime minister and a powerful president', Prishtina Insight, 5 June. Available at: <https://prishtinainsight.com/a-weak-prime-minister-and-a-powerful-president/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Emini, D. (2022) (Un)Shielded: Russia's Western Balkans Influence Through the Kosovo-Serbia Open Dispute. Springer Nature.

Emini, D. and Marku, D. (2018) Kosovo in the Berlin Process: Gains and challenges, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS). Available at: <https://qkss.org/en/publikimet/kosovo-in-the-berlin-process-gains-and-challenges> (Accessed: 07 October 2023).

Emini, D. and Stacic, I. (2018) 'Belgrade and Pristina: lost in normalisation?', European Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Paris.

Enyedi, Z. (2016) Populist Polarization and Party System Institutionalization: The Role of Party Politics in De-Democratisation. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 63(4), p. 210–220.

Epstein, R.A. and Sedelmeier, U. (2008) 'Beyond conditionality: international institutions in postcommunist Europe after enlargement', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15(6), pp. 795–805. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760802196465>.

Erdmann, G. (2011) 'Decline of Democracy: Loss of Quality, Hybridisation and Breakdown of Democracy', in G. Erdmann and M. Kneuer (eds) *Regression of Democracy?* Wiesbaden: Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft – Sonderhefte (ZfVP), pp. 21–58. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-93302-3_2.

Erjona Popova and Morina, D. (2018) 'Kosovo 'Must' Change Laws for Serb Municipalities Deal', *Balkan Insight*, 10 July. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/07/10/serb-municipalities-association-needs-kosovo-laws-changes-07-10-2018/> (Accessed: 23 June 2022).

Eror, A. (2023) *The EU has failed in Serbia and Kosovo, Foreign Policy*. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/10/18/eu-usa-violence-vucic-serbia-kosovo/> (Accessed: October 2023).

Erwan (2022) 'The EU Mustn't Betray its Promises to the Western Balkans', *Balkan Insight*, 20 June. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/06/20/the-eu-mustnt-betray-its-promises-to-the-western-balkans/> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).

Esch, V. (2011) 'A European future for Kosovo: Is the EU losing its grip?', *Sicherheit und Frieden*, 29(3), pp. 169–176. doi:10.5771/0175-274x-2011-3-169. Ethier, D. (2003) Is Democracy Promotion Effective? Comparing Conditionality and Incentives. *Democratization*, 10(1), pp. 99-120 .

EU Commission (1997) *The Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties*. [Online] Available at: https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/default/files/docs/body/treaty_of_amsterdam_en.pdf [Accessed 2021].

EU Commission (2003) Enlargement - Stabilisation and Association Process. [Online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/sap_en[Accessed 2020].

EU Commission (2003) EU-Western Balkans Summit Thessaloniki Declaration, 21 June 2003, European Commission - European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_03_163 (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

EU Commission (2003). The Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans,. [Online] Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accesion_process/how_does_a_country_join_the_eu/sap/thessaloniki_agenda_en.htm (Accessed:29 June 2022).

EU Commission (2003). The Thessaloniki Summit: a milestone in the European Union's relations with the Western Balkans. [Online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_03_860 (Accessed December 2020).

EU Commission (2005) Enlargement Strategy. [Online] Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2005:0561:FIN:EN:PDF> [Accessed June 2021].

EU Commission (2010) Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans, Brussels: European Commission. (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

EU Commission (2013) Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo* (2013) European Commission. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/stabilisation-and-association-agreement-with-kosovo.html> (Accessed: 07 August 2023).

EU Commission (2015) 'Chapter 35: Other issues Item 1: Normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo'. Available at: https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/pristupni_pregovori/pregovaracke_pozicije/ch35_common_position_eu.pdf. Accessed: 23 July 2022).

EU Commission (2018) 'Visa Liberalisation: Commission confirms Kosovo fulfils all required benchmarks'. European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_4562 (Accessed: 07 August 2023).

EU Commission (2018) Key findings of the 2018 Report on Kosovo, European Commission - European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_18_3404 (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

EU Commission (2018) Strategy for the Western Balkans: EU sets out new flagship initiatives and support for the reform-driven region. [Online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_561 (Accessed: 07 August 2023).

EU Commission (2019) Communication on EU Enlargement Policy. [Online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-communication-on-eu-enlargement-policy_en.pdf (Accessed: 07 June 2023).

EU Commission (2020) 'European Commission 2020 Country Report for Kosovo'. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2020-10/kosovo_report_2020.pdf.

EU Commission (2022) Common foreign and security policy. Available at: https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/common-foreign-and-security-policy_en (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

EU Commission. (2019) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 2019

Communication on EU Enlargement Policy,. [Online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/20190529-communication-on-eu-enlargement-policy_en.pdf (Accessed: 07 August 2023).

EU General Affairs Council (1999) 2186th Council meeting, European Commission - European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_99_171 (Accessed: 25 April 2023).

EU Global Strategy (2016) Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy. [Online] Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf (Accessed: 15 April 2023).

EU Parliament (2018) Parliament in favour of lifting visa requirements for Kosovars | News | European Parliament. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20180912IPR13304/parliament-in-favour-of-lifting-visa-requirements-for-kosovars> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

EU Parliament (2022) The Conference on the Future of Europe concludes its work | News | European Parliament. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220509IPR29102/the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe-concludes-its-work> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

EU Parliament (2022) Turkey: persistently further from EU values and standards | News | European Parliament. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220603IPR32136/turkey-persistently-further-from-eu-values-and-standards> (Accessed: 21 April 2023).

EU Rule of Law Mission, EULEX (2014) Compact Progress Report. Prishtina. Available at: https://www.eulex-kosovo.eu/eul/repository/docs/CPReport_2_14.pdf (Accessed: 11 May 2023).

EUAM (1996) Special Report No 2/96 concerning the accounts of the Administrator and the European Union Administration, Mostar (EUAM) accompanied by the replies of the Commission and the Administrator of Mostar, Report on Special Report No. 2/96 of the Court of Auditors concerning the accounts of the Administrator and the European Union Administration, Mostar (EUAM) accompanied by the replies of the Commission and the Administrator of Mostar - Committee on Budgetary Control | A4-0386/1996 | European Parliament. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-4-1996-0386_EN.html (Accessed: 07 November 2023).

EUR-Lex (1993) EUR-Lex - Accession_Criteria_Copenhagen - EN - EUR-Lex. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/accession-criteria-copenhagen-criteria.html> (Accessed: 21 April 2023).

European Commission (2003) 'Stabilisation and Association Process'. 2003. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/glossary/stabilisation-and-association-process_en.

European Commission (2013) Serbia and Kosovo*: historic agreement paves the way for decisive progress in their EU perspectives, European Commission - European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_13_347 (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

European Commission (2022) Membership Status: Serbia. Available at: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/serbia_en (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

European Commission (EC) (2022) ‘Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process – Council Conclusions’. Annual Report. Brussels.
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/60797/st15935-en22.pdf> (Accessed: 07 August 2023).

European Council (1978) ‘Declaration on democracy at the Copenhagen European Council, 7-8 April 1978’. European Council. Available at:
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20773/copenhagen_april_1978__eng_.pdf (Accessed: 07 August 2023).

European Council (2018) ‘A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans’. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf (Accessed: 07 August 2023).

European Council (2020) Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: EU appoints a new Special Representative. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/04/03/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-eu-appoints-a-new-special-representative/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

European Council (2022) Remarks by President Charles Michel following the first working session of the European Council, 23 June 2022. Available at:
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/23/intervention-du-president-michel-a-l-issue-de-la-premiere-seance-de-travail-du-conseil-europeen-23-juin-2022/> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

European Council (2023) ‘Kosovo*: Council Gives Green Light to Visa Free Travel’. 2023.
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/03/09/kosovo-council-gives-green-light-to-visa-free-travel/> (Accessed: 17 September 2023).

European External Action Service (EEAS) (2015) ‘Association/Community/of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo—general principles main elements’. European External Action Service (EEAS). Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/statements-eeas/docs/150825_02_association-community-of-serb-majority-municipalities-in-kosovo-general-principles-main-elements_en.pdf. (Accessed: 13 March 2023).

European External Action Service (EEAS) (2015) EUFOR Concordia. [Online] Available at: http://www.eeas.europa.eu/archives/csdp/missions-and-operations/concordia/index_en.htm (Accessed 17 December 2020).

European External Action Service (EEAS) (2022) Europe in the Interregnum: our geopolitical awakening after Ukraine | EEAS Website. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/europe-interregnum-our-geopolitical-awakening-after-ukraine_en (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

European External Action Service (EEAS) (2023) 10 years of Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue | EEAS. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/10-years-belgrade-pristina-dialogue-0_en (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

European External Action Service (EEAS) (2023) Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: EU Proposal - Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia | EEAS. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-eu-proposal-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en (Accessed: 9 May 2023).

European External Action Service (EEAS) (2023) Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: EU Proposal - Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia | EEAS. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-eu-proposal-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en (Accessed: 9 May 2023).

European External Action Service (EEAS) (2023) Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: EU Proposal - Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia | EEAS. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-eu-proposal-agreement-path-normalisation-between-kosovo-and-serbia_en (Accessed: 10 May 2023).

European External Action Service (EEAS). (2023) Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Implementation Annex to the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia |. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-implementation-annex-agreement-path-normalisation-relations-between_en (Accessed: 10 May 2023).

European External Action Service EEAS Stratcom (2021) Tackling disinformation: Information on the work of the EEAS Strategic Communication division and its task forces (SG.STRAT.2) | EEAS Website. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/countering-disinformation/tackling-disinformation-information-work-eeas-strategic-communication_en?s=2803 (Accessed: 28 June 2022).

European External Action Service (EEAS) (2017) Apostolova: Kosovo has no time to lose. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/32556_en (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

European Parliament (2019) European election results | European Parliament, <https://europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/>. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/portal/en>. Available at: <https://europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/> (Accessed: 30 May 2023).

European Parliament (2020) Answer given by Vice-President Borrell on behalf of the European Commission. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2019-004599-ASW_EN.html (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

European Parliament (2022) Foreign policy: aims, instruments and achievements | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/158/foreign-policy-aims-instruments-and-achievements> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

European Stability Initiative (ESI) (2000) Zagreb Summit: Final Declaration. [Online] Available at: <https://www.esiweb.org/pdf/bridges/bosnia/ZagrebSummit24Nov2000.pdf> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

European Stability Initiative (ESI) (2003) The Road to Thessaloniki: Cohesion and the Western Balkans. [Online] Available at: https://www.esiweb.org/sites/default/files/reports/pdf/esi_document_id_44.pdf (Accessed: 13 May 2023).

European Union (1992) The Maastricht Treaty. [Online] Available at: https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaen/files/docs/body/treaty_on_european_union_en.pdf (Accessed: 13 February 2022).

European Union (2012) Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union, Brussels: Official Journal of the European Union (Accessed: 13 May 2023).

European Union (2013) 'Report to the European Parliament and the Council on Kosovo's progress in addressing issues set out in the Council Conclusions of December 2012 in view of a possible decision on the opening of negotiations on the Stabilisation', Brussels, European Union (Accessed: 13 May 2023).

European Union (EU) (2007) 'Treaty Of Lisbon Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community'. [Online] Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12007L/TXT&from=EN> (Accessed: 13 November 2022).

European Union External Action (2016) ‘A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy’. Council of the European Union. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-strategy-european-unions-foreign-and-security-policy_en (Accessed: 17 February 2023).

European Union External Action Service (2021) ‘Integrated Approach for Security and Peace Directorate’. EEAS. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/isp2_mediation_factsheet_for_publication_20022021.pdf. (Accessed: 19 January 2023).

European Union, (2015) Chapter 35: Other issuesItem 1: Normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. [Online] Available at: https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/pristupni_pregovori/pregovaracke_pozicije/ch35_common_position_eu.pdf (Accessed January 2020)

European Union, Foreign and Security Policy (2022) Foreign and Security Policy. Available at: https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic/foreign-and-security-policy_en (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

European Western Balkans (2015) ‘Serbian EU Accession Negotiations: Nothing Unexpected in Chapter 35’, European Western Balkans, 28 December. Available at: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2015/12/28/serbian-eu-accession-negotiations-nothing-unexpected-in-chapter-35/> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).

External Action Service (EEAS) (2009). ‘Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities’. [Online] Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/cfsp/conflict_prevention/docs/concept_strengthening_eu_mediation.pdf (Accessed 2021).

Fabbrini, Federico (2020) ‘The Conference on the Future of Europe: Process and Prospects’. *European Law Journal* 26 (5–6): 401–14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eulj.12401>.

Fassi, E. and Zotti, A. (2018) The EU and EAEU: Normative Power and geopolitics in EU-russia ‘shared neighbourhood’. Available at: <https://publicatt.unicatt.it/handle/10807/118554> (Accessed: 04 April 2023).

Fazliu, E. and Butcher, J. (2015) Tear gas, eggs and protests - Kosovo 2.0, Kosovo 2.0. Available at: <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/tear-gas-eggs-and-protests-seven-things-you-need-to-know-about-kosovos-political-standoff/> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).

Ferreira, C., Bruno (2022) Challenges and Barriers to the European Union Expansion to the Balkan Region. IGI Global.

Ferreira, L.R. (2020) Implementing the Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy, *Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA)*. Available at: https://www.tepsa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/EUGS-TEPSA-Briefs_Final.pdf (Accessed: 07 August 2022).

Fetahu, A. (2022) ‘The spillover effects of Ukraine crisis in Western Balkans: How can Kosovo push through the Dialogue with Serbia?’ *Group for Legal and Political Studies*. Available at: <http://www.legalpoliticalstudies.org/the-spillover-effects-of-ukraine-crisis-in-western-balkans-how-can-kosovo-push-through-the-dialogue-with-serbia/> (Accessed: 07 December 2022).

Fiott, D. (2011) ‘The European Union’s Normative Power in a Multipolar World’, *SSRN Electronic Journal* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2171146>.

Fleming, S., Hopkins, V. and Peel, M. (2020) EU identity crisis: Poland, Hungary and the fight over Brussels' values. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/bfa58276-1868-4011-9891-ccd363dc68dc> (Accessed December 2020).

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (2021) UK announces new Special Envoy to the Western Balkans, GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-new-special-envoy-to-the-western-balkans> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Fouéré, E. (2013) Thessaloniki ten years on: Injecting momentum into the enlargement process for the Western Balkans, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). Available at: <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/thessaloniki-ten-years-injecting-momentum-enlargement-process-western-balkans/> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).

Fouéré, E. (2019) The EU's re-engagement with the Western Balkans: A new chapter long overdue, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). Available at: https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PB2019_01_EF_WesternBalkans.pdf (Accessed: 9 November 2022).

Franke, C. and Ulrike, S. (2021) 'Ambiguous alliance: Neutrality, opt-outs, and European defence – European Council on Foreign Relations', ECFR, 28 June. Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/publication/ambiguous-alliance-neutrality-opt-outs-and-european-defence/> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).

Franke, U. and Varma, T. (2019) 'Independence play: Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy', ECFR. Available at: https://ecfr.eu/special/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomy/ (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

Freedom House (2007) Nations in Transit 2007, OSCE Human Dimension. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/e/27688.pdf>.

Freedom House (2016) Back Where We Started in the Balkans, Freedom House. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/article/back-where-we-started-balkans> (Accessed: 25 April 2023).

Freedom House 2020. [Online] Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-freedom-world-2020-finds-established-democracies-are-decline> [Accessed 4 March 2020].

Frontini, A. (2016) The EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy: A Short Guide for the Perplexed. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/eu-global-strategy-foreign-and-security-policy-short-guide-perplexed-15441> (Accessed January 2021).

Fruscione, G., 2019. The Transition in the Balkans and the Dogma of Political Stability. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/transition-balkans-and-dogma-political-stability-22833> (Accessed February 2020).

Fukuyama, F. (2006) *The End of History and the Last Man*. United Kingdom: Free Press.

Gagnon, C. (2004) *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Ganzle, S. (2022) 'The European Political Community: A Step toward Differentiated Integration in Europe?' EUROP (blog). 6 October 2022. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2022/10/06/the-european-political-community-a-step-toward-differentiated-integration-in-europe/>.

Gashi, S. and Novaković, I. (2017) *From Technical Negotiations to Comprehensive Normalization*. Policy paper. Belgrade: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/13820.pdf>.

- Gashi, Z. (2015) 'Jahjaga do t'i drejtohet Gjykatës Kushtetuese për Asociacionin', Radio Evropa e Lirë. Available at: <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/27331789.html> (Accessed: 30 June 2022).
- Gaston, S. (2017) 'Far-Right Extremism in the Populist Age', DEMOS, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung [Preprint]. Available at: <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Demos-Briefing-Paper-Far-Right-Extremism-2017.pdf>.
- Gehrke, L. (2020) Hungary no longer a democracy, Freedom House says, POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/06/hungary-no-longer-a-democracy-report-239807> (Accessed: 18 May 2023).
- Gelhaus, L. and Dinkel, S. (2021) Geopolitics in Europe's Neighborhood | DGAP. Available at: <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/geopolitics-europes-neighborhood> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).
- Gerrits, A. (2009) 'Normative Power Europe in a Changing World: A Discussion', Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael [Preprint]. Available at: https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20091200_cesp_paper_gerrits.pdf.
- Gerschewski, J. and Schmotz, A. (2011) Contrary or Contradictory? Autocracies and Democracies between Dichotomy and Gradation. Reykjavik, Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB) and Berlin Graduate School of Social Sciences (BGSS), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, pp. 1-30.
- Glaudić, J. (2011) The Hour of Europe: Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia. United States: Yale University Press.
- Gora, A. and de Wilde, P. (2020) 'The essence of Democratic backsliding in the European Union: Deliberation and Rule of Law', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 29(3), pp. 342–362. doi:10.1080/13501763.2020.1855465.
- Gordon, C. (2009) 'The Stabilization and Association process in the western balkans: An effective instrument of post-conflict management?', *Ethnopolitics*, 8(3–4), pp. 325–340. doi:10.1080/17449050903086930.
- Gordon, P. H. (2001) September 11 and American Foreign Policy. [Online] Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/september-11-and-american-foreign-policy/> (Accessed 13 November 2020)
- Government of North Macedonia (2022) Open Balkan, Влада на Република Северна Македонија. Available at: <https://vlada.mk/node/30372?ln=en-gb> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).
- Grabbe, H. (1999) A Partnership for Accession? The Implications of EU Conditionality for the Central and East European Applicants. Working Paper. European University Institute. Available at: <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/1617> (Accessed: 27 May 2023).
- Grabbe, H. (2002) 'European Union conditionality and the Acquis Communautaire', *International Political Science Review*, 23(3), pp. 249–268. doi:10.1177/0192512102023003003.
- Grabbe, H. (2006) The EU's Transformative Power Europeanization Through Conditionality in Central and Eastern Europe. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grabbe, H. (2014) 'Six lessons of enlargement ten years on: The eu'S TRANSFORMATIVE POWER IN RETROSPECT and Prospect', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 52(S1), pp. 40–56. doi:10.1111/jcms.12174.

- Gray, A. and Heath, R. (2018) Serbia, Kosovo presidents broach border changes for historic deal, POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/aleksandar-Vučić-hashim-thaci-serbia-kosovo-balkans-eu-enlargement-alpbach-forum/> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).
- Grevi, G. (2009) ESDP institutions. In: G. Grevi, D. Helly and D. Keohane, eds. *European Security and Defence Policy: the first ten years (1999-2009)*. Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), pp. 17-69.
- Griessler, C. (2020) 'The Berlin Process. Bringing the Western Balkan Region Closer to the European Union'. *Südosteuropa* 68 (1): 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2020-0001>.
- Grieverson, R., Grübler, J. and Holzner, M. (2018) *Western Balkans EU Accession: Is the 2025 Target Date Realistic?* Available at: <https://wiiw.ac.at/western-balkans-eu-accession-is-the-2025-target-date-realistic--dlp-4526.pdf>, The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies.
- Grimm, S. (2019) 'Democracy promotion in EU Enlargement Negotiations: More interaction, less hierarchy', *Democratization*, 26(5), pp. 851–868. doi:10.1080/13510347.2019.1590701.
- Group for Legal and Political Studies (GLPS) (2018) 'Linking the Kosovo Serbia Dialogue to the EU enlargement strategy - which accession prospects are at stake' Available at: <http://www.legalpoliticalstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/GLPS-Linking-the-Kosovo-Serbia-Dialogue-to-the-EU-Enlargement-Strategy.pdf> (Accessed May 2021).
- Guardian (2015) 'Kosovo fails in Unesco membership bid', 9 November. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/09/kosovo-fails-in-unesco-membership-bid> (Accessed: 16 April 2022).
- Haas, D. (2023) *Dare we hope that an agreement between Serbia and Kosovo is possible?* Emerging Europe. Available at: <https://emerging-europe.com/news/dare-we-hope-that-an-agreement-between-serbia-and-kosovo-is-possible/> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Hadfield, A., Manners, I. and Whitman, R. (2017) *Foreign Policies of EU Member States: Continuity and Europeanisation*, Routledge and CRC Press. Available at: <https://www.routledge.com/Foreign-Policies-of-EU-Member-States-Continuity-and-Europeanisation/Hadfield-Manners-Whitman/p/book/9780415670067> (Accessed: 17 February 2023).
- Halmay, G. (2018) 'The possibility and desirability of economic sanction: The rule of law conditionality requirements against illiberal EU member states', *SSRN Electronic Journal* [Preprint]. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3126231.
- Hamilton, A. (2012) *From Technical Arrangements to Political Haggling: The Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue and the North of Kosovo*, Prishtina: Group for Legal and Political Studies.
- Hamilton, A. and Merja, A. (2012) *Readying Kosovo for SAA Negotiations: A blueprint of achievements, slow reforms and the path ahead*, Prishtina: Group for Legal and Political Studies.
- Hamilton, D. S. (2008) *The United States: A normative power?* In: N. Tocci, ed. *Who is a normative foreign policy actor? The European Union and its Global Partners*. Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, pp. 76-147.
- Hanley, S. and Cianetti, L. (2021) *The End of the Backsliding Paradigm*, *Journal of Democracy*. Available at: <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-end-of-the-backsliding-paradigm/> (Accessed: 28 May 2023).

- Hardwick, D. (2011) 'Is the EU a Normative Power?', *E-International Relations*, 3 September. Available at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2011/09/03/is-the-eu-a-normative-power/> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).
- Hartwell, L. (2020) *The Serbia-Kosovo Dialogue: Ripe for Resolution?*. [Online] Available at: <https://cepa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CEPA-Serbia-Kosovo-5.10.21-V2.pdf>[Accessed 2021].
- Haughton, T. (2007) 'When does the EU Make a Difference? Conditionality and the Accession Process in Central and Eastern Europe', *Political Studies Review*, 5(2), pp. 233–246. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-9299.2007.00130.x>.
- Hellman, J. S., Jones, G. and Kaufmann, D. (2000) *State Capture, Corruption and Influence in Transition*.: World Bank.
- Higgott, R. and Reich, S. (2022) 'Hedging by Default: The Limits of EU 'Strategic Autonomy' in a Binary World Order', *LSE Ideas Programme Report* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/publications/reports/hedging-by-default>.
- Hillion, C. (2016) *The Creeping Nationalisation of the EU Enlargement Policy*.: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies.
- Hopkins, V. (2018) *Macedonia's Gruevski says Hungary has granted asylum*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/87c6059e-ece1-11e8-89c8-d36339d835c0> (Accessed December 2020).
- Howorth, J. (2010) 'The EU as a global actor: Grand strategy for a global grand bargain?', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48(3), pp. 455–474. doi:10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02060.x.
- Hoxhaj, A. (2020) *The EU Rule of Law Initiative Towards the Western Balkans*, The Hague: Hague Journal on the Rule of Law.
- Hughes, J., Sasse, G. and Gordon, C.E. (2004) *Europeanization and regionalization in the EU's enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe: the myth of conditionality*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. Available at: <http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?PID=269552> (Accessed: 28 May 2023).
- Huntington, S. P., (1993). *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Huntington, S.P. (1991) 'Democracy's Third Wave', *Journal of Democracy*, 2(2), pp. 12–34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1991.0016>.
- Huntington, S.P. (1996) 'Democracy for the Long Haul', *Journal of Democracy*, 7(2), pp. 3–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1996.0028>.
- Hurd, D. (1992) Document Number 92/339, 'Statement at the Plenary Session of the 47th UN General Assembly'. New York, United Nations General Assembly.
- Ilse, S. (2021) 'I want this state to succeed first', *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*. Available at: <https://eu.boell.org/en/2019/12/04/i-want-state-succeed-first> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).
- Ines, A., 2014. *The Political Economy of State Capture in Central Europe*. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 52(1), pp. 88 -104.
- International Court of Justice (ICJ) (2010) *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo, Advisory Opinion*. [Online]

International Crisis Group (2010) Kosovo and Serbia after the ICJ Opinion. Europe Report N°206. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/dsee/dv/0916_04/0916_04en.pdf.

International Crisis Group (ICG) (2011) North Kosovo Meltdown, Crisis Group. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/kosovo/north-kosovo-meltdown> (Accessed: 7 February 2022).

International Crisis Group (ICG) (2021) Relaunching the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue. [Online] Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/kosovo/262-relaunching-kosovo-serbia-dialogue> [Accessed 25 January 2021].

International Crisis Group (ICG), (2021) Relaunching the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/kosovo/262-relaunching-kosovo-serbia-dialogue> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies (2018) Kosovo 2019 early parliamentary election: A new chance for decriminalisation of Kosovo? Available at: <https://www.ifimes.org/en/researches/kosovo-2019-early-parliamentary-election-a-new-chance-for-decriminalisation-of-kosovo/4456> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Islam, S., 2003. Big Bang Expansion of the European Union. [Online] Available at: <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/big-bang-expansion-european-union> [Accessed December 2020].

Isufi, P. (2019) ‘Western Govts Urge End to Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue Stalemate’, Balkan Insight, 13 August. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/08/13/western-govts-urge-end-to-kosovo-serbia-dialogue-stalemate/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Janse, R. (2019) ‘Is the European Commission a credible guardian of the values?’, International Journal of Constitutional Law, 17(1), pp. 43–65. doi:10.1093/icon/moz009.

Jarábik, B. (2015) Long Live Minsk II? Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available at: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/59451> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

Javor, B. (2019) The Wrong Man in the Wrong Place | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Brussels office - European Union, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. Available at: <https://eu.boell.org/en/2019/10/08/wrong-man-wrong-place> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Jopp, M. (1994) The Implications of the Yugoslav Crisis for Western Europe’s Foreign Relations, Paris and Brussels: European Institute for Security Studies (EUISS).

Joseph, E.P. (2020) ‘Anatomy of a Kosovo Summit Catastrophe’, Foreign Policy. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/24/kosovo-serbia-summit-white-house-catastrophe-balkans-peace-process/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Joseph, E.P. (2021) ‘Biden’s Balkans Test Has Arrived’, Foreign Policy. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/11/bidens-balkans-test-has-arrived/> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Juncker, J.C. (2018) Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the opening plenary session of the Ideas Lab 2018 “Europe – Back on Track” of the Centre for EU, European Commission - European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_18_1121 (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Juncos, A.E. and Blockmans, S. (2018) ‘The EU’s role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding: Four key challenges’, Global Affairs, 4(2–3), pp. 131–140. doi:10.1080/23340460.2018.1502619.

- Kapidzic, D. (2020) 'The rise of illiberal politics in Southeast Europe', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 20, pp. 1–17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2020.1709701>.
- Karlas, J. and Zuber, C.I. (2019) 'The Limits of the EU's Political Conditionality Approach in the Western Balkans', in. Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Limits-of-the-EU%E2%80%99s-Political-Conditionality-in-Karlas-Zuber/1ae65a05061c697134aa5c726a4f249cdc789306> (Accessed: 28 May 2023).
- Karnitschnig, M. (2016) Serbia's latest would-be savior is a modernizer, a strongman — or both, *POLITICO*. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/aleksandar-vucic-serbias-latest-savior-is-a-modernizer-or-strongman-or-both/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).
- Kartsonaki, A. (2020) 'Playing with fire: An assessment of the EU's approach of constructive ambiguity on Kosovo's blended conflict', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 22(1), pp. 103–120. doi:10.1080/19448953.2020.1715668.
- Keane, R. (2004) 'The Solana Process in Serbia and Montenegro: Coherence in EU foreign policy', *International Peacekeeping*, 11(3), pp. 491–507. doi:10.1080/1353331042000249064.
- Keane, R. (2005) 'The partnership–conditionality binary in the Western Balkans: Promoting local ownership for Sustainable Democratic Transition', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 18(2), pp. 247–257. doi:10.1080/09557570500164678. pp. 247-257.
- Keane, R. (2005a) 'The partnership–conditionality binary in the western balkans: Promoting local ownership for Sustainable Democratic Transition', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 18(2), pp. 247–257. doi:10.1080/09557570500164678.
- Keane, R. (2005a) 'The partnership–conditionality binary in the Western Balkans: Promoting local ownership for Sustainable Democratic Transition', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 18(2), pp. 247–257. doi:10.1080/09557570500164678.
- Keil, S. (2012) 'Explaining Democratic Stagnation in the Western Balkans'. Available at: <https://www.iemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Explaining-Democratic-Stagnation-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>
- Keil, S. (2013) 'Europeanization, state-building and democratisation in the Western Balkans', *Nationalities Papers*, 41(3), pp. 343–353. doi:10.1080/00905992.2013.768977.
- Keil, S. (2018) 'The business of state capture and the rise of authoritarianism in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia', *Southeastern Europe*, 42(1), pp. 59–82. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1163/18763332-04201004>.
- Kelemen, R. D., Menon, A. and Slapin, J. (2018) *The European Union: Integration and Enlargement*. London: Routledge.
- Kelemen, R., Slapin J., and Menon A. (2014) 'Wider and Deeper? Enlargement and Integration in the European Union'. *Journal of European Public Policy* 21 (May). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2014.897745>.
- Kelemen, R.D. (2017) 'Europe's other democratic deficit: National authoritarianism in Europe's Democratic Union', *Government and Opposition*, 52(2), pp. 211–238. doi:10.1017/gov.2016.41.
- Kelemen, R.D. (2020) 'The European Union's authoritarian equilibrium', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27(3), pp. 481–499. doi:10.1080/13501763.2020.1712455.

Kelemen, R.D. and Blauburger, M. (2016) 'Introducing the debate: European Union Safeguards Against Member States' Democratic backsliding', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(3), pp. 317–320. doi:10.1080/13501763.2016.1229356.

Kelly, M. and Baker, C. (2013) *Interpreting the Peace: Peace Operation, Conflict and Language in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. London: Palgrave Studies in Languages at War.

Ker-Lindsay, J. and Armakolas, I., 2017. *Lack of Engagement: Surveying the Spectrum of the EU member states policies toward Kosovo*. Prishtine: Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS).

Ker-Lindsay, J. et al. (2017) 'The national politics of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 17(4), pp. 511–522. doi:10.1080/14683857.2017.1424398.

Keukeleire, S. (2003) 'The European union as a diplomatic actor: internal, traditional, and structural diplomacy', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 14(3), pp. 31–56. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592290312331295556>.

Keukeleire, S., Fonck, D. and Métais, R. (2015) 'The EU's structural diplomacy towards Kosovo', in *The Diplomatic System of the European Union*. Routledge.

Keukeleire, S., Justaert, A. and Thiers, R. (2009) 'Reappraising Diplomacy: Structural Diplomacy and the Case of the European Union', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 4(2), pp. 143–165. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1163/187119109X440889>.

King, A. L. (1993) *Bosnia-Herzegovina--Vance-Owen Agenda for a Peaceful Settlement: Did the U.N. Do Too Little, Too Late, to Support This Endeavor?*. *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 23(2).

Klaus Patel, K. (2019) 'Widening and deepening? recent advances in European Integration History', *Neue Politische Literatur*, 64(2), pp. 327–357. doi:10.1007/s42520-019-00105-4.

Klaus Patel, Kiran (2019) 'Widening and Deepening? Recent Advances in European Integration History'. *Neue Politische Literatur* 64 (2): 327–57. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42520-019-00105-4>.

Kmezić, M. (2020) 'Recalibrating the EU's approach to the western balkans', *European View*, 19(1), pp. 54–61. doi:10.1177/1781685820913655.

Kmezić, M. (2021) 'Rule of law and democracy in the western balkans: Addressing the gap between policies and Practice', *Illiberal Politics in Southeast Europe*, pp. 177–192. doi:10.4324/9781003208327-10.

Kmezcic, M. and Bieber, F. (2016) *Media Freedom in the Western Balkans*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/BIEPAG-Media-Freedom-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf> [Accessed January 2020].

Kmezić, M. and Bieber, F. (2017) *The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. An Anatomy of Stabilitocracy and the Limits of EU Democracy Promotion*, s.l.: Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG).

Kmezcic, M. and Bieber, F. (2018) *Western Balkans and the EU: Beyond the Autopilot Mode*, Graz - Belgrade: Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group.

Koeth, W. (2010) 'Bosnia, Kosovo and the EU: Is Accession Possible without Full Sovereignty?' Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/148867969.pdf>.

Koha Ditore (2017) *Radojciqi's documents were found in the cars used in Banjska - Koha.net*. Available at: <https://www.koha.net/en/arboretum/393175/svecla%2C-we-have-documents-that-prove-Radojciqi%27s-participation-in-the-north/> (Accessed: 07 November 2023).

Kosova Democratic Institute KDI (2018) 'Kosovo Serbia Dialogue: Challenges and the way Forward'. Available at: <https://kdi-kosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/18-Sfidat-ENG-04.pdf>.

Kosovo 2.0 (2020) Is the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue really reaching an historic moment? - Kosovo 2.0. Available at: <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/is-the-kosovo-serbia-dialogue-really-reaching-an-historic-moment/> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2011) 'Population, Household Census and Housing in Kosovo 2011'. Kosovo Agency of Statistics. Available at: <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/2074/te-dhenat-kryesore.pdf> (Accessed: 11 September 2022).

Kosovo Government/ Office of Prime Minister (2020) 'Prime Minister Hoti: For us, mutual recognition is the only purpose of dialogue with Serbia', Office of the Prime Minister, 9 July. Available at: <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/en/prime-minister-hoti-for-us-mutual-recognition-is-the-only-purpose-of-dialogue-with-serbia/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Kostanyan, H. (2014) 'The rationales behind the European External Action Service: The principal-agent model and power delegation', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 10(2). doi:10.30950/jcer.v10i2.560.

Kraemer, R. (2022) 'Serbia on the Edge'. Foreign Policy Research Institute. Available at: <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/serbia-on-the-edge-issuu.pdf>.

Kramer, J.M. (2004) 'EU enlargement and the environment: Six challenges', *Environmental Politics*, 13(1), pp. 290–311. doi:10.1080/09644010410001685245.

Krastev, I. (2002) 'The Balkans: Democracy Without Choices', *Journal of Democracy*, 13(3), pp. 39–53. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0046>.

Krastev, I. (2016) What's Wrong with East-Central Europe? Liberalism's Failure to Deliver.. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), pp. 35-39.

Kratochvíl, P. and Sychra, Z. (2019) 'The end of democracy in the EU? the eurozone crisis and the EU's democratic deficit', *Journal of European Integration*, 41(2), pp. 169–185. doi:10.1080/07036337.2019.1569001.

Kubicek, P. J. (2003) *The European Union and Democratization: Reluctant States*. London: Routledge. Available at: <https://www.routledge.com/The-European-Union--Democratization-Reluctant-States/Kubicek/p/book/9780415311366> (Accessed: 27 May 2023).

Kühne, B. (2014) *Are the EU and the Balkans drifting apart?* Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Lang, S., Mushaben, J.M. and Wendler, F. (2017) 'German unification as a catalyst for change: Linking political transformation at the domestic and international levels', *German Politics*, 26(4), pp. 443–456. doi:10.1080/09644008.2017.1367384.

Lange, S., Nechev, Z. and Trauner, F. (eds) (2017) *Resilience in the Western Balkans*. Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies (ISSUE report, No 36 (August 2017)). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2815/211038>.

- Lasheras, F. (2016) Return to instability: How migration and great power politics threaten the Western Balkans, ECFR. Available at: https://ecfr.eu/publication/return_to_instability_6045/ (Accessed: 25 April 2023).
- Laštro, C. and Bieber, F. (2021) 'The performance of opposition parties in competitive authoritarian regimes: Three case studies from the Western Balkans', *European Political Science*, 20(4), pp. 617–629. doi:10.1057/s41304-021-00326-w.
- Lavdas, K. A. (1996) The European Union and the Yugoslav Conflict: Crisis Management and re-Institutionalization in Southeastern Europe. *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 4(2), pp. 209–232.
- Lehne, S. (2004) Has the 'Hour of Europe' come at last? Paris and Brussels: European Union Institute of Security Studies.
- Lehne, S. (2007) Is There Hope for EU Foreign Policy?, Carnegie Europe. Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/12/05/is-there-hope-for-eu-foreign-policy-pub-74909> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).
- Lehne, S. (2009) 'Resolving Kosovo's Status', Österreichisches Institut für Internationale Politik [Preprint].
- Lehne, S. (2012) Kosovo and Serbia: Toward a Normal Relationship, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Lehne, S. (2013) Serbia-Kosovo Deal Should Boost the EU's Western Balkans Policy. [Online] Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2013/04/23/serbia-kosovo-deal-should-boost-eu-s-western-balkans-policy-pub-51582> [Accessed 2021].
- Lehne, S. (2016) How the Refugee Crisis Will Reshape the EU. [Online] Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/02/04/how-refugee-crisis-will-reshape-eu-pub-62650> [Accessed 2020].
- Lehne, S. (2022) Making EU Foreign Policy Fit for a Geopolitical World, Carnegie Europe. Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/04/14/making-eu-foreign-policy-fit-for-geopolitical-world-pub-86886> (Accessed: 17 February 2023).
- Lehne, S. (2023) After Russia's War Against Ukraine: What Kind of World Order?, Carnegie Europe. Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2023/02/28/after-russia-s-war-against-ukraine-what-kind-of-world-order-pub-89130> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).
- Lepore, P. (2012) Beyond the Asterisk Agreement, Istituto Affari Internazionali. Available at: Lepore, P. (2012) Beyond the Asterisk Agreement, Istituto Affari Internazionali. [Accessed 2020].
- Levitsky, S. and Way, L.A. (2015) The Myth of Democratic Recession, *Journal of Democracy*. Available at: <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-myth-of-democratic-recession/> (Accessed: 24 April 2023).
- Levitz, P. and Pop-Eleches, G. (2010) 'Monitoring, Money and Migrants: Countering Post-Accession Backsliding in Bulgaria and Romania', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62(3), pp. 461–479. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668131003647838>.
- Levitz, P. and Pop-Eleches, G. (2010b) 'Why No Backsliding? The European Union's Impact on Democracy and Governance Before and After Accession', *Comparative Political Studies*, 43(4), pp. 457–485. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414009355266>.

Lewis, P.G. (2001) 'The 'Third Wave' of Democracy in Eastern Europe: Comparative Perspectives on Party Roles and Political Development', *Party Politics*, 7(5), pp. 543–565. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068801007005002>.

Lewitsky, S. and Way, L. A. (2010) *Competitive Authoritarianism. Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*: Cambridge University Press.

Lindberg, S. (2018) The nature of Democratic backsliding in Europe. Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/07/24/nature-of-democratic-backsliding-in-europe-pub-76868> (Accessed: 07 November 2023).

Lindberg, S. I. (2018) The Nature of Democratic Backsliding in Europe. Reshaping European Democracy project,

Linz, J.J. and Stepan, A.C. (1996) 'Toward consolidated democracies', *Journal of Democracy*, 7(2), pp. 14–33. doi:10.1353/jod.1996.0031.

Lozancic, D. (2008) Kosovo: Adjusting to a 'New Reality'. Available at: <http://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/kosovo-adjusting-new-reality> (Accessed: 20 June 2022).

Lucarelli, S. (2000) *Europe and the Breakup of Yugoslavia. A Political Failure in Search of a Scholarly Explanation*. The Hague: Kluwer Law International.

Lyall, J.M. (2006) 'Pocket protests: Rhetorical coercion and the micropolitics of collective action in semi-authoritarian regimes', *World Politics*, 58(3), pp. 378–412. doi:10.1353/wp.2007.0003.

MacDonald, N. (2007) Russia rejects plan for Kosovo. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/f3f09aae-30a0-11dc-9a81-0000779fd2ac>.

MacDowall, A. (2018) 'Kosovo detains Serbian politician after 'illegal entry' into region', *The Guardian*, 26 March. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/26/kosovo-serbia-politician-marko-djuric> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Makarychev, A. and Devyatkov, A. (2014) The EU in Eastern Europe: Has Normative Power Become Geopolitical? – PONARS Eurasia. Available at: <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/the-eu-in-eastern-europe-has-normative-power-become-geopolitical/> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

Malazogu, L. and Vladimir Todoric (2011) 'Belgrade Prishtina Dialogue Transformation of Self-Interest Required'. New Policy Centre. Available at: file:///Users/donika/Desktop/EFB%20Reimbursement/Belgrade_Prishtina_Dialogue_Transformati.pdf

Mappes-Niedek, N. (2020) My Europe: Resistance to Trump's Balkan deal – DW – 02/01/2020, *dw.com*. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/my-europe-trumps-balkan-deal-sends-shivers-through-southeastern-europe/a-52228291> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).

Marciaq, F. (2017) *The European Union and the Western Balkans after the Berlin Process Reflecting on the EU Enlargement in Times of Uncertainty*, Sarajevo: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Accessed: 20 February 2023).

Marciaq, F. (2022) *The European Political Community and the Western Balkans*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/19790.pdf> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).

- Marić, S. (2014) Serbia officially begins EU accession negotiations. [Online] Available at: <https://cep.org.rs/en/publications/serbia-officially-begins-eu-accession-negotiations/> [Accessed January 2021].
- Marovic, J., Prelec, T. and Kmezcic, M. (2019) *Strengthening the Rule of Law in the Western Balkans: Call for a Revolution against Particularism*, Graz: Balkans in Europe Polic Advisory Group (BiEPAG).
- Masters, J. (2023) *Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia*, Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).
- Matias, B. (2018) *Linking the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue to the EU enlargement strategy – which accession prospects are at stake*. [Online]
- Mechkova, V., Lührmann, A. and Lindberg, S.I. (2017) ‘How much democratic backsliding?’, *Journal of Democracy*, 28(4), pp. 162–169. doi:10.1353/jod.2017.0075.
- Mehmetaj, E. (2020) ‘Kosovo’s Controversial 100 Percent Tariff: An Analysis of Its Imposition and the Issues Bleeding Into the Conflict Between Kosovo and Serbia’, *Brooklyn Journal of International Law*, 45(2), p. 35.
- Meka, E. (2015) ‘European integration, democratic consolidation, and democratic regression in CEE: An Institutional Assessment’, *Journal of European Integration*, 38(2), pp. 179–194. doi:10.1080/07036337.2015.1110149.
- Meurs, W. (2003) *The next Europe: South-eastern Europe after Thessaloniki*. *Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe*, 5(3), pp. 9-16.
- Meyer-Resende, M. (2018) *Is Europe’s Problem Illiberal Majoritarianism or Creeping Authoritarianism?*. [Online] Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/06/13/is-europe-s-problem-illiberal-majoritarianism-or-creeping-authoritarianism-pub-76587> [Accessed 20 January 2020].
- Michalski, A. and Nilsson, N. (2019) ‘Resistant to Change? The EU as a Normative Power and Its Troubled Relations with Russia and China’, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 15(3), pp. 432–449. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/ory008>.
- Mickey, R., Levitsky, S. and Way, L. A. (2017) *Is America still safe for democracy? why the United States is in danger of backsliding*. 96(3), pp. 20-29.
- Migueis, R. et al. (eds) (2007) *Towards a global dimension: EU’s conflict management in the neighborhood and beyond*. Lisboa: Foundation Friedrich Ebert.
- Milačić, F. (2020) ‘Europeanization and the statehood problem: The cases of Croatia and Serbia’, *Nationalities Papers*, 48(5), pp. 861–875. doi:10.1017/nps.2019.78.
- Minic, J. (2013) *The dynamics and context of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans*. *International Issues and Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, 22(4), pp. 21-39.
- Mirel, P. (2018) *The Western Balkans: between stabilisation and integration in the European Union*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/questions-d-europe/qe-459-en.pdf> [Accessed 13 May 2021].

- Mirel, P. (2022) 'In support of a new approach with the Western Balkans: Staged accession with a Pierre MIREL consolidation phase'. Robert Schuman Foundation. Available at: <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/questions-d-europe/qe-633-en.pdf>.
- Miró, J. (2022) 'Responding to the global disorder: the EU's quest for open strategic autonomy', *Global Society*, 0(0), pp. 1–21. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2022.2110042>.
- Mischke, J. (2019) 'Trump names Ric Grenell his special envoy for Serbia and Kosovo', *POLITICO*, 4 October. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/trump-names-ric-grenell-his-special-envoy-for-serbia-and-kosovo/> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Molina, I. and Sorroza, A. (2013) *Strengthening the EU as a global actor: the EEAS and the Europeanisation of national diplomacies*, Madrid: Elcano Royal Institute.
- Montanaro, L. (2009) 'The Kosovo Statebuilding Conundrum: Addressing Fragility in a Contested State'. FRIDE. Available at: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/131017/WP91_Lucia_Montanaro_Kosovo_Statebuilding_Conundrum_3dic.pdf.
- Moravcsik, A. (2012) *Europe After the Crisis: How to Sustain a Common Currency*. *Foreign Affairs*, 91(3), pp. 54-68.
- Moravcsik, A. and Vachudova, M.A. (2003) 'National Interests, State Power, and EU Enlargement', *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures*, 17(1), pp. 42–57. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325402239682>.
- Morina, D. (2018) 'Opposition Demands Vote to 'Protect Kosovo's Territory'', *Balkan Insight*, 29 August. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/08/29/kosovo-opposition-unites-with-a-resolution-to-protect-territorial-integrity-08-28-2018/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).
- Morina, E. (2022) 'Enlarged and in charge: Why the EU needs a new approach to accession – European Council on Foreign Relations', *ECFR*, 29 June. Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/article/enlarged-and-in-charge-why-the-eu-needs-a-new-approach-to-accession/> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).
- Morina, E. (2022) 'The Time to Incentivize the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue is Now', *Balkan Insight*, 17 May. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/05/17/the-time-to-incentivize-the-kosovo-serbia-dialogue-is-now/> (Accessed: 23 June 2022).
- Mos, M. (2020) 'Ambiguity and interpretive politics in the crisis of European values: Evidence from Hungary', *East European Politics*, 36(2), pp. 267–287. doi:10.1080/21599165.2020.1724965.
- Mtchedlishvili, D. (2018) *Is there a room for optimism for the near-future enlargement of the European Union?*. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, 10(3), pp. 87 - 95.
- Mucznik, Marta. (2022) 'The European (Geo)Political Community and Enlargement Reform'. 2022. <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/The-European-geopolitical-community-and-enlargement-reform~49e404>.
- Mudde, C. and Kaltwasser, C. R. (2017) *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Muharremi, R. (2010) *The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) from the Perspective of Kosovo Constitutional Law: Max-Planck-Institut für ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht*.

- Muharremi, R. (2021) The 'Washington Agreement' Between Kosovo and Serbia | ASIL. Available at: <https://www.asil.org/insights/volume/25/issue/4/washington-agreement-between-kosovo-and-serbia> (Accessed: 30 May 2023).
- Mujanovic, J. (2018) *Hunger and Fury: The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans*. London: Hurst Publishers.
- Mujanović, J. (2023) The flare-up of violence in Kosovo shows the folly of the West's appeasement of Serbia, *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/sep/29/the-flare-up-of-violence-in-kosovo-shows-the-folly-of-the-wests-appeasement-of-serbia> (Accessed: October 2023).
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2007) 'EU accession is no 'end of history'', *Journal of Democracy*, 18.
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A., van Meurs, W. and Gligorov, V. (2007) 'State Building and Democratic Institutions in Southeastern Europe', 'Captive States, Divided Societies: Political Institutions of Southeastern Europe in Historical Comparative Perspective [Preprint]. Available at: http://sar.org.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/2007_planB.pdf.
- Munich Security Conference (2007) Speech delivered at the MSC by the President Vladimir Putin. Available at: https://is.muni.cz/th/xlghl/DP_Fillinger_Speeches.pdf.
- Musliu, V. and Gashi, K. (2017) 'Mediation through recontextualization: The European Union and the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 22(Issue 4), pp. 533–550. doi:10.54648/eerr2017039.
- Mutluer, D. and Tsarouhas, D. (2018) 'EU foreign policy and "perceived coherence": The case of Kosovo', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18(3), pp. 419–438. doi:10.1080/14683857.2018.1518845.
- Naegele, J. (2003) Yugoslavia: Djindjic Calls for Opening Talks On Kosovo's Status, *Radio Free Europe*. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/1101935.html> (Accessed: 18 April 2022).
- Naggy, A. (2014) 'North Kosovo as a Political and Administrative Phenomenon'. *Revue des Sciences Politiques*.
- Nanopoulos, E. and Vergis, F. (2019) The Crisis as a Crisis of the EU's Political and Democratic Legitimacy,' in *The Crisis behind the Eurocrisis: The Eurocrisis as a Multidimensional Systemic Crisis of the EU*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 99-240.
- Nechev, Z. (2016) Reinstating the Transformative Power of the European Union in the Western Balkans, *European Fund for the Balkans*. Available at: https://www.balkanfund.org/site/pubs/uploads/publications/other%20links/Reinstating_the_Transformative_P.pdf (Accessed: 25 April 2023).
- Nechev, Z. (2020) Stimulating strategic autonomy - Western Balkans' contribution for a shared European Future, Skopje: Institute for Democracy 'Societas Civilis
- Nechev, Z. and Emini, D. (2022) 'Visa Liberalization: Kosovo's Saga on the EU Path'. Kosovo Open Society Foundation (KFOS). Available at: <https://kfos.org/en/publications/114/visa-liberalization-kosovos-saga-eu-path>.
- Nechev, Z. and Trauner, F. (2017) *Fostering resilience in the Western Balkans*. Publications Office. Available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2815/53260> (Accessed: 28 June 2022).

- Newman, E. and Visoka, G. (2018) 'The Foreign Policy of State Recognition: Kosovo's Diplomatic Strategy to Join International Society', *Foreign Policy Analysis*.
- Nezaj, N.X. (2015) 'The development of Kosovo and its relationship with the EU'. Available at: <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/110956/1/827020082.pdf>. (Accessed: 27 May 2023).
- Niemman, A. and Bretherton, C. (2013) 'EU External Policy at the Crossroads: The Challenge of Actorness and Effectiveness', *International Relations*, 27(3), pp. 261–275.
- Nimetz, M. (2020) 'The Macedonian "name" dispute: The Macedonian question—resolved?', *Nationalities Papers*, 48(2), pp. 205–214. doi:10.1017/nps.2020.10.
- North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) (2011) Statement by the North Atlantic Council in KFOR format on the situation in Kosovo, NATO. Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_81493.htm (Accessed: 7 February 2022).
- Noutcheva, G. (2009) 'Fake, partial and imposed compliance: The limits of the EU's normative power in the Western Balkans', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16(7), pp. 1065–1084. doi:10.1080/13501760903226872.
- Noutcheva, G. (2009a) 'Fake, partial and imposed compliance: The limits of the EU's normative power in the Western Balkans', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16(7), pp. 1065–1084. doi:10.1080/13501760903226872.
- Noutcheva, G. (2020) 'Contested Statehood and EU Actorness in Kosovo, Abkhazia and Western Sahara', *Geopolitics*, 25(2), pp. 449–471. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1556641>.
- Noutcheva, G. and Bechev, D. (2008) 'The successful laggards: Bulgaria and Romania's accession to the EU', *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures*, 22(1), pp. 114–144. doi:10.1177/0888325407311793.
- Novakovic, I. (2020) 'Beyond Constructive Ambiguity: How to Stop Worrying and Love the Association/Community of Serbian Municipalities', FOMOSO, 26 October. Available at: <https://www.fomoso.org/en/mosopedia/research/beyond-constructive-ambiguity-how-to-stop-worrying-and-love-the-association-community-of-serbian-municipalities/> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Novaković, I. (2020) 'Seven Years of Serbia's Alignment with the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU', *International and Security Affairs Centre*, p. 92.
- O'Brennan, J. (2014) "'on the Slow Train to Nowhere?" The European Union, "enlargement fatigue" and the western balkans', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 19(Issue 2), pp. 221–241. doi:10.54648/err2014011.
- O'Carroll, L. and Borger, J. (2023) Kosovo Serb politician arrested over role in armed ambush of police, *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/03/belgrade-police-arrests-kosovo-serb-politician-milan-radoicic> (Accessed: October 2023).
- O'Donnell, G. (1995) 'Democracy's Future: Do Economists Know Best?', *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1), pp. 23–28. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1995.0015>.
- Obradović-Wochnik, J. and Wochnik, A. (2012) Europeanising the 'Kosovo Question': Serbia's Policies in the Context of EU Integration. *West European Politics*, 35(5), pp. 1158–1181.

Olcott, B. and Ottaway, M. (1999) Challenge of Semi-Authoritarianism. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,, Issue 7, pp. 1-5.

Oliver, T. (2016) What impact would a Brexit have on the EU?. [Online] Available at: https://www.stiftung-mercator.de/content/uploads/2020/12/Dahrendorf_Policy_Brief_Dahrendorf-Analysis_Brexit_Tim_Oliver.pdf [Accessed December 2020].

Opiłowska, E. (2017) ‘Reconciliation through europeanization: Secondary foreign policy in the German–Polish borderlands’, *Regional & Federal Studies*, 27(3), pp. 283–304. doi:10.1080/13597566.2017.1343719.

Osland, K.M. and Peter, M. (2021) ‘Securitisation of the EU approach to the Western Balkans: From conflict transformation to crisis management’, in *The EU and crisis response*. Manchester University Press, pp. 115–138. Available at: <https://www.manchesteropenhive.com/display/9781526148346/9781526148346.00012.xml> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

Ottaway, M. (2003) *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Panagiotou, R. (2012) *The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Western Balkans and their EU Accession Prospects*. European University Institute, Volume 64.

Pancevski, B. and Hinshaw, D. (2018) U.S. and EU—but Not Germany— Support Land Swap in Balkans - WSJ. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-and-eubut-not-germany-support-land-swap-in-balkans-1538226000> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).

Panebianco, S. and Rossi, R. (2004) EU attempts to export norms of good governance to the Mediterranean and Western Balkan countries. *Jean Monnet Working Papers in Comparative and International Politics*, Issue 53, pp. 1-25.

Papadimitriou, D., Baltag, D. and Surubaru, N.-C. (2017) ‘Assessing the performance of the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe and in its neighbourhood’, *East European Politics*, 33(1), pp. 1–16. doi:10.1080/21599165.2017.1279608.

Papadimitriou, I. and Gateva, E. (2008) *Between Enlargement-led Europeanisation and Balkan Exceptionalism: an appraisal of Bulgaria’s and Romania’s entry into the European Union*, London: Observatory Papers on Greece and Southeast Europe.

Parliament (2020) Resignation of Kosovo’s Prime Minister and normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-000909_EN.html (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Parrock, J. (2020) Kosovan PM to push for constructive dialogue with Serbia, euronews. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/02/28/kosovan-pm-to-push-for-constructive-dialogue-with-serbia> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Patten, C. (2002) European Commission. [Online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_02_150 [Accessed 03 January 2021].

Pavlovic, S. (2016) Montenegro’s ‘stabilitocracy’: The West’s support of Đukanović is damaging the prospects of democratic change. [Online] Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/12/23/montenegros-stabilitocracy-how-the-wests-support-of-djukanovic-is-damaging-the-prospects-of-democratic-change/> [Accessed January 2020].

Pavlovic, S. (2017) West is best: How ‘stabilitocracy’ undermines democracy building in the Balkans. [Online] Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/05/05/west-is-best-how-stabilitocracy-undermines-democracy-building-in-the-balkans/> [Accessed January 2020].

Pearson, B. (2002) Putting Peace into Practice Can Macedonia’s New Government Meet the Challenge?, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

Peel, M. and Mehreen Khan (2018) ‘Land swaps in the western Balkans’, *Financial Times*, 7 September. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/fa77c1be-b24d-11e8-99ca-68cf89602132>.

Perry, V. and Keil, S. (2018) ‘The business of state capture in the western balkans’, *Southeastern Europe*, 42(1), pp. 1–14. doi:10.1163/18763332-04201001. Perry, V. and Keil, S. (2018) ‘The business of state capture in the Western Balkans an introduction’, *Southeastern Europe*, 42(1), pp. 1–14. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1163/18763332-04201001>.

Petrova, T. (2011) ‘The New Role of Central and Eastern Europe in International Democracy Support’, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* [Preprint].

Petrovic, P. (2022) ‘“Serbs and Russians are brothers forever”: far-right support for Putin’s invasion of Ukraine’. Available at: <https://atlanticinitiative.org/serbs-and-russians-are-brothers-forever-far-right-support-for-putins-invasion-of-ukraine/> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Phinnemore, D. (2003) Stabilisation and Association Agreements: Europe Agreements for the Western Balkans?. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 8(1), p. 77 – 103.

Phinnemore, D. (2009) From Negotiations to Accession: Lessons from the 2007 Enlargement. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 10(2), pp. 240-252.

Picciano, N. (2023) The Inadequate Franco-German Proposal for Kosovo and Serbia, *Visegrad Insight*. Available at: <https://visegradinsight.eu/the-inadequate-franco-german-proposal-for-kosovo-and-serbia/> (Accessed: 19 February 2023).

Pierce, K. (2018) Sustainable normalisation through dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, *GOV.UK*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/sustainable-normalisation-through-dialogue-between-kosovo-and-serbia> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Pineles, D.P. (2020) ‘Trump Administration’s Bet on Kosovo’s Thaçi Fails to Pay Off’, *Balkan Insight*, 1 July. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/07/01/trump-administrations-bet-on-kosovos-thaci-fails-to-pay-off/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Plänitz, E. (2018) ‘Towards a Comprehensive Framework of Mediation Success: EU Mediation in the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue’, *Journal of Regional Security*, 13(1), pp. 65–96.

Popova, E. (2015) Liderët Opozitarë Nënshkruajnë Peticionin Kundër Asociacionit dhe Demarkacionit. Available at: <https://kallxo.com/shkurt/permbledhje-lajmeve/lideret-opozitare-nenshkruajne-peticionin-kunder-asociacionit-dhe-demarkacionit/> (Accessed: 30 June 2022).

Popova, E. and Gashi, P. (2018) ‘Srpska Lista leaves Kosovo government’, *Prishtina Insight*, 27 March. Available at: <https://prishtinainsight.com/srpska-lista-leaves-kosovo-government/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Popović, S. (2023) Orbán’s alliance with Vučić demonstrates Strategic Hungarian interests in the western balkans, *European Western Balkans*. Available at: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2023/06/26/orbans-alliance-with-vucic-demonstrates-strategic-hungarian-interests-in-the-western-balkans/> (Accessed: October 2023).

- Prelec, M. (2008) 'Kosovo Serbs burn border checkpoints near northern enclave', *The New York Times*, 19 February. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/19/world/europe/19iht-kosovo.3.10188658.html> (Accessed: 7 February 2022).
- Prelec, T. and Delevic, M. (2019) *Flatter and faster: New Western Balkans pathways to the EU*, ECFR. Available at: https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_flatter_and_faster_new_western_balkans_pathways_to_the_eu/ (Accessed: 29 May 2023).
- Preussen, Wilhelmine (2022) 'Bosnia and Herzegovina Set for EU Candidate Status'. *POLITICO* (blog). 13 December 2022. <https://www.politico.eu/article/bosnia-and-herzegovina-set-to-receive-eu-candidate-status/>.
- Pridham, G. (2005) *Designing Democracy: EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pridham, G. (2005) *EU Enlargement, Democratisation and Domestic Politics in Post-Communist Europe: Patterns and Problems of Motivation*. In: *Designing Democracy EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe*. United Kingdom : Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 63 - 96.
- Pridham, G. (2008) *Democratizing the Western Balkans*. Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, 17(3), pp. 72-89.
- Primatarova, A. and Deimel, J. (2013) *Albania before and after the Parliamentary Elections 2013 - Democratic Test of Maturity Passed?*. Issue 03-04, pp. 56-71.
- Prishtina Insight (2020) 'Thaçi states he won't participate in negotiations led by Lajcak', 26 May. Available at: <https://prishtinainsight.com/thaci-states-he-wont-participate-in-negotiations-led-by-lajcak/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).
- Puddington, A. (2008) 'Freedom in Retreat: Is the Tide Turning? Findings of Freedom in the World, 2008', *Freedom House* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2008/essay-freedom-retreat>.
- Puddington, A. (2011) 'Project MUSE - Democracy Under Duress', *Journal of Democracy*, 22(2), pp. 17-31.
- Pula, B. (2016) *The Budding Autocrats of the Balkans*. [Online] Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/15/the-budding-autocrats-of-the-balkans-serbia-macedonia-montenegro/> [Accessed January 2020].
- Quentin, L. and Mirja, G. (2022) 'Right-wing extremism in the EU'. Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs Directorate-General for Internal Policies. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/700953/IPOL_STU\(2021\)700953_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/700953/IPOL_STU(2021)700953_EN.pdf).
- Quille, G. (2004) *The European Security Strategy: a framework for EU security interests?*, *International Peacekeeping*, 11(3), pp. 422-438.
- Radio Free Europe (2003) *Serbia: Prime Minister Calls For Division Of Kosovo*. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/1102441.html> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).
- Radio Free Europe (2018) *Kosovo Fails For Third Time To Win Interpol Membership*. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-fails-for-third-time-to-win-interpol-membership/29610709.html> (Accessed: 16 April 2022).

- Radio Free Europe/RL's Balkan Service (2020) 'U.S. Envoy Calls Kosovo's Decision To Partially Lift Serbian Import Tariffs A 'Serious Mistake'', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/u-s-envoy-calls-kosovo-s-decision-to-partially-lift-serbian-import-tariffs-a-serious-mistake-/30459227.html> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).
- Radosavljević, J. and Ničić, B. (2021) *Political parties of Kosovo Serbs in the political - KFOS*. Available at: <https://kfos.org/storage/app/uploads/public/609/3e0/08e/6093e008eac26273165717.pdf> (Accessed: 07 May 2023).
- Ramcharan, B. (2000). *The International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia*. The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
- Rashiti, N. and Prelec, M. (2015) 'Serb Integration in Kosovo After the Brussels Agreement'. Balkans Policy Research Group. Available at: <https://balkansgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Serb-Integration-in-Kosovo-After-Brussels-Agreement-2.pdf>.
- Reimann, N. (2019) Trump 'Shadow Diplomacy'? Deploys 'Ambassador' To Address Serbia-Kosovo Tensions, Forbes. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicholasreimann/2021/11/11/trump-shadow-diplomacy-deploys-ambassador-to-address-serbia-kosovo-tensions/> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Reinhard, J. (2010) 'EU Democracy Promotion through Conditionality in its Neighbourhood: The Temptation of Membership Perspective or Flexible Integration?', 4.
- Rettman, A. (2018) EU Commissioner goes against Merkel on Balkan borders, EUobserver. Available at: <https://euobserver.com/eu-political/142655> (Accessed: 30 June 2022).
- Rettman, A. and Krasniqi, E. (2020) EU or US: Who's in charge of Kosovo-Serbia talks?, EUobserver. Available at: <https://euobserver.com/world/147706> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).
- Reuters (2021) Kosovo Honors Beau Biden, Late Son of US President, VOA. Available at: https://www.voanews.com/a/europe_kosovo-honors-beau-biden-late-son-us-president/6209033.html (Accessed: 21 May 2023).
- Reuters (2023) *Kosovo Serb politician admits role in gun battle that killed four*, Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kosovo-serb-politician-admits-role-gun-battle-that-killed-four-2023-09-29/> (Accessed: October 2023).
- Richter, S. (2012) 'Two at one blow? The EU and its quest for security and democracy by political conditionality in the Western Balkans', *Democratization*, 19(3), pp. 507–534. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2012.674360>.
- Richter, S. and Wunsch, N. (2020) 'Money, power, glory: the linkages between EU conditionality and state capture in the Western Balkans', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27(1), pp. 41–62. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1578815>.
- Rjelic, D. (2014) Geopolitics and loans: The EU does not want to lose the Western Balkans. [Online] Available at: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/geopolitics-and-loans-the-eu-does-not-want-to-lose-the-western-balkans/>[Accessed 2021].
- Roberts, E. (2002) Serbia and Montenegro: A New Federation. [Online] Available at: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/38722/2002_Mar.pdf [Accessed 12 2020].
- Rodt, A. P. (2011) The EU: A Successful Military Conflict Manager? *Democracy and Security*, 7(2), pp. 99-122.

- Rodt, A. P. and Wolff, S. (2012) European Union Conflict Management in the Western Balkans. *Civil Wars*, 14(3), pp. 414-430.
- Rossi, M. (2018) A land swap between Kosovo and Serbia would be deeply problematic – and potentially dangerous | EUROPP. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/08/17/a-land-swap-between-kosovo-and-serbia-would-be-deeply-problematic-and-potentially-dangerous/> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).
- Rahmani, B. and Belegu, M. (2023) ‘Endless EU Facilitated-Mediated Dialogue Between Kosovo and Serbia’, *Insight Turkey*, 25(1), pp. 223–246.
- RTK (2020) Thaci: US-guaranteed dialogue will result in mutual recognition, RTKLive. Available at: <http://www.rtklive.com/en/news-single.php?ID=16687> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).
- Rudic, I (2017) ‘Serbia Seeks Russian Role in Kosovo Talks’, *Balkan Insight*, 20 December. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/12/20/Vučić-russia-willing-to-mediate-serbia-kosovo-talks-12-20-2017/> (Accessed: 28 June 2022).
- Ruge, M. (2023) ‘How to kill four birds with one stone: The West’s foreign policy challenge in Serbia – European Council on Foreign Relations’, *ECFR*, 26 January. Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/article/how-to-kill-four-birds-with-one-stone-the-wests-foreign-policy-challenge-in-serbia/> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Rupnik, J. (2007) From democracy fatigue to populist backlash. *Journal of Democracy*, 18(4), pp. 17-25.
- Rupnik, J. (2007) Is East-Central Europe Backsliding? From Democracy Fatigue to Populist Backlash, *Journal of Democracy*. Available at: <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/is-east-central-europe-backsliding-from-democracy-fatigue-to-populist-backlash/> (Accessed: 28 May 2023).
- Russell, M. (2019) Serbia-Kosovo relations Confrontation or normalisation?. [Online] Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635512/EPRS_BRI%282019%29635512_EN.pdf [Accessed May 2021].
- Samorukov, M. (2019) Russia and the Western Balkans: A Last Stand or More of the Same?, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Available at: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/2019/09/04/russia-and-western-balkans-last-stand-or-more-of-same-pub-79796> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).
- Samorukov, M. (2022) Last Friend in Europe: How Far Will Russia Go to Preserve Its Alliance With Serbia? - *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/eurasiainsight/87303> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).
- Saric, D. and Morcos, P. (2022) The War in Ukraine: Aftershocks in the Balkans. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/war-ukraine-aftershocks-balkans> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).
- Sata, R. and Karolewsk, P. I. (2020) Caesarean politics in Hungary and Poland. *East European Politics*, 36(2), pp. 206-225.
- Scazzieri, L. (2021) Reviving European policy towards the Western Balkans, *Centre for European Reform*. Available at: <https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/policy-brief/2021/reviving-european-policy-towards-western-balkans> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- Scazzieri, Luigi. 2023. ‘Can the European Political Community Be a Bridge between the UK and the EU?’ *Centre for European Reform*. https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/pb_LS_EPC_28.4.23.pdf.

Scekic, J. (2014) 'Russia's Orthodox Culture Warrior Comes To The Aid Of Kosovo's Serbs', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-serbs-russian-orthodox-warrior/25250663.html> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Schimmelfennig, F. (2008) EU political accession conditionality after the 2004 enlargement: consistency and effectiveness. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15(6), pp. 918-937.

Schimmelfennig, F. (2010) 'The normative origins of democracy in the European Union: toward a transformationalist theory of democratization', *European Political Science Review*, 2(2), pp. 211–233. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773910000068>.

Schimmelfennig, F. and Scholtz, H. (2008) 'EU Democracy Promotion in the European Neighbourhood: Political Conditionality, Economic Development and Transnational Exchange', *European Union Politics*, 9(2), pp. 187–215. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116508089085>.

Schimmelfennig, F. and Scholtz, H. (2008) EU Democracy Promotion in the European Neighbourhood: Political Conditionality, Economic Development and Transnational Exchange. *European Union Politics*, 9(2), pp. 187-215.

Schimmelfennig, F. and Scholtz, H. (2010) 'Legacies and Leverage: EU Political Conditionality and Democracy Promotion in Historical Perspective', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62(3), pp. 443–460.

Schimmelfennig, F. and Sedelmeier, U. (2004) 'Governance by conditionality: EU rule transfer to the candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11(4), pp. 661–679. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350176042000248089>.

Schimmelfennig, F. and Sedelmeier, U. (2004) Governance by conditionality: EU rule transfer to the candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11(4), p. 661–679.

Schimmelfennig, F. and Sedelmeier, U. (2005) The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe. Available at: <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/2860> (Accessed: 28 May 2023).

Schimmelfennig, F. and Sedelmeier, U. (2019) The Europeanization of Eastern Europe: the External Incentives Model Revisited.

Schimmelfennig, F. and Winzen, T. (2017) Eastern enlargement and differentiated integration: towards normalization. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(2), pp. 239-258.

Schimmelfennig, F. et al. (2015) *Enlargement and EU integration capacity of the EU*, Berlin: Free University Berlin.

Schimmelfennig, F., Engert, S. and Knobel, H. (2015) The Impact of EU Political Conditionality. In: *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*. New York: Cornell University Press, pp. 29- 50.

Schmidt, V.A. (2005) 'Democracy in Europe: The Impact of European Integration', *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(4), pp. 761–779.

Schneider, C.J. (2008) *Conflict, Negotiation and European Union Enlargement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511575235>.

Sedelmeier, U. (2006) 'Europeanisation in new member and candidate states', *Living Reviews in European Governance*, 1(3).

Sedelmeier, U. (2014) Europe after the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union: 2004-2014 | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Brussels office - European Union, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. Available at: <https://eu.boell.org/en/2014/06/10/europe-after-eastern-enlargement-european-union-2004-2014> (Accessed: 24 April 2023).

Sedelmeier, U. (2014) Europe after the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union: 2004-2014 | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Brussels office - European Union, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. Available at: <https://eu.boell.org/en/2014/06/10/europe-after-eastern-enlargement-european-union-2004-2014> (Accessed: 24 April 2023).

Sedelmeier, U. (2014) Europe after the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union: 2004-2014. [Online] Available at: <https://eu.boell.org/en/2014/06/10/europe-after-eastern-enlargement-european-union-2004-2014> [Accessed 23 November 2020].

Sedelmeier, U. (2023) Is there an East–West divide on democracy in the European Union? Evidence from democratic backsliding and attitudes towards rule of law interventions. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/13501763.2023.2198569?needAccess=true&role=button> (Accessed: 28 May 2023).

Sedelmeier, U., 2013. Anchoring Democracy from Above? The European Union and Democratic Backsliding in Hungary and Romania after Accession. *Journal of Common Market Studies - Special Issue* , 52(1), pp. 105-121.

Semenov, A. (2016) 'EU-Russia Rivalry in the Balkans: Linkage, Leverage and Competition (The Case of Serbia)', *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* [Preprint]. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307965219_EU-Russia_Rivalry_in_the_Balkans_Linkage_Leverage_and_Competition_The_Case_of_Serbia.

Serbia and Kosovo: The Path to Normalisation (2013) Crisis Group. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/serbia/serbia-and-kosovo-path-normalisation> (Accessed: 20 June 2022).

Sewer, D., Bajraktari, Y. and Parajon, C. (2007) *Kosovo: What Can Go Wrong?*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace.

Shala (2020) 'Kosovo and Serbia: An incomplete peace', *GIS Reports*, 3 August. Available at: <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/resolution-kosovo-serbia-conflict/> (Accessed: 23 June 2022).

Shehu, B. (2017) Kriza e dialogut Kosovë-Serbi – DW – 02/07/2017, *dw.com*. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/sq/e-paqart%C3%AB-e-ardhmja-e-dialogut-kosov%C3%AB-serbi/a-39512166> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

Shekhovtsov, A. (2016) *Is Transition Reversible? The Case of Central Europe*. London: The Legatum Institute.

Shepherd, A. J. K., (2008) A Milestone in the History of the EU': Kosovo and the EU's International Role. *International Affairs*, 85(3)

Shin, D. C. (1994) On the Third Wave of Democratization: A Synthesis and Evaluation of Recent Theory and Research. *World Politics* , 47(1), pp. 135-170.

Shkreli, B. (2013) 'Two Germanys Model' Suggested for Kosovo | *Balkan Insight*. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2013/05/29/two-germanys-model-suggested-for-kosovo/> (Accessed: 22 June 2022).

Simić, J. (2018) Kosovo-Serbia talks to resume, overshadowed by land swap rumours, [www.euractiv.com](https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/kosovo-serbia-talks-to-resume-overshadowed-by-land-swap-rumours/). Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/kosovo-serbia-talks-to-resume-overshadowed-by-land-swap-rumours/> (Accessed: 23 June 2022).

Simon, J. (2007) *Preventing Balkan Conflict: The Role of Euroatlantic Institutions*, s.l.: Institute for National Strategic Studies National Defense University.

Skolimowska, A. (2015) 'The European Union as a 'Normative Power' in International Relations. Theoretical and Empirical Challenges',

Smith, K. E (2017) *A European Union global strategy for a changing world?*, London: LSE Research Online.

Smith, K. E. (2001) Western actors and the promotion of democracy. In: *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe. Volume 2: International and Transnational Factors*. Oxford(UK): Oxford University Press, pp. 31 - 57.

Smith, K. E. (2003) The Evolution and Application of EU Membership Conditionality. In: M. Cremona, ed. *The Enlargement of the European Union* . UK: Oxford University Press .

Smith, K. E. (2005) The Outsiders: The European Neighbourhood Policy. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 81(4), pp. 757-773.

Smith, K.E. (1997) The use of political conditionality in the EU's relations with third countries : how effective? Working Paper. European University Institute. Available at: <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/287> (Accessed: 27 May 2023).

Solioz, C. (2020) 'Deconsolidation and de-democratisation: Current western Balkans experience of the transition', *SEER*, 23(2), pp. 187–208. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5771/1435-2869-2020-2-187>.

Sopi, A. and Morina, D. (2019) 'Splits Over Serbian Taxes 'Damage' Kosovo', *Balkan Insight*, 21 January. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/01/21/kosovo-politicians-differing-stances-on-taxes-damaging-to-the-dialogue-01-18-2019/> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Spöri, T. et al. (2023) Strict, fair and more open towards EU enlargement! Dutch public opinion on EU membership of the western balkans, BiEPAG. Available at: <https://biepag.eu/publication/strict-fair-and-more-open-towards-eu-enlargement/> (Accessed: September 2023).

Stabilisation and Association Process (2003). Available at: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/glossary/stabilisation-and-association-process_en (Accessed: 21 March 2023).

Stanicek, B. (2020) *A new approach to EU enlargement*, Brussels, European Parliamentary Research Service.

Stanicek, B. (2022) 'Russia's influence in the Western Balkans' Brussels, European Parliamentary Research Service.

Stanicek, B. (2021) 'Belgrade-Pristina dialogue The rocky road towards a comprehensive normalisation agreement'. European Parliamentary Research Service. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689371/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)689371_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689371/EPRS_BRI(2021)689371_EN.pdf).

Stephan Keukeleire and Delreux, T. (2014) *Enlarge The Foreign Policy of the European Union*. Second Edition ed. s.l.:Palgrave Macmillan.

Stojanovic, M. (2021) Serbia, Hungary will ‘rebuild, protect, Central Europe’, Orban says, *Balkan Insight*. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/09/08/serbia-hungary-will-rebuild-protect-central-europe-orban-says/> (Accessed: October 2023).

Stojanovic, M. (2022) ‘Serbia Backs UN Resolution Condemning Russian Attack on Ukraine’, *Balkan Insight*, 2 March. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/03/02/serbia-backs-un-resolution-condemning-russian-attack-on-ukraine/> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Stradner, I (2020) *Solve the Kosovo Dispute to Counter Chinese and Russian Influence in Europe* | American Enterprise Institute - AEI. Available at: <https://www.aei.org/foreign-and-defense-policy/europe-and-eurasia/solve-the-kosovo-dispute-to-counter-chinese-and-russian-influence-in-europe/> (Accessed: 23 June 2022).

Stradner, I. (2022) ‘The War in Ukraine and the Western Balkans’, American Enterprise Institute - AEI. Available at: <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-war-in-ukraine-and-the-western-balkans/> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Stratulat, C. et al. (2021) *Policy Brief: Escaping the Transactional Trap: The way forward for EU Enlargement*, BiEPAG. Available at: <https://biepag.eu/publication/escaping-the-transactional-trap-the-way-forward-for-eu-enlargement/> (Accessed: 24 April 2023).

Stratulat, Corina, Marko Kmezić, Nikolaos Tzifakis, Matteo Bonomi, and Zoran Nechev. (2020), ‘Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Opinion and Integration in the Western Balkans’. 2020. file:///Users/donika/Desktop/CLEAN%20VERSIONS%20/Between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place-English-1.pdf.

Strelkov, A. (2016) The EU and rule of law promotion in Western Balkans – a new role for candidate states’ parliaments. *East European Politics*, 32(4), pp. 505-524.

Subotic, J. (2011) Europe is a State of Mind: Identity and Europeanization in the Balkans. *International Studies Quarterly*, 55(2), pp. 309-330.

Surubaru, N. and Nitoiu, C. (2020) One decade onwards: assessing the impact of European Union membership on Bulgaria and Romania. *European Politics and Society*.

Szasz, P. C. (1995) Peacekeeping in Operation: A Conflict Study of Bosnia. *Cornell International Law Journal*, 28(3), pp. 685-699.

Szpala, M. (2016) Hostages to dialogue. The process of normalising Serbian-Kosovar relations, OSW Centre for Eastern Studies. Available at: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2016-06-08/hostages-to-dialogue-process-normalising-serbian-kosovar> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

Szpala, M. (2018) Serbia-Kosovo negotiations – playing for time under pressure from the West, Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies.

Tcherneva, V. (2018) ‘The price of normalisation: Serbia, Kosovo, and a risky border deal – European Council on Foreign Relations’, ECFR, 13 November. Available at: https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_price_of_normalisation_serbia_kosovo_and_a_risky_border_deal/ (Accessed: 22 June 2022).

- Tcherneva, V. and Morina, E. (2021) How Biden can make a big difference in the Western Balkans, ECFR. Available at: <https://ecfr.eu/article/how-biden-can-make-a-big-difference-in-the-western-balkans/> (Accessed: 21 May 2023).
- Techau, J. (2016) EU Global Strategy: Defining Foreign Policy Interests. [Online] Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/01/15/eu-global-strategy-defining-foreign-policy-interests-pub-62529> [Accessed December 2020].
- The Office of the Serbian President (2022) Meeting with the Ambassador of the United States of America, The President of the Republic of Serbia. Available at: <https://www.predsednik.rs/press-center/press-releases/meeting-with-the-ambassador-of-the-united-states-of-america-31074> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).
- Theuns, T. (2022) ‘The Need for an EU Expulsion Mechanism: Democratic Backsliding and the Failure of Article 7’, *Res Publica*, 28(4), pp. 693–713. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-021-09537-w>.
- Tilev, D. (2015) *The new Enlargement Methodology: Enhancing the Accession Process*, Skopje: Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis.
- Todorović, I. (2022) Mihajlović, Hill hint at Serbia-US strategic partnership agreement, *Balkan Green Energy News*. Available at: <https://balkangreenenergynews.com/mihajlovic-hill-hint-at-serbia-us-strategic-partnership-agreement/> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).
- Töglhofer, T. and Wunsch, N. (2011) EU-Erweiterungspolitik auf dem westlichen Balkan: Zwischen Stabilisierung und Integration. *Sicherheit + Frieden*, 29(3), p. 141–148.
- Tomini, L. (2014) ‘Reassessing Democratic Consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe and the Role of the EU’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 66(6), pp. 859–891.
- Tomini, L. (2015) *Democratizing Central and Eastern Europe: Successes and failures of the European Union*, Routledge and CRC Press. Available at: <https://www.routledge.com/Democratizing-Central-and-Eastern-Europe-Successes-and-failures-of-the-Tomini/p/book/9781138716643> (Accessed: 28 May 2023).
- Tomini, L. (2017) *When Democracies Collapse: Assessing Transitions to Non-democratic Regimes in the Contemporary World*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Toneva-Metodieva, L. (2014) Beyond the Carrots and Sticks Paradigm: Rethinking the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism Experience of Bulgaria and Romania. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 15(4), pp. 534-551.
- Toshev, A. and Cheikhameguyaz, G. (2005) The European Union and the Final Status for Kosovo. *The Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 80(1), pp. 273-304.
- Toshkov, D. (2017) The impact of the Eastern enlargement on the decision-making capacity of the European Union. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(2), pp. 177-196.
- Touval, S. (2002) *Mediation in the Yugoslav Wars: The Critical Years, 1990–95*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Transparency International (2018) *Corruption Perceptions Index 2018* Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2018> (Accessed: 21 June 2022).

- Trauner, F. (2007) *EU Justice and Home Affairs Strategy in the Western Balkans Conflicting Objectives in the Pre-Accession Strategy*, Brussels: Center For European Policy Studies CEPS.
- Troncotă, M. (2018) ‘The association that dissociates – Narratives of local political resistance in Kosovo and the delayed implementation of the Brussels Agreement. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 18(2), p. 219–238.
- Tulmets, E. (2007) Policy adaptation from the enlargement to the neighbourhood policy : a way to improve the EU’s external capabilities ?. *Politique européenne*, 2(2), pp. 55-80.
- Turčilo, L. (2013) *Bosnia-Herzegovina and the European Union: Strong European Identity in Spite of Scepticism*, Berlin: Heinrich Boell Stiftung.
- Tziampiris, A. (2012) ‘The Macedonian name dispute and European Union Accession’. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 12(1), pp. 153-171.
- Tzortzi, E. (2008) U.S. outrage as Serb protesters burn embassy | Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-serbia-idUSL2087155420080221> (Accessed: 20 February 2023).
- U.S. Department of State (2007) *Statement on Kosovo by Contact Group Ministers*. Available at: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/93059.htm> (Accessed: 07 November 2023).
- U.S. Department of State (2008) *International Support for Kosovo*, State Gov. Available at: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/ci/kv/c27789.htm> (Accessed: 20 June 2022).
- U.S. Department of State (2021a) *Gabriel Escobar - United States Department of State*. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/biographies/gabriel-escobar/> (Accessed: 21 May 2023).
- U.S. Department of State (2021b) *The Summit for Democracy - United States Department of State*. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/summit-for-democracy/> (Accessed: 21 May 2023).
- U.S. Embassy in Belgrade (2022) *Ambassador Christopher R. Hill, U.S. Embassy in Serbia*. Available at: <https://rs.usembassy.gov/ambassador-christopher-r-hill/> (Accessed: 21 May 2023).
- UK Government (2022) *Kosovo Serb voting within Kosovo in Serbia’s elections: joint statement*, GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/kosovo-serb-voting-within-kosovo-in-serbias-elections-joint-statement> (Accessed: 30 March 2022).
- Ulfelder, J. and Lustik, M. (2007) ‘Modelling Transitions To and From Democracy. *Democratisation*’, 13(3), pp. 351-387.
- Ulgen, S. (2012) ‘Widening Versus Deepening Reloaded’. *Carnegie Europe*. 2012. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/49310>.
- United Nations General Assembly (2010) *Adopting Consensus Resolution*. Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2010/ga10980.doc.htm> (Accessed: 4 April 2022).
- United Nations Security Council (2008) *Ban Ki-moon urges restraint by all sides after Kosovo declares independence*, UN News. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2008/02/249372-ban-ki-moon-urges-restraint-all-sides-after-kosovo-declares-independence> (Accessed: 20 June 2022).
- United Nations Security Council (UNSC), (2010) ‘Security Council Report - Monthly Report’, November, New York: United Nations.

- Uroz, N.L. (2020) 'Populism Amidst Prosperity: Poland's Growth Model and its Socio-Political Outcomes', LEQS Paprt 159/2020 [Preprint].
- Vachudova, M. (2005) *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration After Communism*, Slavic Review. Oxford University.
- Vachudova, M. A. (2002) *The Leverage of the European Union on Reform in Postcommunist Europe*. Turin, ECPR Joint Session Workshops, pp. 2-44.
- Vachudova, M. A. (2018) *EU Enlargement and State Capture in the Western Balkans*. In: J. Džankić, K. Soeren and M. Kmezić, eds. *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans: A Failure of EU Conditionality?*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 63-87.
- Vachudova, M.A. (2006) 'Democratization in Postcommunist Europe: Illiberal Regimes and the Leverage of International Actors', Center for European Studies Working Paper Series #139 [Preprint].
- Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) (2019) *Democratic Declines in Hungary*. Available at: https://v-dem.net/weekly_graph/democratic-declines-in-hungary (Accessed: 18 May 2023).
- Väyrynen, R. (1997). 'Towards Effective Conflict Prevention: A Comparison of Different Instruments'. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 2(1), pp. 1-18.
- Vedran, D. et al. (2018) *Overcoming the Democratisation*. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/14631.pdf> (Accessed: 07 November 2023).
- Veljanoska, K., Andonov, O. and Shibakovski, G. (2014) *The Democratization Process in the Western Balkans in the Last 20 Years: Interethnic Relations and Security Implications*. *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*, 12(2), pp. 29-41.
- Viceré, A. and Maria G. (2019) 'The Future Is Back: The EU, Russia and the Kosovo–Serbia Dispute', Available at: <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/future-back-eu-russia-and-kosovo-serbia-dispute>. (Accessed: 22 May 2023).
- Vilanova, P. (2016) *Kosovo: The Limits of International Post-Conflict Governance*, Barcelona: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs.
- Visoka, G. (2017) *Shaping Peace in Kosovo: The Politics of Peacebuilding and Statehood*. First Edition ed. London: Springer International Publishing and Palgrave Macmillan.
- Visoka, G. and Doyle, J. (2016) 'Neo-Functional Peace: The European Union Way of Resolving Conflicts', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 54(4), pp. 862–877. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12342>.
- Vladisavljev, S. and Ruge, M. (2020) *Serbia's 5G deal with Washington: The art of muddling through*, ECFR. Available at: https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_serbias_5g_deal_with_washington_the_art_of_muddling_through/ (Accessed: 22 May 2023).
- Vogel, T. (2018) *Out of Focus: the EU's Relations with the Western Balkans* | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Brussels office - European Union, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. Available at: <https://eu.boell.org/en/2018/10/09/out-focus-eus-relations-western-balkans> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).
- Vojvodic-Medic, F. (2021) *How to Downsize Russia in the Balkans*, GMFUS. Available at: <https://www.gmfus.org/news/how-downsize-russia-balkans> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Von der Leyen, U. (2019) Speech by President-elect von der Leyen in the EP, European Commission - European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/speech_19_6408 (Accessed: 24 June 2022).

Voskopoulos, G. (2001) *Western Europe and the Balkans: A Geo-Cultural Approach of International Relations?*, Institute of International Relations.

Vuksanovic, V. (2019) *Why Serbia Won't Stop Playing the Russia Card Any Time Soon*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available at: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/80188> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

Vuksanovic, V. (2020) *The Dragon Lands in Belgrade: LSI IDEAS Strategic Update*. Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/updates/LSE-IDEAS-The-Dragon-Lands-in-Belgrade.pdf>. (Accessed: 22 May 2023).

Vuksanovic, V. (2021) 'How Serbia Became China's Dirty-Energy Dumping Ground', *Foreign Policy*, 16 July. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/16/serbia-china-bri-coal-copper-dirty-energy-dumping-ground/> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).

Vuksanovic, V. (2022) 'Serbia's Arms Deals Show It's Tilting Away From Russia and Toward China', *Foreign Policy*, 11 May. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/11/serbias-arms-deals-show-its-tilting-away-from-russia-and-toward-china/> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).

Wagner, W. (2003) *Why the EU's common foreign and security policy will remain intergovernmental: a rationalist institutional choice analysis of European crisis management policy*. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 10(4), pp. 576-595.

Walker, C. and Habdank-Kończakowska, S. (2012) *Fragile Frontier: Democracy's Growing Vulnerability in Central and Southeastern Europe*. New York: Freedom House. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/NIT_2012_Booklet_0.pdf.

Webber, D. (2016) 'Declining Power Europe: The Evolution of the European Union's World Power in the Early 21 Century', *European Review of International Studies*, 3(1), pp. 31-52.

Weber, B. and Bajrami, A. (2018) 'How to Recognize Reality? The Issue of Serbia's Recognition of Kosovo', Prishtina: Kosovo Foundation for Open Society.

Weber, B. and Bajrami, A. (2020) *What can Kosovo offer Belgrade? Bilateral Issues in the Negotiations on a Comprehensive Agreement*. Prishtina: Kosovo Foundation for Open Society. Available at: <https://kfos.org/storage/app/uploads/public/5f2/015/78d/5f201578d8dce857544417.pdf>.

Weber, S. (1995) 'European Union Conditionality', in B. Eichengreen, J. Frieden, and J. von Hagen (eds) *Politics and Institutions in an Integrated Europe*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer (European and Transatlantic Studies), pp. 193-220. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-57811-3_9.

Weber, W. and Vogel, T. (2020) [Opinion] *Why Miroslav Lajčák is the wrong choice for EU envoy*, EUobserver. Available at: <https://euobserver.com/opinion/147510> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Weller, M. (2008) *Negotiating the final status of Kosovo*. Paris: Inst. for Security Studies (Chaillot papers, 114). Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/cp114.pdf>.

Weller, M., 2008. *The Vienna Negotiations on the Final Status for Kosovo*. *International Affairs*, 84(4), pp. 659-681 .

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD). (2019) 'Parliamentary Boycotts in the Western Balkans'. [Online] Available at: <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/WFD-WB-Boycotts.pdf> [Accessed January 2020].

Whitman, R. G., 2016. The UK and EU Foreign, Security and Defence Policy after Brexit: Integrated, Associated or Detached?. *National Institute Economic Review*, 238(1).

Wolff, Guntram B., John Erik Fossum, Sergio Fabrinini, and Magdalena Gora. (2022) 'The Conference on the Future of Europe: Vehicle for Reform versus Forum for Reflection?' Bruegel | The Brussels-Based Economic Think Tank. 11 December 2022. <https://www.bruegel.org/blog-post/conference-future-europe-vehicle-reform-versus-forum-reflection>. [Accessed January 2020].

Wunsch Gaarmann, M. (2022) 'As Ukraine pushes for EU candidate status, enlargement hopes fade in the Western Balkans', *EUROPP*, 22 June. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2022/06/22/as-ukraine-pushes-for-eu-candidate-status-enlargement-hopes-fade-in-the-western-balkans/> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Wunsch, N. (2015) Coming full circle: Differential empowerment in the EU accession process. [Online] Available at: <http://aei.pitt.edu/79710/1/Wunsch.pdf> [Accessed 5 December 2020].

Wunsch, N. and Blanchard, P. (2023) 'Patterns of democratic backsliding in third-wave democracies: a sequence analysis perspective', *Democratization*, 30(2), pp. 278–301. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2130260>.

Wunsch, N., Stratulat, C., Tzifakis, N. and Kmezić, M. (2019) 'Overcoming enlargement deadlock: an action plan for the incoming EU leadership', Graz: BiEPAG. [Online] Available at: <https://biepag.eu/publication/overcoming-enlargement-deadlock-an-action-plan-for-the-incoming-eu-leadership/> [Accessed 5 December 2020].

Xhambazi, V. (2019) 'EU Initiatives Signal No Breakthrough in Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue', D4D Institute. Available at: <https://d4d-ks.org/en/papers/eu-initiatives-signal-no-breakthrough-kosovo-serbia-dialogue/> (Accessed: 19 February 2023).

Youngs, R. (2022) EU Democracy After the Conference on the Future of Europe, Carnegie Europe. Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/05/12/eu-democracy-after-conference-on-future-of-europe-pub-87110> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).

Zahn, R. (2013) European enlargement and the economic crisis: impact and lasting effects. [Online] Available at: https://pure.strath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/44345257/Zahn_European_enlargement_and_the_economic_crisis_impact.pdf [Accessed 2020].

Zaimi, G. (2023) Kosovo and Serbia lose if their leaders delay and deliberately block peace process - Robert Lansing Institute. Available at: <https://lansinginstitute.org/2023/02/06/kosovo-and-serbia-lose-if-their-leaders-delay-and-deliberately-block-peace-process/> (Accessed: 19 February 2023).

Zandee, D. (2016) EU Global Strategy: from design to implementation. [Online] Available at: <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2016-02/EU%20Global%20Strategy%20-%20AP%20-%20August%202016.pdf> [Accessed December 2020].

Zhelyazkova, A. et al. (2019) 'European Union Conditionality in the Western Balkans: External Incentives and Europeanisation', in J. Džankić, S. Keil, and M. Kmezić (eds) *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans: A Failure of EU Conditionality?* Cham: Springer International Publishing (New Perspectives on South-East Europe), pp. 15–37. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91412-1_2.

Zhelyazkova, A., Nechev, Z., Damjanovski, I. and Schimmelfennig, F. (2018) ‘European Union Conditionality in the Western Balkans: External Incentives and Europeanisation’, Palgrave Macmillan.

Zivanovic, M. (2018) ‘Serbian President to Seek Putin’s Support on Kosovo’, Balkan Insight, 1 October. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/10/01/serbian-president-to-ask-for-putin-s-support-over-kosovo-10-01-2018/> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

Zivanovic, Marija (2017) ‘Russian Centre in Serbia Scorns Espionage Claims’, Balkan Insight, 11 September. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/09/11/russian-serbian-humanitarian-centre-rebuffs-spy-accusations-09-08-2017/> (Accessed: 27 June 2022).

Żornaczuk, T.(2012) Breakthrough in the Dialogue with Kosovo Brings Serbia Closer to the EU. Polish Institute of International Affairs, Volume 32.

Zuokui1, L. (2010) ‘EU’s Conditionality and the Western Balkans’ Accession Roads. Journal on European Perspectives of the Western Balkans, 2(1), pp. 79-98.

Zupančič, R. and Pejič, N. (2018) ‘The EU’s Affair with Kosovo’, in R. Zupančič and N. Pejič (eds) Limits to the European Union’s Normative Power in a Post-conflict Society: EULEX and Peacebuilding in Kosovo. Cham: Springer International Publishing (SpringerBriefs in Population Studies), pp. 33–63. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77824-2_3.

Zweers, W. and Shopov, V. (2020) ‘China and the EU in the Western Balkans’, Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/china-and-the-eu-in-the-western-balkans.pdf>.

Zweers, W. et al. (2022) ‘The EU as a promoter of democracy or ‘stabilitocracy’ in the Western Balkans?’, p. 55.

Zweers, W., 2019. Between effective engagement and damaging politicisation. Prospects for a credible EU enlargement policy to the Western Balkans. [Online] Available at: https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/PB_Western_Balkans_May19.pdf [Accessed January 2020].

List of Interviews

POSITION ²²	DATE OF THE INTERVIEW	CODE
Interview with former High EU Official supporting the EU facilitated Dialogue in 2011 (technical phase)	24 June 2021	1
Former EU Official, EEAS	21-Mar-22	2
Policy Analyst / UK	21-Nov-21	3
Think Tank Expert and Academic / U.S.	17-Sept-22	4

²² Full list containing names of the people interviewed can be provided on request.

Former Kosovo Diplomat, Former Liaison Officer of Kosovo in Serbia, Think Tank	04-Apr-22	5
Former High EU Official, EEAS	31-Mar-22	6
Former Political Advisor / Serbia	15-Nov-22	7
Former Member of the EU Parliament / Austria	19-May-22	8
Former Foreign Minister and Think Tank Expert / North Macedonia	23-Nov-22	9
Interview with Political Advisor on Kosovo -Serbia Dialogue to Kosovo Prime Minister	26-Apr-22	10
Think Tank Expert / Germany	22-May-22	11
Think Tank Expert and Academic/ Greece	22-Nov-22	12
Expert on Russian hybrid warfare and US-European relations / Russia	21-May-23	13
Think Tank Expert / Slovakia	25-May-22	14

List of Cited Agreements Reached in Brussels

Freedom of Movement. [Online] Available at: <https://dialogue-info.com/freedom-of-movement/> [Accessed 2021].

Agreement on Cadastral Records 2011. [Online] Available at: <https://dialogue-info.com/cadastral-records/> [Accessed 2021].

Agreement on Customs. [Online] Available at: <https://dialogue-info.com/custom-stamps/> [Accessed 2021].

Agreement on the recognition of Diplomas. [Online] Available at: <https://dialogue-info.com/recognition-of-diplomas/> [Accessed 2021].

Civil Registry Books. [Online] Available at: <https://dialogue-info.com/civil-registry-books-2/> [Accessed 2021].

Integrated Border/Boundary Management. [Online] Available at: <https://dialogue-info.com/integrated-border-boundary-management/> [Accessed 2021].

Exchanging Liaison Officers. [Online] Available at: <https://dialogue-info.com/exchanging-liaison-officers/> [Accessed 2021].

First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations/ Justice. [Online] Available at: http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Kosovo_Report_on_State_of_Play_in_the_Brussels_Dialogue_15_June_2016-signed.pdf [Accessed 2021].

Local Elections/Establishment of Serb-majority Municipalities, 2013. [Online] Available at: <https://dialogue-info.com/local-elections-establishment-of-serbian-municipalities/> [Accessed 2021].

Regional Representation and Cooperation 2012. [Online] Available at: <https://dialogue-info.com/regional-representation-and-cooperation-2/> [Accessed 2021].

First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations/ Police 2013. [Online] Available at: <https://dialogue-info.com/police/> [Accessed 2021].

General Principles/ Main Elements of ASM/CSM (2015) The Dialogue. Available at: <https://dialogue-info.com/association-community-of-serb-majority-municipalities/> [Accessed 2021].