

## The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the European Union's Policies toward the Western Balkans

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The European Union can be considered as the major actor in the Western Balkans in terms of its political and economic impact in the last decade. It is one of the biggest trade partners of the regional countries as well as biggest donor of aid. It has also played an active role in the post-war reconstruction of the states as seen for example in its role in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, mainly in terms of institutional structures like EULEX, International Civilian Office and Office of High Representative. However, as the global economic crisis started to spill over to the EU member countries, it led to the increase of the trend of "enlargement fatigue". Hence, though all the Western Balkan countries are taking part in the European accession process, except Croatia there is not much hope that enlargement process of the regional countries would speed up due to internal problems as well as the Union's policies. As the Commissioner for Enlargement Stefan Füle remarked there is also reform fatigue in the candidate states. Thus, "enlargement fatigue" of the European Union and "reform fatigue" of the regional states feed each other and create enlargement dilemma. As the EU loses its will and eagerness to expand, the regional actors' enthusiasm for reforming their structures is decreasing.

As the EU is focused in general much more on its internal issues in the recent years, and lost its energy to develop new initiatives for the solution of the regional problems, Turkey, as a regional actor, since 2009 started to launch new proposals for the regional issues, as seen for example in its trilateral initiatives: on the one hand among Turkey, Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina, on the other hand among Turkey, Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina.

This research aims to examine how the current economic crisis in the European Union members affects the attitude toward the neighbouring region of the Balkans. My main research questions are as follows: How is the discourse of European Union decision makers toward the Western Balkans affected by the economic problems? Is there any considerable change in policy implementations? What are the repercussions of the EU's increasing enlargement fatigue on the region? How does the EU's

performance in the region affect its actorness global affairs? How does the EU evaluate Turkey's initiatives toward the region?

In fact, EU's attitude underwent considerable changes since the 1990's. As the European Community (EC) has gone through a radical structural transformation in the 1990s due to both deepening and enlargement, the conflicts in the Western Balkans started to be considered as a test case for this changing Europe. Conflicts, wars, and tensions that broke out in the former Yugoslavian territories and disturbed the whole Europe proved that the emerging new era following the end of the bipolar international politics was not going to be as peaceful as it had been longed for. The complexity of the problems of former Yugoslavia has effected the evolution of the European Union which has been, with the encouragement of the US, trying to be a regional actor by developing a more coherent approach toward the issues of foreign affairs and security policies among its member states.

The research will have a conceptual part discussing different views on the global actorness of the European Union. George Modelski in his study "The Long Cycle of Global Politics and the Nation-State" defines world powers as follows: "... world (or) global powers control (or substantially control) the global political system and hence also have the capacity to regulate other global processes (such as long-distance travel)."

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