

Crisis of the European Union and its Effects on the EU Enlargement Policy: Case of Western Balkans

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Abstract: *European Union (EU) Enlargement is identified as a successful tool for the EU in order to enhance economic and security benefits as well as to Europeanize the prospective members. Despite its achievements until now, enlargement have also some negative repercussions since the enlargement process gives rise to exceeding burden to the EU budget, institutions and some key policies in the short term. Current economic crisis of the EU, along with its political and social impacts add another dimension to the challenges of enlargement. Today Western Balkan countries, Turkey and Iceland are the countries involved in the future enlargements. Main aim of this paper is to analyse the impact of the EU crisis on the enlargement of the EU in general and on Western Balkans in particular. Although the EU enlargement process continues officially, current economic crisis has negatively affected the process. On the one hand, the EU with an ongoing crisis lost some attractiveness for the candidates and on the other hand, its absorption/integration capacity has decreased in the sense that a new enlargement wave with burdensome candidates would not be feasible for the EU. Besides, the crisis deepened the North-South divide in the EU and thus Western Balkan countries will be mostly among the Southern part in terms of economic and social development. Bearing in mind the negative perception of the European public opinion towards EU enlargement which deepened with the crisis, EU needs more legitimacy in order to justify the Western Balkans Enlargement. Last but not the least, growing EU demand from the candidates as a result of the evolving enlargement conditionality through the years is the other factor affecting the future of enlargement. Main argument of this paper is; although the economic and political crises of the EU do not present favourable conditions for both sides, the EU already has the justification for Western Balkans' Enlargement due to its geographic location "in" Europe and the EU's ineffective position to prevent the violence during the wars of 1990s which will be reverted to an active position with enlargement.*

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