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The Role of Civil Society in Re-shaping EU Enlargement Policy in the Context of Geopolitical Changes: The Model for Staged Accession to the EU as a Case Study

SUMMARY

Since the last expansion of the European Union in 2013, the enlargement policy ceased to be a priority for the Union. This happened despite the civil society organisations' (CSOs) warnings of the perils such a stance might bring. The inability of CSOs to impact the EU's policymaking agenda was a result of the EU's traditional struggles with the inclusivity of non-state actors concerning policy development. With the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, however, the tides

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have changed. In the midst of geopolitical challenges, EU officials started emphasising that the enlargement policy was back on the agenda. The paper argues that this shift has created a strategic opportunity for CSOs to carve out a more distinctive position within the EU's policymaking process. This was achieved through their robust advocacy for innovative ideas concerning enlargement, thereby positioning CSOs as influential contributors to the evolution of EU policies. As a case study, the paper uses the Model for Staged Accession to the EU, published in October 2021 and revised in August 2023 by the European Policy Centre (CEP – Belgrade) and the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS – Brussels). With CSOs across Europe functioning as multipliers of the original proposal, a critical mass significant enough was generated to compel decision-makers in the EU institutions and EU member states to incorporate the Model's key features into subsequent official proposals of their own. These features are best visible in proposals that refer to the necessity to render the enlargement policy more gradual, structured, dynamic, effective, predictable, and credible. Therefore, by effectively navigating the shift from a lack of prioritisation to enhanced reprioritisation of the enlargement policy, this paper demonstrates that CSOs have played a pivotal role in reshaping the enlargement policy and making the EU's policymaking more inclusive.

KEYWORDS: European Union, Enlargement, Civil Society, Model for Staged Accession, Western Balkans.

1. THE INTERSECTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND EU ENLARGEMENT

The civil society has traditionally been perceived as one of the basic pillars of contemporary democracies. Seen as an "arena outside the family, the state, and the market", it is created by individual and collective actions, organisations, and institutions to advance shared interests (CIVICUS 2012, 8). In fact, civil society organisations (CSOs)[2] represent a phenomenon whose width is contin-

2 The paper deliberately uses the term *civil society organisations* (CSOs) throughout all sections, instead of *think tanks*, for two reasons. First, civil society is a wider term and encompasses the work of think tanks as research-based non-governmental organisations. Although the example of the Model of Staged Accession to the EU has been developed by organisations that clearly brand themselves as think tanks, it is not incorrect to refer to them as CSOs either. The deliberate choice of "CSOs" avoids the potential exclusion of organisations branding themselves differently. This choice aligns with the paper's focus on analysing broader trends and civil society's

uously growing (including different types of organisations such as think tanks, trade unions, women's groups, youth clubs, entrepreneurial and professional associations, religious groupings, community-based coalitions, academic researchers etc.) and deepening (covering wide-ranging and diverse topics such as democracy, policy development, human rights, good governance, environmentalism, social justice, etc.). On top of that, the types of their activities are proliferating, as their roles include service providing, advocacy/campaigning, monitoring, building active citizenship, and participating in governance processes (Cooper 2018, 2). Given a valuable combination of their commitment to the fulfilment of their vision and notable expertise and experience as drivers of action and out-of-the-box thinking, their *modus operandi* requires an enabling environment most commonly found in (aspiring) democracies. In fact, whether and to what extent there are conditions for their development and functionality are traditionally perceived as one of the prerequisites "for a democracy to be consolidated" (Linz & Stepan 1996, 17), particularly as they can help start transitions, help resist reversals, and push transitions towards their completion (ibid, 18).

Given the seemingly inseparable phenomena of democracy and civil society, the latter's importance has become undisputed in the context of the EU's enlargement to the Western Balkans. It is derived from the fact these organisations engage in advocating for the necessary reforms, particularly in the area of the rule of law, including the fight against corruption, reform of the judiciary, advancing public administration reforms, or, in general, holding the government accountable. The activities, however, do not stop there. CSOs have long directed their attention to the enlargement policy, aiming to unlock its full potential. Their objective is to leverage it as a tool for supporting necessary reforms while ensuring an expedited journey towards full membership. Moreover, their engagement has also allowed for the enlargement policy to draw some of its legitimacy, particularly as it is often and still largely seen as an elite-driven process (O'Brennan 2013, 30). In that sense, CSOs have had a clear normative goal – transforming the societies in line with pro-European values – and a practical one – improving democracy standards and achieving EU membership as the reaffirmation of those standards. Sharing the view that an empowered civil society is "a crucial component of any democracy", the European Commission goes on to argue that it also represents "an essential player in the enlargement agenda" (DG NEAR 2022). Consequently, fostering a conducive

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influence on EU policymaking. Secondly, the term civil society is a concept already well established in the EU and the Western Balkans, maybe even more so than think tanks. The former also seems to be more pronounced in the academic literature. In short, opting for a term "CSOs" instead of "think tank" is done purely for practical reasons, while not having any diminishing sense to it in case of the work of think tanks.

environment for CSOs has become an important pillar of enlargement policy (Wunsch 2015, 452).

Yet, unlike the CSOs that are arguably synonymous with transparency, deliberation, and participatory democracy, the EU itself has long been criticised for the lack of transparency, adaptability to the ongoing needs, and overall uninclusiveness of its policymaking process. Some even go as far as to argue that "democracy has been the elephant in the room of the European integration project since its inception" (Kelbel, Marx, & Navarro 2021, 221). Although over the last decades, there has been a push toward more transparency, with an aim to enhance the EU's democratic legitimacy, the European Ombudsman warns that the issue of transparency – defined as the EU's "black hole" – comes about mainly because the Council, despite being a co-legislator with the European Parliament, continues to "use old-style diplomacy" for reaching deals in a method that obviously views transparency as an impediment to its work (O'Reilly 2018, 3). With these and other related shortcomings at hand, the concept of "democratic deficit" has been a recurring theme in both political and academic debates.

The same applies when analysing how the enlargement process has been undertaken so far by those in charge of it. CSOs have, in fact, warned that the formal mechanisms of EU integration continue to suffer from an "executive bias" (Lazarevic & Maric 2019, 1), while adding that the limited options for CSOs to formally partake in the EU accession process has, *inter alia*, negatively affected the democratisation of the region (ibid, 3) Yet, the paper's basic assumption is that the EU has realised that the very nature of the policymaking process needs, if not to change, to adapt, in order to more effectively address the ongoing geopolitical challenges. Using the example of the CSO proposed, developed, and promoted, Model for Staged Accession to the EU, the paper shows that with the rise of geopolitical challenges, the EU has become more ready, maybe than ever before, to openly consider CSO proposal(s) as a way forward in terms of enlargement policy. Not only has this contributed to fighting the aforementioned uninclusive nature of EU's policymaking arena, but it has also allowed as well CSOs to contribute to redefining the enlargement policy. In other words, the basic thesis is that civil society has played a significant role when it comes to influencing policy debates on the necessity of developing new ideas for enlargement, thereby positively contributing to the evolution of the EU's policymaking process.

To showcase the CSOs managed to carve out a more distinctive position within the EU's policymaking process, the paper discusses the matter in several sections. After this introductory chapter, in section 2, the paper provides a description of what the Model of Staged Accession to the EU is, how and under what circumstances has developed in the past years. This will set the stage for a basic understanding of the Model's premise, tools to overcome challenges, and overall purpose. In section 3, the paper engages in mapping out the Model's

"life" after its inception, that is, identifying a rough estimate of CSOs that have so far picked it up, discussed it and endorsed it as a way forward. By having circulated, brainstormed, and even promoted the Model across Europe (and beyond), the paper will show that they have contributed to the process of reshaping the EU's top agenda. In section 4, the paper identifies key EU documents that have been actually influenced by the idea of Staged accession, including the work of EU institutions such as the European Commission, the European Council, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament, as well as the work of individual member states. The documents include official conclusions, communications, declarations, and non-papers that have so far had a full or partial mention or adjusted interpretation of the ideas originating from the Model, such as the staged/gradual/phased integration of candidate countries into the EU. Although these terms are not conceptually identical, their purpose aligns – to alter the status quo and invigorate enlargement. Finally, section 5 will provide conclusory remarks, interpreting the findings and reaffirming the thesis of the paper.

2. UNPACKING THE MODEL FOR STAGED ACCESSION TO THE EU

Soon after Serbia started its accession talks in 2014, it became clear that the EU enlargement policy was not producing the expected transformative effect. A similar trend was obvious in other parts of the region as well. This was visible by the fact that the Commission's reports have provided basically the same overall preparedness assessment, whereas the Council was thus reluctant to close the negotiating chapters. In order to change the status quo – i.e., an environment conducive both to the growth of authoritarian tendencies in the region and the (malign) external influence[3] – the Belgrade-based European Policy Centre (CEP) and Brussels-based Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) have joined efforts to produce a model that would attempt to put an end to this situation. Their collaboration culminated in the publication of the Template for Staged Accession in 2021 (Emerson, Lazarevic, Blockmans, & Subotic, 2021), with a revised and improved Template 2.0 being revealed two

3 In a separate paper, the author also argues that the standstill has contributed to the development of limbo states in the region. Introducing it as a novel concept, *a limbo state* is seen as "a state whose leadership's inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to break free from the status quo becomes its defining feature". Consequently, the *pro forma* vision remains just a matter of words instead of action; even when reforms are initiated, they lack the transformative impact; and society is left marked by apathy, that is, a feeling of being stuck while being uncertain about knowing where the country will be in the future (Subotic 2023c).

years later (Mihajlovic, Blockmans, Subotic, & Emerson 2023).[4] The Model's main goal is to incentivise candidates, especially those in the Western Balkans, to start making positive changes on their path to full EU membership, while also addressing the EU's concerns with regards to the future functioning of the enlarged Union. In other words, the idea was to change the status quo and showcase that with the right adjustments, the enlargement policy can regain its status of the Union's most successful policy.

Looking at the Model from the candidates' perspective, it represents a straightforward, structured, and innovative approach, offering gradual access to financial and institutional benefits that resemble those envisioned for EU members. Moving away from the status quo, these increased benefits would get unlocked only if notable progress across all clusters is registered. Using the European Commission's country reports as the key assessment tool, and upon quantifying their findings, one could transparently track whether a country is eligible to progress from one stage to another. A "stage" is a different name to describe a moment from which a country can become eligible to access the benefits that were previously off the table. In practice, a candidate would need an *average* "moderate level of preparation" per cluster to enter Stage 1 ("intermediate pre-accession" with a rating of 3 on a scale from 1 to 5) and on *average* "good levels of preparation" to enter Stage 2 ("advanced pre-accession" with a rating of 4) (see illustration 1). To prioritise rule of law reforms, the Model requires a *minimum* rating of 3 in each and every chapter in Cluster 1 (*Fundamentals*) for Stage 1 – including subareas such as the Economic Criteria, Functioning of Democratic Institutions, and Public Administration Reform – and a *minimum* rating of 4 to enter Stage 2. For instance, a country excelling in economic aspects but falling short on the rule of law would not be able to acquire the increased benefits. Nonetheless, having well-defined reform targets, the achievement of which would unlock these benefits, would ensure the predictability of the process.[5]

When it comes to financial incentives, as they progress through stages, the candidates would become eligible for a gradual increase of available funding several times more than they currently get from the Instrument for Pre-

4 In Template 2.0, on pages 23 and 24, there is a table that lists all the differences between the original and revised proposals. For the sake of straightforwardness, when referring to the Model for Staged Accession to the EU only refers to the latest version as put in Template 2.0.

5 This stands in contrast to the proposals that advocate a sectoral approach akin to "phasing-in", which refer to the possibilities for the candidates to achieve deeper integration with the EU in specific policy areas, before actual accession to the EU. As the region is already undergoing various forms of sectoral integration – open to all countries regardless of their level of preparedness while lacking predictability and entailing only looser forms of cooperation – the Template 2.0 sees its added value only if these are managed as complementary to the merit-based and gradual incentive regime as per the Model for Staged Accession to the EU.

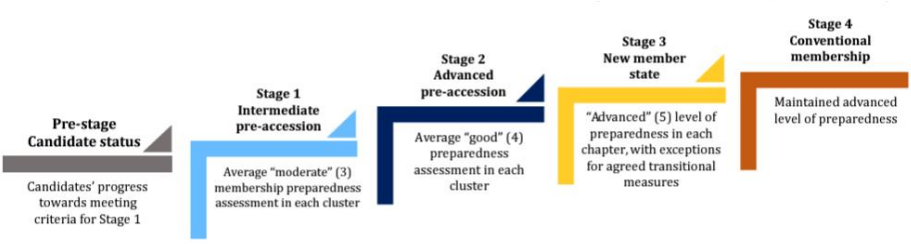
Accession (IPA). According to the Model, a country in Stage I would get access to up to 40% of the funds it would be entitled to as a member state, and 60% in Stage II. In the case of Serbia, for example, if it reaches Stage 1, this would entail a jump from the annual access to EUR 200 mn under IPA to EUR 760 mn, and in Stage 2 to EUR 1,19 bn (Subotic 2023a, p.10). Acting as a strong incentive for reforms to be undertaken, the idea behind the increased funding is to assist the countries to put their economies on their feet as early in the process as possible. This approach aims to reduce the existing socio-economic gap between the region and the EU's average. If the gradually increased funds are managed in a manner tailored to better equip the countries for membership (Mihajlovic 2023), the intention is to better prepare them to absorb structural funds upon acquiring membership as well. On top of that, such engagement would assist the EU not only in its efforts to solidify its geostrategic position in the region *vis-à-vis* other external players but would send a message to citizens that the EU perspective is indeed credible, and that the EU is indeed ready to invest in its *future member states*. Given that these benefits are subject to reversibility, any stagnation or regression during the accession process would significantly amplify the opportunity costs.

Simultaneously, as they progress with the reform pace, the candidates would become eligible to get access to EU institutions (albeit without the right to vote). It entails starting to selectively participate in meetings of joint importance (while keeping them regularised and predictable) in Stage 1 and eventually maximally expanding participation in terms of scope and intensity in all EU institutions in Stage 2 – with the vision to facilitate swift and effective political integration and socialise candidates even prior to official membership. In both cases, the meetings would be facilitated based on the "right of occasional presence" of third countries in EU bodies (Subotic 2023b). This would include access to institutions such as the Council, the European Council, the European Parliament, the European Commission's Expert Groups, the Comitology, as well as EU Consultative bodies and Agencies. In the Council, for instance, in practice, a country would be invited by the chair to attend the session, upon the agreement of a simple majority of member states to temporarily take down the obligation of professional secrecy.[6] The invitee would be able to take the floor and address the member states. Upon exchanging views, it would be required to leave the room. As the invitee would not be able to sit during the entirety of the meeting, particularly not during the voting process, the EU's decision-making autonomy would be safeguarded. At the same time, the proposed benefits would be subject to reversibility, if the undertaken reform commitments are not upheld. In that case, the chair would simply need to decide not

6 The only exception to that rule is if the invitation to a third party constitutes a political decision with a bearing on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP); in this case, the decision has to be taken unanimously.

to put the notion of inviting the candidate on the agenda. In short, the Model is the first one to provide a doable solution that would contribute to reducing the current asymmetry in the relationship and create a sense of belonging and purpose. Although there were instances of candidates being invited for discussion in the past, this was only sporadic, rare, and done on an ad-hoc basis. With the Model's structure, the possibility of regularised institutional participation turns into a tool for genuine partnership building and a way for the candidates to have their say on policies that will affect them in one way or another.

Illustration 1. Basic Structure of the Model for Staged Accession to the EU (Template 2.0 version)



Meanwhile, what makes the Model stand out is the fact it also looks at the enlargement conundrum from the EU's point of view, offering a way to proceed with the next enlargement while the EU is still in the process of putting its house in order. Namely, it responds to the legitimate concerns voiced by several member states – France particularly – over the future functioning of an enlarged Union. The highlighted risk is that expanding the number of future veto players in the EU, with yet-to-be-proven solidified democratic standards, may hinder decision-making and undermine respect for democratic values. In practice, the solution lies in utilising the Accession Acts to introduce a temporary differentiation between conventional and new member states, without harming the EU's legal order (Blockmans 2023).

Namely, according to the Model, once the countries fulfil all the reforms (rating 5), they would enter Stage 3, marking the formal attainment of EU membership. As such, they would take on all membership obligations and most of the rights. The Template 2.0 outlines them as follows:

Accordingly, they would become full participants in the EU's single market and customs union, gain full access to ESIF [European Structural and Investment Funds], and have the possibility of joining Schengen and the Eurozone upon fulfilling the standard conditions. Their citizens would acquire EU citizenship rights and protection, including standing for and voting in European elections. In terms of obligations, all EU legal acts would be equally binding to [new member states] as to any other member, with the Court of Justice of the EU being the ultimate arbiter of any legal disputes that might arise. In addition,

[new member states] would also pay [their] mandatory contribution to the MFF [Multi-annual Financial Framework], thus "investing" into the future of the Union like all the rest. Looking at the listed rights and obligations, entering Stage 3 and acquiring the status of a new member would represent a genuine fulfilment of the promised membership perspective (Mihajlovic, Blockmans, Subotic, & Emerson 2023, 14).

Unlike the earlier enlargements, however, the new member states would face temporary limitations (up to ten years in the form of temporary derogations) on the exercise of their veto rights in the EU Council. This is the most important post-accession novelty the Model introduces.[7] Although temporary derogations have been utilised since the inception of the EU, with the limitation of the freedom of labour movement notably used since the 2004 "Big Bang enlargement", the limitation of voting rights would go into territory previously untested. For these to work, they need to ensure the principle of equality of member states is not permanently and irreparably harmed. As the derogations would automatically elapse, this diminishes any fears of potential and permanent second-class membership, particularly as the proposal ensures its proportionality to the objective that it seeks to achieve (Blockmans 2023).

Put this way, Stage 3 is foreseen to protect both the interests of newcomers and of conventional members. As Template 2.0 goes on to say, this regime would not strip the newcomers' potency to influence decisions in the Council, as the new member states' "representatives would be allowed to participate in all Council deliberations and consensus-building processes as well as to vote on all simple and qualified majority issues (including forming of blocking minorities)" (Mihajlovic, Blockmans, Subotic, & Emerson 2023, 15). Moreover, to mitigate the impact of the temporary derogation on newcomers' core interests – such as harmonisation of taxes, own resources decision, vital security interests) – the Template proposes the introduction in the Accession Treaty of an 'emergency brake' similar to that foreseen in Article 31(2) TEU.[8] With all this said, Stage 4 takes place upon expiration of all temporary derogations, thus en-

7 It would be accompanied by the expansion of the scope and duration of the *Safeguard Clauses*. Previously utilised in the Accession Acts of Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, the possibility for their activation was limited to a period of three years. Once triggered – by the Commission on its own initiative or upon a request of a member state – it could last as long as the identified concern is not identified. This applied to the Internal Market and the Internal Market, hence the Internal Market Safeguard Clause and the Justice and Home Affairs safeguard clause. The Template 2.0, therefore, suggests increasing the areas to which new clauses could apply while expanding the duration up to ten years during which these could be triggered. The idea is to provide more robust safeguards that the EU would need to rely on Article 7 as the key way of addressing backsliding, particularly considering the difficulty of it being properly activated as it requires unanimity.

8 In that case, it would be up to the chair of the Council, in close consultation with the newcomer involved, to search for a solution acceptable to it. If this goes without success, the Council may,

abling the newcomers to automatically graduate into conventional member states, with their full veto rights included. Therefore, from the conventional member states' perspective, the proposal gives the EU the additional time to introduce internal institutional reforms while having new member states inside rather than keeping them waiting on the outside. As the proposed exception regime is of a temporary nature, it would also maintain a degree of pressure on conventional member states to ensure the functionality of decision-making with an enlarged membership in the long run. In short, by incorporating these elements as a "compromise" solution between the conventional members and newcomers, the Model offers an effective and legally feasible response to the concerns raised by France and other member states' concerns over the enlarged Union by takes into account the Union's incapability to effectively absorb further countries. This way, the EU would gain the capacity to become a larger but still capable geopolitical force in the rapidly changing world.

3. THE SPREAD OF THE STAGED ACCESSION MODEL ACROSS THE EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY LANDSCAPE

The Staged Accession Model, an initiative born from the collaboration efforts of two like-minded think tanks, owes much of its success to the broad acceptance it garnered within the civil society community across Europe. This was an important stepping stone towards achieving the desired impact on EU policymakers, as it allowed the Model to evolve into a policy framework that transcends the geographical boundaries of candidate countries to which it would primarily apply. Moreover, as enlargement is largely steered by member states in the Council, the deliberate inclusion of the Model in the agendas of various CSOs significantly heightened the probability of it gaining traction among member states' governments. This way, it became an unavoidable point of discussion for policy action.

To understand the extent of the Model's presence in ongoing discussions and how it became a key reference point among CSOs, it was important to engage in a comprehensive mapping exercise via extensive desk research. Such exercise has involved examining a diverse range of sources, to trace the Model's dissemination, adoption, and influence in various contexts. The findings show that by mid-November 2023, there were at least 101 papers from 28 countries that reflected on the Model, referring to it or quoting it. Among these are reputable organisations such as Clingendael, Carnegie, Europeum, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), German Council

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acting by a qualified majority, request that the matter be referred to the European Council for a decision by unanimity.

on Foreign Relations, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), and Atlantic Council (see Annex for a detailed breakdown).[9] The total list of countries can be classified based on the type of country the paper was published in:

1. EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.

Of the three groups, this one has been the most influential one, considering the proximity to the decision-making process in Brussels and the respective national capitals. This particularly applies to papers that have been most dominant in terms of numbers, such as Belgium, Germany, and France. Nevertheless, the fact that the Model has also gained attention from the northern reaches of Finland to the southern territories of Spain demonstrates its ability to transcend regional differences and resonate across varying contexts. Its validity and value as a credible source for enlargement reform is also reaffirmed given that the Model was covered by CSOs both in enlargement-friendly states such as Austria, and enlargement-sceptics such as the Netherlands. Notwithstanding that the governments' positions on this topic do not necessarily coincide with CSOs', and should not thus be equated, the proliferation of the analysis related to the ideas promoted by the Model's authors indicates an accumulation of critical mass that was needed for the discussions to enter EU's policymaking arena.

2. Candidate and Aspirant Countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine.

Here, two groups evidently arise. The first refers to the "old" candidates and aspirants coming from the Balkans, and the second to the "newcomers" from Europe's eastern flank. CSOs discussing the Model from the countries listed here, have less potential to influence decision makers in Brussels and member states, but nevertheless hold a notable value. For the enlargement policy to produce effective results, it needs to be two-sided, i.e., having an enlargement-friendly (or enlargement-ready) Union while also having interested candidates proactively engaged in reforms that are in line with EU's vision and core values. The CSOs coming from this group, therefore, primarily serve the purpose of legitimising the discussions from a local or home perspective. As the Model envisions temporary post-accession limitations for new member states, such as the limitation of veto rights up to a period of ten years while introducing and expanding

9 I hereby express gratitude to Djordje Dimitrov, my colleague from the European Policy Centre (CEP), for assisting me in compiling this extensive list of CSOs.

the number and duration of safeguard clauses, their role gains particular importance. They will be the ones to bear responsibility to explain to citizens how both pre- and post-accession stages are going to unroll in practice. At the same time, as some governments might be reluctant to agree on anything that introduces even a temporary differentiation between them and conventional member states, their efforts therefore are to include domestic advocacy as well. Only with acceptance of candidates and aspirants will the Model properly work, and the role of CSOs in making sure that happens is not to be underestimated.

3. Non-candidate Countries: Liechtenstein, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Although not the "usual suspects", CSOs from these countries have a role to play as well. Firstly, all the mentioned countries, although having no will to (re)engage in accession talks with the EU, they have nevertheless fully supported the process other countries have had with the Union. This was the case, as the enlargement policy has been seen as a strategic tool to ensure countries located in the courtyard of the Union are both stabilised and turned into credible partners or perhaps even long-term allies. Secondly, these countries already very closely cooperate with the Union, from political, economic, and social standpoints, making it in their interest to continue being engaged in discussions that are related to enlargement. Although they have no official say in the process, they nevertheless can play a role as a neutral arbiter, thus adding another layer of diversity of perspectives when it comes to the Model's applicability. Finally, as CSO cooperation knows no boundaries, it is possible for CSOs to assist each other in developing a discourse whose focal point will be the necessity to reform the Union's enlargement policy as part of its larger effort to render it ready to engage with like-minded countries to protect the value-based international order, while providing safety, security, and stability.

Going beyond the numbers not all of the identified organisations necessarily look at the Model from the same perspective — reflecting the varied contexts, priorities, and vision of these organisations. Some CSOs enthusiastically endorse the model, recognising its potential to address key challenges of the enlargement policy. Others subject it to rigorous critical assessment, offering constructive feedback and proposals for adjustments based on their on-the-ground experiences. There are also those who just mention it and contrast it with other initiatives without delving deeper into the content. Nevertheless, the diverse spectrum of responses, from endorsement to critical evaluation, has created a dynamic dialogue within the civil society. The overarching point is that these discussions have allowed the Model to become "mainstreamed" into expert and policy discussions.

4. TRACKING THE MODEL'S TRACES IN EU POLICY DOCUMENTS

Between the EU's last enlargement in 2013 and the War in Ukraine in 2022, there were no serious attempts to alter the course of the enlargement policy. Although the Revised Enlargement Methodology was revealed in February 2020,[10] the CSOs have adamantly criticised the EU for leaving it unoperationalised. The only visible difference was the introduction of the clustering system, which was supposed to better facilitate the organisation of the negotiating chapter. Yet, as the opening of a cluster was a "one-day news" from the perspective of citizens and decision-makers, the tangible effects of it remained negligible. In essence, the enlargement dynamics remained entirely unchanged when compared to the period preceding its adoption. Moreover, even though the Model for Staged Accession to the EU was given birth in October 2021, there were no policy breakthroughs. In other words, it was a period devoid of serious policy action on enlargement policy. With the unfortunate war arriving, however, a new window of opportunity was created, as geopolitics was reinstated as an essential part of EU enlargement equation.

Accounting for CEP and CEPS comprehensive advocacy engagement since the Model's inception, accompanied by the steady development of a favourable and enlargement-friendly discourse by a wider network of CSOs across Europe and beyond, the EU found itself compelled to think creatively and commit to tangible changes. The first ones to follow suit and take action were the Austrian officials, with their non-paper on enlargement in May 2022, just three months after the start of the war. This was an encouraging start, as the non-paper drafted the way forward for discussions on how to gradually integrate the Western Balkans and future candidates into the EU's orbit as soon as possible while keeping the process merit- and reform-based. Their officials have not hidden from the public the fact that the Model was the initiative that led them to take action in the described direction. This was the first time the Model's proposals were featured in a document issued by an EU member state. Soon after, other member states began their own internal deliberations on the matter.

The make-it-or-break-it moment took place during the European Council Summit in June 2022. At that time, it was still uncertain whether the member states would in any way whatsoever endorse ideas of gradual integration of the countries on their path to the EU. Although the Ukraine war opened the doors

10 Curiously, even the Revised Enlargement Methodology was directly influenced by the 2019 French non-paper, which the Template in return influenced for the Staged Accession's predecessor paper, i.e., the paper called "Away with the Enlargement Bogeyman" (Lazarevic 2018). The authors of the French non-paper have reaffirmed this, both in private and in public discussions, as evidenced by the author of this paper.

for the discussions to start, with CSOs filling in the gap swiftly and effectively, the fact the European Council decided by consensus raised fears that some traditionally enlargement-sceptic states would delay the discussion on the matter or shut the matter down altogether. Yet, things unrolled in favour of those who advocate the necessity to change the status quo in a vigorous, effective, and credible manner. Notably, the European Council has not only decided to give the candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, but has called, in Article 16, "the European Commission, the High Representative and the Council to further advance the gradual integration between the European Union and the region already during the enlargement process itself in a reversible and merit-based manner". One can easily cross-check the sentence with the wording present in the Model for Staged Accession to the EU and see that there is a clear link between the two. Although the European Council did not delve deeper into the matter, leaving it up to other EU institutions to follow suit (as per standard line of practice in the complex EU institutional setting), it opened the gates for further work on the ideas for gradual integration of candidates to take place. In parallel with the Model's creators' advocacy efforts, not only have more CSOs started to rapidly join the discussion and take part in shaping the currently enlargement-friendly discourse, but member states and EU institutions have shown that they understood the message too.

The table below shows the list of documents that the author of this paper has identified since the publication of the Model. There are 12 documents at least, that were developed in the context of reforming the enlargement. All those who follow enlargement policy and accompanying discussions, at least since the last expansion of the Union in 2013, know that this is an unprecedented number. Moreover, they seem to be well interlinked, all converging and leading towards the goal of facilitating gradual integration sooner rather than later. This is important, especially given the newfound sense of urgency associated with enlargement, including a more pronounced geopolitical dimension in recent times. Finally, upon crosschecking the table below with the table on CSOs' work, it becomes evident that the positive steps taken by the EU (following the Model's promotion by CSOs), encouraged civil society to further increase the level of their engagement. In other words, a self-sustaining circle was formed, thus ensuring that the topic is here to stay.

Table 1. A list of EU Institutions/Documents inspired by the Model for Staged Accession to the EU [11]

#	DATE	INSTITUTION	DOCUMENT[12]
1	May 2022	Austria	Non-paper on Enlargement (i)
2	June 2022	European Council	Conclusions (ii)
3	October 2022	Chechia Presidency	Non-paper on Enlargement (i)
4	November 2022	Chechia Presidency	Non-paper on Enlargement (i)
5	November 2022	European Parliament	New Enlargement Strategy (ii)
6	December 2022	EU-WB Summit	Tirana Declaration (iii)
7	June 2023	Friends of the Western Balkans	Göttweig Declaration (i)
8	July 2023	Spanish Presidency	Presidency Programme (iii)
9	September 2023	Franco-German Expert Group	Report on Reforms (iii)
10	October 2023	Austrian	Non-paper on Enlargement (i)
11	November 2023	European Commission	The New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans (ii)
12	November 2023	Friends of the Western Balkans	Non-paper on Enhanced Cooperation with the Western Balkans (i)

The identified list of documents can be classified in a threefold manner

i. Member states' non-papers

Non-papers, in this case, are documents written solely by a member state or a group of them with the purpose of putting on the table their views and suggestions on gradual integration. Documents of this kind are, of course, not binding and rather act as "food for thought" in ongoing policy discussions. So far, this has included, two Austrian non-papers, two non-papers made by the Czech

11 The list presents the documents in a chronological manner. Yet, to enhance its explanatory power, the author adds designations such as (i), (ii), and (iii), to indicate the type of document in question. As it is explained in paragraphs following the table, designation (i) stands for "Member states' non-papers", (ii) for "Official policy documents by EU institutions", and (iii) for "Other EU-related sources".

12 The list of all documents will be provided in the bibliography.

Presidency, and two more developed by the Friends of the Western Balkans.[13] As they are considered to be internal and often classified documents of the EU, their number could be bigger than presented here.[14] Nevertheless, their importance should not be underestimated, particularly when done by a Council Presidency, as these are received and evaluated by each and every member state. Most commonly, these are then discussed in COELA, i.e., Working Party on Enlargement and Countries Negotiating Accession to the EU within the General Affairs Council (GAC). Considering that most enlargement-related decisions are already settled at the working body level, the non-papers discussed there, therefore, have the potential to usher the path for collective and binding decisions to be taken later on.

ii. Official policy documents by EU institutions

ii.1. European Council

The already mentioned European Council Conclusions from June 2022 served as a critical juncture.

ii.2. European Parliament

Although not explicitly invited by the European Council to advance the idea of gradual integration, the European Parliament independently entered the enlargement-discussion arena in November 2022, with its own Enlargement Strategy. Notwithstanding its very limited role in the enlargement process — primarily consisting of the ability to have a final say only at the end of the process while also being engaged in monitoring reforms and issuing its own reports with non-binding recommendations and assessments — the European Parliament has played a relevant role in the ongoing discussions. This is particularly noteworthy considering the speed of adoption, as well as the comprehensiveness, of its New Enlargement Strategy. Like the Staged Accession Model, it discusses the necessity to bring the benefits as early in the process in order to incentivise the reforms and bring the EU back on the citizens' agenda. This proposed process includes reversibility, wherein institutional (invitation as observers to the European Parliament) and financial (call for increased funds)

13 The Friends of the Western Balkans include the following member states: Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Italy, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

14 Although the existence of non-papers is often leaked to the media, including some bits and pieces of their content, their nature is supposed to be classified. The author of this paper, therefore, cannot and will not be able to reference them as original sources. A simple Google search will lead interested parties towards the news outlets that have made news about them.

benefits fluctuate based on progress. Moreover, the European Parliamentary Research Service referenced, in an accompanying document whose aim was supposed to feed the parliamentarian's discussions, the work done by CEP on enlargement.[15] The fact the European Parliament was the first EU institution to officially provide a way forward that incorporates key features of the Model ushered a path for others to follow.

ii.3. European Commission

The Commission took most time to act in contrast to other EU institutions. On the one hand, the reality shows that it operates as an institution that often follows rather than leads. Although this may sound counterintuitive, considering that the Commission is expected to assume the role of the engine of enlargement, practice has shown that it is often incapable of taking decisive action if there is no critical mass sufficient for it to step out of the traditionally well-established lines. Yet, under the right circumstances, it has demonstrated the ability to engage in creative thinking. In this case, the document of essence is the "Growth Plan for the Western Balkans", published in November 2023. Building upon the notion that the candidate countries should be assisted in the process of integrating into the EU as soon as possible, under the condition that reforms are gradually implemented, the Commission suggested increasing the funding (EUR 2bn in grants, and EUR 4bn in loans). The Growh Plan also explored the complementary idea of sectoral integration, offering ways for the candidates to integrate parts of their economies with the EU single market earlier in the process. The overall objective was to incentivise reforms by linking them to clear reform targets, narrow the socio-economic gap between the region and the EU (using the funds as a top-up to the ongoing IPA), and overall, convey a message that the EU is indeed ready to seriously invest in the future of its "future member states", as they are now often referred to. As such, it represents "a form of staged accession", as stated by Mr Gert Jan Koopman, Director-General of DG NEAR (Todorovic & Subotic 2023, 2). Therefore, if approved by member states and properly applied, this proposal would indeed present a step forward in rendering the enlargement more gradual and tangible, in line with the Model's basic premise.

15 In fact, the European Parliamentary Research Service quoted the earliest work by CEP on the gradual integration dating from 2018 that was called "Away with the Enlargement Bogeyman" (Lazarevic 2018). Although not as detailed as the Template and Template 2.0, it nevertheless offered the starting point for the Model's subsequent development.

iii. Other EU-related sources

This group of documents is the most diversified one.

iii.1. Spanish Presidency Programme

The notion of gradual integration in the Spanish Presidency Programme. Although only briefly mentioned, this was the first time any official Council Presidency Programme referred to the idea. This way, it recognised the fact that it has become a part of the mainstream discussions.

iii.2. 2022 EU-Western Balkan Summit

The 2022 Tirana Declaration went as far as to provide a more detailed overview of how gradual integration could be applied. This way, unlike the documents from the previous summits, the 2022 Declaration became a more substantive outlook on where the region could be headed in the near future. The Declaration refers to institutional, sectoral, and single-market integration.

iii.3. The Franco-German working group of experts on EU institutional reforms

It made a notable attempt to borrow the ideas presented in the Model for Staged Accession to the EU.[16] These include a staged approach to participation rights in EU institutions, additional financial support, a more structural and conditional methodology for sectoral integration (a complementary proposal mentioned in Template 2.0), reversibility of this partial integration if the EU's principles values, and strategic orientation are no longer met, and QMV for opening/closing negotiating chapters (supplementary proposal mentioned in Template 2.0). They even refer to the idea of setting a target date as 2030 for the EU to complete its internal reforms to be ready for future enlargements — something CEP did one year before (Majstorovic 2022) as a complementary idea to the Model, followed also by President of European Council, Charles Michel (Consilium 2023). In addition, as all documents have so far focused on the proposals for gradual integration of the pre-accession period, the Expert Group went further and even advocated for a transitory period that takes away their right to vote on future enlargements for a jointly agreed timeframe. Again, this fits with the Model's proposal to temporarily limit the veto rights of new

16 The Expert Group was originally commissioned by the German Minister of State for Europe and Climate, Anna Lührmann, and French Secretary of State for European Affairs, Laurence Boone with the aim to set the stage for key decisions to be taken both on EU's internal reforms and for reforming the enlargement policy.

member states, something that Michel also followed up with his proposal of the "confidence clause" (ibid).

In short, these documents have certainly contributed to enriching the discussion, each borrowing the ideas from the Model and adjusting them to fit their vision of enlargement.

5. CONCLUSION

The Staged Accession Model has significantly and positively permeated the European civil society landscape, securing widespread acceptance and exerting influence in policy discussions. Its success is evident through its adoption as a pivotal reference point in influential EU member states and its resonance across a spectrum of contexts, ranging from enlargement-friendly to sceptical states. The comprehensive mapping of the Model's presence in CSO work, and EU and EU member states' documents, not only reflects its mainstream integration but also showcases its positive contribution to the evolution of the EU's policymaking process, traditionally considered to be insufficiently inclusive. The subsequent endorsement and incorporation of its key features in EU policy documents mark a transformative shift in the approach to enlargement, signifying a self-sustaining circle of engagement between civil society and EU institutions – at least on this topic. This emerging relationship ensures the Model's ongoing relevance and positions it as a guiding force in shaping the future trajectory of EU enlargement policy.

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Annex

Civil Society and the Model for Staged Accession to the EU

	Country	Name of the Pubication	Name of the Author Publishing Organisation	Date
1	Albania	Dealing with "enlargement fatigue" to avoid "patience fatigue"	Gentian Elezi, independent expert	May 2023
2	Austria	Twenty years later in New Eastern Europe – the Western Balkans	Antonis Nestora, Eurozine	September 2023
3	Austria	A Grand EU Bargain, the Four Freedoms and Merit: How to Fix the European House and Make Room for New Members	Nikola Dimitrov, the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM)	August 2022
4	Austria	What is to be done? The War, the Western Balkans and the EU. Six fixes for the Western Balkans Six	Nikola Dimitrov, Srdjan Cvijić, Isabelle Ioannides, Zoran Nechev, Ioannis Armakolas, Oana Popescu Zamfir, Valbona Zeneli, Stefan Lehne and Rosa Balfour, The Institute for Human Sciences (IWM)	June 2023
5	Austria	It's a Package Deal! Reforming and Enlarging the European Union in a Contested World	Isabelle Ioannides Zoran Nechev Oana Popescu-Zamfir, the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM)	June 2023
6	Austria/Serbia	No clear path to make enlargement work in CorD October 2023 issue	Florian Bieber, CorD	October 2023

7	Austria/Serbia	[EWB Interview] Schmidt: EU integration process is always the art of compromise	Paul Schmidt – Austrian Society for European Politics for European Western Balkans	26 October 2023
8	Belgium/US	The EU's Eastern Enlargement and Differentiated Democracy Support	Irakli Siribiladze from German Marshall Fund of the United States and Elena Venturam from Carnegie Europe	September 2023
9	Belgium	Ukraine's Candidate Status: Rediscovering the EU's Essence	Mariam Khotenashvili, Trans European Policy Studies (TEPSA)	March 2022
10	Belgium	Think Tank Review	EU – Consilium Think Tank	June 2023
11	Belgium/Sweden	The Next Steps for EU Enlargement – Forward or Backwards?	Michael Emerson and Steven Blockmans – CEPS published for Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS website)	November 2022
12	Belgium	Ukraine's Accession Poses a Unique Conundrum for the EU	Sophia Besch and Eric Ciaramella, Carnegie	October 2023
13	Belgium	Overcoming EU Accession Challenges in Eastern Europe: Avoiding Purgatory	Kataryna Wolczuk, Carnegie Europe	June 2023
14	Belgium	Managing the Risk of instability in the Western Balkans	International Crisis Group	July 2022
15	Belgium	Perspectives on staged accession – A new path to enlargement for the Western Balkans	Sabina de Silva, Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)	August 2023
16	Belgium	The von der Leyen European Commission at midterm: Same priorities, different reality	Corina Stratulat, European Policy Centre (EPC)	June 2022
17	Belgium	Staged Integration for Future EU Enlargement: Geopolitical Imperatives and frac Leadership	Maria Alesina, European Liberal Forum (ELF)	November 2022

18	Belgium	Seize the geopolitical movement – The Western Balkans and the European Security	Paul Taylor, Friends of Europe	Winter 2022
19	Belgium	Staged Integration for Future EU Enlargement: Geopolitical Imperatives and Liberal leadership (in EU Policy Review, Volume 2 (2022): 135–149)	Marina Alesina European Liberal Forum (ELF)	2023
20	Belgium and Spain	Europe After the War: Financial Cooperation for Pan-European Euro-Mediterranean and EU-Africa Integration	Rym Ayadi, Paolo Garonna and Goran Svilanovic, CEPS and Euro-Mediterranean Economic Association	February 2023
21	Belgium, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova	Open Letter to EU in Support of Georgia's Candidacy	Michael Emerson, Steven Blockmans, Tinatin Akhvlediani (CEPS), Veronika Movchan, Artem Remizov (Institute for Economic Research), Denis Cenusa (Expert-Group), Kornely Kakachia (Georgian Institute of Politics)	March 2022
22	Belgium/France	Beyond enlargement': European Political Community and enlargement policy reform	European Parliament Think Tank	November 2022
23	Belgium/France	Qualified majority voting in common foreign and security policy	European Parliament Think Tank	August 2023
24	Belgium/France	EU-Ukraine 2035	European Parliament Think Tank	September 2023
25	Belgium/Germany	The Next Best Thing: Staged Accession as an Alternative for Fast-Track Accession for Ukraine, in "Designed in Brussels, Made in Ukraine: Future of EU-Ukraine Relations"	Marija Golubeva, European Liberal Forum (ELF) & Robert Bosch Academy	2023
26	Belgium/Serbia	[EWB Interview] Balfour: Western Balkan countries should get their act together to catch the EU enlargement train	Rosa Balfour, Carnegie Europe for European Western Balkans	October 2023
27	Belgium/Sweden	EU Accession Prospects of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – first responses to the conditions set by the European Commission	Michael Emerson, Tinatin Akhvlediani, Denis Cenusa, Veronika Movchan and Artem Remizov, CEPS – 3DCFTAs project	February 2023

28	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Staged Accession Model – a Way to End the Stagnation?	Haris Ćutahija, Foreign Policy Initiative (FPI BH)	May 2023
29	Bosnia and Herzegovina/ Hungary	The EU's Enlargement Strategy at a Crossroads? – Redirecting the Debate Toward Acquisition-based Integrative Models	Jamsin Hasicm Sarajevo School of Science and Technology & S KÜLGAZDASÁGI INTÉZET Hungarian Institute of International Affairs	2023
30	Bulgaria	Before it's too late: How the EU should support the Western Balkans' EU accession	Essela Tcherneva, ECFR Sofia	September 2023
31	Bulgaria/Belgium	Eastern European Enlargement and Accession: From Geography to a United Europe in Towards New Security Architecture Brochure	Mira Keneva, University of Sofia and European Liberal Forum	2023
32	Czech Republic	Background paper: Can the EU Enlargement Process be Finally Revitalised?	Jana Juzova, Europeum	October 2022
33	Czech Republic	Reinvigorating the EU enlargement policy: Phasing-in as a way to overcome the enlargement impasse	Jana Juzova and Ziga Faktor, Europeum	June 2023
34	Finland	The discussion about EU enlargement is making rounds – What is Finland doing? (artice is written in Finish)	Jelena Simic, Kelavi Sorsa Foundation	October 2023
35	Finland	EU Reform is Back on the Agenda	Manuel Muller, Finish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA)	May 2023
36	France	State of the Union, Schuman Report on Europe 2023	Multiple authors, Edited by Pascale Joannin from Foundation Robert Schuman	2023
37	France	The EU enlargement process	Cecilia Vidotto Labastie, Institute Montaigne	October 2023
38	France	In support of a new approach with the Western Balkans: Staged accession with a consolidation phase	Pierre Mirel, Foundation Robert Schuman	May 2022
39	France/Germany	The European Political Community and the Western Balkans: Strategic Thinking or Misleading Hope?	Florent Marciacq, Fridrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)	December 2022

40	Germany	Will Ukraine Momentum Help to Overcome the Stalled Enlargement policy of the European Union	Oliver Schwartz, Der (europäische) Föderalist	August 2022
50	Germany	Russia's War in Ukraine: Rethinking the EU's Eastern Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy	Stefan Meister, Milan Nič, Iskra Kirova, Steven Blockmans – German Council on Foreign Relations	January 2023
51	Germany	The Berlin Process in the Western Balkans: Big Ideas, Difficult Implementation	Marina Vulovic, The German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)	December 2022
52	Germany	Economic Relations between the Western Balkans and Non-EU Countries – How the EU can respond to challenges concerning direct investment, trade and energy security	Marina Vulovic, The German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)	July 2023
53	Germany	Getting serious about enlargement perspectives – how else are we to respond to this war?	Simon Ilse, Heinrich Boll Stiftung (HBS)	June 2022
54	Germany	Pubic lecture on how EU can address current crises	Besa Shahini and Anton Hofreiter, Hertie School debate	September 2023
55	Germany	The Enlargement and Reform Conundrum	Nathalie Tocci, International Politik Quarterly	September 2023
56	Germany	Ukraine and the EU at the Time of War: A New Paradigm	Laure Delcour and Kataryna Wolczu, Zentrum Liberale Moderne	January 2023
57	Germany	Perspektiven der Erweiterung – ein Versprechen, multiple Szenarien	Andrea Gawrich and Doris Wydra, Institute for European Politics (IEP)	October 2023
58	Germany	Ukraine's EU Integration: A Long Way Home	Ilona Sologoub, ZBW and Leibniz Information Centre for Economics	August 2022
59	Germany	Eastern Europe Joins the Western Balkans: A New Start for the EU Enlargement Policy	Khrystyna Prandii, German Marshal Fund	June 2023
60	Germany	The European Union Must Set Ukraine Clear Accession Goals	Marija Golubeva, Robert Bosch Academy	N/A

61	Germany/France	Sailing on High Seas: Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st Century	Franco-German expert group on EU institutional reform	September 2023
62	Hungary	The Orbán regime as the 'perfect autocracy': The emergence of the 'zombie democracy' in Hungary	Attila Agh, Sciendo	2022
63	Italy	Moving the Western Balkans Towards the European Union: The Dauting Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Integrating the Western Balkans	Renzo Daviddi, Springer	July 2023
64	Italy	Perspective on staged accession. A new path for enlargement for the Western Balkans?	Sabina de Silva, Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI)	August 2023
65	Italy	New Visions for the Western Balkans: EU Accession and Regional Security	Matteo Bonomi, Luisa Chiodi and Irene Rusconi, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)	May 2023
66	Italy	Integrating the Western Balkans into the EU	Milica Uvalic – edt. , University of Perugia; author – Renzo Daviddi	
67	Italy/Serbia	EU Enlargement to the Western Balkans – limited progress in 2021	Marko Milenkovic, Center for Constitutional Studies and Democratic Development and Institute of Social Sciences Belgrade	January 2022
68	Italy/Serbia	A year later: war in Ukraine and Western Balkan (geo)politics	Milena Lazarevic & Strahinja Subotic (CEP) for a publication by the European University Institute (EUI)	June 2023
69	Liechtenstein	Scenarios for European Union enlargement	Michael Leigh, GIS	July 2022
70	Montenegro	Potential application of the Staged accession model	Dragana Jacimovic, Institute Alternative (IA)	May 2023
71	Montenegro/US	War in Ukraine and implications for Montenegro's EU membership	Gordana Djurovic, Atlantic Council Montenegro	April 2022
72	Multiple EU countries	Sustain and prosper: How Europeans can support Ukraine	Marie Dumoulin, Lykke Friis, Gustav Gressel, and Leo Litra, ECFR	October 2023

73	North Macedonia	The Staged accession model in practice – Addressing the challenges ahead for North Macedonia?	Stefan Ristovski, European Policy Initiative (EPI)	May 2023
74	Poland	The EU debate on qualified majority voting in the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Reform and enlargement	OSW – Centre for Eastern Studies	October 2023
75	Poland/US	Ukraine's Bombed Way to EU Membership	Kataryna Wolczuk – Journal of International Affairs, 75(2)	2023
76	Romania	From the Association Agreement to the Staged Integration to the EU	Veronika Movchan, European Institute of Romania	December 2021
77	Serbia	Nova Metodologija Proširenja Evorpske unije – Pravni Aspekti i Izazovi	Jelena Ćeranić Perišić, Institut za uporedno pravo	2022
78	Serbia	Towards Gradual Integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union: The Case of Serbia, published in Journal of Liberty and International Affairs	Milos Petrovic, Institute of International Politics and Economics (IMPP)	February 2022
79	Serbia	Reclaiming the fundamentals – Unleashing reform potential of the EU enlargement process	Bojan Elek, Jelena Pejic Nikic and Luka Steric, Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP)	October 2022
80	Serbia	How to implement gradual accession to the EU: Single Market, staged accession or something else?	Aleksandar Ivkovic, European Western Balkans	September 2023
81	Serbia	Srbija i Evropska unija dve decenije nakon sounskog samita	Milos Petrovic, Maja Kovacevic and Ivana Radic Milosavljevic – Institute of International Politics and Economics (IMPP)	September 2023
82	Serbia	Do we need an alternative EU accession process for the Western Balkans?	Most Europa	October 2022
83	Serbia/Belgium	Key Determinants of the Enlargement Stalemate and How to Address Them in Towards New Security Architecture Brochure	Milos Pavkovic (CEP) for European Liberal Forum (ELF)	2023

84	Serbia/France	Boosting Societal Cooperation in Florent Marciacq and Romain Le Quiniou (eds.), French Engagement in the Western Balkans: Boosting Strategic, Political, Economic and Societal Cooperation	Strahinja Subotić, Miloš Pavković and Kristina Nikolić (CEP) for IFRI	February 2022
85	Serbia/Italy	The EU and Third Actors in the Balkans: Relaunching Enlargement in Europe and Russia on the Balkan Front: Geopolitics and Diplomacy in EU's Backyard	Milena Lazarevic and Sava Mitrovic (CEP) for Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI)	February 2023
86	Serbia/Slovenia	The Staged Accession Proposal: Breaking the spell of the sleeping EU enlargement	Milena Lazarevic and Mios Pavkovic, European Policy Centre (CEP) at Bled Strategic forum (BSF)	August 2022
87	Slovakia	Challenges of Rule of Law Conditionality in EU Accession	Ana Knezevic Bojovic and Vesna Coric – Bratisava Law Review	June 2023
88	Slovenia/North Macedonia	A grand EU bargain, the four freedoms and merit	Nikola Dimitrov (IWM) at Bled Strategic Forum	August 2022
89	Spain	Novedades En La Red, Nº 905: Enfrentamientos En Yenín (News on the Network)	Elcano Royal Institute (Newsletter)	July 2023
90	Sweden/Belgium	It Takes Two to Tango – Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia Advance Over the EU's Conditions, While the EU Itself Prevaricates	Michael Emerson for Centre for Policy Studies (CEPS) for SCEEUS – Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies	July 2023
91	Sweden	Fit through Flexibility? Differentiated Integration and Geopolitical EU Enlargement	Frank Schimmelfennig, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS)	September 2023
92	Sweden	Fit for Reform? The Implacable Logic of Numbers	Yves Mény, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS)	September 2023
93	Sweden	How the West Can Help Ukraine – Three Strategies for Achieving a Ukrainian Victory and Rebirth	Andreas Umland – Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS)	January 2023
94	Switzerland/ Serbia	Western Balkans – Maintaining the EU accession Lead Over the Eastern Partners	Milos Petrovic from IMPP for Geneva Graduate Institute	March 2023

95	The Netherlands	The EU as a promoter of democracy or 'stabilitocracy' in the Western Balkans?	Wouter Zweers, Giulia Cretti, Myrthe de Boon, Alban Dafa, Strahinja Subotić, Milena Muk, Arber Fetahu, Ardita Abazi Imeri, Emina Kuhinja, Hata Kujraković, Clingendael as the publisher	February 2022
96	UK	As Ukraine pushes for EU candidate status, enlargement hopes fade in the Western Balkans	Margit Wunsch Gaarmann, London School of Economics (LSE) Blog	June 2022
97	UK	Constitutional Changes in the European Union: Towards a Federal Europe	Andrew Duff	2022
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