

Annex 1: The European Movement in Serbia for a more ambitious approach to enlargement policy¹

The European Movement in Serbia (EMS) advocates a bold reform of EU enlargement policy to complement its recent reengagement with the Western Balkans. “The EU should show the political readiness to make enlargement functional, putting it at the centre of its policies by devoting resources and funds” (p. 25), and reaffirming the non-negotiability of European values. To this end, the EMS has elaborated on a number of proposals that includes four central fields of the accession process:

A) A “new methodology for membership negotiations” (p.11):

- “Roadmaps, as a new instrument in the accession process, should be introduced in every phase of accession in order to streamline the reforms necessary for reaching the next step” (p. 25);
- “The qualified majority voting procedure in the European Council should be extended to the decision-making process in enlargement policy,” (p. 26) while unanimity should be maintained only for starting and closing accession negotiations with an individual country;
- Including the WBs in “the internal work of EU institutions as much as possible (although without voting rights), as well as in discussions about the future of the EU” (p. 26).

B) More funds for the accession process, linked to effective conditionality (p. 17):

- The EU should “devote more funds for enlargement to the WBs. This increase would start with the new MFF 2021-2027, with the goal of reaching 2% of individual WB countries’ GDP in the year of their accession to the EU” (p. 26);
- “It is necessary to develop, strengthen and maintain the capacities of countries to manage increased funds. Therefore it is necessary to ensure that the new financial pre-accession instrument for the MFF 2021-2027 is prepared on time and harmonised with the requirements of structural funds – especially in programming, financial management, conditionality and control” (p. 26).

C) A “better use of the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA) as frameworks for a faster adaptation to single market rules and for faster economic development” (p. 20):

- “Through the full exercise of possibilities envisaged in existing SAAs, some benefits of the EU internal market can be extended to the WB without the need to amend agreements” (p. 26);
- The EU should “sign bilateral Agreements on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products with WB countries to eliminate technical barriers to trade, which are currently the main obstacles when goods are exported from the WBs to the European Union” (p.26);
- “The EU should guide the WBs in using state aid rules within SAAs as a policy tool to gradually redirect public funds from perpetuating economic inefficiencies to supporting investments that are compatible with the internal market”. The EU should demonstrate “flexibility for national

¹ The proposal has been written by Vladimir Međak, Duško Lopandić, Maja Bobić and Ivan Knežević for the European Movement in Serbia with the title: “Twelve Proposals for EU enlargement from the Western Balkans”. Their proposal is presented here by Matteo Bonomi in a brief summary; the entire paper can be found at the following link: <http://www.emins.org/product/twelve-proposals-for-eu-enlargement-from-the-western-balkans/>.

investment policies aligned with the EU agenda, allowing for the reindustrialization of the region” (p. 26).

D) A focus on the rule of law as the ultimate readiness test for EU membership (p.23):

- “Developing the rule of law and reaching EU standards in judicial independence, in the fight against corruption and organised crime, and in the protection of fundamental rights by the WB should be the ultimate test of readiness for EU membership. No leniency should be accorded in this area. In order to change the situation of “state capture” in the WBs, the EU should identify where such state capture exists and name the offending actors in the individual country reports” (p. 27).

Annex 2: EU Enlargement: A Six Percent Target for the Western Balkans²

By Tobias Flessenkemper and Dušan Reljić

If the countries of the Western Balkans are to have any prospect of overcoming almost three decades of economic stagnation and crisis, they will need to double their annual growth rates. This will necessitate a fundamental rethinking of the European Union's enlargement policy.

A recent study by the World Bank indicates that the economies of the Western Balkans will need to grow at annual rates of at least 6 percent if they are to match the EU average by the end of the 2030s. After a decade without growth, the current figures scarcely exceed 3 percent, too low to catch up. Yet a comparable level of per-capita GDP is what would be required to strengthen democracy and rule of law on the road to EU membership. Instead the gap is growing and exposing the region to the temptations of populism, nationalism and other anti-European currents.

EU enlargement policy in the Western Balkans has been a story of failure. That must be admitted, even if Brussels points to the opening of new negotiating chapters with Montenegro and Serbia, or to the fourth Western Balkans Summit bringing together leading EU members with the accession candidates in Trieste on 12 July (as part of the Berlin Process). Many in the region suspect that Brussels only shows an interest when local crises threaten the Union itself: as migration corridor, as source of organised crime, as staging post for Islamist terrorism, or as sideshow in the West's conflict with Moscow.

Washington Consensus Falls Flat

The states of the Western Balkans have largely implemented the fundamental reforms demanded by the European Union, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund under the so-called Washington consensus. They have opened their markets to the European Union, privatised and liberalised their economies, and imposed austerity policies. The idea behind the Washington consensus is for reforms – in combination with incremental adoption of the EU's laws, principles and activities – to create market economies and pave the way for EU membership.

The “invisible hand” of the market can indeed be seen at work here, but not in the manner foreseen in the transition blueprints. In many cases nepotism and weak public administration prevent political and economic alignment with the European Union. This is the bitter legacy of the mistaken privatisation policies of the 1990s, when collective enterprises were first nationalised and then passed into the hands of a few – above all politically connected – tycoons. Since then the economies have been ransacked, with the ongoing court cases over the mega-holdings Agrokor in Croatia and Delta in Serbia merely the tip of the iceberg.

But the biggest impediment is the region's structural economic relations with the core EU. Financial and trading relations, geographical position and political ties already make the Western Balkans de facto a part of the EU – but with many disadvantages and no voting rights. And there is no sign of a catching-up process: industries have vanished, unable to withstand competition from the European Union; foreign debt is growing; and unemployment remains high, with almost half the under-30s out of work. Instead a

² This proposal was launched by Tobias Flessenkemper and Dušan Reljić on occasion of the Reflection Forum in Trieste on 26-27 June 2017. A link to the original text is here: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/point-of-view/eu-enlargement-a-six-percent-target-for-the-western-balkans/>.

bloated administration and service sector is emerging, with a low intensity of value creation. Investment is also inadequate, especially in education and in research and development.

This creates a situation where it is impossible to produce sufficient exportable goods and services – nor even to maintain existing infrastructure such as the motorways connecting the southern EU member states, Turkey and the Middle East to the core EU. Migration push factors remain strong, drawing the best-trained and most motivated workers to the core EU.

The region's external debt and all its consequences ultimately stem from the trade deficit totalling €98 billion that these small open economies accrued with the European Union between 2005 and 2016. In order to make up the shortfall, the states of the Western Balkans have borrowed heavily abroad, again largely from EU-based banks. These in turn control most of the region's own banking sector, so they profit both from their lending to the states, and directly from the region's businesses and consumers.

In such a situation further EU integration offers no attraction for the region's citizens. The fate of their Greek neighbours underlines their doubts as to whether the current EU model is right for them.

Integration of the Western Balkans Could Benefit the European Union

What the EU accession candidates in the Western Balkans urgently need is a development perspective and more public investment in order to double their annual growth rates to at least 6 percent. To that end they should be granted access to the EU's structural funds, be permitted to participate in the EU's financial stability mechanisms, and be treated in all other respects as part of the European integration project. It is in the EU's own economic interests to make the region more attractive for trade and investment, and to join up its transport, energy and digital networks. This would also lessen the pressure of migration. The potential political gains are obvious too: A strengthening of regional security in south-eastern Europe would boost the EU's standing in a new era of geopolitics. The EU's democracy model could gain a new lease of life, acting to constrain the influence of other actors like Russia, Turkey and Islamic states – as well as the erratic Trump administration.

Now is the time to prepare a realignment of policy towards south-eastern Europe. The EU enters a new institutional cycle in 2019 with elections to the European Parliament, a new Commission and a new EU budget. And on the other side, Brexit could create space for more active structural and cohesion policies. The objective of the new EU-27 should be to integrate the countries of the Western Balkans. Success for its economic and social model there would boost the EU's credibility as an assertive strategic actor capable of creating a comparable standard of living across Europe.

Annex 3: Material aspects of EU relations with the Western Balkans³

By Aleksandar Kovačević

Aside from the complex accession process, with its security, governance, democratization, trade and many other dimensions, the European Union and the Western Balkans have developed a range of mutual physical or material relations. These relations determine the quality of governance, trade relations and the need for connectivity infrastructure. Therefore, it may be desirable to consider these aspects in the context of the EU accession process.

Unprecedented deforestation is the key process across Western Balkan territory. It is a determinant of the quality of governance, security of property rights, rule of law and the ability of these countries to use available resources. The deforestation pattern remains unaltered by nominal political changes and it has remained largely the same during conflicts in 1990's, after these conflicts and during EU accession years till now.

Use of fuel wood by over 2/3 of households as the main source of heat causes indoor and outdoor air pollution beyond any acceptable standard in Europe. It affects the health and human rights of the majority of the population while creating a disproportional impact on women. Both fuel wood and district heating services (where available) are inefficient and expensive beyond what is affordable for the majority of people. With few exceptions, families are exposed to energy poverty: unable to heat adequate living space, unable to maintain necessary hygiene standards, needing to compromise between heat, food, health and education. These people desperately switch to electricity for heating during very cold days causing massive spikes in electricity demand and network losses.

Almost the entire capacity of Western Balkan hydro energy is engaged in supporting these social needs. Electricity trade is altered by limitations at high voltage grid capacity and cross border capacities have been taken off the market. Although this problem may be addressed by investments into additional grid capacity, its main cause still needs to be addressed.

As a consequence, the European energy market is deprived of its largest flexible renewable energy source that may support the deployment of intermittent renewable energy across Central Europe, Greece and Italy.

Deforestation accumulated over 26 years has already caused a massive change in water regimes to rivers and large hydro power plants. The sequence of flooding from 2014 demonstrates the scale of the problem.

Over 3/5 of electricity is generated by lignite fired power plants that makes the Balkans GDP the most carbon intensive in Europe. As these plants are scheduled to close within 5-8 years, during which time their performance is likely to degrade further, a shortage of energy and further exposure to Russian or Chinese influence, as well as significant challenges with security of supply, cross border disputes and further unemployment, seems the most likely scenario.

Local governance patterns and energy price distortions in the wider European market serve as an impediment to private investment into power and heat generation. Availability of financing to local governments exposes any private investor to a significant obsolescence risk and leads to local utilities

³ This is an input paper presented by Aleksandar Kovačević on occasion of the Reflection Forum hosted in Brussels on July 4, 2018.

gaining limited access to the latest technologies. As a result, responses to strategic challenges are limited to obsolete technology options and business models.

There is a risk that the region will not be able to fulfil its obligations to the Energy Community Treaty and the UNFCCC Paris Agreement and this may create difficult precedents within these international treaties.

Following the relative success of the International Corporation for Investments in Yugoslavia (ICIY, 1968-1992) and the UN intervention to rebuild the energy sector (UN OCHA 1999-2003) the critical recommendation is as follows: to accompany the Berlin Process and the EU accession process with a dedicated private investment fund for modern renewable energy in the Balkans, plus reforestation and the eradication of energy poverty in the region.

It is to be expected that such a deliberate intervention is going to enhance local employment, improve the security of supply and remove the root-causes of bad governance including soft budget constraints stemming from the use of lignite, the import of gas and deforestation.

Annex 4: A proposal for a safer and more accountable macro-financial management in the Western Balkans in support of a faster and sustainable economic growth in the region⁴

By Fikret Čaušević

Over the last two decades financial systems in Western Balkan countries have been developed as bank-based financial systems. These systems are characterised by the leading role of banks in providing additional sources of liquidity and financing sources for the businesses in the region. On the other hand the most important source of financial funds used for financing the infrastructure have been loans from international or regional financial institutions such as IBRD, EBRD, EIB or, in recent years, bilateral agreements for constructing hard infrastructure and building power plants.

Although the two dominant sources of financial funds mentioned above have been indispensable in reconstructing and developing the regional economies, in order to develop (deepen and broaden) domestic financial markets and to increase the transparency of the use of financial resources and the accountability of the domestic politicians in the process of financing infrastructural projects, the region needs safer sources of financing not being based on a typical loan-based type of financing. The loan-based type of financing increases the problem of macro-liquidity management as the countries are required to make a monthly repayment of the loan that contains both a proportional part of face value of a loan and the interest on the loan. Although some countries in the region have been issuing government bonds denominated in respective national currencies (Serbia, Albania, Macedonia, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina the entities have issued entity-bonds and there have been no government bonds issued by the Bosnian Authorities at the state level) those bonds cannot be treated as safe financial assets or at least not in the sense of high-quality-liquid assets (HQLA) - as defined and introduced by Basel III international standards. So in order to deepen and broaden the domestic financial markets and to increase the accountability in spending public resources it could be very useful to establish a Euro-Balkan Guarantee Fund.

The Euro-Balkan Guarantee Fund could be established by the governments of the most important economic partners from the EU with Western Balkan countries. These are the following countries: Germany, Austria, Italy, Slovenia, and it could be useful to add the governments of France, the Netherlands, the UK, and Belgium. The Euro-Balkan Guarantee Fund would issue guarantees for the new type of financial asset – euro-Balkan bonds. Euro-Balkan bonds would be issued by the governments of Western Balkan countries and would be denominated in the domestic currencies of those countries. As those bonds would be guaranteed by the Euro-Balkan Guarantee Fund, they would be treated as the safest financial assets in the region and according to the Basel III standards would be treated as (at least) double A ranked financial assets. These bonds would be issued with maturities of a minimum of 10 years, but also with maturities of 15, 20 and 30 years. As those bonds would be backed-up by the EU countries the required return (yield) on them would be lower and the prices of those assets would be (correspondingly) higher. From the perspective of financial investors (the buyers of those bonds) this type of asset would offer a safer type of savings and a more liquid type of assets in comparison to the existing ones, and would improve the financial management of institutional investors in the region such as private pension funds and investment funds.

⁴ This is an input paper presented by Fikret Čaušević in occasion of the Reflection Forum hosted in Brussels on July 4, 2018.

The Euro-Balkan Guarantee Fund would benefit from „a triple insurance“ for giving the guarantees: the first right for the Fund would be a guarantee-equity swap held by the Fund. This basically means that the Fund would be given the possibility to swap a guarantee for equity in the public utility companies owned by the governments in the region whose assets and cash-flows would be used as a pledge in the Fund. Secondly, the Fund would have a golden share in public utility companies being managed by the respective governments. Thanks to those golden shares (in public utility companies), the EU Guarantee Fund for the Western Balkans would have its professional representatives on the steering boards of these companies and would be able to improve the quality of corporate governance and the accountability of respective managers, while removing the need to privatize those companies in the short-to-medium term. The third type of the Fund's effective control over the use of financial resources gained by selling euro-Balkan government bonds would be a right to oversee budgets every year, thus effectively increasing the transparency of public expenditures in the region. The funds collected by selling euro-Balkan bonds would be used to finance infrastructural projects, preferably the cross-border projects in the region and inter-entirety projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for renewable energy projects, development of export-oriented clusters, and for financing R&D in the region.

In addition to the Euro-Balkan Guarantee Fund another supranational institution backed by some of the EU countries could be extremely useful for the region. This would be the European Stability Mechanism for the Western Balkans (ESMWB). This institution should be established and financial resources be subscribed and paid-in by Germany, France, Austria, Italy, the UK, and by six countries in the region: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Albania. ESMWB would have the five possible sources of financial support similar to that of the ESM for euro-zone countries. Namely, a direct financial support to the governments in need of financial resources (under the conditions of the Memorandum of Understanding), financial support for recapitalizing the banking industry, ESMWB direct support for the development of the primary capital market especially when it comes to the issuance of new types of financial assets, ESMWB direct support to the secondary capital market, and support for extending precautionary credit lines for Western Balkan countries.

The above mentioned two types of supranational financial institutions that would be directly managed and supported by the EU (core countries of the EU) would significantly improve and support the level of financial stability, would allow for a better and easier macro-liquidity management of WB countries, and would increase the effective tools of control over the use of financial resources for financing capital and long-term projects in the Western Balkans.

Sarajevo, 10 July 2018

Annex 5: Initiative for the opening of the European Social Fund for the Western Balkans by the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of Serbia⁵

Whereas the Western Balkan countries have been exposed to increasing pressure by international financial institutions and the EU for stabilising their macroeconomic outlook, this has proved to be a drain on the provision of adequate funds for social development. This is partly reflected in socio-economic indicators, particularly in the form of high unemployment rates, extremely high rates of absolute and relative poverty, and an increasingly evident phenomenon of brain drain and youth exodus from the region. Moreover, despite WB governments' adoption of the European Semester formula through the drafting and implementation of an Economic Reform Programme and an Employment and Social Reform Programme, the amount of funds available for the enlargement countries for implementing structural reforms stemming from these processes are far from sufficient. For example, Serbia today receives 20 million euro annually for the sector of social development within the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), whereas if it were already an EU member state today it would have the right to approximately ten times this amount.

In order to face this social emergency in the Western Balkan countries, the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit has advanced an initiative, in May 2017, to enable WB countries to use funds from the European Social Fund for the implementation of the measures envisaged by the Economic Reform Programmes and the Employment and Social Reform Programmes. Various options are available for the implementation of the initiative:

Option A: An amendment to the Regulation no. 1304/2013 on the European Social Fund would enable the limited use of funds by the WB countries;

Option B: Without amending the Regulation, networking and cooperation would be made possible between projects financed by ESF and those financed under IPA within areas of common interest (e.g. in the field of youth employment), securing additional funds from the EU budget for such purposes;

Option C (as an independent, or subsidiary activity in case of options A and/or B): The European Commission and the governments in the region would establish a platform for the exchange of expertise in the use of ESF, and/or IPA funds in areas of common interest (e.g. drafting technical documentation for social infrastructure projects).

⁵ The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of Serbia launched the initiative in May 2017. The summary of the initiative was written by Matteo Bonomi.

The Government of Serbia established the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit in July 2009. It is mandated to strengthen Government capacities to develop and implement social inclusion policies based on good practices in Europe. The Swiss Confederation is providing support to the Government of the Republic of Serbia to enhance the national social inclusion process in the period 2009 – 2021,

Annex 6: Away with the enlargement bogeyman: Reforming the EU Enlargement Policy for a swifter accession of the Western Balkans⁶

In a recent paper of the European Policy Centre of Belgrade (CEP), Milena Lazarević argued it was necessary to rethink the EU's enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans. In the face of a prolonged EU association and accession process of the Western Balkan countries and an increasingly negative attitude among EU citizens regarding further enlargements of the Union, a new approach is needed in order to both accelerate the process and eliminate the intimidating appearance of the enlargement policy for EU member states and their own national publics.

To this end, one solution “could be to render the point of accession less formidable. Instead of immediately gaining access to almost all EU policies, access to specific benefits of membership could be made more gradual and conditional with the achievement of certain reform benchmarks” (p. 6).

The key aim of the proposal is to redesign EU's policy approach towards the Western Balkans by integrating the enlargement policy with a post-accession conditionality mechanism. The proposal is articulated along four pillars:

- *Gradual access to EU policies.* In addition to Schengen and Eurozone, the range of policy areas for which access would be delayed after EU accession could be extended (e.g. to the freedom of movement of workers). This revised enlargement policy “would lead to a kind of ‘membership minus’ at the moment of accession, with a clear roadmap for gaining access to new policy areas based on the achievement of benchmarks which would be laid out in the accession treaty” (p. 6).
- *A multi-tier sanctioning mechanism.* Introducing a new sanctioning mechanism where there is a breach of the agreed conditions of accession, tied to the fundamental membership criteria – particularly rule of law, economic governance and public administration reform. The mechanism should not depend on unanimous voting by member states, to enable simple enforcement, and the severity of measures could vary, depending on the gravity of breaches.
- *A credible monitoring and reporting mechanism.* The backbone of the proposal is the development of a credible monitoring and reporting mechanism to show the state of affairs in new member states, and providing the base on which decisions would be made. Similar instruments, such as the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania, have attracted several criticisms, especially regarding their lack of adequate rewards and sanctions. The new monitoring and reporting mechanism should be able to neutralise these deficiencies through the combination of the idea of gradual access to EU policies and a multi-tier sanctioning mechanism.
- *Support system.* The mechanism should be complemented by a set of support measures designed to assist in the fulfilment of the benchmarks to access new policy areas. These could include expert peer support from member states and relevant international organisations, providing assistance in particularly vulnerable areas.

⁶ Milena Lazarević (2018). *Away with the enlargement bogeyman: Reforming the EU Enlargement Policy for a prompter acceptance of the Western Balkans*. European Policy Centre (CEP) Discussion Paper: <http://cep.org.rs/en/publications/away-with-the-enlargement-bogeyman/>. The summary of the proposal was written by Matteo Bonomi.

Annex 7: Solidarity as a strategic response to unpredictability in EU accession matters: why the Western Balkans should risk standing up for each other as a region united by a common purpose

By Florent Marciacq⁷

“Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto solidarity*” (emphasis by the author).

The Schuman Declaration, Paris, 9 May 1950.

Solidarity is a fundamental value of the European Union (EU) facing a dramatic crisis, a bad omen for the pursuit of European integration. The Western Balkans should remind the EU of the importance of this value. Rather than pleading individually for accession in a context of high unpredictability, they should walk the talk and show unconditional solidarity by uniting their European perspectives as a sign of reconciliation and good neighbourliness. Their political courage would be rewarded in many ways, by an increase of their leverage for faster accession, by deeper transformation and above all by taking pride in making the EU a better political order.

The EU’s commitment to solidarity is a historical reality enshrined in the Treaties as a basic value (art. 2. TEU), in relation to its overarching aim (art. 3 TEU) and a number of policy approaches (in arts. 24, 67 TEU and 222 TFEU). But EU politics today does not reflect this commitment and rather exudes a lack of solidarity at all levels. Perceived inequalities among citizens are on the rise, fuelled by a socio-economic model promoted by the EU internally as well as externally which encourages the dismantlement of social and redistributive policies and raises intergenerational issues. This rise in perceived inequalities exacerbates in turn frustrations, conveniently harnessed by xenophobic, nationalist and Eurosceptic movements. Less solidarity leads to greater divisions and (self)exclusion. The consequences can be dramatic. The European sovereign debt crisis, the refugee crisis, the widening of East/West and North/South dividing lines across the European continent and the impending withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU are challenges in the history of the EU, which conspicuously shine by the absence of *de facto* solidarity.

Likewise, in the Western Balkans, the EU relies on the “regatta principle”, arguing that constructive competition is a better driving force than solidarity in the realisation of their accession perspectives. The limitations of this approach in a region still marked by post-conflict divisions are obvious. Competition has not been constructive and generates zero-sum game calculations, undermining reconciliation and good neighbourly relations. But the trauma of the 2004 enlargement wave, which has not vanished in most EU member states, hinders the advancement of another approach prioritising solidarity in effectively addressing the specific challenges common to the whole region. This approach would entail the re-framing of the EU’s accession policy as a regional process, rather than a juxtaposition of national projects. It would imply a joint commitment of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia; a commitment establishing a solidarity-based community of destiny, interlinking their European perspectives and ready to stand up for each other.

⁷ Florent Marciacq, PhD, is Deputy Secretary General and Research Fellow at the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe. This proposal was launched on occasion of the Reflection Forum in Trieste on 26-27 June 2017. A link to a related publication is here: the <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/13948.pdf>

Surprising though it may seem, there is an appetite for this approach in the region. To improve their conditions, citizens across the Western Balkans believe more in regional cooperation than EU accession (Balkan Barometer 2017). And more has been achieved in the past 5 years with the Berlin Process in this area than in the past 15 years through the EU's regatta approach. Even the accession of Croatia cannot overshadow the limitations striking the socio-economic transformation of the country, its emigration flows and resurgent nationalism. Although the 2018 Enlargement Strategy fails to take over the spirit of the Berlin Process (in its innovatively regional focus), the experience of putting the WB6 into a single boat has borne fruit and has even greater potential. Progress in physical and human connectivity accomplished by the region in the framework of the Berlin Process should be extended to new governance areas (environment, social policies, etc...) and offers fertile ground for taking one decisive step: striving for a more ideational type of connectivity – solidarity in the conduct of national accession policies.

Of course, any deviation from the current approach will be fraught with obstacles. Standing for a grouped accession would run the risk that the accession timing could be recalibrated on the basis of the lowest common denominator. The most prepared countries would have to commit themselves to wait for the least prepared ones, extinguishing any attempt at group accession prospects. But post-accession conditionality would offer here an effective way to address this issue. It would bring the prospect of accession for a self-constituted WB6 group closer, while introducing new rules into the EU family, reducing the likelihood of post-accession backsliding (see the annex 6 in this paper). Compliance studies show that stricter pre-accession conditionality does not necessarily increase post-accession compliance anyway and it is moreover likely that the EU will eventually have to accept states that are not ready. While resonating well with Macron's view on circles of integration, post-accession conditionality could give WB6 leaders the political leverage needed for the WB6 to lobby as a group for faster accession.

Standing for EU accession as a regional rather than a national priority would also create constructive cleavages on WB6 political scenes and force WB6 pro-EU nationalist leaders to clarify their position towards regional solidarity. This would leave room for more cosmopolitan-minded politicians to cooperate across the region and could give reconciliation and good neighbourliness a fresh impetus. In a collective approach premised on solidarity, bilateral disputes and ethnopolitics become largely irrelevant.

So, how do we get there? The first step is to acknowledge a sobering reality: the accession process is not only lengthy (due to slow progress in legal and socio-economic convergence, good-neighbourliness and democratic transformation). It is increasingly hindered by rising unpredictability in enlargement politics. This unpredictability cannot remain unanswered. The initiative to join forces in accession matters as a response to this challenge should come from the WB6 themselves - and their civil societies first of all. It would offer to the EU the reconciliation narrative, which it has been clumsily striving for in the past 2 decades and would be a source of wider inspiration. If the countries of the region succeed in walking the talk, advocating the grouping of their accession perspectives and the prevalence of solidarity over competition, they will set an example in European politics and, by their actions, remind the EU of the importance of this fundamental value. How could the EU and its member states possibly oppose what the EU stood for at the very beginning?