



“Looking Southeast: Providing Fresh Impetus towards EU Membership”

Central European University, Budapest
Nádor utca 9, Monument Building, Popper Room
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EVENT REPORT

On 28 May 2014, CEU’s Center for EU Enlargement Studies (CENS) and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest organized an expert conference on the Western Balkans and Turkey entitled “**Looking Southeast: Providing Fresh Impetus towards EU Membership**”. The event supported the joint strategic goal the EU has for the European future of the Western Balkan region, and it also examined Turkey’s path towards the EU. The conference built on the positive developments in the region which took place in the last decade; second, it gave incentives/positive examples from the countries which have stepped up a gear and are now in the EU (e.g. Croatia); and finally it focused on a Turkish foreign policy towards the EU and assessed its successes and shortcomings.



As CEU President and Rector **John Shattuck** pointed out in his opening remarks, there are signals from Germany which could indicate that the EU door might have closed after Croatia’s accession (Greek blockage of Macedonia for instance), but there are also positive aspects such as the example of Croatia. Turkey, which stands as a bridge to the Middle East and the Muslim world, is an existential issue. The question that remains is whether Europe will break down this bridge or not. Stakes are very

high for the European project, but the opportunities are also there. The conference was an occasion to concentrate and discuss the enlargement prospects, noted **Jan Niklas Engels**, Director of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the institutional co-sponsor of the event.

The first keynote speaker **Tanja Mišćević**, Head of the Negotiating Team for Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union, outlined three things that are different today compared to the previous enlargement: first, there is a completely different enlargement environment with huge challenges and hurdles. The environment is also more disintegrated with diverse paces of integration in the EU and in the Western Balkans; second, there is a different negotiation technique required. Croatia started a new model with the higher number of chapters and the introduction of benchmarks. During



Croatia's negotiating process tough chapters were opened in the early negotiation stages (the same applies to Montenegro), and this model became the official rule from then on. The rule of law chapter became a basis to start with, which is extremely difficult to conduct and even harder to implement. Tanja Mišćević continued by referring to the European values, which are needed for Serbia. It is necessary for the citizens to know that their rights are protected. Chapter 35 is probably the most problematic one, dealing with the monitoring process between Belgrade and Pristina. This is also the chapter that can block the whole negotiation process. She also reminded that the EU has still a huge appeal for all the Western Balkan countries. "It is important to perceive the EU as an instrument, not just as a goal", emphasized Mišćević and said that 2018 is the end goal to finish the negotiations. She concluded by saying it is crucial to continue with the positive developments in the entire Western Balkan region. Even though Serbia did not recognize Kosovo, they will not block cooperation with the EU, and this will also give positive signs to the rest of Western Balkan countries.



Director of CENS and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary **Péter Balázs** gave the second keynote speech, reminding that negotiations are underway with three countries from the Western Balkans and the EU has promised membership for the entire region. He also reiterated that Jean-Claude Juncker recently said that no enlargement is expected within the next five years. The conference was an opportunity to update our knowledge and prepare for further research one year after Croatia's membership

and eleven years after Thessaloniki. "Now we start a new MFF until 2020 which gives the framework for the actions, including enlargement", noted Balázs, "and now we know that SEE is not the main direction of the enlargement policy". He talked about three main aspects of the conference: Western Balkans, Turkey and the EU. Following the post-Yugoslav accessions Slovenia took advantage of the backwind and support of both the EU and other candidates at the time; Croatia had many difficulties on its way with border issues and with the fact that the political will was not that strong at the time; and currently we have Serbia and Montenegro on the way. He believes that the latter two could be ready in the office time of the next Commission by 2018. One of the time bombs is Kosovo and the solution will have to be found. Balázs further stated that Turkey is not the classical enlargement story, and the usual rules do not apply. "Turkey is a regional player. It has a strong influence in the Western Balkans, South Caucasus, Middle East, Mediterranean and in the whole area of Arab Spring", said Balázs. We have to take this into consideration, as Turkey grew out of the waiting room. Finally, he stated that the next President of the Commission matters. Depending on who and what kind of person we get, enlargement can turn out in different ways. Another important question is who the next Enlargement Commissioner will be.

EU Enlargement and the Western Balkans - 10 Years after Thessaloniki

The first panel of the conference discussed EU Enlargement and the Western Balkans ten years after Thessaloniki. **Maja Bakran Marcich**, Head of Directorate for Coordination of European Affairs at the Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs of Croatia, said that the Thessaloniki meeting was a very enthusiastic summit at the time, but we did not see it working later. The main difficulties for Croatia during the negotiation process were



benchmarking (23 opening benchmarks, 104 the total number of benchmarks); 35 chapters (chapters 23 and 24 were very complicated); the absence of accession date; as well as many pages of the *acquis* that had to be translated. Bakran Marcich said there are many hurdles for Serbia, too. What Serbia will have that Croatia did not are interim benchmarks, equilibrium clause, and additional emphasis on economic criteria. The crucial chapters for Serbia will be the rule of law, environment and agriculture, while for Croatia those were transport, fisheries and competition. She reminded that often problems can occur where you least expect them. In the case of Croatia that was the taxation chapter. Bakran Marcich also noted that the accession process has nowadays become more vigorous and that the Commission has weakened over the years. She further pointed out that Croatia was aware of individual influence of single member states (disputes with Slovenia) and that economic criteria could become a key word in the subsequent negotiations. She also predicted that there is a chance to revive the enlargement process, but the single rule will stay the same: merit-based principle. "If you do your homework, you will definitely get in", said Bakran Marcich. Croatia will also try to introduce a tailor-made process for Bosnia and Herzegovina on the way to the EU, as keeping the momentum is crucial.



Research Director of the Hungarian Institute of World Economics **András Inotai** started his presentation by reminding that Croatia and Turkey started negotiating together, but the process finished with different endings. Croatia had to deal with 35 chapters, but it is not only the number of chapters that matters, but also the level of difficulty. He further recalled that a number of new issues came up along the negotiating process for Croatia, which was not the case for CEE countries. Compared to the countries of CEE, there were 6 different changes in the negotiating

process and 12 different stages for Croatia. We also cannot forget that Croatia was blocked by Slovenia and learned a valuable lesson to never block another country. Croatia also faced a new element, the sequencing of chapters, which means starting the process with difficult chapters. Inotai continued by analyzing the progress of individual Western Balkan countries. Montenegro is characterized by 2 very interesting features: the fact it has already introduced euro and that much of Montenegrin economy is dominated by Russia. Serbia's main priority remains to join the EU. Albania has submitted the application and it is waiting for the green light. Macedonia is a special case, as it continues to be blocked by Greece. Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are not finished states and a lot of work awaits them. Inotai concluded his remarks by giving a set of recommendations: first, a new strategy for the Western Balkans has to be introduced and developed; second, strong conditionality; third, future of the Western Balkans can be influenced by other players in the region (Russia, Turkey); fourth, perception of the EU as a stability anchor, how reliable the EU is?

Tanja Mišćević, Head of the Negotiating Team for Accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union, repeated that Thessaloniki was important, but what she calls the "Zagreb process" was even more important – lessons we learned from Croatian accession experience. She highlighted the importance of talking not only about hurdles, but also not neglecting technical standards that need to be introduced. For Serbia the most problematic chapters



will be agriculture, transport and environment. Another important element is to see the EU as a moving target: number of chapters and their content is becoming more difficult. “The idea of mutual bilateral blocking still exists”, said Mišćević, “and you have to negotiate more with your neighbors than with Brussels”. She concluded that communication is important. “Public, civil society, trade unions have to be informed and we have to be completely transparent in terms of public opinion”.

The panel was chaired by **Tamás Szigetvári**, Senior Researcher at the Hungarian Institute for World Economics.

Croatia’s EU Accession and Its Effects on the Rest of the Western Balkan Countries



The second panel of the conference addressed Croatia’s EU accession and its effects on the rest of the Western Balkan Countries. **Senada Šelo Šabić**, Research Associate at the Croatian Institute for Development and International Relations, assessed the post-membership situation in Croatia. The country still has not seen the positive effect of EU membership and economically speaking the country is currently in a bad shape. However, both the EU

and NATO are success stories for Croatia, even though there are no automatic benefits from the membership. The assessment is not very optimistic at the moment (Perkovic case, usage of minority languages in the public sphere, high emigration of young educated people). Šelo Šabić finally referred to the recent EP elections, saying that Croatia elected 11 MPs for the EP: 6 Christian democrats, 4 social democrats and 1 green party. There was a better turnout this year than in the last elections.

Mihailo Crnobrnja, Professor at the Belgrade Faculty of Economics, Finance and Administration, talked about the present situation in Serbia and said that today every political party is in favor of the EU, which was not always the case. He also stated that all the Western Balkan countries can benefit from the entry of Croatia. In his view, the EU has not only widened over the years, but also deepened (more *acquis*, chapters, benchmarks). “If you have a strong ‘sponsor’ it is easier to get in and Serbia doesn’t have one at the moment”, said



Professor Crnobrnja. He also outlined two main reasons for which Croatia’s accession is good for the rest of the region: first, accession is possible in the Western Balkans; second, anything can be done in its own merit. What is essential for Serbia now is making sure the country starts receiving foreign direct investments and making the investment process less complicated. “Serbia is successfully diversifying these days but external investments are necessary”, concluded Crnobrnja.

Imre Varga, Ambassador and Senior Advisor of the International Centre for Democratic Transition of Hungary, noted that Croatia’s accession to the EU is a great success story both for the county and the region. He said that all the neighboring countries should join the EU, although nobody can predict a timeframe for such a scenario. A great starting point is to have a consensus among major political parties (especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia), because the real learning process about

the EU starts after accession. Varga also reminded that from the economic point of view the beginning of the EU story is never that bright. "It took Hungary more than 10 years to catch up. It's never only about economy but also social and employment rights", stated Varga. The fact that Serbia began official talks with the EU is an important moment. He also made a comparison between politicians, as those who always think in a 4-year-term, and leaders, who think in long-term perspectives. Varga concluded by saying that much of what happens in the Western Balkans depends on Brussels and not solely on the region. Brussels also requires a very strong leadership, and the Western Balkans should not be ignored and neglected.

The panel was chaired by **Milan Nič**, Executive Director of the Slovak Central European Policy Institute.

Turkey and the EU: A Broken Relationship?

The last panel of the conference discussed the relationship between the EU and Turkey. **Emre Hatipoglu**, Assistant Professor at Turkish Sabanci University, revisited the topic of privileged partnership between Turkey and the EU. He also assessed the current situation in Turkey, outlining the three major developments: first, the country is expanding its foreign policy portfolio; second, international trade is becoming very important; third, Turkish foreign policy is popularized. The current Turkish government uses the latter element to score points at home. For example, their "zero-problems policy" did not work and Turkey in fact had problems with every single neighbor, and they always seem to subscribe to a set of short term values. Furthermore, Turkey has become an important regional player over the years. The relations between the Western Balkans and Turkey are very good ("Istanbul Declaration", "Kosovo is Turkey, Turkey is Kosovo"); the Russia-Turkey relationship is in place, as both countries have dubious European credentials; and the Turkey-Middle East dimension is traditionally there. "The fact there is no EU policy towards Turkey will be very dangerous", said Hatipoglu. It is not clear where the EU wants to see Turkey in the future - as a candidate or a privileged partner? The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is an agreement connecting Turkey and the USA closer together. The EU is not saying anything about this link, which sends a strong signal from the EU to Turkey. Finally, the Turkish government is becoming more and more populist and nobody knows what the consequences will be.



Aybars Görgülü, Program Officer at the Turkish Foreign Policy Program of TESEV, started his presentation by saying that it is harder than ever before to follow Turkey today. The Turkish people always say the process is more important than the end result, but one has to recognize the fact that in the recent years there is a stalemate in Turkey-EU relations. Görgülü talked about new developments in the country which are taking place nowadays: new chapters are being open; Turkey accepted to reform its border checks; and there is a new

minister of EU integration who says 2015 will be the enlargement year. Turkey is important for the EU because of energy and therefore the energy chapter should be opened as soon as possible, as well as

human rights and judiciary. Görgülü concluded by saying that Turkey faces a couple of challenges at the moment: first, Egypt and Syria (the EU should be more helpful here); second, the relationship between Turkey and the EU should be not broken.

Emel Akçali, Professor at Central European University, noted that the EU lost interest and appetite for Turkey. “We have to admit that the EU has never been a popular project in Turkey”, said Akçali. There are polls according to which the majority of Turks say that being part of the EU is not that crucial any longer. Akçali assessed the EU as a significant player for the domestic level, but claiming that the EU economic strength cannot create leverage for the Turkish growing economy; the Turkish people carry quite anti-EU sentiments (especially in Cyprus); Turkey would be perfectly fine without the EU; and the slow process between Turkey and the EU is not only a Turkish fault, but also the fault of individual member states that oppose Turkish accession. She also referred to the issue of EU’s identity which is being questioned. Does the EU have its identity or not? Maybe the relationship between Turkey and the EU is actually greatly needed? Perhaps there is already a kind of interdependence, especially when it comes to economy and economic development. “What is very worrying is the fact that radical movements occur in the west and those people are the future enlargement policy makers”, said Akçali. She concluded by asking whether there is a need for a membership (for both the EU and Turkey). Things are so ambivalent that nobody can speak confidently about this at the moment.



The panel was chaired by **Erzsébet N. Rózsa** from the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs.