

Brussels: Next Capital of the Balkans?

We are in an Indian summer of European Union enlargement. Warm words of encouragement continue to flow from Brussels to Sarajevo, Belgrade, Zagreb, Tirana, and Skopje, but a freeze is coming. As the Dutch and French “no” votes suggest, European populations have grown tired of grand European projects, including the EU’s expansion toward countries such as those of the western Balkans, which have religious, ethnic, cultural, and even imperial histories that diverge from northern Europe’s own heritage. For three to four years, the European Commission will continue to work with the countries of the western Balkans to prepare them for membership in the EU, even as popular skepticism about further expansion grows. At that point, a confrontation is likely: the European Commission will judge the first of these aspirants ready for membership. European leaders then will face a choice: live up to their own rhetoric in favor of enlargement or bow to the expectations of their publics by deciding against it.

If the western Balkan aspirants are well prepared, European leaders will probably invite them to join. They will be guided in the end by the strategic case for expansion: absorbing new, entrepreneurial populations that offer opportunity and avoiding the high cost of creating a band of weak, poverty-stricken states on the European continent. Yet, this outcome is certainly not inevitable. Popular discussion about expansion will be healthy for Europe, but populist demagoguery in current EU member states will undercut the political will in some western Balkan countries to reform in preparation for membership. This could leave one or more aspirants unprepared for membership, letting the EU’s current members avoid a choice between their strategic interests and their popular attitudes.

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Leaders in the EU, the western Balkans, and the United States can improve popular European acceptance of expansion to the western Balkans if they work constructively, separately and in cooperation, over the next few years. Voices in favor of enlargement need to be heard in Europe, and the United States has an important role to play in encouraging western Balkan states to undertake some reforms essential to EU membership, such as improvements in the security sector. Absent that kind of cooperation, Europe runs the risk of leaving some or all of the western Balkans outside Europe's new borders. This would re-create the dividing lines, Ottoman from Hapsburg, Roman Catholic from Orthodox and Muslim, that sliced the southern part of the continent from western Europe for centuries. The result would be a poverty-stricken group of states, surrounded by EU members but encumbered by travel restrictions, weaker governments, organized crime, and questionable business empires, in short, a ghetto that could create criminal and even security risks for Europe.

Enlargement's Track Record

The enlargement of the EU is one of the great success stories of the post-Cold War world. From its birth as an economic community, the EU has deepened into a shared economic and political space. The most rapid growth came when the socialist bloc collapsed in the late 1980s, and the EU had to confront its place on the continent as a whole.¹ After several years of reluctance on the part of France and other states, a track developed for central and eastern European states to join. Aspirants to membership had to establish themselves as competitive, free-market democracies committed to the Copenhagen criteria, a collection of requirements to provide all citizens with political, civil, and human rights.² By 1996 the states of central and eastern Europe, outside of the former Yugoslavia, entered into EU negotiations. In 2004, eight became members.

In the space of a few years, the Iron Curtain that divided Europe for approximately 45 years had been erased, at least politically. Each of the eight new members was accepted as a free-market-oriented democracy with demonstrated progress toward becoming a pluralistic, stable electoral democracy. These states joined what had become the largest economic market in the world, agreeing to implement fully the EU's shared law, the *acquis communautaire*, a 30-plus-chapter compendium addressing issues from science and research to more sensitive questions of culture and state aid to businesses. Each new member state took its place in Europe's decisionmaking bodies, where they adopted mature and leading roles in difficult decisions on the European budget and on EU policy toward democracy in neighboring states. They now

engage in deciding European laws and policies and are evaluated by the European court system and the European Commission.

The process of EU enlargement, as Javier Solana has said, not only improves the technical capacity of states but also commits them to shared values and wraps them in an ongoing process of lawmaking, law implementing, and norm creation. Solana, the foreign policy representative of the EU's Council of Member States, was correct to call EU enlargement the greatest state-building success in modern history.³ It is also the greatest success in building a new and unprecedented entity, a Europe built on shared institutions and a commitment to making a new history in the post-Cold War period. The struggles now evident over the powers of the EU, as opposed to those of the member states or over the creation of a European identity in addition to the national identities, are part of the inevitable pains of a new creature finding its way. The introduction of more popular voices into the discussion and the populism that follows is a healthy step. There is no way of predicting what the EU might become—deeper, shallower, broader, or more insular—but the debates following on European immigration, assertions of authority by the European institutions, and the failed constitution are the stuff of nation building. Skepticism about enlargement is one only facet in this debate and not one central to the perceptions of the European public.⁴ Yet, enlargement can bring new perspectives, shaped by the membership process, into the institutions that will decide Europe's future.

The western Balkans could become a ghetto with criminal and security risks for Europe.

LESSONS FOR THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

The path of the states emerging from the former Yugoslavia—Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and what is now Serbia and Montenegro—has been steeper. In 1993, as European leaders acknowledged that the EU could expand into central Europe, Croatia, Bosnia, and the rump Yugoslavia were at war. More than half of Croatia's territory was under the flag of a self-styled Serb republic. Seventy percent of Bosnia was ruled by a Republika Srpska created by ethnic cleansing and genocide. All of these countries were under a United Nations arms embargo.⁵ Just weeks before the Copenhagen summit, the UN Security Council created an ad hoc international tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the first international criminal court since the Axis leaders were tried in Nuremberg and Tokyo.

In this context, it was inconceivable that the EU would express any seri-

Can the governments deliver the reforms necessary to merit inclusion in the EU?

ous interest in seeing these new states become members. Still, it mishandled its engagement in the Balkans. It endorsed an ill-formed peace process that created two peace envoys who acted without the tools needed to compel peace, were forced to deal with too many parties, and were undercut at each stage as countries outside the region intervened to protect various warring

parties. The peace process coalesced once the United States and NATO took leading roles and the military balance shifted away from the long-dominant Serb forces.⁶

The EU also proved incapable of shaping the postconflict political environment in the western Balkans. The 1995 Dayton agreement for Bosnia provided for an international civilian administration charged with overseeing all civilian implementation issues.

Negotiators at Dayton faced a basic question: who would instruct the leader of the civilian implementation mission? The obvious candidates were not available. The UN and the Balkans were tired of one another. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) had no credibility, organization, or enforcement power. NATO, charged with military responsibilities, wanted nothing to do with civilian tasks. The best answer would have been a special representative of the EU, armed with the mandate of helping Bosnians prepare their country for convergence to European norms and possibly membership.

Yet, there was no enthusiasm for a strong EU role. Europeans wondered if it could take on this postconflict task, especially outside EU territory. The United States and Russia were skeptical that they could or should push for the EU to take charge. Instead, Dayton produced an improvised structure, with a “High Representative” who reports to an ad hoc coalition of countries. The extent of the high representative’s authority was disputed until it was clarified by the Peace Implementation Council in 1997, ensuring his right to hire, fire, block, and impose laws. At times, this has been derided as an “imperial” mandate; but the current high representative, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, has said that his goal is to reduce the involvement of his office in Bosnian political decisions and to focus on helping the Bosnian authorities prepare for EU membership.⁷ This dispute over the power of the international representative reflects the fact that the international community left Dayton with no political strategy. Had there been agreement at Dayton that Bosnia should be prepared for EU membership and that the EU would provide people and an institution to support this preparation, the tasks of the civilian authority, the powers needed, and the resources to be supplied would have been made clear.

Europe's perspective changed in 1999 for several reasons. New governments in the United Kingdom and Germany began to take another look at how Europe should engage in the Balkans. The slow but steady progress in Bosnia provided reassurance that a greater role on the ground could be peaceful and constructive. The issue was forced, however, by the war over Kosovo. By 1998, Slobodan Milosevic's regime in Serbia faced rising Albanian violence in Kosovo, domestic unrest, and less and less ability to foment problems in Bosnia and Croatia without provoking major international outrage. In the spring of 1999, Milosevic rejected international peace overtures over Kosovo and launched a major Serb offensive. One million Albanians fled, and NATO began the first military action of its 50-year history.

A PLACE IN EUROPE?

Within weeks of the conflict's start, international leaders recognized that another ad hoc international presence, added to those in Croatia and Bosnia, would prolong international engagement in the region but leave the root causes of its instability untouched. The German government proposed that the region have a future in Europe. This initiative was closely coordinated with the United States, where Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made a similar proposal in April 1999. The result was a summit in Sarajevo in June 1999, weeks after the Kosovo war ended. There, in the city that served as a symbol for the brutality of Yugoslavia's dissolution, the EU acknowledged for the first time that the states of the western Balkans had a future in Europe. This carefully phrased statement unfortunately did not specifically mention EU membership.⁸ European leaders had not yet absorbed the idea of the Balkans in the EU, and the European public had not been consulted.

Moreover, in 1999 no outside observer could say that Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, or Albania were ready to join the EU. Croatia's first postindependence government was spiraling inward and downward, amid illness at the top and corruption by others. Milosevic had by then been indicted by an international tribunal, and the Belgrade leadership was ever more isolated and corrupt. Montenegro had elected an anti-Milosevic government, so what remained of Yugoslavia had fallen into internal strife. Bosnia's first avowedly nonnationalist government was more than a year away. Albania was just two years past the collapse precipitated by failed pyramid schemes. Macedonia was installing an inexperienced, nationalist government that would lead the country into a civil war within 18 months.

Over the next several years, however, the EU acknowledged that it needed to move assertively to help these countries prepare themselves. The membership process was a uniquely powerful tool in this regard. The result was an improvisation, at a high level and under constant skepticism, by se-

nior EU officials, especially Solana; Chris Patten, the foreign affairs commissioner; and Enlargement Commissioner Gunther Verheugen as well as his successor, Olli Rehn. The EU developed programs tailored to the regional governments' specific weakness: a new assistance program provided technical and financial support focused on convergence with the EU, road maps spelled out priorities for states to prepare for early stages of talks,

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and so-called Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAAs) provided an intermediate destination for countries not ready to begin formal talks.

The EU also began to treat its membership process as an answer to security problems rather than to regard security problems as a reason to defer membership talks. In 2001 the EU provided the senior civil administrator to help Macedonia implement its peace agree-

ment. This move contrasted markedly with the EU's earlier reticence in Bosnia. In 2003 the high representative in Bosnia was also the EU's representative, with a clear mandate to help Bosnia on its way to membership. By the fall of 2005, all of southeastern Europe was clearly on the path to EU membership. Bulgaria and Romania were slated to become members in 2007, unless delayed; Croatia and Macedonia were declared to be candidates for membership; Albania signed its SAA; and Bosnia as well as Serbia and Montenegro had begun negotiations to complete SAAs.

This shift was fairly rapid. In 1995 the EU's hesitance toward the region lay partly with the mess that was the former Yugoslavia and partly with the EU itself, which was only then developing its approach toward further enlargement. Yet, there was another side to the story. For centuries, Europe's largest empires had faced off across lines drawn on this territory. Just driving through the land reveals obvious differences in architecture, culture, tempo, and style. As recently as 10 years ago, there was a sense, palpable even to a casual U.S. observer, that European officials saw Slovenia and western parts of Croatia as European. These territories had for centuries stood just outside the Ottoman Empire. They looked and felt middle European, and northern and western Europeans felt comfortable with them. This was not the case with Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, and Macedonia. They are eastern, Orthodox, and Muslim, the stuff of epic poetry and wild legend, looking south and east. European unease about these countries was evident in any discussion about a future EU role for the region. Today, the membership process apparently proceeds without regard for differences among civilizations. The challenge that these states must now confront is the same faced

by every candidate thus far: can the government deliver the reforms necessary to merit inclusion in the EU?

Domestic Challenges for the Western Balkans

The primary challenge lies in the countries of the western Balkans themselves. Preparations for EU membership will require painful domestic choices, and resistance will be inevitable. European ambivalence about accepting the western Balkans could leave some states without the support needed to drive through reforms. Croatia, as the state most likely to be ready soonest, is especially important. If Croatia stumbles, antienlargement forces in Europe will argue that the region is not ready and will urge that the entire prospect of membership be reconsidered. If that happens, other aspirants may find themselves unwilling to take on the difficult reforms needed for membership: resisting the pull of nationalism, staying the course, and improving the performance of weak states amid bureaucratic challenges.

NATIONALIST NOSTALGIA

It can be assumed that each state in the region will continue on the membership path, but it is possible that a prospective member state may quickly turn its back on the EU. In the western Balkans, Serbia may appear to be the main candidate for this dramatic gesture of rejection. Every other state has gone through a significant political battle or change of government and emerged committed to the EU process. In Serbia, however, mainstream politicians still associate themselves with the nationalist themes that poisoned the 1990s. The likelihood that both Montenegro and Kosovo will become independent within the next year provides stimulus for a nationalist fit in Serbia, especially if the EU is perceived to have fostered the breakup of what remains of Yugoslavia.

Yet, a dramatic moment of rejection seems unlikely, even in Serbia. The consequences are large. Diplomatic attention would increase; financial and technical assistance would be reshaped to bolster the accession process; participation in other international bodies, particularly NATO, would be linked to continued commitment to the EU process; Serbian domestic campaigns in support of EU membership or reforms associated with it would find external assistance easily and in large amounts; and individuals associated with an anti-EU movement would find themselves subject to limitations on their travel and possibly on their financial transactions. For those Serbian political leaders whose business dealings could not stand the scrutiny, a group that may include Milosevic's erstwhile ally, Bogljub Karic, or some radical

leaders, this spotlight would be uncomfortable. These tools, combined with the enormous inertia behind the EU process, have been effective. Other poor, aspirant countries have gone through anti-EU governments, and none has terminated the process once it has gone as far as Serbia has.

Most of all, however, Serbia is unlikely to become rejectionist because its own people have chosen to join Europe. Serbians now look west, not east. What it means to be Serb is a contested issue, of course, but their future direction is not. The Serbian public's reaction to the death of Milosevic captures the arc of the country. Western media sought out his apologists, defenders, and conspiracy theorists, but they found only some pensioners who resemble the Russian crowds that mourn Stalin. More Serbs gathered in honor of Zoran Djindjic, the Milosevic opponent who was assassinated three years ago. For most Serbs, Milosevic's death produced the equivalent of a shrug.

Unfortunately, Milosevic's rhetoric of a greater Serbia, which could include large parts of Croatia and Bosnia along with some of Macedonia, in which even he did not believe, lives on. It will stain Serbian politics for decades, but not as a rallying cry for a majority; similar slogans attract 10–20 percent of voters in other countries. The popular acquiescence and the corrupt state apparatus needed to project Greater Serbia are gone. As a reminder of how politics can be twisted into a force for evil, the collapse of Yugoslavia remains a lesson for statesmen. As a political force, Milosevic himself no longer matters. His victims should be remembered longer than the man himself.

STAYING THE COURSE

Instead of a sudden break, the more likely problem in the western Balkans will be erosion. To understand the problem, it helps to review how intrusive, technically demanding, and politically difficult the membership process is. As mentioned earlier, the heart of EU membership is the shared body of European law, covering most aspects of the common market, from human rights policies to state subsidies to judicial reform. Once a state is invited to be an official candidate for membership, it begins negotiations on the *acquis*.

Yet, "negotiation" is a misleading term here. The EU does not change its standards for any country. It is the same for Poland as for the Czech Republic as it will be for Albania. For the western Balkans, this absolutism is very appealing. Each state worries that another will cut special deals; appeals for understanding of its unique history, role in the region, or political travails; fears that others will avoid the painful choice behind membership; and hopes that a special deal will allow it to defer difficult reforms. If deal making started, the effect would be a race to the bottom, with concessions to one state matched by deals cut with others.

The EU's approach has been to reject all requests for special deals, and it has done so publicly so that no state plausibly can claim that another is receiving special treatment or expect such treatment itself. A plea for special arrangements in Bosnia's accession, based on a compelling and lengthy historical exegesis of Bosnia's past, provoked one European Commission official to respond, "We don't care. It's 35 chapters for you, just as it was 31 chapters for everyone else before and will be 35 chapters for everyone else."⁹ Of course, history cannot be ignored, especially where, as Winston Churchill said, there is so much of it to consume. The improvised pre-accession process was created as an apprenticeship to take into account the weakness of the western Balkans.¹⁰

A dramatic moment rejecting the EU seems possible but unlikely, even in Serbia.

Before being invited to see the *acquis*, each state had to pass key benchmarks. The crucial points were the midway SAAs, pacts in which the EU and the aspirant country acknowledged that there are several years to go and specific improvements to make. From the standpoint of the aspirants, this stage was enormously helpful. It identified priorities and brought with it the promise that if the country completed those priorities, it would be invited to become a candidate for membership. First, however, they had to negotiate a road map toward the SAA. This provided an early checkpoint about what had to be done. Based on this experience, the road map process likely will be important in resolving the final status of Kosovo. The conclusion of Serbia's SAA probably will be announced around the end of the talks. As part of the package of Kosovo's independence, Serbia would become an official candidate for membership. A newly independent Kosovo, however, will be a step behind Serbia and presumably behind Montenegro, whether it is independent by then or not.¹¹ With a new state, new government, and changed international presence, Kosovo is likely to be judged not ready to sign an SAA and will instead be invited to embark on a road map just as other western Balkan states have done. This stepping-stone approach will have the political advantage in Serbia of seeming to accelerate Serb membership once Serbia is free of Kosovo.

In one sense, the road map approach makes perfect sense. It will guide the new Kosovar state in its early years and shape the priorities of the international presence in the state in a way that did not happen in Bosnia in 1995. For Kosovars, the prospect of an SAA, probably within a year or two after independence, provides guidance, assistance, and a promise that EU member states will recognize Kosovo as a state by the time the SAA is

signed. There is, however, a troubling wrinkle. If recognition as a state is delayed until the road map has been completed, then any EU member state can stop the SAA and membership process by refusing to recognize a Kosovar state. The problem is that recognition is traditionally a political decision and is reserved to member states and granted or withheld without external constraint. Conversely, the membership process is intended to be merit based—do the work and get in. If the Kosovars have reason to doubt that any EU member state would follow through, their adherence to the steps in the road map will falter. Europe could be left with a terrible situation, a weak state recognized by some but not all of its neighbors, unwilling to reform in the way that Europe needs. It would be better for the EU member states to recognize Kosovo soon after independence is agreed on as part of that package, rather than to cloud the membership process with this political decision.

BUREAUCRATIC CHALLENGES

This careful process of capacity building, in a dialogue between the European Commission and a national government, is threatened by Europe's angst over enlargement. The problem is not at the grand political level of declarations and posturing. The threat instead comes because the bureaucracy that is to implement the membership process is isolated and vulnerable to political pressures that may be too gradual and subtle to be caught.

Each country establishes a secretariat for EU integration that generally reports directly to the head of government. In the best of circumstances, they are led by dynamic officials respected for their talent, not their connections. Each has a staff of 50 to 100 experts responsible for coordinating with their counterparts in the European Commission and with the relevant ministries. The secretariat may come with wide-ranging support, for example, in Croatia, all political parties have endorsed the secretariat and given it a tenure that exceeds that of the government. The European Commission establishes priorities, perhaps 100 to 140 across the spectrum of the *acquis*. Each priority becomes the subject of an action plan, with specific requirements and timelines spelled out. A general priority, such as judicial reform, would be broken into multiple steps, with the relevant actor in the government identified.

Already, western Balkan states face a huge challenge. Many ministries need substantial help to complete their tasks. They often are unreformed, undertrained, and underfinanced. Change can affect entrenched interests, and many in the region may be tired of change; as one participant told me, the states "are tired of transition." It is an open question whether the small teams of EU integration can help ministries enough, even when political

support for enlargement is strong. Aware of this, the EU has built accountability into the process. The European Commission has an office in each aspirant, visits each month, and keeps scorecards. Within countries, the EU coordinator can report often to the head of government. In Macedonia, for example, each weekly cabinet meeting begins with a review of progress. Small problems can be addressed before they grow into crises in the membership process. This practice has brought enormous change to the functioning of ministries. In the words of one participant from an aspirant, "Our expectations were high, and they have been exceeded."¹²

Attention to detail is the prerequisite of success, but it is also why the system can slip. A head of government uninterested in accession or unwilling to struggle with a hesitant coalition member could slow the process without appearing derelict. Less time spent meeting with his integration officials or less effort at bringing recalcitrant ministries along would slow reforms without leaving fingerprints. The EU integration offices, isolated from the rest of the bureaucracy, would wither. Even if the European Commission were to identify and report problems, the damage would be done. Skeptics of enlargement would interpret problems as a failure of will on the part of the aspirant and will feed skepticism about the state's willingness to join the EU. This will encourage demands for more political engagement. States favorably inclined to the lagging state will intervene, arguing that although the requirements of membership are not negotiable, timetables may be, and the process will become politicized.

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Channeling the European Debate

This brings the issue back to the disturbing yet unsurprising European debates over enlargement. The EU's growth over the last 15 years has been spectacular but driven by elites, with technical support from the ever more influential bureaucracy in Brussels. Fatigue was inevitable, and popular concerns about Europe's expansion reflect normal public response to economic uncertainties and cultural differences between new candidates and the self-perception of current members. A frank argument about the nature and boundaries of Europe is healthy if the EU is to deepen its democratic credibility at home.

In the face of continued public concern, the European Commission's expertise and the numbing detail of the *acquis* will not be persuasive enough.

There are clear steps that should be taken moving forward. The first is to indicate that there is space both for reflection on EU reform and for renewing the promises of enlargement. Over recent months, advocates of expansion have done just this, reiterating that states will become members when they have demonstrated their preparedness but that the EU will have to take its own “absorptive capacity” into account. European foreign ministers sounded the same note in their meeting with Balkan leaders on March 11, 2006.

It is not surprising that Europeans are demanding time to reflect on what they are doing.

The European Stability Initiative, an influential think tank, sees the reference to absorptive capacity as a loophole that will be used to deny membership to deserving candidates.¹³ Absorptive capacity might in fact become the euphemism that kills enlargement. Conversely, it can signal a new maturity in the discussion. One should be able to entertain the ideas that expansion should happen and that the EU should reform. In March 2006, the European Parliament asked

the European Commission to report on how enlargement would fit with improvements to absorptive capacity.¹⁴ In calling for the report, the parliament rejected a stronger proposal that would have called for alternatives to membership for the western Balkans. European institutions are developing a constructive vocabulary for concurrent discussions of absorptive capacity, EU reform, and expansion.

A second step is to lead the debate. European leaders in and out of government should debunk myths and appeal to the self-interest of European publics. The western Balkans are too small to overwhelm Europe’s labor markets, but they will provide the labor and ideas needed to supplement the EU’s aging work force. Moreover, early indications are that fewer workers will travel and resettle than Europeans fear.¹⁵ Of course, much of the concern over the western Balkans flows from fear of Turkey and even the Maghreb. Europe should strengthen its neighborhood policy to reassure its population that there is an alternative to membership for the countries of northern Africa and central Asia. Bold leaders might make the case for Turkey to become a member, as it should. Less-forceful advocates should make a point of simple fairness: expansion to the western Balkans does reinforce the case for Turkey, but these small states should not be judged by this or by their historical ties to the Ottoman Empire. This holds them hostage to a past that is not their own responsibility.

Finally, Europe’s leaders will need courage. The debate will not burn out in a few months. Voices accented by xenophobia, racism, and anti-Muslim bias will

never accept the regions emerging from the Ottoman Empire as European enough to be part of the EU. These contemptible voices will be a minor canon of distaste and contempt that will not dominate but that need answering. In the western Balkans, irredentist and populist politicians will seize antiexpansion voices in the EU as grounds to resist reform, even as they themselves will become poster children for European antiexpansionists. Both the EU and the aspirants of the western Balkans have political debate strong enough to withstand the pressures of these voices from the past, but their leaders must speak out. Otherwise, there may be a vicious circle impeding reform.

In this light, it is alarming to see calls for enlargement decisions to be controlled by national parliaments or by referenda. This is an abdication. It is unlikely that the publics will support expansion without greater leadership, but if leaders know that they will not have to decide once their publics have said no, the leadership will be lacking. The European Parliament can play a stronger role and provide a popular voice. The parliament is an institution often dismissed as weak, mostly because it is not normally in the position to make decisions of consequence. Yet, if a commitment is made for the parliament to play a central role in enlargement decisions, it can be an issue in the next parliamentary elections, which will be held before most western Balkan states are ready for membership. The breadth and depth of the concern over enlargement means that Europe's populations need a voice, but it should be a voice informed by listening, in a forum where many national interests come together. It should not consist of voices shouted in locked rooms, where the anger may often be directed at domestic governments and not at enlargement.

The Near-Term U.S. Role

The EU's expansion may be a subject on which the United States might remain quiet, but this would be the wrong approach. The EU's engagement with the western Balkans is likely to turn sour if the United States is either absent or too loud. The United States has strong and legitimate interests in seeing the western Balkans join the EU. Washington has an interest in a united, free Europe, and in some places in the Balkans, the U.S. voice is the most influential. Because Washington cannot seek to dominate a debate that is essentially about what it means to be European, its role needs to be carried out with a finesse that too often is lacking.

The U.S. role starts from the facts on the ground. Many of the issues that bedevil the western Balkans, such as racism, ethnically divided governments, and unduly influential security services, fall outside the formal EU process. From time to time, the EU has found ways to address issues such as

these within the membership process, mostly by setting new conditions for delaying or suspending membership talks. In this way, the EU has required that Croatia and Serbia cooperate fully with the international tribunal in the Hague for talks on membership to begin. The conditions applied in this way are welcome, and the EU has been serious in following up. As a sys-

The content of European public debate will have repercussions in the western Balkans.

tematic approach to improving governance, however, this reliance on ad hoc criteria is as arbitrary as a lightning strike. Issues are selected or ignored for reasons other than their direct contribution to a state's ability to carry out the requirements of EU membership. The symbolic criteria leave unresolved the underlying weakness in the governmental capacity of the states. In Serbia, for example, it is unclear the extent to which civilian leaders can direct the security services to co-

operate with the tribunal. Djindjic was assassinated because of such a power struggle. The EU's insistence on the symbolic act of cooperation with the tribunal by itself does not come with the institutional backing needed to carry out policy improvements.

The United States has a special role to play in this regard. It can help see that issues of security and military reform are addressed, bilaterally or through international groupings in which it plays a major part such as NATO, the OSCE, or ad hoc groups such as the Contact Group for the Balkans and the Adriatic-3. More generally, in the next year, several issues call out for close transatlantic cooperation. In the former Yugoslavia alone, Kosovo and Montenegro are seeking independence, and Bosnia is amending the constitution that has held the peace for 10 years. This is a full plate for the international community in a region it has largely ignored for five years. Still, the problems are manageable, with Kosovo being the most sensitive. Independence, simply drawn and given quickly, offers the best hope for stability in the region. The situation of Kosovo's remaining Serbs is deplorable, however, and Kosovo's Albanians will look to Washington for guidance. It will be easy to persuade NATO to remain after independence and possibly Russia to help, as reassurance to Kosovo's Serbs and other non-Albanian communities. The difficult part will be investigating and stripping paramilitary and political party-affiliated intelligence organizations of their resources and influence. A new Kosovar government will be whipsawed by these forces unless a strong U.S. hand forces reform. The EU lacks the capacity to carry out this task. NATO may provide multilateral cover, but it must speak with an American accent.

The United States will also have to provide discipline. Serbia and the Kosovars will not reach agreement through negotiations. No politician from

either side could survive by agreeing to any proposal that the other side would accept. Once the UN-appointed envoy declares talks at an impasse, international envoys will flock to the region to urge agreement on a deal that will either be independence for Kosovo or something close to it. There will be tendency to propose new preconditions for independence, sowing confusion, frustration, and recrimination among Kosovo's Albanians. The United States will have to push the international community to make a decision and press Kosovo's Albanians to carry through on their commitments. This will not be difficult, but it will demand attention and willpower in the face of a looming crisis over Iran. Managing the endgame of the Kosovo talks is an eight-foot putt. Professionals should make it.

Bosnia provides a different example. Bosnia's political elites benefit from the decentralized structure now in place. Reforms needed for EU membership could be implemented through the constitution negotiated at Dayton, but it would be better if Bosnia's political leaders could amend the constitution, signaling their support for reform. They will not take this step from their own interests because their affluence and power come from decentralization. In late March, constitutional amendments were introduced in the Bosnian parliament, with support from Bosnia's major parties. This happened only with strong U.S. involvement, and even these amendments continue to give nationalist parties undue influence. It will take continued U.S. engagement to reduce nationalist voices and let the EU membership process push through the reforms that Bosnia needs.

This U.S. role follows in practice from the expansion to central Europe. Aspirants from central and eastern Europe sought membership in or approval of organizations such as NATO, the Council of Europe (COE), and a reformed OSCE even as they applied and prepared for EU membership. These organizations helped the states address lingering concerns about their candidacy. The treatment of minorities and special communities, for example, was an area of special concern to the COE, while NATO proved itself a useful forum for changing security policies and resolving legacy border issues such as those between Hungary and Romania. By endorsing the initiatives of such organizations and groups, the EU in effect leverages its own mandate and takes advantage of the capabilities of these other organizations. By using U.S. leadership on these issues, the European Commission can make it more likely that the states of the western Balkans will be ready for membership.

Charting a Postreferendum European Path

In the next decade, the states of the western Balkans, including Albania, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, and probably the independent states of

Montenegro and Kosovo will likely become members of the EU. In fewer than 20 years, the EU has gone from a club of like-minded states to a political association that draws on many traditions, religions, and nationalities. In light of a historic shift in what it means to be European, it is not surprising that Europeans are demanding time to reflect on what they are doing. The Dutch and French voted for breathing space, but enlargement played little role in the debates or decisions on the constitution, and the votes themselves should not be seen as a decision against membership for the western Balkans.

The content of European public debate over the next years, however, will have repercussions in the western Balkans. A nationalist debate may discourage constituencies working for reform in these countries, resulting in some states not being ready for membership. If European leaders engage in this debate constructively, however, the debate can strengthen European democracy and commitment to a deeper, broader EU. Unanimity is a dangerous luxury, especially when a continent is reinventing itself. Yet, Europe's self-examination must not become a pretext for the western Balkan states to slow needed reform.

The story of the EU's engagement with the western Balkans is remarkable. These countries—poor, Muslim, Orthodox, and recently socialist—have been divided from western Europe since the Ottoman Empire settled south of Vienna. The effort to bring them into a pan-European union erases these imperial boundaries. History is being written on a grand scale, so large that many of us living through it may not recognize the salience of the moment. Europe's leaders can deepen their own democracy as they reach out to new democracies.

The United States has an important role in addressing security and other issues that fall outside the European Commission's mandate. An approach that is absent minded or heavy handed, however, could lower the chances for the countries of the region to enter the EU. The United States should take the lead in addressing the most explosive issues remaining in the Balkans, helping the EU to do what it has done better than any initiative in history: create an expanding, shared space of values and policies on a continent that was divided, not just for the decades of the Cold War but for centuries of empire.

Notes

1. See Milada Anna Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration After Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
2. For the Copenhagen criteria for membership in the EU, see http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/towards_EU_membership/criteria_en.html.

3. Javier Solana, remarks at the Sound of Europe Conference, Salzburg, January 27, 2006.
4. See "Enlargement Played Small Role in Constitution No Votes," *EU Observer*, June 27, 2005, http://euobserver.com/index.phtml?search_string_top=&subscribe_email=Enter+your+email&subscribe_sendout=td&accept_charge=Accept+charge&aid=19430&cost_shown=1&sid=9.
5. For the best account of this situation, see Laura Silber and Alan Little, *Death of a Nation* (New York: Penguin, 1997) (revised edition).
6. For more detail on the pre-Dayton peace processes, see James C. O'Brien, "The Dayton Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Ceasefire on Its Way to Becoming a Settlement," in *Peace vs. Justice: Negotiating Forward- and Backward-Looking Outcomes*, ed. William Zartmann (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).
7. See European Stability Initiative, "Post-Industrial Society and the Authoritarian Temptation," October 2004, <http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=18>. For a smart analysis of what Bosnia must do for itself, see Zoran Pajic, "Bosnia: A Statehood Crossroads," February 10, 2006, <http://www.tol.cz/>. See also Christian Schwarz-Schilling, "Bosnia's Way Forward," March 17, 2006, http://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/preso/presa/default.asp?content_id=36772.
8. See Sarajevo Summit Declaration, <http://www.stabilitypact.org/constituent/990730-sarajevo.asp>.
9. European Commission official, Sarajevo, November 29, 2005.
10. The intention behind Europe's new process is captured by Chris Patten, who served as the EU commissioner for external relations. See Chris Patten, *Cousins and Strangers: America, Britain, and Europe in a New Century* (New York: Times Books, Henry Holt, 2006), pp. 179–180.
11. The Montenegrin referendum is scheduled to take place in May 2006.
12. Interview with author, February 2006.
13. See European Stability Initiative, "EU Balkan Salzburg Meeting March 2006," <http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=166>.
14. See, for example, Olli Rehn, "The EU Accession Process: An Effective Tool of the European Foreign and Security Policy," remarks at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, February 21, 2006, <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/06/112&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>. See also "2005 Enlargement Strategy Paper," A6-0025/2006, February 3, 2006.
15. For thoughtful papers on this topic, see Katinka Barysch, "Does Enlargement Matter for the EU Economy," May 2003, <http://www.cer.org.uk>; Katinka Barysch, "East Versus West? The European Economic and Social Model After Enlargement," October 26, 2005, <http://www.cer.org.uk>.