



BiEPAG

Policy Brief

Bilateral Disputes Conundrum: Accepting the Past and Finding Solutions for the Western Balkans

By Marika Djolai and Zoran Nechev

05 April 2018

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About BiEPAG

The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG)

is a co-operation initiative of the European Fund for the Balkans (EFB) and Centre for the Southeast European Studies of the University of Graz (CSEES) with the aim to promote the European integration of the Western Balkans and the consolidation of democratic, open countries in the region. BiEPAG is composed by prominent policy researchers from the Western Balkans and wider Europe that have established themselves for their knowledgeable understanding of the Western Balkans and the processes that shape the region. Current members of the BiEPAG are: Dimitar Bechev, Florian Bieber, Blerjana Bino, Srdjan Cvijić, Milica Delević, Srđan Majstorović, Natasha Wunsch, Mari-ka Djolai, Vedran Džihić, Tobias Flessenkemper, Dejan Jović, Marko Kmezić, Jovana Marović, Milan Nič, Corina Stratulat, Dane Taleski, Nikolaos Tzifakis, Alida Vračić, Shpend Emini and Zoran Nechev

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Introduction

The language of the European Commission Strategy “A Credible Enlargement Perspective and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans” signals a more integrative approach and marks new dynamics in the EU – Western Balkans (WB) relations. The Strategy sets out an Action Plan with six concrete flagship initiatives targeting specific areas of common interest: rule of law, security and migration, socio-economic development, transport and energy connectivity, digital agenda, reconciliation and good neighbourly relations². However, WB countries still face a number of obstacles on their EU path, from fulfilling accession conditionalities and implementing fundamental reforms to solving numerous bilateral disputes. In the Strategy, the EU is clear about not accepting to import these disputes and instability they may entail and makes a bold stance by demanding that the responsible parties solve the bilateral disputes as a matter of urgency. This marks a shift from soft diplomacy that dominated the sphere of bilateral disputes in recent years, under which they were tackled only after getting highly politicised and flaring up to a point of seriously impeding relations between the two countries involved. Given the aspirations for a stronger, more stable and resilient Union in the coming decade, resolving outstanding disputes has now become even more of a priority.

Bilateral disputes are rooted in the geopolitics and history of the Balkans region, the latest wars and the breakup of Yugoslavia, and encompass a vast range of issues. **Border and territorial disputes** concern delineation and demarcation of borders and recognition of sovereign states within those territories, which should also be internationally recognized. Disputes **pertaining rights of national minorities** have a broad scope that includes property issues, identity, status and representation, as well as the status of refugees and IDPs from the neighbouring countries. Apart from the structure, bilateral dis-

1. Primary authors: Marika Djolai and Zoran Nechev. With special thanks to Nikola Burazer, BiEPAG Visiting Fellow who conducted desk research on the progress made in the disputes resolution since 2015, which directly supported section two of this brief.

2. A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf (last accessed 07/04/2018)

putes can be grouped according to **actor constellation**³. Experience thus far shows that the most serious problems arise when a Member State (MS) starts using asymmetric powers against a candidate country to block its accession path, because there is no mechanism within the EU for political, technical or legislative interventions over a Member State in this respect. It is clear that the EU cannot accept WB countries whose statehood is contested and whose borders are not recognised, or those with long-running disputes of other forms. **Open disputes** are most pertinent, but there are many others, which are currently **latent**, that pose a concern because they may be easily politicised by the parties involved at crucial points of the EU accession process. Neither the categories nor the scope of any bilateral dispute should be seen as fixed or limited for any of the WB6 countries. Due to the fluid nature of global, European and WB domestic politics, there are frequent shifts in bilateral relations and external influences, which affect the prominence of bilateral disputes and their impact.

Although intrinsically connected, each dispute requires different set of approaches for it to be resolved, while the timing is crucial to ensure that the local context is favourable. Though the need for resolution may seem clear, the bilateral disputes don't always destabilize bilateral relations, particularly when it comes to business interests, which can deflate motivations of the governments to resolve them. Disputes often appear paradoxical because cooperation or trade between two countries could be running smoothly, while at the same time a dispute is ongoing on a political level. For example, bilateral relations between Albania and Macedonia are friendly in many instances, including connectivity agenda, business and economy, despite Albania formally only recognizing their neighbour under the UN provisional reference FYROM. In some cases, the countries may be satisfied with a less formalised solution where the agreement falls short of ratification but is still implemented. Nonetheless, it is difficult to see the region progressing without stable bilateral relations, whether between the Western Balkan countries themselves or with the neighbouring Member States. They should not be imposed from the outside, because such measures have not produced durable, positive outcomes in the Western Balkans over the past two decades.

Against all the current uncertainties, this policy brief sets out to offer novel approaches to bilateral disputes resolution that envisage

3. BiEPAG Policy brief 'Removing obstacles to EU Accession: Bilateral disputes in the Western Balkans' (2015). <http://balkanfund.org/removing-obstacles-to-eu-accession-bilateral-disputes-in-the-western-balkans/> (last accessed 08/04/2018)

joint involvement of the Commission and the governments of the EU Member States, to ensure that credible solutions are identified within the timeframe set out in the new strategy, namely by 2025. This brief will review the progress in addressing bilateral disputes since 2015, a period when the Berlin Process was introduced to support the Western Balkans' EU accession. The main focus of the brief is on open disputes, particularly those that are at present directly obstructing the EU accession of the Western Balkan countries. It concludes by suggesting next steps for finding realistic and durable solutions that can be integrated in the EU accession framework and draw on good-neighbourly relations.

Progress in the sphere of bilateral disputes

The disputes in the Balkans are mainly dealt with bilaterally, at both technical and political levels. Technical sphere includes intergovernmental mixed commissions, expert commission, border commissions, and joint working groups, normally at the country level, which are embedded within Ministries of Foreign Affairs. These bodies have been operating in most cases for at least 15 years, but with very mixed success; many of them have been inactive for a large part of this period. At the political level, the key moment that accelerated search for solutions was signing of the Declaration on Regional Cooperation and the Solution of Bilateral Disputes by the Western Balkans countries at the Vienna Summit in 2015. They agreed not to block, or encourage others to block, the progress of neighbours on their respective EU paths and to submit an annual review on the progress of resolving bilateral issues, to allow the systematic monitoring on annual bases. Apart from finding solutions and exchanging experiences, the key goal of the reporting is to bring the disputes and proposed solutions into the public sphere, to inform and engage the citizens. Although the initial reports were never publicly released, some progress has been made in the past three years as the Berlin Process has gained momentum with a number of positive developments.

There was a tangible progress in the cases where actor constellation includes a Member State. The case of Macedonia exemplifies this point. The European Commission issued a positive recommendation to open accession negotiations back in 2009, however, due to the objection by Greece over the name issue, Macedonia failed to progress

to a more advanced stage. This pushed Macedonia to turn inwards, which led to increased democratic backsliding, especially in the later stages of Gruevski's rule. Consequently, the Commission conditioned the recommendation in 2015 with continued implementation of the Przhino agreement and substantial progress in the implementation of the 'Urgent Reform Priorities'. Furthermore, this state of play allowed other international actors, some with very different perspectives on the country's future to those of its citizens, to exploit the opportunity to project their own interests in Macedonia. With the formation of the new government lead by Zoran Zaev in 2017 came the new impetus in the negotiations between **Macedonia and Greece** to resolve the "name issue". The willingness of both sides to reach a compromise surfaced, although the parties were engaged in a more technical dialogue through the 'confidence building measures' since 2015. Resolution of this bilateral issue will allow Macedonia to move towards opening the EU accession negotiations and joining the NATO, and Greece to close one of the disputed chapters with its neighbours. The resolution would also give boost to tackling existing disputes with other countries.

Greece also has a complex relationship with its other neighbour, **Albania**, with number of challenging issues between them. They include ending formally, through an Act passed in the Parliament, the state of war (in effect since 1940); delineation of the maritime border, over which an agreement was reached in 2009, but Albania's Constitutional Court deemed it unconstitutional in 2010 and new agreement is yet to be finalised; Cham question property rights of the descendants of Albanians who had to leave from Epirus after the Second World War; their claims of the right to return to Greece; rights of the Greek National Minority in Albania (mainly living in Northern Epirus); exhumation of Greek soldiers fallen during the Italo-Greek war (Second World War) in Albania. Despite having a number of high-level meetings at the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers level between 2016 and 2018 (last one on the side-lines of Davos this year), concrete solutions are not reached yet. On the positive side, the two governments committed to signing of the new Document of Strategic Partnership in the spring 2018, in which some of the bilateral issues should be reframed and with new solutions offered.

Another positive development is palpable around resolving territorial dispute between **Serbia and Croatia**, although the issues pertaining rights of national minorities are still being avoided. Both countries have appointed a Coordinator for "resolving open issues": the Serbian state secretary Nemanja Stevanovic at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Croatian Assistant to the Minister of Foreign and European Af-

fairs Boris Grigic. The Coordinators met twice, on 30 November 2017 and in February 2018, with the next meeting scheduled for July 2018. In addition, the Intergovernmental Mixed Committee for protection of minorities held their seventh meeting on 30 January 2018, which was the first since October 2014, where they committed to meeting annually in the future. This is a key development for Serbia's EU accession progress because Croatia had previously, in 2016, delayed opening of Chapters 23 and 24, using the issue pertaining the rights of Croatian national minority in Serbia. The two countries continue to strengthen high-level political relations, with two key meetings taking place recently. First, there was a meeting in June 2016 involving Aleksandar Vučić, then the Serbian PM, and Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarović to discuss the Serbo-Croatian border dispute, at which the Declaration on Improvement of Relations was signed; then, in February 2018, Vučić, now President, paid a visit to Zagreb. Improvements in cooperation at both technical and political levels offer a reason for cautious optimism.

On the other hand, resolution of bilateral disputes among WB neighbouring states shows less progress. One of the major bilateral disputes between **Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)** over construction of Pelješac Bridge is still ongoing. The construction of this bridge is of great importance to Croatia, but it would obstruct BiH's access to international waters and is connected to a territorial dispute over two islands near Neum, Mali Škoj and Veliki Škoj. One of the main obstacles to resolution is caused by the fact that BiH's position changes over time, especially before elections. Furthermore, the BiH officials are sharply divided over the issue, usually along the line of nationalist parties. While the Lower House of the BiH parliament adopted a Declaration to stop the construction of Pelješac bridge in September 2017, the Upper House (structured according to the national key) voted against this Declaration, deemed it unconstitutional and declared that it was not the official stance of the BiH Parliament. This response to the problem with Croatia has highlighted a much more important internal dispute. BiH, with a support from the Commission, should attempt to find solutions for the many internal bilateral issues between the two entities and political representatives of the three constituent nations.

Except for Peljesac Bridge dispute, the two states share almost 1,000 km of land border, of which up to 5% is considered disputed. The two countries reached a border agreement in 1999, but it has not been ratified neither in Zagreb nor Sarajevo, but is still provisionally implemented to this very day. **BiH also has an open border dispute with Serbia**, but the Inter-State Diplomatic Commissions (integrated in MFAs) did not meet since 29 June 2010 to discuss it, with BiH encoun-

tering problems with (re)forming and running the Commission. After years of frozen dispute, there was a high level political breakthrough resulting in discussions in late 2017 between Serbian President Vučić and RS President Dodik, followed by Mr Vucic's meeting with the members of the BiH Presidency, offering a hope in finding solutions.

The Agreement on the state border between **Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina** was reached and signed in August 2015 during the Vienna Summit of the Berlin Process and came in effect in April 2016 after it was ratified by both parliaments. On the other hand, the border agreement between **Montenegro and Kosovo** was also signed at the Vienna Summit, but it never came in effect because the Kosovo Parliament refused to ratify it for the next three years. The issue of border demarcation became hotly-contested internal problem in Kosovo and even led to the downfall of the government in May 2017, because some political parties opposed ratification of the Agreement, seeing it as unjust. Montenegro viewed the situation as an internal issue of Kosovo and held a stance that, as far as they are concerned, the demarcation has already been agreed. The breakthrough finally happened on 16 February 2018 when Kosovo President Thaci and Montenegrin President Vujanović, signed an Annex to the Vienna border demarcation agreement, which was adopted by the Kosovo Government on 17 February 2018 and ratified in the Parliament five days later, opening the path to Kosovo's visa liberalisation.

This assessment of the commitment by the WB countries and Member States to finding solutions for bilateral disputes since 2015 shows that there was enough progress made in the past four years to allow for cautious optimism that they could be resolved or at least "defrosted" in the first instance in the near future.

Bilateral Disputes and the EU Accession

Given that all the WB countries aspire towards the EU, the accession process should be used to encourage and facilitate the resolution of bilateral disputes. The approach very much depends on the actors involved and the accession stage they are at. The disputes between the EU candidates from the Western Balkans have a greater potential for resolution and for Commission's involvement than those where one or more Member States are involved. In the latter case, the role of the Commission as a facilitator in the process is much weaker, as it would not directly influence the Member States' preferred course

of action vis-à-vis resolution of a dispute. This raises the question of what mechanisms can be integrated into the EU accession process to encourage and facilitate the resolution of disputes.

When it comes to disputes among candidate countries, one way forward is for the Commission to introduce conditionality related to resolving disputes and to offer certain incentives that would contribute to advancements in their accession process. If the circumstances change so that one party in the dispute becomes a Member State, the Commission should have in place provisions and safeguarding measures to prevent it from using asymmetric powers against the other candidate, drawing on the lessons learnt from e.g. Slovenia and Croatia bilateral dispute. According to the new Strategy (2018), the Commission will insist on 'a special arrangement and irrevocable commitments'⁴ to ensure that new Member States do not start blocking remaining candidates. This is a welcome advancement in incorporating commitments that WB countries already made in Vienna 2015 by signing the Declaration on Bilateral Disputes.

Another important factor for deciding the course of intervention is whether the countries are already in the negotiation process such as Montenegro and Serbia, or only have a candidate status (Macedonia and Albania), or are still awaiting candidacy (BiH and Kosovo). Once a country starts negotiating with the EU, the example of Serbia and Kosovo should be exploited. In the case of Serbia, the Chapter 35 is devoted to the issue of normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Normally, it deals with miscellaneous issues that may come up during the negotiation process but are not covered under any other negotiation chapter. According to the negotiation framework for Serbia⁵, the country must ensure that its position vis-à-vis the status of Kosovo does not create obstacles in the implementation of the acquis. The combination of conditionality embedded in the negotiation framework for Serbia and the application of a new approach towards accession negotiations, which in this special case, as well Chapters 23 and 24, also includes Chapter 35 (Other issues), paves the way for continuous monitoring of the progress and implementation of solutions of bilateral disputes. 'In duly justified cases', issues related to normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo are also addressed in other relevant negotiation chapters.

4. A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans; published on 6 February 2018 (p.16)

5. European Commission - Enlargement - Negotiating framework https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/negotiating-framework_en

The overall balance (equilibrium) clause is used in the same manner as for the Chapters 23 and 24, i.e. if there is no sufficient progress in Chapter 35, Serbia 'would not be allowed to open and/or close other negotiation chapters until the imbalance is addressed'. Expanding the scope of the balance clause to Chapter 35, with a set of interim benchmarks followed by reports published at least twice a year to monitor their fulfilment, showcases the importance the Commission is placing to the resolution of bilateral issues. An additional role has also been given to the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice-President of the Commission to monitor the implementation and report to the European Council. However, for Chapter 35 to become a success in resolving this Gordian knot and similarly complex disputes depends on the solution being framed in such a way that it does not appear externally imposed or forced.

Building on the Serbia-Kosovo example, this approach should allow provisions for the countries dealing with bilateral disputes to move forward on their respective European paths, which will gradually lead towards a comprehensive agreement and sustainable implementation with a track record of agreed actions. Only such a flexible approach is likely to lead towards normalisation of bilateral relations in the form of a legally binding agreement by the end of Serbia's accession negotiations, as requested in the new Strategy. It will also comply with the Commission's expectations of finding a solution that is implementable, with the highest possible guarantees preventing it from subsequently modified by either side involved. In some cases, insisting on formal resolution of the bilateral disputes may even be counterproductive, because the countries may operate informal agreements that, despite not being ratified, are functional, such as the case of the Croatia-BiH border or the Prevlaka peninsula in the Croatia-Montenegro border dispute.

Similar pathway of using Chapter 35 can be applied to the territorial dispute between Montenegro and Kosovo. The Annex signed and ratified in February 2018 foresees the possibility for 'correction' of agreed border at a later stage. More specifically, the parties involved will establish a Joint Working Group with a mandate 'to identify and address potential disagreements during the demarcation of the border', which will operate in the coming period. While this step mainly benefits Kosovo and its citizens at this stage, Montenegro should be satisfied to tick-off this dispute side from its list of the potential challenges to EU accession, while also accommodating the concerns of a newly established nation. And it follows the line of acceptance of a solution that both parties can happily live with, as well as the Commission in view of overcoming the bilateral disputes as obstacles for the EU accession process. However, this example also shows that

solutions are often not ultimate and signing an agreement doesn't always lead to its ratification and implementation and needs a conditionality embedded in Chapter 35, which for Montenegro is possible at present.

If the specific situation allows, the Commission should substantially engage in resolving the most difficult bilateral disputes during the negotiation phase. It is more challenging for the Commission to use incentives or pressure in the same form of measures specified in the negotiation framework or built into negotiation chapters for the Western Balkans countries that are not in the negotiation stage. In such cases, weaker leverage over the countries' actions can be compensated for by offering incentives in the form of faster progress on the accession path and associated with certain future milestones in the process, such as opening accession negotiations, recommendation for opening accession negotiations or approving candidate status. In the case of Kosovo, a visa liberalisation offer seems to have been sufficiently motivating. Nevertheless, the Commission has the strongest leverage during the negotiation phase and it should be in its interest to strive to assist these countries to fulfil the necessary criteria and advance to this stage. Necessary preconditions for the disputes resolution could be made subject to discussion immediately after reaching candidate status.

A commonality of all Western Balkans bilateral disputes, regardless of the actors involved, is that their resolution needs to be institutionalised and embedded to the highest possible extent in the accession process by assigning formal mechanisms and monitoring role to the Commission with involvement by EEAS and the Council. In the next three years, the Commission should aim all its efforts on the gravest and most difficult bilateral disputes, namely those that directly block EU accession path (e.g. Macedonia) or that are most likely to escalate into abuse of asymmetric powers once a country enters the Union. In those cases where one of the parties involved is a Member State, the Commission and other EU institutions should take into account the larger European context and domestic political circumstances in which these countries operate and consider offering them incentives to engage in a dispute resolution, even if it is not in their immediate interest.

Brokering the next steps

With the current favourable climate and good winds from the EU, the countries of the Western Balkans have a historic opportunity to re-

solve their longstanding issues, both open and latent. Finding solutions is in the interest of the citizens, businesses and societies of these countries, to help them get on the path towards becoming fully-fledged members of the EU and enjoying political, economic and social prosperity. For this to happen, the engagement and commitment of the European Commission and EEAS needs to be enhanced and solidified in line with the EU's new Strategy for the Western Balkans.

The Berlin Process offers additional support, because the bilateral disputes fall naturally in its mini-intergovernmental nature and can play a significant role in setting up favourable conditions for resolving and subsequently implementing and sustaining solution of any bilateral issue. The annual Summits provide a favourable setting for discussions at the high-political level, in the presence of the Member States supporting the process. We initially define steps for a three-year perspective, starting from 2018, for tackling of the most pressing bilateral disputes. This period is the approximate time-frame for one political elite in power to make any bilateral arrangement go through the whole procedure outlined above, including organising referenda or ratification in Parliament. A three-year period between 2018 and 2020 is also foreseen in the new Strategy for taking concrete actions in the flagship areas. The formula for success in resolving bilateral issues lies in making the best use of existing external and internal mechanisms and measures, in combination with proper and timely sequencing. The following section offers a direction that the European Commission and Member States can follow in the coming period.

1. Firm commitment from the external actors and specific mechanisms

The EU should use the accession process to aid disputes resolution. Mechanisms need to be embedded in the official documents and approval procedures of the EU accession process of the WB countries, including the negotiation framework and EU common position regarding specific chapters. In the case of a candidate country that entered negotiation process, the requirements should be built into Chapter 35. For the countries that are not yet at the negotiation stage, the Commission and EEAS have to offer alternative mechanisms that combine incentives for a candidate (Albania, Macedonia) or a prospective candidate (BiH, Kosovo), with clearly defined expectations for resolving a disputes.

The Commission, EEAS and the Member States have to be unequivocally committed to the resolution in the proposed three-year period initially, and until 2025 generally, bearing in mind the time frame set in the new Commission's Strategy of 6 February 2018.

The EU decision makers should take forward the Berlin Process beyond 2018 and, even if this is not possible, the Declarations of commitment should continue annually and implemented by the WB governments. The four constituent components of the Berlin Process, the high-level annual Summits, civil society, youth and business process, all make a crucial difference needed to resolve bilateral disputes and to foster regional cooperation.

From the **security perspective**, the Commission and EU member states need to take into consideration interest of other international actors such as Russia, China, Turkey or the Gulf states active in the region. Some of these actors are not necessarily in favour of the resolution of the bilateral disputes, openly or in the shadows, thus are against the future EU membership of WB countries. Resolution of the bilateral issues, like the one between Serbia and Kosovo or Macedonia and Greece, will directly affect Russia's leverage in the region. **The EU has to develop specific mechanisms to counter the negative influence of these other actors.**

2.The internal sphere – a way forward on the home front

The technical sphere: It is essential for the work of the WB intergovernmental committees and working groups to become more consistent, with clear planning of meetings and activities for the next three years. They should be proactive, coordinate their work with the political sphere, be flexible and prepared to accommodate the changing dynamics of bilateral relations and seek to engage in preparation of the solutions for bilateral disputes. They should publish regular reports to assist their governments and state institutions, make the reports public and initiate discussions with civil society organisations on how to communicate particular aspects of the disputes resolution to the citizens.

The political sphere: Most of the bilateral disputes are initially negotiated between the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers in high-level meetings. In doing so, the political leaders have to prioritise interests of their countries and citizens over the narrow-minded pursuit of the goals and ideologies of war and conquest to set the floor for negotiations. Once the solution is found, it is the government's or the President's responsibility to immediately put it forward for ratification in the parliament; to ensure that it is integrated into the relevant legislation and to hold a consultation process if constitutional changes are needed. This is especially true if the negotiated solution to a bilateral dispute needs to be passed by a referendum, as is the case with Macedonia. Finally, if the dispute is resolved through international arbitration, it is the responsibility of government to uphold the agree-

ment and respect it in the spirit of good-neighbourly relations.

The Civil Society Forum has played an important role in the Berlin Process framework in the past five years. **The specific role of the civil society organisations should be in communicating developments and resolution of bilateral disputes to the citizens.** This will prevent a notion that some solutions are imposed from the high political level or external factor on the countries and their citizens and prevent confusion about the outcomes and their impact on the countries' future. Even when a deal is brokered through bilateral negotiations or international, binding arbitration, it has to be implemented locally. This is where the civil society and community organisations should play an active role to make those compromises more sustainable and widely accepted, to prevent backsliding along the way of implementation.

There is a need for direct involvement of local populations from disputed areas (territorial or disputes pertaining national minorities) in finding and shaping the solutions. Adding local consultations to mediation efforts at the national level would ensure that the solutions for bilateral disputes are implemented smoothly and will provide easy monitoring and feedback to annual reporting by the WB countries.

About the European Fund for the Balkans

The European Fund for the Balkans is a joint initiative of European foundations that envisions, runs and supports initiatives aimed at strengthening democracy, fostering European integration and affirming the role of the Western Balkans in addressing Europe's emerging challenges.

The up-to-date programme strategy is based on three overarching areas – Capacity Development, Policy Development and Regional Cooperation - and channelled via flagship programmes and selected projects, complemented with a set of actions arising from EFB's regional identity as a relevant player in its fields of focus.

Their synergetic effects are focussed on continuous "Europeanisation" of the policies and practices of the Western Balkans countries on their way to EU accession, through merging of the region's social capacity building with policy platform development, and a culture of regional co-operation.

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About the Centre for Southeast European Studies, University of Graz

The Centre for Southeast European Studies was set up in November 2008 following the establishment of Southeast Europe as a strategic priority at the University of Graz in 2000. The Centre is an interdisciplinary and cross-faculty institution for research and education, established with the goal to provide space for the rich teaching and research activities at the university on and with Southeast Europe and to promote interdisciplinary collaboration. Since its establishment, the centre also aimed to provide information and documentation and to be a point of contact for media and the public interested in Southeast Europe, in terms of political, legal, economic and cultural developments. An interdisciplinary team of lawyers, historians, and political scientists working at the Centre has contributed to research on Southeast Europe, through numerous articles, monographs and other publications. In addition, the centre regularly organizes international conferences and workshops to promote cutting edge research on Southeast Europe.

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