

AUTHORITARIAN TRENDS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: A CHALLENGE FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION?

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ABSTRACT

The countries of the Western Balkans, candidates for membership of the European Union (EU), face multiple challenges. One of these challenges, the subject of this paper, is caused by the authoritarian trends in Serbia and Montenegro. There is a major risk of the emergence of an “illiberal” bloc in South-East Europe. The evolution of the countries' incumbent regimes raises questions around their commitment to the EU's values. The most urgent issues include patronage at the highest levels of the state, press freedom and, to a lesser extent, in Serbia's case, the role of the intelligence services. This paper concludes that it is necessary to relaunch the debate over EU enlargement to the Western Balkans.

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At the 2003 European Council in Thessaloniki, the European Union (EU) vowed to support the “European perspective” of the Western Balkans.² While Croatia has been a member since 2013, Montenegro and Serbia are currently in the final phase of negotiation, having been candidates since 2010 and 2012 respectively, and North Macedonia and Albania’s accession is now being discussed. However, at the EU-Western Balkans summit in Sofia, on 17 May 2018, France and the Netherlands clearly expressed reticence towards the possibility of rapid accession, leaving a bitter taste in the mouths of the participants. The Commission and some of the member states, including Germany, Italy and Austria, emphasise two essential challenges. Although economic criteria are important, given the future integration of these three states into the South-East of Europe, the issue of security comes first. There are multiple challenges: fear of mass migration on the level of the 2015 crisis and the ensuing social tensions; the return of jihadists with unknown destabilising effects in the medium and long-term; not to mention the high level of illegal trafficking which afflicts the region, due to the authorities’ weakness or complicity.

While President Emmanuel Macron has acknowledged the necessity of “anchoring the Western Balkans to the EU,” as well as “the extremely important efforts” agreed to by the candidates, he also underscored the progress still to be made “on the question of the fight against corruption.”³ Calling attention to the unscrupulous practises of local elites in this way is significant. Since the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the “Copenhagen Criteria” are now formally inscribed and listed in the Treaty on European Union (TEU), in article 49.

However, article 2 states that “The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”⁴

In short, European integration is explicitly reserved for democracies. The EU has recently insisted on this point, although it has been applied for decades. This can be seen as a cautious way of fighting against regional illiberalism, especially since the political evolution of the Western Balkans has diverged to the path envisaged by the EU. Since Lisbon, the European Commission tends to apply a stricter reading of the Copenhagen Criteria. Regarding the integration of the remaining Balkan countries, this issue is regularly

1. European Commission, [Strategy for the Western Balkans: EU sets out new flagship initiatives and support for the reform-driven region](#), 6 February 2018.

2. Following the naming convention used by European institutions to refer to the former-Yugoslav European Union members and third countries.

3. Emmanuel Macron, [Press Conference by the President of the Republic in Sofia](#), 18 May 2018.

4. Treaty of European Union, Title 1, article 2, 13 December 2007.

underscored by both the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the European Commissioner for integration, Johannes Hahn. However, the Western Balkans governments seem to be instead following the model of *post-communist mafia states*, according to Balint Magyar's expression.⁵ The prime example he cites is Viktor Orban's Hungary. The country has seen a wave of privatisation following the 2008 financial crisis, which has been accompanied since 2010 by acquisition and accumulation by and for the Prime Minister, as well as his political circle and clients.

This paper considers the two countries which are the furthest in to process of EU integration, Serbia and Montenegro. It will first briefly present the countries' respective Presidents, the true holders of power. They follow the Turkish model whereby power is transferred from the Prime Minister to the President. The two countries' leaders are atypical for Europe, both representing the last generation of Yugoslav communism and a type of ideological "weathervane." The EU, in its aim to stabilise a still-fragile region, is forced to rely on these partners who lean towards Hungary and Turkey, including in their governance models. For many years the EU has aimed to secure the region by relying on strongmen to guarantee stability, while paradoxically also promoting the values which these leaders disdain. Nevertheless, since the May 2018 Sofia summit, European institutions seem to have acknowledged this situation, meaning that the principle of conditionality should (again) become a key element of integration. There is a danger of external influence, be it from Russia, China or the Arabian Peninsula, fuelled in part by local actors for strategic reasons. However, this paper will rather focus on the far more concrete, present danger of the rise in authoritarianism.⁶ For this reason, it will emphasise in particular the concentration of power and patronage at the highest levels of the state, the issue of press freedom, and the role of the intelligence services.

There is a growing risk that the process of European integration might establish or preserve regimes with illiberal tendencies. This is all the more concerning as it will further strengthen this same tendency currently seen within the EU itself, led by Poland and Hungary. Are the liberal democracies of the West in the process of creating their future adversaries?

CONCENTRATING POWER AND PATRONAGE

At the time of writing, Serbia and Montenegro are the two countries furthest in the EU accession process. They are particular for both having parliamentary systems with a long-term leader at the forefront. In May 2017 the Serbian people elected their former Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić (2014-2017). A journalist by profession, in the 1990s he joined the Serbian Radical Party (SRS), founded by Vojislav Šešelj and Tomislav Nikolić. The former has been convicted for crimes against humanity, while the latter is president of the

5. Balint Magyar, *Post-Communist Mafia State: The Case of Hungary*, Noran Libro with Central European University Press, 2016.

6. Dimitar Bechev, *Rival Power's: Russia Influence in Southeast Europe*, Yale University Press, 2017.

National Council for Coordination of Cooperation with the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China.

Having supported the war in Bosnia, the nationalist party barely survived the fall of Slobodan Milošević in October 2000. Milošević's Minister for Information after 1998 had been none other than Vučić. It was not until 2008 that Vučić, together with Nikolić, founded the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), resulting in a profound ideological reversal. These former radicals henceforth presented themselves as pro-EU, albeit still asserting the importance of links with Russia. Since then, the party has won most elections since 2012. Vučić surprised many after being elected president in 2017 by naming a pro-European, homosexual woman as Prime Minister, in a country with conservative values.

There are a number of analogies with Milo Đukanović in Montenegro. He was suspected by the Italian judiciary of participating in smuggling cigarettes into Europe in the 1990s, while the country was under an international embargo.⁷ In 1991, at just 29 years old, Milošević appointed Đukanović as head of the Republic of Yugoslavia. After ousting the old-guard of the Communist Party of Montenegro, Đukanović founded the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS), which he still leads to this day. He was initially perceived favourably in the West as a reformist and a progressive opponent of Milošević. And because he refused to share power, alternating between the posts of Prime Minister and President, he saw his popularity gradually fall. Having traditionally been viewed as Russia's backyard in the region, Montenegro declared its candidature for the EU and NATO in 2008, and has been a member of the latter since 2017.

Nonetheless, behind this pro-European façade hides a rather different reality. First, we will illustrate a fairly general observation: the growing concentration of power in the hands of the leader.⁸

There is a relevant comparison between these regimes and the current situation in Hungary, under the leadership of Viktor Orbán. The two former-Yugoslav states saw an unofficial institutional upheaval, shifting from a parliamentary regime, as outlined by their respective constitutions in 2006 and 2007, towards a semi-presidential one. In practise, this informal change has led to the concentration of power in the hands on the two presidents, giving them unprecedented influence over all areas of society. To a lesser extent, it is tempting to draw parallels with Vladimir Putin's Russia: no matter the institutional role which the strongman occupies, in reality he always holds the reins of power.⁹

In these four countries it is difficult to distinguish the activities of the ruling party from those of the state. The structural reforms implemented by the government, at the request of the EU, are above all a tool to legitimise the incumbent power. Each new election is thus seen by them as a plebiscite and allows the state's resources to be distributed to a clientele.¹⁰

7. Jean-Arnault Dérens, "[Les Balkans occidentaux et la faillite du processus d'élargissement européen](#)," *Politique étrangère*, No. 1, 2015, p. 173-186.

8. Günay Cengiz, "[Decoding the authoritarian code: exercising 'legitimate' power politics through the ruling parties in Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia](#)," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4, p. 4.

9. Foreign Affairs Commission of the French National Assembly, [Rapport sur les Balkans occidentaux](#), Information Report No. 4450, 17 February 2017, p. 76-77, paragraph 98.

10. Günay Cengiz, "[Decoding the authoritarian code: exercising 'legitimate' power politics through the ruling parties in Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia](#)", *op. cit.*, p. 7.

While the fight against corruption has been part of most parties' political agendas since 2002, the problem remains unchanged, especially concerning electoral financing, unregulated lobbying, the excessive protection of representatives, or event buying votes.¹¹ While the practise of bribery may not seem to be a huge day-to-day problem, the local population judges anything which tarnishes their representative or national authorities very severely.¹² In this respect, the imbroglio around the Belgrade Waterfront property holdings, situated in the heart of the city, is especially illustrative. A flagship of foreign investment and a true showcase for the capital's modernisation, the project was supported by the current government, no matter the cost. However, in 2016 the project led to what is known as the "Savamala scandal." Part of the eponymous historic quarter had been surrounded by armed and hooded figures and pedestrians were expelled as construction machines set about demolishing homes and buildings which hindered the construction of the properties.¹³ The mayor, Siniša Mali, refused to admit any responsibility and tried to stifle the affair, despite large demonstrations organised by the shocked and angry population.¹⁴ Despite the scandal, Mali was even at one point seen as a potential candidate for head of the Prime Minister's cabinet, before the former mayor was eventually appointed as Minister of Finance¹⁵.

In Montenegro, the President's entourage take advantage of his stranglehold over society to acquire new investments and lucrative activities.¹⁶ This includes financial embezzlement in the banking sector, such as the government bail-out of banks in which the Đukanović family held many shares, or even the expansion of a coal-fired power station, deemed useless, in which the President's brother is a shareholder.¹⁷ This is not to mention the loans issued by the government to private businesses who hold privileged relations with the family. These loans are never repaid, severely straining public finances.¹⁸ The *Organized crime and corruption reporting project* succinctly describes of most of the affairs in which the President is implicated.

PRESS FREEDOM AND THE MUZZLING OF THE OPPOSITION

The EU considers press freedom and media plurality to be fundamental issues. It was over these very issues that Germany suspended Croatia's accession in 2011. Nevertheless, European integration do not offer a full guarantee: even though Bulgaria is an EU member, it has one of the worst press freedom scores in Europe, even compared to other Balkans countries.¹⁹

11. Transparency International, *Serbia: overview of political corruption*, Anti-corruption helpdesk, 26 March 2014.

12. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Corruption in Serbia: Bribery as experienced by the population*, 2011.

13. Sasa Dragojlo, "Belgrade Officials Deny Green-Lighting Nocturnal Demolition," *BalkanInsight*, 28 April 2016.

14. Radio Slobodna Evropa, "Serbie : qui se souvient encore du scandale de Savamala ?," *Courrier des Balkans*, 1 December 2018.

15. Government of the Republic of Serbia, *Nomination of a new Minister of Finance*.

16. Jasmin Mujanović, *Hunger and Fury: The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2018; Renaud Dorlhiac, "Le Monténégro ou la fragilité à toute épreuve," *Politique étrangère*, No. 4, 2017, p. 115-127.

17. OCCRP, "First Bank - First Family," 20 May 2012; CEE Bank Watch Sector, "The economics of Pljevlja II coal plant - smoke, mirrors and EU law derogations," July 2016.

18. OCCRP, "First Bank - First Family," *op. cit.*

19. RSF rankings 2018, [Bulgaria 111th/180](#).

However, in Serbia the situation appears to have deteriorated since 2012, with the rise to power of SNS, and two years later, with the nomination of Aleksandar Vučić as Prime Minister. This election coincided with the mass privatisation of national and local media companies, which were then acquired by figures close to the government, and a “tabloidisation” of the press, to the detriment of investigative journalism. This has been compounded since 2014 by efforts to restrict independent or pro-European newspapers that cross the government’s sights.²⁰ By December 2015 the process of media privatisation was completed, with almost 72 media companies open to bidders.²¹ The results of these sales were mixed. Around half of the newspaper titles have found a buyer and the tabloid format is now widespread.²² This wave of privatisation, encouraged by the EU, has therefore so far had the inverse effect of what was expected, limiting both the number of media outlets and their financial resources.²³

“Independent” newspapers hence face multiple administrative obstacles, be it increased government inspections or the withholding of public subsidies, as with *Vranjke*.²⁴

This situation is exacerbated for many newspapers, such as *Adria Media Group*, *Kurir* or *Danas*, by threats, defamation campaigns and asset freezes.²⁵ Many methods currently employed are simply distant echoes of those used twenty years ago. Beyond these administrative difficulties, the threats can become far more concrete and individually affect certain journalists.

When the first World Press Freedom Day took place in May 2018, the Serbian Rights Defender presented the current situation in the country: since the beginning of the year there had been around thirty attacks on journalists, two of which were physical.²⁶ This pressure is mostly exerted on journalists investigating members of the criminal underworld, businessmen or politicians seen as close to the government. In 2017 more than ninety attacks took place; one of which was particularly prominent, taking place on the day of President Vučić’s inauguration. Many journalists and protestors were harassed by members of the President’s unofficial security services, recruited from ranks of hooligans and other criminal kingpins in Belgrade.²⁷ The authorities were supported in by the newspapers close to them which enjoyed a considerable audience, such as *Blic*, *Informer* or *Politika*, as well as television stations such as Pink TV. After the presidential election, these media outlets did not miss an opportunity to present the former Prime Minister and his colleagues in a

20. “Être journaliste dans la Serbie de Vucic – Entretien avec Dusko Medic,” *Gare de l’Est*, 20 March 2016.

21. Antonino Castaldo & Alessandra Pinna, “De-Europeanization in the Balkans. Media freedom in post-Milošević Serbia,” *European Politics and Society*, 2018, Vol. 19, No. 3, p. 13.

22. European Commission, *Annual Report on Serbia in the framework of the Enlargement Policy of the European Union*, 17 April 2018, p. 26-27.

23. Antonino Castaldo & Alessandra Pinna, “De-Europeanization in the Balkans. Media freedom in post-Milošević Serbia,” *op. cit.*, p. 12.

24. Matteo Trevisan, “Journalism in Serbia? Funny as an autopsy,” *Osservatorio balcani e caucaso transeuropa*, 5 July 2018.

25. Marija Đukić, “Narod koji ima najkraće pamćenje na svetu Vučić priča o cenzuri medija,” *Preko Ramena*, 10 May 2012.

26. Defender of Rights of the Republic of Serbia, *Defender of Rights Annual Report–2017*, 15 March 2018.

27. Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, “Serbie : Aleksandar Vučić, les hooligans et les réseaux criminels,” *Courrier des Balkans*, 27 July 2017.

favourable light, regularly inviting them on to television shows or to write columns in the newspapers.²⁸

In short, the current President is the focus of a large part of the media coverage, the other candidates being relegated to the role of simple democratic caveats or primary targets for media. The media outlets closest to the government did not hesitate to support every claim made by the President, in particular when it involves discrediting his peers by accusing them of being financed by the West, and especially when they are investigating corruption or clientelism within the government.²⁹ Many media outlets were forced to close down, having found themselves in opposition to the government or, at the very least, having had the misfortune of undertaking too forceful investigations into members of the cabinet and their close friends.³⁰

The President's private life is thus fiercely defended by the media gatekeepers. When the newspaper *Krik* tried to publish compromising information about the head of state, the tabloid *Informer* launched a ferocious defamation campaign, discrediting the investigation.³¹

Any investigation or claim that contradicts the official version extolled by the authorities is dismissed as "American relays" or "Western propaganda" – which still resonates with many citizens. The memory of the 1999 bombing campaign is very much alive in the country, especially when the flames are regularly fanned by successive governments who officially support media or cinema productions which convey a highly Serbo-centric version of the events.³²

As for Montenegro, despite a very small market (a population of 660,000), there are numerous media outlets. However, this diversity is only relative and numerical. Most of newspapers, television and radio channels and websites are public. They require financial support by the state to survive in a private market concentrated in the hands of a few oligarchs, who are themselves close to the government.³³

During the last presidential election, Milo Đukanović greatly favoured certain private partners, rather than rely on national television (RTCG). Throughout 2017, the channel had been subject to immense pressure (in particular the dismissal of its president and certain members of its board of directors).³⁴ Pink M TV, the Montenegrin branch of Pink TV, the media pillar of the Serbian President, is one of President Đukanović's greatest audiovisual supports.³⁵

On the eve of the EU/Balkans summit, which took place on 17 May 2018 in Sofia, the Balkans partners had the opportunity to meet a number of European leaders. They were

28. Miloš Milojević, "[2017 Serbian presidential election: Vučić's neat victory in the election is not so neat](#)," *Visegradpost*, 17 April 2017.

29. Natalia Zaba, "[Serbia Tabloid Targets BIRN, Other Media, as 'Mercenaries'](#)," *BalkanInsight*, 7 November 2016.

30. "[Serbie : la journaliste Tamara Skrozza victime d'un lynchage médiatique par TV Pink](#)," *Courrier des Balkans*, 31 January 2018.

31. "[Serbie : nouvelle attaque contre le site d'investigation Krik](#)," *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso et Courrier des Balkans*, 19 March 2016.

32. N1, "[Serbian defence chief visits crew making film about Kosovo](#)," 6 July 2018.

33. European Union & The Council of Europe, "[Montenegro Media Sector Inquiry with Recommendations for Harmonisation with the Council of Europe and European Union standards](#)," 2017, p. 74-80.

34. OSCE, "[Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Right Election Observation Mission Final Report](#)," April 2018, p. 15.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

accompanied by figures from civil society: essentially NGOs and the media. Aware of the recent deterioration in press freedom, these organisations called on Europe to strengthen its efforts to guarantee that this essential element of democracy can function correctly. Eventually, they demanded the creation of the *Media Freedom Advocacy Fund*, whose objective is to support local journalists who face political pressure.³⁶

THE ROLE OF THE SERBIAN SECURITY SERVICES

Unlike in other countries formerly under Soviet influence, after the fall of the USSR the Serbian interior security apparatus did not undergo reforms.³⁷ There was no comparable democratic transition in the 1990s. The security services played a significant role in prolonging the war, helping finance and arm paramilitary groups, in particular in Republika Srpska.³⁸ Mostly composed of Serbs, the former Yugoslav interior intelligence services survived throughout the 1990s.

Given the country's isolation due to a Western blockage and a pre-existing black market which grew due to the restrictions, there are multiple links with the criminal underworld. The most famous example is undoubtedly that of Željko Ražnatović, known as Arkan. He served as both the leader of a paramilitary group and a mobster linked to the state security services.³⁹ The distinction between paramilitary, government agent and thugs could not be more blurred. However, this overlap did not end with the conflicts. Since the fall of Milošević's regime, many reforms were implemented, in 2002, 2007 and 2009, to regulate the services and their oversized influence.⁴⁰ The most recent of these initiatives seeks to establish parliamentary control through a commission responsible for supervising the intelligence services. After less than ten years of existence, today this Commission is no longer meaningfully active.⁴¹

In practise, the Commission now lies in the hands of the SNS. Of its eighteen members, only five regularly attend meetings, four of whom come from the party. It has been infiltrated by the ruling party and does not function correctly, especially since the other members of parliament lack access to the necessary clearance to examine certain documents.⁴² Beyond the opacity of these services, there is a major issue of politicisation. The director of the Serbian Intelligence Agency (BIA) is a former Minister of Defence and, above all, one of the founder of the ruling party.

36. Martin Dimitrov, "[EU Urged to Pressurise Members on Media Freedom](#)," *BalkanInsight*, 16 May 2018.

37. Marina Caparini, "[Comparing the Democratization of Intelligence Governance in East Central Europe and the Balkans](#)," *Intelligence and National Security*, 2014, Vol. 29, No. 4, p. 13.

38. Maria Vivod, "[In the Shadow of the Serbian Paramilitary Units: Narrative Patterns about the Role of Paramilitary Units in Former Yugoslav Conflict](#)," *Advances in Anthropology*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2013, p. 26, 30.

39. DIDR-OFPPRA, "[La Garde des volontaires serbes](#)," 2 October 2017, p. 3, 5, 7-8.

40. Western Balkans Security Observer, "[Ten Years of Security Sector Reform in Serbia](#)," Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, 2010, p. 37-41.

41. Radio Slobodna Evropa, "[La BIA, des services de renseignements au service exclusif de Vučić](#)," *Courrier des Balkans*, 24 July 2017.

42. Predrag Petrovic & Katarina Djokic, "[Slippery Slopes in the reform of Serbian Security Services](#)," Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, 2017.

Outside of any real control, the BIA allegedly exploited this situation to increase its illegal practises, such as surveillance and phone-tapping of citizens.⁴³ This freedom of action does not only have internal repercussions.

The attempted 2016 coup in Montenegro and the events in the Macedonian Parliament in 2017 underline this empowerment for political ends – these two cases of interference took place when the prospect of NATO membership was raised. On 27 April, after the election of the president of the National Assembly, following the Macedonian presidential election, in front of the representatives, a hundred members of the VMRO-PMNE stormed into the Macedonian Parliament by force. The conservative party had just lost power after occupying the highest national positions for eleven years. Its members initiated a gigantic brawl, in which around ten members of parliament were injured. Among the intruders was Goran Živaljević, a member of the BIA who had been posted to the Serbian embassy in Skopje since 2005.⁴⁴ In both cases, the role of the Serbian agencies was disturbing, to say the least. Serbian citizens are among those accused, as well as Russians,⁴⁵ with direct or indirect connections to the security services – the primary suspect for the Montenegro coup was a former colonel in the Serbian gendarmerie.

CONCLUSION: A NEW EUROPEAN APPROACH TOWARDS THE TWO COUNTRIES?

Despite lying on their doorstep of one of the world's largest economic blocs, economic prospects in the Balkans countries remain limited and political plurality is disappearing. It is therefore understandable that part of the population, especially young people, are turning towards the escape route which the EU represents. Certainly, on the European side, there is a feeling of weariness in the European Institutions over the sluggishness of the reforms, especially in Montenegro.⁴⁶ However, is it wise to give the impression of supporting the regimes which are increasingly in contradiction with European values, in the name of the countries' "European perspective?" Would continuing discussions, if not accompanied by serious caveats, not favour regimes which are moving away from standards of liberal democracy?

There is the question of France's position in this process. Given the desire of the French President to breathe new life into the European project, it seems pertinent to promote the strengthening of the Franco-German relationship thereupon to the future of the Balkans. This approach would both open a new axis of cooperation between France and Germany and provide a consolidated vision of European values, in order to counter the risks of "illiberal" tendencies in the Balkans. Such a policy would be all the more justified since the member states who most favour opening the Balkans to the EU – outside of Eastern Europe – are

43. *Ibid.*, p. 13-17.

44. Stevan Dojčinović & Saška Cvetkovska, "Lazanski i BIA u „makedonskom scenariju,” *Krik*, 28 May 2017.

45. Valerie Hopkins, "Indictment tells murky Montenegrin coup tale," *POLITICO*, 23 May 2017.

46. Monitor, "Monténégro : L'UE est impatiente de voir partir Milo Đukanović," *Courrier des Balkans*, 13 July 2018.

Italy and Austria. The two countries are currently also advocating a vision of the EU which breaks with the previous consensus of values. In the same way that Germany threatened Croatia in 2011 with suspending the accession process if it did not improve press freedom, it is possible for the European partners to proceed with the same warnings.

That said, Croatia, the newest member of the European Union, was already more embedded in the West than the current candidates. Perhaps the subject should be approached differently: rather than participating “in the dramatization of a confrontation between great powers,”⁴⁷ it would be wise for the EU to support civil society, which is just waiting for the EU’s help.⁴⁸ Measures to improve governance should be maintained by increasing partnerships and inspections. In parallel, the EU should contribute to the development of an active civil society, as well as checks on power which the state’s institutions are no longer able to provide.⁴⁹

If the EU succeeds in bringing these countries into the European project, the security problem would become easier to address, while fears of the emergence of a new, illiberal bloc would be reduced. When President Emmanuel Macron presented his vision of the European project in Lisbon in July 2018, he hinted that even 2025 was an unrealistic date for the accession of these countries. He thereby joined European Commissioner for integration, Johannes Hahn, who also deemed the task “too ambitious.”⁵⁰ Should this be viewed as a simple manifestation of European enlargement “fatigue” or, equally, that European leaders are beginning to realise the situation in the region?

(English translation by Andreas CAPSTACK)

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47. France Culture, “Référendum en Macédoine : un résultat empoisonné ?,” interview by Jean-Arnault Dérens, “Les enjeux internationaux,” 3 October 2018.

48. Jasmin Mujanović, *Hunger and Fury: The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans*, op. cit.

49. European Commission, “[COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT – Serbia 2018 Report](#),” Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, p. 25.

50. “[French president explains his vision of reformed EU](#),” B92, 30 July 2018.