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European integration of the Western Balkans during the war in Ukraine – illusion or real incentive towards full membership?

SUMMARY

The author examines the existence of specific progress in the Western Balkans (WB) within the process of European integration, taking into account the context of the war in Ukraine and the current status of the European Union (EU) on the international scene. The starting point is that the EU aims to be the most significant actor in the WB, and maintaining such perception in light of the new geopolitical situation is of utmost importance. In this spirit, the EU strives to preserve its role as a transformative force that keeps the region stable and reform-oriented, providing a new impetus to the European perspective of the WB countries, but without a genuine intention to accelerate the accession process. Through the theoretical paradigm of social constructivism, the author explores whether the EU's enlargement policy instruments lead to a deepening of the European integration process by opening accession negotiations with the Republic of Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia and granting

candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through content analysis and comparative methods, the author addresses whether the progress in the integration process is illusory or a genuine encouragement toward full membership. Firstly, the author presents learned lessons from the accession process of the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Montenegro, whose (un)successes are reflected to other WB states. Additionally, the author examines the relationship between the Ukrainian war and the enlargement policy, exploring the geopolitical moment of the WB integration process. To conclude, the integration progress of the mentioned WB states is caused by a combination of geopolitical and regional factors, which maintain the global actorness of the EU in WB without a more promising membership perspective, considering the other WB countries' experience.

KEYWORDS: European Union, Western Balkans, transformative power, EU Enlargement, constructivism.

INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) integration process of the Western Balkans began in 1999 with the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), which aimed to promote stability and prosperity in this post-conflict region and prepare it for eventual EU membership. The term Western Balkans included all former Yugoslavian republics except Slovenia, together with Albania. Even though the EU launched the SAP, the process itself wasn't explicit about the membership for the countries in the Western Balkans region (Kaminski & Rocha 2003, 2). In 2003, the Thessaloniki Summit of the European Council reaffirmed the EU's commitment to enlargement and stated that "the future of the of the Balkans is within the European Union" once they meet the Copenhagen criteria (EU Western Balkans Summit Declaration 2003).

The EU accession process is a complex and demanding one, requiring candidate countries to adopt and implement EU laws and standards in a wide range of areas, including democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy. By insisting on reforms in different areas for candidate states, the EU demonstrates its role as the transformative power that defuses its values, ideas and norms outside its territory and marks its global actorness.

Since the launch of the Stabilization and Association process, which marks the beginning of the European integration for this region, the only country which was successful and finished the integration process was Croatia that joined the EU in 2013. For other countries in the region, there is still a long road to pass until full membership in the Union. There are different opinions whether the EU is not ready to accept new members, or the candidate countries

are not fulfilling its obligations from the accession process (Petrovic 2009). Nevertheless, the European integration process lasts around two decades which can undermine on one side, EU credibility as the global actor, and the support of European integration from candidate states elites and public from the other.

The war in Ukraine which started in 2022 has changed the geopolitical landscape in the world and put the security issues as the top priority for the EU. One can argue that the war in Ukraine impacted (accelerated) the European integration process in the Western Balkans: in this period the EU officially opened accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia and granted the candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the paper, we want to answer some of the questions that led to these decisions. Firstly, we examine why is important, or rather what are the benefits for the EU to fully integrate Western Balkans into the Union. Secondly, we will try to explain the EU motives for the newest decisions in the enlargement policy to the Western Balkans. The final question is why the EU made these decisions at the respective moment, and not a couple of years before or later. We will start with the constructivist interpretation of the EU's role in global affairs and its application to the Western Balkans region.

EUROPEAN UNION AS A GLOBAL ACTOR – CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

The European Union was often associated with the term civilian power, emphasizing the non-military character of its foreign action and influence. Ian Manners (2002), following the social-constructivism perspective of the international relations, introduced the concept of the *normative power Europe* describing role of ideas, values and norms in shaping the behavior of states and international actors by the EU. The EU is seen as a normative power because it seeks to influence the behavior of other actors through specific means – by exporting its values. Manners identified five core norms (values) of the EU: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and human rights and four "minor" norms: social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance (Manners 2002, 32). It is important to notice that those values are not of some declarative nature and narrative of the EU, rather a constitutive element of the EU's political being that is respected in the whole Union and represents the EU's identity of the international stage.

From Maastricht to Lisbon Treaty, the Union has been becoming more political, and we are able to see that the EU puts more and more focus on its core, founding values and their respect in every area of political life and its policies. Besides enumerating its values in the Founding Treaties, the EU envisioned special mechanisms to protect the values. One of the politically most important cases that can be founded it the Treaty, is when a member state is perceived

to be in violation of the EU's fundamental values. In Article 7 of the Treaty of the European Union, the Council has a power to suspend certain rights of the member state that is in "serious and persistent breach" of the EU's values. More recently, through adoption of Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation in 2020 (came into force in 2021), EU developed new mechanism that ensures the respect to the rule of law principle in the member states. The rule of law mechanism provides the EU institutions with the power to freeze the EU funds for the member states that have serious decrease in the rule of law quality. EU Commission sanctioned Hungary and froze some of the funds dedicated to this country in 2022 due to lack of rule of law (Euractiv 2023).

By reinforcing values and norms embedded in the Founding Treaties through its political system and in its member states, the EU legitimizes itself as the credible actor that may spread these norms beyond its borders. EU certainly diffuses its norms, ideas, and values across the globe through different international agreement that cover different range of development aid (financial and technical aid, preferential trade agreement to less developed countries, humanitarian mission, etc.), but the most visible and we could say the most transformative mean of exporting the values is the EU enlargement policy (Manners 2002, 35). Especially in recent history, after the fall of communism in Eastern and Central Europe, the EU has prioritized the respect of EU core values in candidate states and assimilation to its values in candidates' polity and political life. This can be seen in Copenhagen criteria and for the Western Balkans, also in the Stabilization and Association process and detailed enlargement methodology of 35 negotiations chapters (now grouped in 6 thematic clusters) that represent different values and policy areas of the EU (Bargiacchi 2020, 52). By demanding the reforms of candidate states institutions, and adoption of the political and economic system based and infused by the EU values, the EU performs its transformative role on the global stage and achieves the Treaty goals of promotion peace, democracy, rule of law and other values.

As we said earlier, the EU aims to promote its values on the global stage. The transformative power through enlargement policy was most visible after the fall of communism when EU transformed state systems in its neighborhood and integrated the Central and Eastern European countries in 2004 enlargement (including integration of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007). All the integrated countries faced huge reforms and transformed themselves in a short period from the communist system to sustainable liberal democratic countries with the political values and economic mechanisms and principles that are in the core of the EU (Miscevic and Mrak 2017, 187–190). This can be seen in the Freedom House reports1, where most of the CEE countries that joined the EU in 2004/2007 were partly free countries in 1991, and almost all of them are

1 See more: Freedom in the World, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world

liberal democracies nowadays. The same scenario has been envisioned for the Western Balkan countries.

EUROPEAN UNION AND THE WESTERN BALKANS

As mentioned before, launch of the Stabilization and Association process aimed to stabilize the post-conflict situation in the region and the EU was the one of the main global actors that kept the Western Balkans region peaceful and prevent bigger escalations that could led to new conflicts. On one side, since today the EU fulfilled its mission of stabilization of the region, but the democratization part was (is still) the problematic one, and often neglected for sake of the stability. The stability-democracy dilemma and the focus on the first part is often taken as a critique to the EU's enlargement policy decision-making (Smith et al. 2021).

Since 1999, the EU has been present in the Western Balkans region with various military (Bosnia, North Macedonia) and more often civil missions. The goal of missions was to provide necessary knowledge, skills and competences that are necessary for the proper function and organization of a country. Most often, the civil missions in the Western Balkans such as ones in North Macedonia and Kosovo (first rule of law mission), aimed to build efficient police forces, prosecution, judiciary, and human rights reforms (Vukasovic 2013, 191–201). The EU external action (missions) accompanied with development aid and enlargement policy instruments (such as IPA funds) helped the Western Balkans country to overcome political and economic difficulties that were present in their process of state-building and to progress in reform process towards the EU membership.

Before we describe the European integration process for North Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is worth mentioning the two countries that made the most progress in the Western Balkans of the current 6 countries – Serbia and Montenegro. Montenegro signed the SAA in 2007, and Serbia did it in 2008. The negotiations for Montenegro accession began in 2012, for Serbia in 2014. Both countries opened several negotiations chapters (in case of Montenegro all chapters) and EU temporarily closed a few of them (Dabrowski and Myachenkova 2018, 20–21). Still, both countries are far away from the accession and full membership in the EU due to unfinished reforms, but also some critical internal problems such as political instability in Montenegro or normalization of relations within the Dialogue with Kosovo in case of Serbia. From their experience, we can predict that the same long path is also anticipated for Albania, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

One could ask, if the Western Balkans countries are so long present in this process without major breakthroughs in reforms and if they are not fulfilling their obligations, why are they so important to the EU and is their integration (if it happens) even worth for the EU?

Firstly, as we can see from the key process launched by the EU (SAP) in this region – stability is one of the key issues, which directly connects to the security issues. The Western Balkans region has a history of ethnic and political tensions, which have led to conflicts in the past. By integrating these countries into the EU, there is an expectation that the integration will contribute to long-term stability, positive peace and reduce the potential for conflicts which are still possible to happen. Moreover, we need to remember that the EU, at its beginning, was the peace project that accomplished its mission to prevent wars between (Western) European states and to develop good neighboring relations (especially between former war enemies France and Germany). Through its enlargement policy, the EU is aiming for the same goal now in the Western Balkans where the EU has put huge focus on the reconciliation and regional relations between the countries. Making this region cooperative and stable, the EU mitigates the spillover effects that one conflict in this region could produce (Jano 2008, 64–68).

The EU's mission on the international stage to promote values of peace, democracy and rule of law are one of the key components in the reform process of the Western Balkan countries. This process is manifested in the *fundamentals first* approach (Miščević and Mrak 2017) to the Western Balkans that emphasizes the need of rule of law and democracy respect (in essence Copenhagen political criteria) as the priority (nowadays negotiation chapters 23, 24 and 31). Some of additional benefits can be listed: even though EU has liberal trade regime with the Western Balkans countries, the accession would enable the new 20-million-people market for EU companies on one side, and lots of work force from the Western Balkans that can fulfill the workforce gaps of the EU labour market, adding the Balkan trade root benefits and others (Jano 2008, 64).To sum up, the full integration of the Western Balkans into the EU would provide lots of political, economic and security benefits.

Since we explained the importance of the Western Balkans to the European Union, now we will briefly summarize the integration process of Albania, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

EU INTEGRATION PROCESS OF ALBANIA, NORTH MACEDONIA AND BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Western Balkans countries engaged in the European integration process in 1999 when the EU launched the Stabilization and Association Process. The Western Balkans is a geographical region with specific political (post-conflict) background. The region is on the edge of the external borders of the EU, and thus the peace and security sustainability in the region was essential for the EU's own security. All countries in the region aspired EU membership had its own political and economic problems and they saw EU Association (and

Accession) process as a mean for prosperity, state-building after the conflicts and the best way to improve of citizens life standard. Bearing in mind specific context of the region and each country internal problems, EU added to specific components that were not present and much important in previous accession processes – regional component that is good neighboring relations (Beshku and Mulissi 2018, 43). In this way EU wanted to secure not only transformation of the countries internally, but to transform the international/regional relations in the manner that corresponds to the EU values (such as strong multilateral system, peaceful dispute settlement, good governance, cross-border cooperation, etc.). Since 1999, the only WB country that fulfilled all the membership criteria and joined the EU was Republic of Croatia.

Albania is the only country in the Western Balkans that didn't have any armed conflict since the fall of communism. This starting "advantage" unfortunately didn't make Albanian integration process more successful than others. Albania signed the Stabilization and Accession Agreement in 2006 but further steps in the integration process didn't happen much faster due to problems of weak state which are present in Albania. The country has had big problems in terms of political stability, judicial reforms, human rights, rule of law and fight against corruption. The official candidate status was granted in 2014 after the serious reforms in the mentioned areas. The negotiation opening was depending on the progress of judicial reform and improvement of political pluralism and dialogue (Beshku and Mulissi 2018, 46).

North Macedonia was the most advanced WB country in the first years of Stabilization and Association process. It was the first country to sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement in 2005 and was granted candidate status the same year. Even though the opening of the accession negotiations was conditioned with the fulfilling the SAA obligations, the name dispute with Greece as the part of good neighbor relations, was the main problem in the year to come. This problem was resolved in 2018 by signing the Prespa Agreement where the country name was changed into North Macedonia. The agreement opened the path to the negotiation opening, but North Macedonia still face huge political issues from the Bulgaria, which can affect the integration process (Mojsovska, 572).

Bosnia and Herzegovina was the country in which the civil war left lots of unresolved problems such as weak institutions, slow democratization process, corruption, issues about human rights and not good economic situation. Bosnia received a lot of support from the EU and its member states after the war. When we talk about European Integration, one of the most important obligations from the European Court of Human Rights decision are not still implemented. The complex political system that is enforced through Dayton Peace Agreement and lack of consensus among national elites made the federal government and its decision-making process inefficient due to the mistrust between constitutional nations the country. Problems in the areas of

judiciary, democratic issues, economic issues, and multi-level governance are the things that are slowing the progress in the European integration process so far (Koneska et al. 2023, 185).

We can conclude that all three countries had similar internal problems associated with weak state characteristics such as weak institutions, political instability, rule of law issues, corruption, etc. It's worth noting that the integration process in this region is taking a long road, bearing in mind that countries that joined the EU often finished its accession process in more or less 10-year-period, and the Western Balkan countries (except Croatia that joined the EU in 2013) are in the process for two decades. This can lead to untrust and decrease of the EU support in both political elites and public opinion.

Three mentioned countries made progress since when the SAA were signed, but EU didn't make any step for almost 10 years to make EU accession closer, by advancing to next enlargement policy milestones such as negotiation opening for North Macedonia and Albania or granting candidate status in case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the following pages, we want to explore why these enlargement policy decisions were made in 2022 (and not later or earlier), what the EU latent motives are and how EU can justify these steps if they are not based on merit in the integration process?

CONTEXT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE WESTERN BALKANS EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

The EU opened the accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Alongside, the candidate status was granted to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022. First two countries made progress in reform process since they received candidate status, and Bosnia and Herzegovina advanced in the integration process with since 2015, when the SAA agreement came into force. The question that imposes on us is why did the EU make a new decision in the enlargement policy exactly in 2022?

First, we need to bear in mind that the process of European integration in the Western Balkans has lasted more than two decades and the integration of the countries in the region is not visible any time soon. There are obstacles that slow (and block) the full integration from both the EU -structural problems, enlargement fatigue, multiannual financial framework timeline, etc.- and the candidate states – lack of progress reforms, internal instability, lack of political will among candidate elites (Economides 2020, 2–14). The longer the process it takes, the trust and support in European integration can decrease in public opinion of candidate states, which indirectly impacts the political elites determination to the accession process. Additionally, the year of potential EU accession of the Western Balkans countries that was figuring for years was 2025 and nowadays we can see the shift in the communication in the European political

elites. The President of the European Council of the European Union, Charles Michel, in his recent speech accounted that the Union will be ready to integrate the Western Balkans in its membership in 2030 – so the process is surely prolonged for at least another five years (Politico 2023).

Thus, the EU needs to motivate candidate states to keep the pace in the European integration by signaling them that the membership is closer and more tangible, not by empty statements of the officials or by new projects for the candidate states, but with the acknowledgement of the progress of the candidates in the integration process allowing them to pass onto next steps – such as granting candidate status, opening and closing the negotiations chapters, and finally by allowing the accession of one or more/all Western Balkans countries.

The 2022 year when the EU decided to accelerate the accession process and use the enlargement policy instruments to motivate Western Balkans countries, was the year when the war in Ukraine started. The war raised serious security issues in the European Union. In EU's interest as a global actor is to keep the international community on its side and aligned with its interests and stance on the Ukraine war, especially the countries that aspire to EU membership. The Western Balkans countries even though interested and committed to European integration process, experience foreign influence from other global actors such as Russia and China and the Ukrainian war can increase the influence of these countries in the region, which can backslide the trust in the European integration and to raise different (political and security) issues to the European Union. Of course, the impact and success of foreign influence varies from state to state in the Western Balkans and in the different areas of international relations and internal policies (for example China investments and infrastructural projects, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia refusal to impose sanctions on Russia) (Anghel and Dzankic 2023, 493).By advancing the integration process and making the membership closer, EU is trying to keep the Western Balkans countries on its side and on European path, thus mitigating the security risks of deeper penetration of unwanted (from the perspective of EU) foreign influence on these countries.

Worth noting is that the EU made some enlargement policy decisions in its Eastern Neighborhood – the EU granted candidate status to Moldova and Ukraine (BBC 2022). These countries were on the lower level of integration and reform process than the Western Balkans countries, but they received the EU acknowledgement of progress (candidate status), earlier than the Western Balkans formally got the negotiations opened (and the candidate status in case of Bosnia and Herzegovina). One can say (and probably be right) to say that Moldova and Ukraine got the candidate status due to geopolitical motives and in the same sense like the Western Balkans countries, EU wanted to suppress the Russian influence in Moldova, and in case of Ukraine to give another signal that "EU stands with Ukraine" not only by providing financial and military aid for the war, but by political signal and commitment of European membership

in the future, bearing in mind that candidate status is one of the first big steps to the membership. This (could) create the discouragement of future efforts of other candidate states and untrust towards the meritocracy principle of the European integration, by which countries that are most successful in the implementation of the reforms, should advance in the process first.

Giving the candidate status to the country in the war is certainly questionable in motives together with the Ukrainian ability to continue the reform process during the warfare period. By making decisions to deepen the process of European integration with the three Western Balkans countries shortly after the granting of candidate status to Moldova and Ukraine, EU wanted to mitigate the risk of untrust of Western Balkans countries.

To conclude this exploration of EU's motive to grant candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina and open the negotiations to Albania and North Macedonia, we can say that key determinant of these enlargement policy moves was the geopolitical moment of the war in Ukraine and EU's security interests, alongside with changes in Eastern Neighborhood policy and enlargement process. But now, the question that arises upon us is how the EU can justify these moves in enlargement policy?

Obviously, calling upon the geopolitical reasons and security of the EU is not good nor the most legitimate way of justification. That is because the enlargement policy and accession process are based on meritocratic principles where the one country's progress in reforms is the one and only thing that matters, and each country is monitored individually (regatta principle), so if one country is ahead of others, then that country should take the fruits of its hard reform work and to progress the most in the integration process (Marciacq 2017, 17). If this is not the case and if the EU had referred to the geopolitical reasons, the whole system of accession would be undermined. That is why the EU had different communication strategy and explanation for enlargement policy moves to the Western Balkans. The EU was picturing itself as transformative power as before, and praised the countries of Western Balkans for their progress of the substantial reforms that were fulfilled based on the European Commission's reports and recommendations (European Commission 2022). In this way, EU is presented as the power that keeps the Western Balkans countries reform-oriented, motivates them to continue the reform process and makes the membership closer.

We can see that the EU will keep insisting on its transformative role through the reforms conditionality and adopting of its principles and values in the candidates states in the future through new programs and initiatives towards the Western Balkans. The newest initiative launched by the European Commission is The New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. Explaining the EU motives and aims of this Plan, statement emphasizes the "need to bring them (Western Balkans countries) closer to the EU and to accelerate their accession process, based on EU-related reforms in the countries" (European Commission 2023).

Accession to the funds of this program is conditioned by the rule of law quality in the candidate states, which will certainly motivate countries to endorse EU values and put more force into the reform process. This interconnection between access to EU funds and rule of law quality was made by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen in her State of the Union speech from 2022. announcing that the rule of law mechanism will be implemented also for the candidate states (European Commission 2022). This remark from the President's speech that will be implemented through the Growth Plan outlines the importance of the EU values and its presence and respect in the candidate countries during the accession process. In this way, the EU ensures that candidate states uphold EU values and that the diffusion of EU ideas and values continuous.

We need to have in mind that this "closer" membership for North Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina is closer only in the terms of accession steps, but far away in time, political will of the EU and readiness of their respective states, as we can learn from Serbia's and Montenegro's experience in the process of European integration.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Western Balkan countries have been in the process of European integration since 1999 when Stabilization and Association Process was launched. Since that year, only country from the region that joined EU was Croatia, and other six still have good way to pass before the accession. We explained that this region even though not close to the full membership in the EU, is still very important to the Eu and its integration (when/if it happens) will give several political, strategic, economic, and other benefits.

In this paper, we focused on the EU's perspective of the region and it's decision in the enlargement policy in 2022, when the EU granted the candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and opened the negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. We came to several conclusions. Firstly, the integration process for these three countries was without any progress in sense of the integration steps for years. This (could) let to the raise od untrust, disappointment and decrease in the public support for the European integration process, which consequently would affect the elites attitudes and readiness to do more on the European path of their respective country. Yet, the EU didn't make any (progressive) decision in enlargement policy for the Western Balkans, until the war in Ukraine started and its geopolitical consequences started to affect the international relations in the world. This event accelerated the Eu decision-making, and provided Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia with new impulse to the European integration process through enlargement policy instruments. Yet even though the Union membership seems closer, experi-

ence from other Western Balkans counties (Serbia and Montenegro) can suggest that the membership will be still far away. We may say that the EU, in this way, transfers the responsibility for the enlargement to the candidate states and their progress in reforms, putting aside its internal (structural) problems and lack of political will and thus creating an illusion of the foreseeable and closer EU membership for the Western Balkans countries.

The last question of this research was about the means of legitimization of this enlargement policy decision. Calling upon geopolitics could derail trust in the meritocratic process of European integration. Thus, the EU in its communication of enlargement policy, emphasized the reforms momentum of democratic institutions, rule of law and human rights, and praised the candidate states efforts and work in the area. In this way, the EU hides its latent geopolitical and security motives, and presents itself as the transformative power of the region, confirming its global actorness.

In the upcoming years, the interplay of geopolitics and democratization principles and determinants will continue to appear and influence the process of Western Balkans European integration. When the Ukrainian war finishes, as an important geopolitical determinant, research should be aimed on its implication to enlargement policy and EU's decisions in the region. Remains unclear whether it will accelerate, or it will have a negative impact on the European perspective and the integration process of Western Balkans countries.

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EVROPSKE INTEGRACIJE ZAPADNOG BALKANA TOKOM RATA U UKRAJINI – PRIVID ILI STVARAN PODSTICAJ KA PUNOPRAVNOM ČLANSTVU?

APSTRAKT

Autor ispituje postojanje konkretnog napretka Zapadnog Balkana (ZB) u procesu evropskih integracija, uzevši u obzir rat u Ukrajini i aktuelni status Evropske unije (EU) na međunarodnoj sceni. Polazno stanovište je da EU nastoji da bude najznačajniji akter na ZB, te da joj je od iznimne važnosti da održi takvu percepciju u svetlu nove geopolitičke situacije. U tom duhu EU nastoji da očuva ulogu transformativne sile koja održava region stabilnim i reformski orijentisanim, davanjem novog impulsa evropskoj perspektivi država ovog područja, ali bez stvarne namere za ubrzavanjem procesa pristupanja. Autor kroz teorijsku paradigmu socijalnog konstruktivizma utvrđuje da li instrumentima politike proširenja EU dovodi do produbljivanja evropskih integracija ZB otvaranjem pristupnih pregovora sa Republikom Albanijom i Republikom Severnom Makedonijom, i davanjem statusa kandidata za članstvo Bosni i Hercegovini. Detaljnom analizom sadržaja i upotrebom komparativne metode odgovara se na pitanja da li se čini samo privid napretka ZB u procesu integracija ili se vrši stvaran podsticaj ka bržem i izglednijem punopravnom članstvu. Kako bi se sveobuhvatno sagledao proces evropskih integracija ZB, autor analizira stanje i naučene lekcije iz procesa pristupanja Republike Srbije i Republike Crne Gore, čiji se (ne)uspesi preslikavaju na ostale države ZB. Dodatno, autor ispituje odnos rata u Ukrajini i politike proširenja, istražujući geopolitički momenat napretka zemalja ZB u procesu integracije. Iz priloženog se zaključuje da je napredak pomenutih država ZB u evropskim integracijama uzrokovan spletom geopolitičkih i regionalnih faktora, koji održava globalno akterstvo EU na ovom području, ali bez izglednijeg članstva imajući u vidu iskustva drugih država ZB.

KLJUČNE REČI: Evropska unija, Zapadni Balkan, transformativna moć, Proširenje Evropske unije, konstruktivizam.