Advocacy Strategy for the EU Integration of the Western Balkans

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November 2016

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Foreword

The Western Balkan countries do not have an advocacy strategy aimed at promoting and speeding up their EU accession. Although there is growing awareness of the need for such a strategy, it has transpired that the WB government institutions have only communication strategies targeting specific groups within their national borders: decision makers and initiators/multipliers of public awareness of the EU accession process, youth, or opponents of integration. However, these strategies have not been oriented towards the relevant target groups in the EU. *The Advocacy Strategy for the EU Integration of the Western Balkans - Guidelines (ASWB)*, developed by eight Western Balkan and Visegrad Group think tanks[1], is the first initiative of the kind.

This document aims at supporting and facilitating EU enlargement to the Western Balkans. It offers practical guidelines for national administrations, parliaments and civil society organisations (CSOs) in order to encourage their advocacy efforts to accelerate accession to the EU and contribute to the development of positive perceptions of the region in the Brussels institutions, EU Member States, as well as the Western Balkans. The future regional and national advocacy strategies stemming from these guidelines are expected to synergise with other regional mechanisms/leverages for the faster European integration.

With a view to fostering the EU integration of the Western Balkan countries, the Guidelines argue that the key impediments are to be confronted through joint advocacy endeavours. They propose that a civil society coalition (the WB6 Advocacy Group) leads on the development of the regional strategy and coordinates its implementation. The authors offer guidelines on the preparation of the regional strategy and its elements: goal-setting, delineation of the desired outcomes and required courses of action, identification of the key target groups and the messages tailoring the courses of action to the groups' particularities, and case-building. They outline typical advocacy products regarding the particular goals and recommendations on their delivery through selected communication channels. The Guidelines propose activities and suggest ways to map and evaluate the stakeholders, which is prerequisite for establishing and maintaining productive relations with them. Mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the realisation of the outcomes are proposed to ensure the flexibility of the strategy and facilitate its fine-tuning during implementation. The recommendations are addressed to the future planners and coordinators of the strategy.

The ASWB is expected to increase the amount of attention paid to the advocacy/communication dimension of the WB countries' EU integration strategies, as well as improve their communication with Brussels and the EU Member States. Moreover, it can facilitate the concerted advocacy of the specific achievements and interests of numerous regional organisations and initiatives in the Western Balkans.

Most of the 180 interlocutors interviewed during the development of the ASWB emphasised the need for a common advocacy approach to the EU integration of the WB. In their opinion, such an approach will be effective only if the WB policy makers address the EU institutions and Member States with "one voice".

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[1] Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS), Foreign Policy Initiative (VPI) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, European Movement in Montenegro (EMiM), European Movement in Serbia (EMinS) in the Western Balkans; and, the Center for European Neighborhood Studies of the Central European University (CEU CENS) in Hungary, the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) in Poland, the Research Centre Slovak Foreign Policy Association (RC SFPA) and the Czech Institute for European Policy EUROPEUM in the Visegrad Group (V4)

Limited WB administrative capacities for EU affairs and official advocacy channels require the involvement of and partnering with other actors in the region as well, notably the think tanks, academia, business community, media, etc., in advocating a faster and more successful EU integration process. Numerous regional initiatives and organisations, at both the political and expert levels, can contribute by mobilising their resources and channels of influence. These mostly underused unofficial channels of advocacy can prove to be a valuable resource in the endeavour to accomplish the goal all WB countries are striving towards – EU accession. The ASWB provides a good framework for a comprehensive strategic approach interlinking official and unofficial actors.

The Visegrad Group's experiences during EU accession and in defining their joint positions in influencing decision-making in the EU after they joined, as well as the communication/lobbying strategies of regional organisations and networks (i.e. RCC, SEETO, RESPA, NALAS, REC, BCSDN, CDRSEE)[2], were of particular relevance during the preparation of the ASWB. The ASWB is informed by abundant literature on EU enlargement, public attitudes and accession experiences collected and analysed during the desk research stage.

The ASWB has been made available to the interested public on a web portal and at promotional events and debates with key policy makers in the Western Balkan countries, the V4 capitals and Brussels.

Jelica Minić
Editor

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[2] See the List of Acronyms

Advocacy Strategy for the EU Integration of the Western Balkans - *Guidelines*[3]

1. Introduction

1.1. The Case for a Regional Advocacy[4] Strategy

Compared with the previous rounds of enlargement, the circumstances under which the European Union (EU) is supposed to enlarge, have never been worse. The EU is facing multiple internal crises. The requirements imposed on aspirant countries have become more complex – more chapters, interim benchmarks, the equilibrium clause and additional emphasis on the economic criteria. The process has been further encumbered by the five-year enlargement moratorium and marginalisation of the issue on the European Union agenda, reduced focus on the Western Balkans (WB)[5] at the EU institutional level and the nationalisation of the enlargement policy following the Lisbon Treaty, coupled with declining support for further enlargement and rising Euroscepticism in the Member States.

On the other hand, the EU accession process in the WB countries has simultaneously been endangered due to low levels of economic growth and increasing poverty and institutional ineffectiveness in the implementation of European standards and values, accompanied by dwindling support for EU accession and accession-related reforms.

In order to fuel the European integration process and manage the anti-accession influences in such circumstances, the aspiring Western Balkan countries will inevitably have to clearly strategise and intensify their advocacy activities to give impetus to the enlargement process in Brussels and the EU Member States, on the one hand, and facilitate the EU accession process and speed up the related reforms at home, on the other.

Diverse activities geared at influencing policies and practices of decision-makers and generating public support – such as lobbying, communication campaigns, promotion of policy alternatives, work with the media and other similar activities – have been designed and implemented by Western Balkan governments since the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, with a view to fostering their European Union integration, as will be presented in the following chapters. These individual countries' advocacy endeavours are in compliance with the "regatta" principle, and, as the comparative experiences of the Visegrad Group (V4) countries' accession processes demonstrate, remain indispensable for fulfilling a number of EU accession prerequisites (i.e. gaining support of the domestic publics, resolution of country-specific issues, etc.). The national approach to advocacy

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[3] Compiled by *Ana Marjanović Rudan,* Organization and Program Development Consultant, Praxis Development Consulting Office, Belgrade

[4] The term *advocacy* in this text refers to various activities of state and non-state actors, aimed at influencing policies and practices of the decision-makers and raising awareness and instigating support of the broader publics.

[5] The term *Western Balkans* in this text refers to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo* (This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro and Serbia.

activities, as opposed to a joint, regional approach, is better suited to achieve certain country-specific goals in the three accession stages, which the countries in the region have been completing at different paces. These three stages cover the periods before, during and after the negotiations, whereby the typical goals include e.g. increase in public support for specific accession-related reforms or countering country-specific opposition to formal accession to the Union, etc. As will be shown, the regional approach focuses on overcoming the region's common rather than the country-specific obstacles to EU integration.

However, there are two key reasons why relying solely on national advocacy efforts will not suffice for the Western Balkan countries' further progress towards European integration and why they should adopt a joint, regional approach to address the obstacles they share:

- Firstly, the nationalisation of the European enlargement process resulting from the Treaty of Lisbon prompted the need for the aspiring EU members to address enlargement and accession-related concerns of decision- and opinion-makers in both the EU and the individual EU Member States, and to work on winning their unyielding support. In practice, this translates into the need to mobilise additional human and financial resources, often beyond the reach of individual Western Balkan countries going it alone. Fortunately, the phenomenon of "cluster perception" of the Western Balkans among the decision- and opinion-makers in the EU and EU Member States, who tend to view it as a single region with shared problems and do not distinguish between the individual countries, facilitates a joint, regional, "cluster response". The "cluster response" to a "cluster perception" is a cost-effective way to achieve those advocacy goals related to the shared, regional impediments to EU enlargement (which are, as will be demonstrated, largely linked to the marginalisation of enlargement on the EU agenda, growing dissemination of the disintegration narrative and the unfavourable image of the region). The resolution of other problems hindering the region's EU integration, such as open bilateral issues with the EU Member States, can also be facilitated by an intensified regional approach and greater involvement of the regional structures.

- Secondly, regional cooperation among Western Balkan countries is the *sine qua non* of their European perspective largely because of their recent conflicts and lingering bilateral issues. More importantly, and aside from being an accession requirement, regional cooperation is the trump card in the hands of the Western Balkan countries, as it is becoming "a key element for the stability of the region and of the whole of Europe"[6], especially in light of the unprecedented security challenges posed by large-scale terrorist threats, continued migration along the Western Balkans route and increased meddling of Russia and other non-EU actors in Balkan affairs, but also in light of the emergence and spreading of the EU disintegration narrative, additionally fuelled by the outcome of the United Kingdom referendum.

While cost-effectiveness is the practical reason for a joint approach to advocacy, the second reason – the added value of regional cooperation in the grim global circumstances – reflects the essence of the European idea. Moreover, for the first time in recent history, the Western Balkan multi-ethnic region has found itself in a situation where its countries are not confronted, but on the same side, focusing on the same goal – EU integration. This historical precedent provides a favourable climate for rallying national energies, resources and knowledge to overcome the hurdles faced by the entire Western Balkans and maximise the region's strengths and opportunities in the accession process.

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[6] According to *Final Declaration by the Chair of the Paris Western Balkans Summit*, 4 July 2016.

In view of all these considerations, a synergetic, regional approach to advocacy is proposed in order to efficiently address the obstacles to EU integration shared by the six Western Balkan countries and facilitate their individual accession. The below guidelines have been developed to initiate the development of a full-fledged regional advocacy strategy for the integration of the Western Balkans in the European Union and its implementation.

1.2. Development, Coordination and Implementation of the ASWB and the Relationship between the Regional and the National Advocacy Strategies

Much like the guidelines, a full-fledged advocacy strategy for the European integration of the Western Balkans should be co-authored by the think tanks from the six countries of the region (rallied in the WB6 Advocacy Group), while peer reviews and advice can be sought from think tanks in the V4 countries, boasting valuable pre- and post-accession advocacy experiences that can prove extremely practicable. The full-fledged strategy should be prepared in consultation with the entities in the six countries that are to participate in its implementation: line ministries and other government institutions, civil society organisations and think tanks involved in EU integration, the national and regional media, as well as business associations. In addition to the national actors, the authors of the strategy should also consult with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and other key regional initiatives that already have elaborate regional strategies[7] and developed links with the European Union and can provide both mentorship during the strategy preparation stage and direct support during the implementation stage. Since the development and the implementation of the strategy will require donor support, advice should also be solicited from donors highly involved in the region. Support for this initiative by the Western Balkan governments and the key regional initiatives – indispensable for the effectiveness of the envisaged advocacy efforts – should be sought and secured within the framework of a high-level platform, such as the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) or the Berlin Process.

While the implementation of the strategy will entail involvement of actors from regional initiatives and state, civil and business sectors, the guidelines propose that the regional group of think tanks developing the strategy also be tasked with the coordination and operational management of its implementation. The guidelines propose that the group be established as a collaborative platform of the six think tanks (the WB6 Advocacy Group) and that the direct involvement of the regional governments and the key regional initiatives be formalised through the Group's Advisory Committee.

Apart from the regional advocacy strategy, which will address the EU integration obstacles shared by the Western Balkan countries, unrelated to the particular contexts of the individual countries, it is also recommended that the WB countries develop national strategies supporting EU accession, to tackle the country-specific goals in different stages of accession. The regional and national strategies should be complementary and their harmonisation should be secured by the think tanks participating in the WB6 Advocacy Group, in their respective countries[8]. Attaching priority to the regional approach is recommended in case of overlaps, for the listed two reasons – cost-effectiveness, and the leverage of regional cooperation in light of the new security challenges and the disintegration narrative.

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[7] Notably, the Southeast Europe 2020 Strategy developed by the RCC, together with the Secretariat of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) 2006, Energy Community Secretariat, Southeast Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO), Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) and others.

[8] It is advisable that the six think tanks participating in the WB6 Advocacy Group also initiate the development of the national advocacy strategies.

2. Strategy Development Guidelines

2.1. Impact, Goals, Projected Outcomes and General Courses of Action

In the context mentioned in Section 1.1, the envisaged impact of the ASWB would be to foster the European integration of the Western Balkan countries through a joint, regional advocacy enterprise. In order to define the ways in which to achieve the desired impact, we intersected the causes of the current stalemate of European integration common to the six WB countries (derived from answers to the following question: What are the shared obstacles standing in the way of the WB countries' accession to the Union?) and assessments of the possible scope of impact of the advocacy efforts as such (derived from answers to the following question: What can be realistically achieved by advocacy activities?). This exercise helped single out three clusters of problems and their causes that can be meaningfully addressed by advocacy mechanisms:

(1) Marginalisation of enlargement on the Union agenda, which can be attributed to the decision-makers' overwhelming focus on the emerging problems threatening the EU's stability and future – the protracted financial crisis and recession, the "digestion" problems after the 2004, 2007 and 2013 enlargement rounds, the surge of Eurosceptics in the European Parliament, the crisis in Ukraine and the "new Cold War" with Russia, the refugee crisis, Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partners (TTIP) negotiations, Brexit, etc.

(2) Decreasing support for EU enlargement in the Member States, in the context of the post-Lisbon nationalisation of the enlargement policy, caused by the negative image of the region and emergence of the EU disintegration narrative[9]. The former stems from the predominance of negative perceptions of the Western Balkan region (war legacy, lack of the rule of law, poverty, widespread corruption, slow reforms) and from the sporadic and mostly negative news coming from the Western Balkan countries; doubts about the EU's future and integrative capacity can largely be ascribed to the same reasons that led to the marginalisation of the enlargement issue on the EU agenda[10].

(3) Lesser support to European integration in the WB countries resulting from the incoherent official discourse[11] about the EU and the decision-makers' modest enthusiasm for regional cooperation, as a tangible and immediate manifestation of commitment to EU integration. Notwithstanding formal commitments to EU accession, daily politics in the WB countries are characterised by ambivalence[12] underlying the official EU-related discourse, along with the reluctance to engage full-heartedly in regional cooperation. This state of affairs is reflected in the regional mainstream media, and perpetuated by their conservatism and inclination to follow the lead of the powers that be. The habitual failure of the

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[9] The decrease in support is also caused by internal reasons (in-country political tensions, election cycles, emergence of Eurosceptic forces), and by bilateral issues between the Member and aspirant states; however, the internal reasons are beyond the immediate scope of an advocacy campaign, and the reasons stemming from bilateral, country-specific issues, should be addressed within the national strategies, and only indirectly within the proposed regional strategy, through the promotion of regional cooperation.

[10] The dissemination of the disintegration narrative linked to the upsurge of Eurosceptic forces is beyond the scope of this advocacy strategy.

[11] The term *official discourse* in this text pertains to public addresses and statements by decision-makers, institutional agendas of the ministries and state institutions relevant to EU integration, everyday messages politicians communicate either by words of actions, etc.

[12] In terms of simultaneous efforts of WB decision-makers to strike a balance between their relations with the EU and with other, non-EU actors, and to appeal to both the supporters and opponents of EU accession at home.

mainstream media to provide functional information on the EU, their lack of interest in reporting on accession-related successes and progress in regional cooperation[13], in turn, shape public opinion and support for EU integration in the Western Balkan countries[14].

We outlined the following three goals of the regional strategy with a view to applying advocacy tools to address the particular causes of these three clusters of problems:

(1) To reinvigorate the issue of enlargement to the WB on the EU agenda;
(2) To increase support for enlargement in EU Member States, in the context of the nationalisation of the EU enlargement policy;
(3) To increase the pro-EU orientation of the official discourse and commitment to regional cooperation among Western Balkan countries.

In order to achieve these goals, we have defined the outcomes leading to their attainment, the required courses of action and the target groups. Given the nature of the outcomes – change in attitudes, perceptions and behaviours – we recommend that the ASWB be developed to cover a three-year period.

Table 1: Goals, Outcomes, Courses of Action, Target Groups

Goals	Projected outcomes – leading to the achievement of the goals	Courses of action	Target groups
(1) Reinvigorate the issue of enlargement to the WB on the EU agenda	• Decision-makers in the relevant EU institutions are willing to take specific actions necessary for moving the WB enlargement issue up on their agendas	• Two-step approach: o Step 1. Indirect action: dissemination of the narrative of further enlargement as part of a solution to the Union's inherent tensions and present-day challenges o Step 2. Direct calls to action: dissemination and promotion of specific proposals of alternative policies and practices	(1) Decision-makers in the relevant EU institutions (2) Opinion-makers with influence in these institutions

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[13] More on the media in: Minić, Jelica, "April 2016 – Media Image of the Western Balkans", in Western Balkans between Geography and Geopolitics, ed. Simurdić, Milan, *Foreign Policy Papers No.1, 2016,* European Movement in Serbia Forum for International Relations, Belgrade, 2016, pp. 17-27. Available at: http://www.emins.org/uploads/useruploads/forum-mo/Foreign-Policy-Paper_1.pdf

[14] Other factors causing a drop in support to EU accession in the WB countries, such as *patience fatigue,* rise in Eurosceptic forces, increasing Russian influence and others, are to be addressed by the national advocacy strategies, as these factors require country-specific approaches due to the particularities of the local contexts.

Goals	Projected outcomes – leading to the achievement of the goals	Courses of action	Target groups
(2) Increase support for enlargement in the Member States, in the context of the nationalisation of the EU enlargement policy	• Increased support of the EU Member States' governments to enlargement to the Western Balkans	• Two-step approach: o Step 1. Improvement of the WB countries' image by countering negative perceptions and exploiting positive ones; dissemination of the further enlargement narrative as part of a solution to the Union's inherent tensions and present-day challenges o Step 2. Direct calls to action: dissemination and promotion of specific proposals of alternative policies and practices	(3) Decision-makers and (4) Opinion-makers in key Member States[15]
(3) Increase the pro-EU orientation of the official discourse and commitment to regional cooperation among Western Balkan countries	• Final outcome: The official discourse in the WB countries clearly reflects their pro-EU orientation and the WB countries demonstrate increased commitment to regional cooperation • Intermediate outcome: public (media-driven) discourse in the WB countries resonates the commitment of elites (decision- and opinion-makers) to European integration and regional cooperation	• In parallel: o Encouragement of the Western Balkan decision-makers to prioritise EU accession and regional cooperation on their agendas and in their public addresses, and intensify their engagement in the existing regional cooperation initiatives, through direct calls to action – specific proposals of policies and practices o Raising awareness of opinion-makers about the finer points of EU integration, their role in shaping public discourse and generating public support for accession and the related reforms, regional cooperation as a formal requirement for accession, existing regional initiatives, mechanisms and strategies – through the promotion of EU integration and regional cooperation	(5) Decision-makers, and (6) Opinion-makers in Western Balkan countries[16]

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[15] Counter-intuitively, a recent research of the European Public Centre found that "public opinion on Balkan enlargement does not seem to be a dominant factor for the official national positions of EU capitals on the dossier" (see: Balfour R., Stratulat C., *EU member states and enlargement towards the Balkans*, European Policy Centre, Issue Paper No. 79, July 2015, p. xii)

[16] The ASWB should focus on decision- and opinion-makers as sources and key influencers of public discourse, while the national advocacy strategies should target broader audiences to secure popular support.

2.2. *Target Groups, Messages and Case-Building*

To proceed with planning activities needed to achieve the projected outcomes, it is necessary to begin by mapping and researching the defined target groups – decision-makers and opinion-makers in the European Union, EU Member States and the Western Balkan countries[17]. Obviously, as the scope of any strategy's outreach to target groups is determined by the availability of resources, it is advisable to prioritise them during the planning stage. Prioritisation should not, however, result in excluding any target groups, as all are instrumental for achieving the goals; rather, prioritisation should be performed within the target groups, among their particular members (who will be known only upon the completion of detailed mapping and research). For instance, not all Brussels-based think tanks, but only the ones wielding the greatest influence, will be invited to a study trip to the Western Balkan countries; not all Member States, but only the ones opposing enlargement the most, will be targeted by the media campaign. The criteria on which to base such prioritisation will include the possible influence of a particular target group to the attainment of the goals (high or low), but their pre-disposition towards the attainment of the goals (affirmative, ambivalent or opposing) should not be an eliminatory factor (only a corrective one). This is because nurturing the support of the proponents of enlargement is as important as reversing attitudes, perceptions and behaviours of its opponents and because addressing the concerns of a low-influence opponent should not be neglected.

The mapping of the target groups' members will entail the preparation of a database with names, positions and contacts of the individuals in the institutions we are aiming to affect, and such a database should be put in place at the very beginning of the strategy preparations and updated twice a year. The database should also contain key findings of the research of the target groups' members, conducted to shed light on the particular targets, such as their circumstances, concerns, priorities etc., which will enable the authors to tailor their advocacy products and select communication channels that will affect the particular counterparts most efficiently. Also, the research will indicate the best timing (based on organisational cycles and other circumstances) to approach particular targeted counterparts.

The following is a preliminary list indicating the typical institutions that belong to the particular target groups, within which individual contacts should be identified, researched, catalogued in the database and targeted by the activities. The list should be compiled in the early stage of strategy development.

The role of the advocacy strategy is to encourage and inspire the target groups to action. EU decision-makers should be inspired to refocus the EU agenda on enlargement, decision-makers in the Member States to support enlargement to the Western Balkans and decision-makers in WB countries to take actions to reaffirm their commitment to EU accession and intensify regional cooperation. This can be achieved by (a) change of narrative and (b) direct calls to action, with the support of the stakeholders (described in Section 2.3).

To define the content of the narratives and direct calls to action, the messages that will be communicated to the members of the particular target groups (aimed at changing the narratives and/or at instigating direct action) are to be clearly defined, reflecting the nature of the desired changes in the target groups' policies,

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[17] The impact of the advocacy strategy will be achieved by the direct engagement of the decision-makers. However, since their action is greatly influenced by various opinion-makers (not only the media, but influential think tanks, academics, eminent public figures, etc. as well), the opinion-makers are directly targeted through advocacy activities, as they hold the keys to changing the decision-makers' policies and practices, which this strategy is seeking to effect. Due to this direct link, opinion-makers are addressed as the strategy "target groups", not as "other stakeholders", who can be engaged in the activities, but changing their perceptions and resulting behaviours is not among the goals of this strategy.

behaviours and practices. The messages will be "packed" in advocacy "products" (letters, publications, etc.) and delivered via communication channels (i.e. one-on-one meetings, roundtables, media, et al).

Table 2: Preliminary List of Institutions Targeted by the Strategy

Target groups	Institutions – preliminary list
In the EU:	
(1) Decision-makers	• European Commission (representatives of the Directorate for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, representatives of other Directorates dealing with international issues – security, trade, energy, connectivity, development etc.), European External Action Service, European Council (Foreign Affairs Council), European Parliament (MEPs, rapporteurs, committees), IFIs, Western Balkan Investment Framework, etc.
(2) Opinion-makers	• Think tanks: Friends of Europe, European Stability Initiative, Carnegie Europe, Centre for European Policy Studies, European Council on Foreign Relations, etc. • Eminent international and Brussels media, such as the Economist, Financial Times, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, International Herald Tribune, Le Monde, New Europe, Balkan Insight, Politico, etc.
In Member States:	
(3) Decision-makers	• Parliamentary committees, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, executive authorities specialising in EU issues
(4) Opinion-makers	• Think tanks focusing on EU policies and the WB region: the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, German Council on Foreign Relations, European Institute at the London School of Economics, French Institute of International Relations, the College of Europe, Humboldt University, Southeast Europe Association, etc. • Think tanks focusing on the Member States' domestic policies • Eminent media (traditional and online, including individual influencers on social networks) with national and regional coverage
In the WB countries:	
(5) Decision-makers	• Parliamentary committees, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, executive authorities whose remits include EU issues, pro-EU and ambivalent political parties
(6) Opinion-makers	• Regional think tanks, such as The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group • Think tanks in the six Western Balkan countries (primarily those in the WB6 Advocacy Group) • Eminent media (traditional and online, including individual influencers on social networks) with national and regional coverage (Balkan Insight, Vicinities, Al Jazeera, N1, EurActiv, European Western Balkans, etc.)

The messages should not be vague or banal; nor should they mechanically reflect the desired outcomes. Instead, they should be logical statements, backed by evidence, which will provide the sophisticated counterparts (as is the case in this strategy) with good reasons to reconsider their attitudes and alter their behaviours. The wording of the messages should be simple and brief and tailored to the particular stakeholders to ensure

that their actual concerns are properly addressed. The messages should be based on the analysis of the overall circumstances (political, social, economic, etc.) and identified pre-dispositions (perhaps most easily accomplished through SWOT analyses[18]), and formulated with the aim of contributing to the achievement of the projected outcomes.

During the implementation of the regional advocacy strategy, the exact way in which the messages within particular products will be phrased and adapted to the particular communication channels will be determined only once the circumstances of each individual stakeholder are reviewed. However, during the further development of the strategy, the umbrella messages should be defined on the basis of the desired outcomes and suit the broadly defined target groups. Umbrella messages are, therefore, raw, semi-products, and should be refined and backed by evidence before they are used in specific advocacy products. Below are the illustrations of the umbrella messages that will be additionally elaborated during the further development of the strategy.

Finally, before proceeding to "packaging" and "channelling" the messages (planning the activities), evidence must be built for the messages that will be communicated – each statement and each request has to be backed by solid arguments. The process of case-building involves gathering and analysing information, desk research and other methods requisite for corroborating the statements and promoting action.

Table 3: Illustrative Umbrella Messages

Target groups	Courses of action	Illustrative umbrella messages[19]

(1) Decision-makers in the relevant EU institutions
 	
(2) Opinion-makers with influence in these institutions
	• Step 1. Indirect action: dissemination of the further enlargement narrative as part of a solution to the Union's inherent tensions and present-day challenges
	
	• Step 2. Direct calls to action: dissemination and promotion of specific proposals of alternative policies and practices
		• For the new narrative:
		o Politically, the EU cannot allow a black hole in its South East flank in the long run, because:
		  - WB has an important geostrategic position (it is surrounded by the EU and NATO) – rendering it attractive to competing great powers
		  - WB has high security relevance (migration, cross-border organised crime, terrorism) – rendering it relevant to the security of the EU countries
		  - WB is a transit region, with an important position regarding European energy security and transport connectivity – rendering it important for full EEA integration

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[18] National chapters of this edition contain preliminary SWOT analyses of WB EU integration by WB and V4 think tanks and should be consulted in the strategic planning process.

[19] The messages were formulated using the recommendations from the national chapters of this edition.

Target groups	Courses of action	Illustrative umbrella messages[19]

		o Operationally, the integration of the Western Balkan countries can proceed effortlessly, since:
		  - The costs of the region's integration will be low due to its small size
		  - Numerous functional EU and regional mechanisms supporting the process are already in place
		• For direct calls to action:
		o Restore high-level EU-WB dialogue
		o Support the WB countries in managing the effects of the nationalisation of the enlargement policy
		o Increase cooperation with and extend greater support to WB regional intergovernmental structures and CSO networks
		o Support the faster functional integration of the WB through security structures, infrastructure development, development of small and medium-sized enterprises and policies conducive to the region's economic growth

(3) Decision-makers and (4) Opinion-makers in the key Member States	• Step 1. Improvement of the WB countries' image by countering negative perceptions and exploiting positive ones; dissemination of the further enlargement narrative as part of a solution to the Union's inherent tensions and present-day challenges • Step 2. Direct calls to action: Dissemination and promotion of specific proposals of alternative policies and practices	• For the new narrative (regarding the image of the WB region): o WB countries are now all on the same side, aspiring towards EU accession o The migrant crisis and security issues have demonstrated the importance of the WB for the entire EU o Various messages promoting the elements of WB's "soft power" and bringing it closer to EU citizens (culture, art, history, food, music…) and countering biases and misconceptions • For the new narrative regarding further enlargement – as above • For direct calls to action: o To Germany, Italy and Austria – WB have proven themselves as solid and cooperative partners. Help WB go through the integration process with the fewest possible obstacles and keep investing in WB countries o To Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia – We have open bilateral issues, but we should deal with them separately from the EU integration process and in parallel with fostering our economic, cultural and other cooperation, which are in our mutual interest o To V4 countries – Help us with your experience in regional cooperation and EU integration, as well as with your influence in the EU institutions. We should expand our economic cooperation o To France, Benelux and the Nordic countries – We should increase our cooperation in trade and investments, as well as our cultural cooperation

Target groups	Courses of action	Illustrative umbrella messages[19]

(5) Decision-makers and (6) Opinion-makers in Western Balkan countries	• Encouragement of decision-makers to prioritise EU accession and regional cooperation on their agendas and in public addresses and intensify their engagement in the existing regional cooperation initiatives
	
	• Raising awareness of opinion-makers about the finer points of EU integration, their role in shaping public discourse and public support to accession and the related reforms, regional cooperation as a formal requirement for accession, regional initiatives, mechanisms and strategies – through the promotion of EU integration and regional cooperation
		• For the new narrative (to inspire change):
		  o Regional cooperation is tangible proof of commitment to EU accession
		  o Regional cooperation is a safeguard against regional conflicts
		  o Opportunities offered by the existing regional cooperation mechanisms are largely untapped
		  o Only through collaboration can the region attract major investments and reindustrialise
		  o The small WB countries can defend their interests only as an interest group, like the Nordic countries, Benelux and V4, before and after the region joins the EU
		  o Many of the hitherto regional cooperation successes have gone unreported
		• Direct calls to action will contain proposals to change polices and behaviours and will encourage the decision-makers to take part in regional initiatives more intensively

2.3. Activities and Stakeholders

Target groups are addressed by products containing evidence-based messages (such as researches, publications, promotional material, etc.) and communicated via particular channels (such as traditional and online media, one-on-one meetings, roundtables, conferences, cocktail parties). Activities denote the placement of the products via the selected channels. The final choice of products and channels can only be made after careful research and mapping of the target groups and, when possible, after the identification of their representatives (due to the high profile of specific counterparts, research of their personal preferences for advocacy products and channels will be useful). Specific activities can be planned once the right mix of products and channels for a target group has been identified.

Typical advocacy products include policy analyses with recommendations, position papers, reports, researches, policy briefs, letters, newsletters, policy- and situation-related statements, press releases, interviews, appearances in TV shows, op-eds, articles, keynote speeches, presentations at conferences, etc.

The products are communicated via channels, such as: face-to-face meetings, dissemination of products via individual letters, mailing lists and social media, organisation of and participation in roundtables and conferences and at events such as cocktail parties, working breakfasts, formal dinners, organisation of study trips, guest lectures, road shows and exhibitions, traditional and online media campaigns, advertising campaigns, etc.

The activities should be tailored to the particular target groups, as demonstrated by the following example:

Table 4: Examples of Activities per Target Group

Target groups	Activities
(1) Decision-makers in the relevant EU institutions (2) Opinion-makers with influence in these institutions	• Meetings (group and individual) with influential representatives of the targeted EU institutions • Organisation of cocktail parties with official speeches • Addresses to the European Parliament and other EU fora which WB candidate countries can access (i.e. sectoral committees, joint committees, political parties' groups in the EP, Working Party on the Western Balkan region (COWEB), etc. • Keynote speeches in distinguished settings such as events on the margins of WB6 Summits, Friends of Europe, European Policy Centre, Centre for European Policy Studies, Davos, London School of Economics and Political Science, the College of Europe in Bruges, Humboldt University in Berlin, etc. • Campaigns in eminent international and Brussels-based media
(3) Decision-makers (4) Opinion-makers in the key Member States	• Meetings (group and individual) with influential representatives of the targeted institutions • Guest lectures at distinguished universities • Organisation of working breakfasts with journalists of eminent media • Organisation of joint WB business road shows promoting WB economies • Organisation of exhibitions of WB artists • Organisation of briefings for the diplomatic corps (from the Member States, appointed to the WB countries) • Placement of articles in eminent media outlets
(5) Decision-makers (6) Opinion-makers in Western Balkan countries	• Meetings (group and individual) with influential representatives of the targeted institutions • Organisation of working breakfasts with journalists of eminent media • Organisation of roundtables with influential representatives of targeted institutions • Organisation of regional events or participation in advocacy activities at the conferences, meetings and workshops organised by regional cooperation organisations and initiatives (SEECP, RCC, CEFTA, ECS, SEETO, REC, NALAS, etc.) • Campaigns in regional media (Vicinities, Al Jazeera, N1) • Promotion of products via social media (boosted posts)

Furthermore, the kinds and levels of involvement of particular stakeholders, who are important because of their power to sponsor, facilitate, fund, enable, impede, distort or disable the outcomes of particular activities, will be clarified during activity planning (but not before that)[20]. Due to their potential role, a segment of the strategy should be dedicated to planning relations with stakeholders, after they are carefully mapped and researched (like the target groups) and their strengths and possible bearing on the outcome of the activities

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[20] While the target groups are defined *vis-à-vis* the direct impact we want to achieve, the stakeholders denote individuals and institutions capable of affecting the achievement of our goals, which can be broadly grouped as allies (including active proponents) and challengers (including direct opponents).

are evaluated (based on their vested interests)[21]. Some of the stakeholders in the regional advocacy campaign activities will include, among others:

- The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) as a hub of regional cooperation;

- The core group of regional initiatives in the Western Balkans and South East Europe: the Central European Free Trade Agreement 2006 (CEFTA), Energy Community Secretariat (ECS), South East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO), Electronic South Eastern Europe Initiative (e-SEE), Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe (SWG), South East Europe Investment Committee (SEEIC), Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), and other regional initiatives, such as the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE), South East European Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (SEECEL), Centre of Public Employment Services of Southeast European Countries (CPESSEC), Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) and other regional initiatives;

- Donor organisations highly involved in the Western Balkans: the European Commission, EuropeAid, European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), Heinrich Boll Foundation (HBS), Embassies of the Netherlands and Norway across the region, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Open Society Foundation's offices in WB countries, European Fund for the Balkans, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and others;

- Civil society organisations and their networks in the Western Balkans and Europe: the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN), Regional Convention on European Integration of Western Balkans, SEE Change NET, Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South East Europe (CDRSEE), European Movement International, etc.

- V4 think tanks that participated in the preparation of this edition[22].

The stakeholders on this illustrative list are the ones with potential positive influence (allies), and efforts should be made to ensure their participation or some other form of involvement in the ASWB activities. However, strategy planning will also have to include the drawing up of a list of stakeholders with potentially negative influence (challengers) across the region, in the EU Member States and Brussels - from among Eurosceptic political parties, extremists from right- and left-wing groups, to organisations and media promoting Russian presence in the Western Balkans - and the preparation of a plan on how to mitigate the risks they pose to the achievement of the outcomes of the strategy activities.

Relations with the stakeholders (dynamic and types of interaction) will be planned after they are mapped and evaluated. One way to plan the activities aimed at maintaining relations with the allies is to place them in the following quadrants[23]:

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[21] The stakeholders need to be evaluated in order to optimise the resources required for establishing and maintaining relations with them; such an exercise is unnecessary in case of the target groups, as they are automatically "evaluated" during the definition of the projected outcomes and the general courses of action.

[22] The other V4 think tanks will be targeted as members of Target Group 4 (opinion-makers in EU Member States)

[23] Adapted from Jones, H (2011) *A guide to monitoring and evaluating policy influence*, Overseas Development Institute.

INTEREST

		Low	High
		Low	High
POWER	High	Keep satisfied	Engage closely and influence actively (maximum effort)
	Low	Monitor (minimum effort)	Keep informed

Once the list is prepared, the strategy authors should determine the courses of action with various stakeholders and activities addressing each and every one of them. The following Table lists examples of activities required for maintaining relations with stakeholders:

Table 5: Examples of Activities Directed at Stakeholders

Relationship goal	Activities
Engage closely and influence actively	• Regular face-to-face meetings • Writing letters with updates on matters of interest • Invitations to events organised within the advocacy campaign • Inclusion in the newsletter mailing list • Inclusion in the lists of recipients of written products • Following the stakeholder's activities and readiness to react
Keep satisfied	• Writing letters with updates on matters of interest • Inclusion in the newsletter mailing list • Inclusion in the lists of recipients of written products • Following the stakeholder's activities and readiness to react
Keep informed	• Inclusion in the newsletter mailing list • Inclusion in the lists of recipients of written products • Following the stakeholder's activities and readiness to react
Monitor	• Inclusion in the newsletter mailing list • Following the stakeholder's activities and readiness to react

2.4. Monitoring, Evaluation and Fine-Tuning

The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to closely and regularly follow the effects of the undertaken activities in order to fine-tune the approaches and increase their efficiency. The Table 6 below outlines the proposed monitoring and evaluation methods and timeframe:

Table 6: Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

Projected outcomes – leading to the achievement of the goals	Monitoring and evaluation measurement tools	Timeframe
• Decision-makers in the relevant EU institutions are willing to undertake specific actions necessary for moving the issue of Western Balkan enlargement up on their agendas	• In-depth interviews with the representatives of the decision-makers – to determine changes in attitudes to EU enlargement to the WB	• Baseline • Annual interviews – with representatives of those institutions
	• Focus groups and in-depth interviews with opinion-makers – to determine the degree in which they adopted the promoted narrative	• Baseline • Annual – with those focus groups
	• Media clipping and qualitative analyses – to determine whether the promoted new narrative is embraced by the media	• Baseline • Periodic analyses of media clippings (respectable as well as popular media), and analyses
• Increased support of EU Member States' governments to enlargement to the Western Balkans	• In-depth interviews with representatives of the decision-makers – to determine changes in perceptions of the WB and in support to EU enlargement to the region	• Baseline • Biannual – with representatives of those institutions
	• Focus groups and in-depth interviews with opinion-makers – to determine changes in perceptions of the WB and the degree in which they adopted the promoted new narrative	• Baseline • Biannual – with those focus groups
	• Media clipping and qualitative analyses – to determine whether the WB are receiving more positive coverage and whether the media are embracing the promoted new narrative	• Baseline • Daily clippings, weekly analyses

Projected outcomes – leading to the achievement of the goals	Monitoring and evaluation measurement tools	Timeframe
• Final outcome: The official discourse in the WB countries clearly reflects their pro-EU orientation and the WB countries are demonstrating increased commitment to regional cooperation • Intermediate outcome: public (media-driven) discourse in the WB countries resonates the commitment of elites (decision- and opinion-makers) to European integration and regional cooperation	• In-depth interviews with representatives of decision-makers – to determine changes in attitudes towards EU integration and regional cooperation	• Baseline • Biannual – with representatives of those institutions
	• Content analysis of the decision-makers' activities to determine their actual dedication to EU integration and regional cooperation	• Baseline • Monthly
	• Focus groups and in-depth interviews with opinion-makers – to determine changes in perceptions and awareness of regional cooperation	• Baseline • Biannual – with same focus groups
	• Media clipping and qualitative and quantitative analyses – to determine changes in the public discourse on EU integration and regional cooperation	• Baseline • Daily clippings, weekly analyses
	• Public opinion surveys – to determine the effects of public discourse – changes in support levels	• Baseline • Annual

During the further development of the strategy, the baseline research will identify the initial values, to serve as starting points for planning the activities and their outcomes. Interim monitoring will demonstrate the level of success of the activities and enable fine-tuning.

3. Next Steps

As recommended in Section 1.2, the proposed team, comprised of think tanks from the six Western Balkan countries – the WB6 Advocacy Group should be responsible for the planning, coordination and operational management of strategy implementation. The think tanks can provide staff for the technical coordination, research, analysis and planning (in the planning stage) and staff for the coordination and performance of activities (in the implementation stage). The V4 think tank group will have a privileged consultative role in the further development of the WB6 Advocacy Group. Not only the Western Balkan countries, but the listed donors as well, will be approached to secure funding for both the further development and the implementation of the regional advocacy strategy. For practical purposes, a Secretariat should be established in one of the six countries, which will serve as a technical mechanism and be responsible for coordinating the Group members' work, fundraising and external communication activities, including the maintenance of the Group's website and

its promotion on the social networks. The Secretariat can be a rotating one, and the think tanks forming the WB6 Advocacy Group can provide the technical and logistic assistance. The Group should consider establishing a Brussels-based contact point (supported by the RCC Liaison Office, or the Secretariat of the European Movement International) for the duration of strategy implementation. The involvement of the WB governments and the key regional initiatives should be formalised through the Group's Advisory Committee.

The next steps may be grouped in three stages:

- During the preparatory stage (Stage 1), the Group should hold a constituent meeting, attended by the representatives of the entities participating in the Advisory Committee, at which it will present the strategy development plan. With the support of the Advisory Committee members, the WB6 Advocacy Group should engage in mobilising the financial resources necessary for further strategy development and planning.

- The planning stage (Stage 2) should begin with a baseline research, to determine the exact state of affairs regarding the target groups' attitudes and perceptions, in order to best plan the activities (and to be able to fine-tune them in Stage 3, based on the interim evaluation of the achievement of the outcomes). After the research, the planning of the strategy should proceed as recommended in this paper, following the proposed order of activities – definition of goals, outcomes and courses of action, prior to the broad definition of the target groups; mapping and research of the target groups and formulation of messages to elicit their engagement; design of activities (products and channels), mapping, evaluation and planning of relations with stakeholders, and planning of monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of the outcomes. The final stage of strategy preparation includes cost-planning and prioritising. Once the strategy is developed, after a series of consultations and peer reviews by the V4 think tanks, the national governments and the donors will be solicited for funds for the implementation of the strategy. Support to the strategy, reflected in an official commitment of all the Western Balkan governments and key regional initiatives, should be sought at this stage, within the framework of the South East European Cooperation Process, the Berlin Process or another high-level forum.

- The implementation stage (Stage 3) will include intensive involvement of the Western Balkan governments and the RCC and other core regional initiatives, which will be facilitated by their participation in the Advisory Committee. It is likely that the implementation will begin with limited funds, to cover the priorities of the strategy, or only its partial implementation, which means that fundraising should be planned as another ongoing activity of the WB6 Advocacy Group's Secretariat.

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List of Acronyms

BCSDN	Balkan Civil Society Development Network
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
CARDS	Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation
CDRSEE	Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe
CEI	Central European Initiative
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CoE	Council of Europe
COSAP	Conference of the European Integration Parliamentary Committees of States participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process
COSME	the EU Programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)
COWEB	Working Party on the Western Balkans Region
CPESSEC	Centre of Public Employment Services of Southeast European Countries
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG	Directorate-General
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ECOFIN	Economic and Financial Affairs Council
ECS	Energy Community Secretariat
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ENIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region
EP	European Parliament
ERI SEE	Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe
ERP	Economic Reform Program
e-SEE	Electronic South Eastern Europe Initiative
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union

EUROPOL	European Police Office
EUROSTAT	European Statistical Office
EUSAIR	European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FES	Friedrich Ebert Foundation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GIZ ORF	GIZ Open Regional Funds
HBS	Heinrich Boll Foundation
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank)
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
ILO	International Labour Organization
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
KAS	Konrad Adenauer Foundation
MARRI	Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative
NALAS	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NIPAC	National IPA Coordinator
NKEU	National Convent for European Union
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RAI	Regional Anticorruption Initiative
REC	Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe
ReSPA	Regional School of Public Administration
SEE	South East Europe
SEE 2020	South East Europe 2020 Strategy: Jobs and Prosperity in a European Perspective
SEECEL	South East European Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning
SEECP	South-East European Cooperation Process

SEEHN	South-Eastern Europe Health Network
SEEIC	South East Europe Investment Committee
SEELS	South East European Law School Network
SEETO	South East Europe Transport Observatory
SELEC	Southeast European Law Enforcement Center
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SWG RRD	Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe
SWP	Strategic Work Program
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport network
The FYROM	The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	Western Balkans
WBIF	Western Balkans Investment Framework
WISE	Western Balkans Research and Innovation Centre
WTO	World Trade Organization