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## EU AND CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION: CHANGES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS REGION

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### Abstract

The European Union now includes membership of 28 countries until the departure of England. However, by 2025, it is envisaged to join the EU countries of the Western Balkans. Membership involves solving many issues of each country individually, but also in the region. The countries of the Western Balkans must make reforms in terms of economy, democracy, many political issues and attitudes. In addition, it is necessary to carry out a reform of care, health and re-examine its industrial policies. Commitment to integration makes it easier to meet the required obligations towards the EU, and exchange of experiences and positive practices between the Western Balkan countries will be beneficial. The economic crisis that hit many countries of the world, which began in 2008, has slowed down the economic growth and development of these countries, slowed down their reforms, and led them into a risk of remaining at the periphery of international development. While the Western Balkan countries seek to reform, at the same time the European Union itself is in the process of internal reorganization.

**Key words:** European Union, accession, Western Balkans, integration, challenges

### INTRODUCTION

Accession of the countries of the Western Balkans with membership in the European Union (EU) is a complex and demanding process. Initially it is necessary

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to align legal, economic, monetary and political systems with the EU system. Adapting the countries of the Western Balkans is not a bit easy, but not even unattainable. Each country, depending on its economic development, has its own way of adjustment. In the first part of the paper, the challenges of integration of these countries with the European Economic and Monetary Union will be exposed. In the second part of the paper, the definition of the term "Western Balka", as well as the directions of the necessary changes and comparisons of countries in the region, will be exposed.

## **EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION AND CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION**

The theme of the fall of the Berlin Wall seems to be as actual as it was at the time it happened. The symbolic act of demolishing the wall between "West and East Germany" is actually a symbol of the end of the bloc's division of the world into the countries of the western and eastern bloc countries, as well as the end of the Cold War. It is also a symbol of major reversals in international politics and economy. Here are the main elements of the European Economic and Monetary Union, the establishment of the euro, and the effects of the euro on the member countries of the euro zone and the EU Member State.

The Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) represents a major advance in the integration of EU economies. While all 27 member states (excluding the United Kingdom) are participating in the economic union, some countries have further integrated themselves into the eurozone and have adopted the euro. Within the EMU, there is no single institution responsible for economic policy, but responsibility is shared between Member States and EU institutions. The main elements are: European Council - sets the main political orientations; The EU Council - coordinates the EU's economic policy and decides whether a member state can adopt the euro; Eurogroup - coordinates policies of common interest for euro area Member States; Member States - set their national budgets within agreed limits, define their own structural policies that include labor, pensions and the capital market; European Commission - oversee policy coherence; The European Central Bank (ECB) - sets the monetary policy and acts as the central supervisor of financial institutions in the eurozone; the European Parliament - formulates EU legislation together with the EU Council. EMU is a means of ensuring stability, sustainable growth in the Eurozone and the EU as a whole in order to make the life of citizens as good as possible. Sustainable economic growth and high employment lead to a stable economic and monetary policy. This includes: 1. the implementation of an effective monetary policy in the euro area with a view to price stability (important because of the impact on interest rates and exchange rates), 2. the coordination of economic and fiscal policy in EU countries



(concerns the government budget and taxation policy that collects revenues, 3. Providing a single market (free movement of goods, services, capital and labor) and 4. Supervising and overseeing financial institutions (the uniqueness of the currency implies the security of banks' deposits ). Monetary policy in the Eurozone is managed by the European Central Bank (ECB) and the national central banks of the Eurozone countries that form the Eurosystem. The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (TSCG) formally ended on March 2, 2012 and entered into force on January 1, 2013. It is an agreement between the governments of the Member States and is not part of the Union's legal order. The Contracting Parties had to adopt, in their legal order of 1 January 2014, the necessary transposing provisions. This Agreement has 25 contracting parties (all Member States except the UK, the Czech Republic and Croatia) are formally bound by the Fiscal Agreement (19 members plus Bulgaria, Denmark and Romania). This contract is included in the Stability and Growth Pact.

However, after the outbreak of the global economic and financial crisis in 2008, the EU has taken a number of measures to strengthen economic and monetary union and prepare for possible future shocks. When the greatest danger passed, the European Commission presented in May 2017 a document on the deepening economic and monetary union in order to make it further progressive. Thus, the White Paper on the Future in Europe was launched on March 1, 2017, and it contains five scenarios in which direction the Union could evolve, depending on the choice of European leaders. The ultimate goal is to increase the unity, efficiency and democratic accountability of economic and monetary union. One of the goals is to achieve high income and high living standards in Europe. One of the proposals is to double the financial framework of the Structural Reform Support Program. For this and for the stabilization function, the banking union and the provision of access assistance to Member States on their way to the Eurozone requires a corresponding EU budget. In addition, it is important for the EMU to ensure that EU countries can withstand economic and social reforms, encourage investment and increase competitiveness, create more jobs and a better standard of living. For these reasons it is important that the EU is at the same time an economic union, a financial union, a fiscal union and a political community. It is seeking to establish a banking union.

As a result, it is justifiable to ask what are the effects of the euro zone today? Namely, since 1989, there have been major changes. These changes reflected on the work and organization of the European Union, in that sense there was a tendency to ensure a sufficient degree of monetary convergence between member states. This was tried already in 1992 by the Maastricht Treaty, when an opportunity was given, but it was also sent to the member states to join the euro zone. This could have been realized by those countries that had an inflation rate of not more than 1.5% compared to the three most successful Member States, as well as a nominal long-term interest rate of



no more than 2%. In fear of the fiscal instability of monetary policy, these rules have been supplemented by the following, namely that the annual budget deficit is not higher than 3% of GDP and the accumulated public debt does not exceed 60% of GDP. At the beginning of the 1990s, the range between low and high inflation rates was 10% in European countries, but until 1999, this range had risen to between 2% and 4%. Thus, in 1999, the European Monetary Union of those countries that met the criteria was launched, and by 2001, others who managed to meet these criteria could join. After this reduction in the inflation differentials before the euro was launched, the goal of reducing the inflation differentials in countries that wanted to be members of the euro zone was achieved. For example, inflation in the eurozone in 2000 in Germany was 1.5%, and in Ireland 5.6% in the same year. Since then, until 2004, Germany has reduced its inflation to 1, 4%, and Ireland to 3.8%. Apart from this difference in the rate of inflation, countries across the euro zone also differed in the rates of productivity growth and the degree of their exposure to global shocks in certain industries. For example, these countries have had varying degrees of exposure to imports from Asian countries and their textile, electronics and other consumer products.

Developing mechanisms to overcome the global economic crisis, followed by sporadic market shocks, Eurozone experienced strong growth in 2016. So Europe prevailed the effects of the global financial crisis in 2008, and somewhat later on the crisis in the euro. A reduction in the budget deficit, as well as a reduction in debt. Financial reforms were carried out with increased supervision of finances, global competitiveness increased, as well as established funds for saving the euro in 2010. These funds are the temporary European Fund for Stability Finance (EFSF) and two years later the Permanent European Stability Mechanism (ESM). These funds played a significant role in suppressing the crisis in the EU, but also made a package of aid and consolidation of the crisis in Greece (Regling, 2018).

## **DEFINITION OF THE TERM WESTERN BALKANS**

The Western Balkans (WB) is a multifaceted notion. In geographical terms, it belongs to Albania and the countries that were created by the breakup of socialist Yugoslavia (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, FYR Macedonia). In 2004, Slovenia became a member of the European Union and Croatia in 2013. By the degree of economic development, the World Bank has been declared a developed country by the World Bank. Croatia and other countries are far behind the average EU development. Each of the blame to become a member of the EU. On this path he solves numerous political, economic, social and other problems. Ways, dynamics and successes are different. The goal is the same, ie, it becomes a successful, democratic



society, with a developed market economy and social values characterized by the developed countries of Europe.

- *In the cultural sense* - the Western Balkans is characterized by the encounter and diversity of the East and the West, in which the effects of different ethnic, cultural, religious and confessional communities and movements are mixed. During the last quarter of the century, they have played a major role in the development of these countries. This, among other things, led S. Huntington to conclude that it was a "conflict of civilizations". This attitude is only partially correct, since the wars of the 1990s in the Western Balkans showed the degree of hatred and conflicts of members of different confessions within the same religion (Christianity). They were just as sharp as between people of different religions (Christianity and Islam). It is therefore important to mention that the "clash of civilizations" in the territory of former Yugoslavia was only one of the most important factors of its disappearance. Moreover, the countries that have emerged after that have the same problems. Now they are trying to solve them in a different way. In doing so, they also greatly help the strategic commitment to engage in Eurointegration.

- *Political definition* - the Western Balkans is most often put to the forefront. It is about the efforts of the West (EU, USA) that, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the bipolar world, they emphasize their political domination, expand their political and other influence on this area. Of course, the interests of these countries are different, but long-term and strategic are rarely changed. They try to realize themselves as efficiently and quickly as possible in order to convulse other international players. On the geopolitical scene, the influences of Russia, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China and India are present in the first place (Simurdic, 2016, 14). All this makes the changes in the societies of the Western Balkans more difficult. Some instigate them and others hinder them. Briefly, the policies of the Western Balkan countries are not isolated from the functioning of regional and world centers of economic, military and other power. Their political elites in power must take care of this.

- The Western Balkans is part of Southeast Europe, which certainly belongs to Bulgaria and Romania, Greece and Tusrka. The first two have been admitted to the EU since 2007. Greece is a member of the EU and NATO, and Turkey is only in this military alliance. Their experiences so far can certainly be used by the Western Balkan countries in the process of Eurointegration. However, today the EU is quite different from the one in which the countries concerned were involved. It is itself in large changes (Minić et al., 2016).

- *The path to the EU is not simple and uniform for each country* - in 1993, the European Council defined the basic principles (in Copenhagen) that each country should fulfill during the stabilization and association process. Policies related to democracy and the rule of law, human rights and respect minority rights. Economic



principles involve the development of a market economy capable of resisting competitive access to the EU. The third group is legal and "others". They imply that the state is able to take on obligations, i.e. political, economic and monetary objectives of the EU. All this is divided into 35 chapters. The fulfillment of these conditions is controlled by the competent institutions of the current, accession process. Namely, the time from expressing the desire and intention to become a member of this regional community until the entry and entry into the candidate is different. The process itself is uncertain and for some of the countries is unsuccessful. The result depends on many geopolitical, economic and other factors in the world, Europe and in a particular society. One consequence of this is the fact that the countries that were not economically developed and otherwise developed in the EU, but for the political and military reasons, the EU became its members (Bulgaria, Romania, for example). The countries of the Western Balkans are, among other things, due to the way they were created (except Albania), and the problems they encounter during the transition of society, in particularly difficult conditions when it comes to joining the EU. In front of them, the EU has experienced the "Bregzit" and a strong wave of intercontinental migration. It is reorganized and has less and less desires and opportunities to speed up the integration of the Western Balkans. In order to maintain its influence and strategic interests in the Balkans, the EU finds new mechanisms to encourage reforms in the aforementioned societies. In this, he cooperates with many other organizations and institutions (UN, STB, SB). One of the goals is even bigger cooperation in all areas of life between the countries of the Western Balkans.

## **THE MOST IMPORTANT DIRECTIONS OF CHANGING THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF COUNTRIES IN THE REGION**

Since 1990, the countries of the Western Balkans have significantly changed the economic, social, demographic, political and institutional structure of society. Their "transition" was aimed at creating a developed market economy, multi-party parliamentarism, the development of democracy, the opening of the economy and society to the world and respect for human rights. These are values respected by the EU, and certainly form part of a wider corpus of civilization values. The domains of each individual country are different, and the dynamics of their Eurointegration depends to a great extent. On this occasion we point out several structural obstacles on this road. These are: the demographic breakdown of the Western Balkans, insufficient construction of a market and competitive economy, the inefficiency of human resources (especially the working age population), unstable political systems and a high degree of conflict in society.



- *The demographic breakdown* - the Western Balkans is a long-term process and today takes on serious dimensions. In most of these countries, even before 1990, there was a downward trend in the overall population growth rate, birth deficits and mortality rates. Migration of the population during the last decade of the 20th century has become massive, primarily due to wars and poor living conditions. Then the problems of slow and unsuccessful transition of societies joined. For many people, waiting for entry into the EU has become slow and have left the country massively. This also happens in those who have become members of the EU (Croatia, for example). According to relevant surveys, the demographers of the state of Zubje have reduced the number of inhabitants, aggravated the age structure, they do not have great chances to slow down negative population trends and reverse in a positive direction (Penev, 2010). Countries leave not only young generations, but also citizens in the best demographic and working age, more educated than less educated. The society piles up economic and social problems related to higher spending on health and social care for the elderly, and because of the economic crisis, these funds are getting smaller. Regarding this, it is more difficult to implement the reforms of the health system, the pension system and social protection, and what the states have committed to foreign creditors (IMF, SB and others).

- *Market and competitive economy* - is still a far reaching and difficult target for most ZB countries. This indicates the level of achieved economic development, for which different indicators are used. One of the most frequent is GDP growth. Growth rate changed over time and significantly depends on the head position. It marks the most economically the direction of economic progress, and it is far from being able to reduce it. According to data on GDP growth from 1990-2000. Albania was the fastest developing (3.6% a), and the slowest in Serbia (0.7%). In 2015, the highest was in Bosnia and Herzegovina (3.0%), and the slowest in Serbia (0.7%). Recent estimates of regional development differences in relation to the EU are not encouraging: "The countries of the Western Balkans are poorer than they were 30. So, even if they register economic growth of 3-4 percent a year, they will need 25 years to reach the current level in the EU, says Radio Free Europe Tobias Flessenkemper, project director for the Balkans European Institute CIFE in Nice and a member of the Advisory Group for Public Policy Balkan in Europe Each of these countries has a dominant private sector, and the most important process of its creation was privatization (social and state) property. These are some of the basic principles of neoliberal development of the economy that Some of the most important consequences of this are deindustrialization, massive job losses and unemployment. The expectations that a competitive economy will be created has not been achieved. WB countries have poorly ranked the global competitiveness index (Tanasković, 2017. fren.org).



- *Unemployment in WB societies is massive* - long-term and systemically conditioned. It is inherited from the time before transition, but it is also "new". This second is a product of a transition society, which is of a low degree of economic and social development and dependent on external financial and other centers of power. The level of unemployment is different in some countries, but it is several times higher than the EU average and the most developed EU countries, where in 2017 it fell to a level lower than in 2008 (7.4). In Spain, it was 16.7, and it was the highest in Greece (20.6). In the region, the unemployment rate is higher than the EU average. At the end of 2017, Eurostat reported that the unemployment rate in Serbia was 15.9, Montenegro 17.11, Macedonia 23.6 and Bosnia and Herzegovina 25.4. Generally speaking, the most important issue of the labor market and its active policy is certainly the reduction of the unemployment rate and the increase in employment rates. "General economic theory teaches that in the conditions of a market economy, increased mobility of production factors (capital, labor, ideas) contributes to an increase in general social efficiency ... Research conducted in a number of countries shows that within each country there are parts of the territory over a longer period of time records worse results, measured by virtually all major economic indicators, including the level and rate of (non) employment compared to the national average. This, of course, adversely affects the overall socioeconomic development of the country. If the mobility of production factors is not developed at the national level, it is unlikely that it will increase significantly due to the expansion of integration processes, and therefore, the benefit of the integration processes will be lower than expected. " It is also important to emphasize that the still labor mobility, both between the region and between occupations, still lags far behind the mobility of goods and capital. The reasons for this lie, first of all, in the difficulties of removing barriers to regional labor migration, and can be economic, social, political, and cultural. (Radovanović, Maksimović, 2010, pp. 59-74). In addition to important traditional issues in the area of labor globalization such as production, financial issues, issues of industrial revolution 4.0 (although it can now be talked about 5.0) and migration issues, issues related to changing the way of work and functioning of human resources are very important. These issues are the issues of flexibility, talent demand, labor force with international experience, interactive network connectivity and constant communication in the search for information (Maksimović, 2017).

- *The idea of multiculturalism* - according to some EU leaders (above all Angela Merkel) - did not come to life in the EU. It is a new wave of mass migrations from the Middle East and Africa. The consequence is the rise of populism and right-wing movements in Europe (Novaković, 2017, 78-81, Novaković, 2016). Unfortunately, populism and extremism of this type are reviving in the Western Balkans again. Exclusivity (ethnic, religious, racial, minority) is increasingly present in the public and political spheres. This is a fact that slows down the progress of society and its



path towards the EU. These ideas and the behavior of those who favor them all are more present in the mass media. The advocacy of media freedom, as a guardian of democracy, is one of the values of the EU and a condition for joining that community. The reality in WB societies is significantly different. The media are often controlled by the elite elites, and there is no formed and influential critical public opinion. There is a degree of deviation from the above conclusion in certain societies, but the general development trend in this area is similar.

## **CONCLUSION**

So far, the EU has proven to be a relatively successful economic, social and political regional community. It has gone through different stages of development and today it faces the challenges of survival and the emergence of the current crisis. The crisis estimates among researchers point out that it is a systemic crisis for others who consider the temporary crisis the EU is leaving. This paper presents some of the problems and challenges that the Western Balkan countries face in the process of Eurointegration.

The EU is still recognized by its citizens and those who come to it as the best place to live. One of the causes is a relatively preserved social state, a developed market economy, a political and institutional structure that is improving and protecting human and civil rights. The weaknesses of the EU, especially in the conflict of transnational and national interests and institutions, the dependence on security policy from NATO and the insufficient building of the political, monetary and fiscal communities are also noticed. In short, the current EU is in a "transition", i.e. finding new solutions for accumulated problems. The "Bregzit" (June 2016) is one of the most important causes of this, and then disorientation due to mass migrations from the East and Africa. They further burdens the EU to temporarily slow down and delay the admission of new members.

The countries of the Western Balkans have been slowed down in the European integration for several reasons. One is the situation in the EU. Other influences from the wider environment, due to the geopolitical interests of the great powers (Russia, Turkey, China, USA). The third reason is internal. They are largely "reheated" by regional and world factors and mean "a return to the past". It is about ethnic and religious conflicts, which are again in the foreground. On the other hand, the reforms of society are in the direction of modernization and democratization, the adoption of values that both belong to the EU and civilization in general. Real changes in the economy, towards a developed and competitive market economy, have been slowed down. Resistance to this comes not only from the political and economic elites, but also from the increasingly poorer population. Elite essentially does not want to lose some of their acquired positions and privileges, which are contrary to the regulated political system, the rule of law and the rule of law. Parts of the economic elite are



afraid of competition in the wider market, and the poor population is struggling to survive. It can not become an active citizen, because there are no material and other assumptions behind it. The global economic crisis and problems during transition significantly reduced the influence of the middle class. Further reforms of the public sector and services will additionally increase the insecurity of employees in them, which opens up space for them to be classified as an opponent of Eurointegration. The resistance of these elites and layers will weaken if the EU itself reforms itself and becomes more attractive to its citizens and those who want to join it.

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