

## eu enlargement 2004: significance of political consequences for the western balkans

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With the 2004 enlargement, the EU external borders have dramatically changed. This new geographic shape of the EU's frontiers has left important marks on the Western Balkans (WB) policies, because they are now a part of the EU's neighbouring world. Political analysts have noted a vast range of consequences resulting from this, but the most likely political consequences are the most interesting ones, providing as they do a wide manoeuvring space for the EU policy makers. In this way, they give potential for a more pragmatic Common Foreign and Security Policy. All in all, the political consequences of the latest enlargement are of the outmost

significance for the WB countries, and events that took place in the second half of 2004, since enlargement, have compounded this importance.

The real breakthrough in the EU's CFSP in the WB region was made by the introduction of the document "European Partnership". This document presents a compilation of all short- and medium-term tasks and goals that the WB

should achieve by a certain deadline in order to finalise their process of Stabilization and Association. The ultimate goal was to be taken into consideration as "future" candidates instead of just being "potential" ones. This document was also a result of an important swing in the EU's CFSP since it was supposed to deal now as EU25 with completely new surroundings that is no more seen as a part of a distant and uncommon third world, but as a

world consisting of countries with a recognized and guaranteed European perspective. Therefore, all policy making has been shifted from DG RELEX to DG ELARG. How this movement will affect future relations

between the EU and WB countries it is still to be seen but the EU Commissioner for Enlargement Mr. Rehn has already started his tour around the region

The first major political consequence has been the signing of the Agreement on a framework for participation in community programs. Having the WB countries participating in such a program allows a greater exchange of



information and knowledge. Overall 24 community programs allow the region to be in track again with the newest scientific and technological developments. This action can be therefore characterized as a political consequence of a regional and individual dimension with a positive and motivating effect. Secondly, there is a tight networking among the WB countries work closely, recognizing their mutual problems (fight against organized crime, corruption, illegal trafficking of people and goods and terrorism) and identified potential solutions by joining forces. A recent example shows that regional cooperation does have a strong influence on the foreign policy agenda of each country. After signing bilateral agreements on foreign trade, a free trade zone was established in the region which later on allowed a regional energy and electricity market to be set up. This enabled the WB countries to be reconnected to the EU electricity market. Thirdly, in the area of EU financial assistance, the Commission has officially as of 29/09/04 introduced a new system of categorization of external assistance: pre-accession assistance, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, development cooperation, economic cooperation and the Instrument for Stability. Only instruments for humanitarian aid and micro-financial assistance have not been modified. Finally, the WB countries, as Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization (CARDS) beneficiaries, can jointly create and participate in programs along with the PHARE, TACIS and MEDA countries, i.e. those of Eastern Europe,

Central Asia and the Mediterranean. The EU has committed €6.8 billion to the WB since 1991 through various programs, and a further €4.6 billion has been allocated for the period 2000-2006.

On the other hand, there are also political consequences that are very demanding and are seen as rather repressing with a negative impact. Three main issues involve the tight visa regime, cooperation with The Hague Tribunal and future of Kosovo and Metohija. For example, according to recent opinion polls 75% of inhabitants in Serbia are in favour of the European integration but almost the same percentage resists reforms so far pursued. Due to the restricted freedom of movement, there is a strong feeling of being imprisoned and of growing isolation. Lack of cooperation with The Hague Tribunal makes the situation even worse for at least three countries (*Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro*) in the region which are seen as the driving forces in the process of association. Unlike the issue of cooperation with the ICTY, the visa regime is of a more troubling nature and affects in a negative way the whole WB region. At the end, there is the story about “having or leaving” Kosovo and Metohija. Still seen as a source of overall instability for the region. The “status and standard” of Kosovo and Metohija are affecting everybody in every aspect and this unresolved issue should be recognized as the most determining political consequence of the EU enlargement in 2004 for the future of the WB region.☺