When the Power of *Realpolitik* Overcomes the Power of Norms – EU Enlargement at a Dead End

Milenko PETROVIC[1]

Abstract: Drawing on the positive experience of the 1993 Copenhagen accession conditions on the post-communist democratization of countries in East Central and Baltic Europe, Ian Manners defined "Normative Power Europe" (NPE) as the EU's ability to spread its international influence by relying on the power of its norms, rather than the political power of its member states. The author argues that, since the onset of enlargement fatigue in the mid-2000s, the relevance of the EU's normative power has faded, and *realpolitik* has once again become the determining factor in its foreign policy. Without clear prospects for EU accession, numerous initiatives to resolve key stability and security issues in the Western Balkans (WB) have produced mixed or no results. The author concludes that the sudden "expansion" of the enlargement process, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to countries lagging behind the WB candidates in meeting EU norms and standards has further undermined NPE and emphasized the importance of the EU's (weak) political power and *realpolitik* in relations with these countries. Such an approach is unlikely to secure regional stability, effectively promote peace and democracy, or provide a clear EU membership perspective.

Keywords: European Union, normative power, enlargement, Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership, EU membership.

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[1] Senior Lecturer Above the Bar, National Centre for Research on Europe, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. E-mail: milenko.petrovic@canterbury.ac.nz, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8225-559X.

Introduction and conceptualisation

Mainly relying on the power of its core norms of peace, liberty, democracy, respect of human rights and rule of law, which were included in the 1993 Copenhagen accession conditions, the European Union has crucially contributed to the largely successful democratisation and marketisation of post-communist countries in East Central and Baltic Europe, all of which became EU members after the end of the 2004/07 enlargement round. Drawing on this experience, Ian Manners (2002) defined 'Normative Power Europe' (NPE) as the EU's ability to spread its influence in the international arena relying on the power of its norms, rather than the political power of its member states. In contrast to NPE, the term 'political power' of the EU and/or its member states is used in this paper to define a combined use (or threat of use) of various sorts of diplomatic (such as sanctions, boycotts etc.), economic (revocation or reduction of promised aid or refusal/postponement of signing favorable trade and/or economic cooperation agreements) and (less so) military pressure on third parties/countries in order to achieve desirable foreign policy goals. This understanding goes slightly beyond Manners and Whitman's (2003) original distinction between the EU's civilian, military and normative power, but it still draws on Manner's (2004, 3-5) argument that "civilian power and military power share an emphasis on physical power" [i.e. force], whereas "the absence of physical force [characterizes] the imposition of norms".

The spread of its norms and influence on third countries has not necessarily been a passive process of "contagion and transference" (Manners 2002, 244-245) but has also relied on various non-forceful actions aiming to promote EU values and norms and define the EU as "an active normative entrepreneur" (Haukkala 2011, 48). Although the EU has been trying to encourage and sometimes even demand third countries around the world to adopt and respect its norms, starting with trade and economic cooperation agreements which it has signed with most of them and which since the late 1980s have been 'routinely' conditioned with requests for the respect of human rights and democracy standards (Nugent 2010, 373-374), the most successful (and in fact the only) 'entrepreneur activity' for promotion of EU values and norms has been the EU enlargement process. Starting in the 1980s with its Southern enlargement to the former Mediterranean right wing dictatorships of Greece, Spain and Portugal and continuing in the 1990s and early 2000s with its 'Mega enlargement' to the post-communist countries of East Central Europe and the Baltics (and Malta and Cyprus), by "combi[ning] stick and carrots" (Haukkala 2011, 47) the EU (including its predecessor EC) has successfully transferred its

norms and 'Europeanised'[2] these countries in its immediate neighbourhood. Later attempts to achieve the same outcomes in the countries of wider EU neighbourhood in North Africa and the Middle East using the tools of the in 2003 launched European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and since 2009 in the six East European post-Soviet states by the tools of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) have been far less successful. The basic reason for this lied in the fact that the latter two policy approaches for promotion and diffusion of EU norms have relied on the similar 'sticks' but offered much smaller 'carrot' than the enlargement process (Haukkala 2011; Zielonka 2013).

The most important award or 'carrot' in the enlargement process has been the promise of EU membership, whereas the 'stick' has been the requirement that the candidate countries have to comply with and meet accession conditions. This 'stick' therefore also includes the refusal or cessation of EU assistance for introducing and implementing necessary institutional and normative reforms in cases where the EU has assessed that a candidate country has not followed the EU's instructions and requirements as to how to proceed with these reforms. However, it is of paramount importance to emphasise that the sticks in the process of diffusion of EU norms via enlargement have been voluntarily (if not gladly) accepted by the candidate countries. They cannot be understood in terms of 'standard' political pressure or the use of any type of diplomatic, economic or military force that a great political power (i.e. a country or group of countries) has traditionally imposed on small ones in international affairs aiming to pursue its strategic interests and achieve foreign policy objectives. In the history of the EU's enlargements (and of its predecessors the EEC and the EC), there is no example of a country being forced to apply for EU membership and thus being 'forced' to comply with the (stick of) accession conditions. This fact further highlights the uniqueness and superiority of the enlargement process in the successful spreading of EU norms and influence to third countries. However, it also raises a question as to why and how the EU has, after the completion of its 2004/07 'Mega enlargement', decided to no longer rely on enlargement as the most effective if not "the only avenue through which the

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[2] Although it is generally used in a much broader sense and related to the transfer of political, socio-economic and cultural values, norms and attitudes developed in (predominantly Western) European countries to non-European countries, the term 'Europeanisation' in the modern political science literature is dominantly used as EU-centric. It primarily refers to the process of transfer (and adoption) of norms, procedures and regulations which exist at the EU level to the political, legal and social structures of the member states or the countries which wish to become EU members. See e.g. Flockhart 2010; Grabbe 2006; Radaelli 2003.

EU can project its normative power" (Haukkala 2011, 61; see also Forsberg, 2011, Schimmelfennig 2008).

Although EU enlargement decisively contributed to the consolidation of democratic institutions and speedy marketisation and economic growth in the candidate countries and was proven to be the EU's best "foreign policy" (Schimmelfennig 2008, 3) and "policy instrument and…conflict prevention mechanism" (Tzifakis, 2007, 59), EU enlargement to other areas of ex-communist Europe and Turkey[3] effectively stopped after 2007. The undoubtedly positive outcomes of the 2004/07 EU enlargement round that were clearly visible in not only the successful transfer of EU norms and standards to the Union's newcomers and the expansion of the zone of peace and stability in Europe, but also the long-term economic benefits for old EU member states (Nugent 2004; Petrovic and Smith 2013) have, paradoxically, not spurred further EU enlargement. While Croatia was the only state which was able to join the EU after 2007 (in 2013), the accession hopes of its post-communist counterparts from the Western Balkans (WB) and six post-Soviet states included in the EaP have been (despite 'optimistic' rhetoric and given promises) continuously discouraged by the EU's leading politicians and officials.

The following sections explain how the EU has given up of the use of its normative power in relations with the two group of countries in its immediate post-communist neighborhood since 2007 and how the enlargement process and membership promises have been used not to promote EU norms and values but to achieve short-term foreign policy goals and the realpolitik priorities of EU member states in the region. These priorities have been largely determined by member states' aims to secure peace and political stability on the EU's borders, i.e. their geopolitical-interests, but also by some exclusively national interests of (some) EU member states (Anghel and Dzankic 2023; Petrovic and Tzifakis 2021). However, such 'politisation' of the enlargement process in which the EU undermines its normative power and relies on its political power (like "a 19th century 'great power'" [Manners 2006, 183]) has served neither to secure long lasting stability and peace in these two group of countries nor to consolidate democracy and advance the other EU's core norms.

Until very recently, the EU had adopted two different approaches and policies for establishing and maintaining close relations with the WB and the EaP states. While the first group, the WB states received the EU's invitation to apply for

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[3] Turkey (*Türkiye*)'s accession had effectively fallen from the enlargement agenda even before that of the Western Balkan states due to both increased opposition to it in the leading EU member states and internal developments in Turkey, particularly President Erdogan's increased authoritarianism and his lack of desire to comply with EU demands and meet accession conditions.

membership and open the enlargement process ('once they are ready') already in the early 2000s, the second group of EaP states was persistently refused such an invitation by the EU throughout all their post-communist history – until February 2022. Then, the changed geopolitical circumstances and foreign policy priorities of EU member states after the Russian invasion of Ukraine led to a sudden and very rapid change in the approach of the EU to its relationship with the EaP countries, and in fact merged it with its approach to the relations with WB States.

Another core aim of the following analysis is to show and confirm that the EU's lack of interest in enlarging and spreading its norms after accession of Croatia in 2013 is the primary reason for the slow accession progress of the WB states and (to a lesser extent) the EaP states, and not the domestic conditions and issues of these states. This is done through a comparative analysis of the content and character of the continuously changing accession conditions for WB candidates – from primarily normative to more or less purely politically driven – and the once defined, unchanged, dominantly normative (Copenhagen) accession conditions that the ECE and Baltic states had to meet during the 2004/07 enlargement round. The effects of these two sets of accession conditions are assessed regarding both progress in post-communist democratisation and progress of the candidate countries in meeting the EU's accession requirements. As a reference value on progress in post-communist democratisation, this analysis relies on the Freedom House's *Nations in Transit* 'democracy score,' which averages seven indicators of democratization[4] and basically provides similar comparative results as other international organizations or projects specializing in monitoring and assessing democratisation, human rights and political and civil liberties in respective post-communist states (such as the Economist Intelligence Unit *or* the Varieties of Democracy project). The finding of this analysis challenges the prevailing view that the unwillingness or (structural) inability of the WB and EaP states to democratise and adopt other EU norms is equally (or even more) responsible for these states' slow progress in both democratisation and EU accession as is the EU's lack of interest in further enlargement. The latter is often claimed by EU officials and political leaders as well as many scholarly analysts (Cirtautas and Schimmelfennig 2010; Keil 2013; Seroka 2008) including those who admit that the EU has largely lost (or never had) a genuine interest in further enlarging in these two regions. Despite this admission, they continue to stress that the inherent internal and

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[4] National Democratic Governance, Electoral Process, Civil Society, Independent Media, Local Democratic Governance, Judicial Framework and Independence, and Corruption (Freedom House 2024)

regional issues[5] of these two groups of states are equally responsible for their slow Europeanisation (Anghel and Dzankic 2023; Dopchie and Lika, 2024).

The EU and the Western Balkans:
Europeanisation through a broken enlargement promise

Following the end of post-Yugoslav wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, and the later Kosovo conflict of 1998/99, the EU labelled the entire post-Yugoslav space (bar Slovenia) and Albania with the term Western Balkans[6] and designed for them the so-called 'coherent strategy' of 'conditionality' and '[a] gradual approach' in offering EU cooperation and assistance for "peace and stability, economic renewal, democracy … and [mutual] cooperation" (EU GAC 1997, Annex III; see also Pippan 2004). The positive impact of this new EU strategy, which by 1999 was turned into the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) for the WB states, rapidly became obvious. Not only did the two largest countries in the region, Serbia (then with Montenegro) and Croatia, almost simultaneously replace their post-communist authoritarian regimes with strongly pro-reformist and pro-EU governments during a 10-month period in 1999/2000,[7] but all the countries in the region (with the sole exception of North Macedonia) succeeded in significantly accelerating their post-communist political and economic transformation in the first half of the 2000s (see Table 1).

These positive trends were strongly supported and further boosted by the conclusions of several EU Council and European Council meetings on the bright prospects of all the Western Balkan states for an 'EU future' which culminated in the adoption of the *Thessaloniki Agenda* in 2003 (EU GAERC 2003, para. 2) which clearly stated:

> "The Western Balkans and support for preparation for future integration into European structures and ultimate membership into the Union is a high priority for the EU. The Balkans will be an integral part of a united Europe".

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[5] Foremost insufficient democratisation (routed in inherent corruption and a lack of respect for the rule of law) and increasing authoritarianism in most of these states, coupled with ethnically based political disputes within and between some of these states.

[6] In order to make a distinction between them and other two (eastern) Balkan states, Romania and Bulgaria which were by then included in the 2004/07 enlargement process.

[7] After the death of Croatia's authoritarian president Tudjman in December 1999 and the overthrow of Serbia's post-communist dictator Milosevic in October the following year.

However, the enlargement optimism and the encouragement for 'ultimate [EU] membership' of the WB states began to deteriorate just a few years after the adoption of the Thessaloniki agenda and even before the 2004/07 enlargement round was completed. Emerging enlargement fatigue and fears for the EU's 'absorption capacity' in key member states, pressured the Council to 'renew [the] consensus on enlargement' and *de facto* tighten the Copenhagen conditions and make the accession process more demanding and complex for new applicants (European Council 2006, point 4; see also Petrovic 2013; Phinnemore 2006). From that moment on, the basic objective of EU enlargement policy towards the Western Balkan states was not to 'Europeanise' and speed up the accession of these states, but rather to try to avoid 'mistakes' from previous enlargement rounds, particularly those related to the 'premature' accession of Romania and Bulgaria[8] and use the enlargement promise as a 'carrot' to achieve the goals of its stabilisation – security policy in the region (Anghel and Dzankic 2023).

In addition to the tightened Copenhagen 1993 accession conditions and conditions coming from the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) for post-war reconciliation and peace-building in the region,[9] the new approach to EU enlargement after 2006 (i.e. after the completion of the 2004/07 enlargement) also included the additional conditions related to compliance with the EU's initiatives for resolving the contested statehood status of some of the Western Balkan states. In this way, candidates and potential candidates for EU membership from the Western Balkans have had to cope with several sets of additional accession conditions which were imposed after the EU offered them an 'EU future' in 2003 (Petrovic 2017). In comparison, the post-communist states that joined the EU within the 2004/2007 enlargement round had only to meet the Copenhagen conditions defined in 1993.

Although EU officials and a significant number of scholars insist on insufficient democratisation, continuously high levels of corruption and (in more recent EU documents and academic sources) emergence of EU supported 'stabilitocracy' (Bieber 2018, 2020) and the 'captured state' (see e.g. Keil 2018; Richter and Wunsch 2020) as the basic reasons for the slow progress of EU enlargement into

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[8] However, more thorough analyses show that there is no real evidence that the post-accession trajectories of these two countries have significantly differed from those of their post-communist counterparts who joined the EU in 2004 (see e.g. Levitz and Pop-Eleches 2010 and Sedelmeier 2014).

[9] Although necessary for overcoming the negative legacies and consequences of the 1990 wars, the SAP conditions, particularly those related to cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague [ICTY] were sometimes very difficult to comply with as they involved 'high political costs of compliance [for] the targeted governments' (Schimmelfennig, 2008).

the Western Balkans, the transfer of EU norms have never been the most important accession requirements for the Western Balkan states. The fulfilment of the Copenhagen conditions on democratisation or the establishment of a 'functioning market economy' has always been subordinated to the geo-political, stability-security goals of the EU and its member states in the region. Besides, as Petrovic and Smith (2013) argue and is also visible from the data presented in Table 1, the level of democratisation reached by the most advanced Western Balkan candidates for EU membership – Serbia, North Macedonia and Montenegro – by the early 2010s was not much below that of the neighbouring EU member states – Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania.

Table 1. Indicators of post-communist democratisation*

	2010	2014	2018	2022
EU members				
Slovenia	*6.07*	*6.07*	*5.93*	*5.71*
Estonia	*6.04*	*6.04*	*6.18*	*6.00*
Czechia	*5.79*	*5.75*	*5.71*	*5.54*
Latvia	*5.82*	*5.93*	*5.93*	*5.79*
Lithuania	*5.75*	*5.64*	*5.64*	*5.64*
Poland	***5.68***	***5.82***	***5.11***	***4.54***
Hungary	***5.61***	***5.04***	***4.29***	***3.68***
Slovakia	*5.32*	*5.39*	*5.39*	*5.25*
Bulgaria	*4.96*	*4.75*	*4.61*	*4.50*
Romania	*4.54*	*4.54*	*4.54*	*4.36*
Croatia	*4.29*	*4.32*	*4.25*	*4.25*
Western Balkans				
North Macedonia	4.21	4.00	3.64	3.82
Albania	4.07	3.82	3.89	3.75
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.75	3.57	3.36	3.29
Montenegro	4.21	4.14	4.07	3.82
Serbia	4.29	4.36	4.04	3.79

	2010	2014	2018	2022
Kosovo[10]	2.93	2.86	3.07	3.25
Eastern Partnership				
Ukraine	3.61	3.07	3.36	3.36
Georgia	3.07	3.32	3.32	3.07
Moldova	2.86	3.14	3.07	3.11
Armenia	2.61	2.64	2.57	3.04
Belarus	1.50	1.29	1.39	1.18
Azerbaijan	1.61	1.32	1.07	1.07

* Freedom House NIT 'democracy score' (7 being the highest: full democracy; 1 being the lowest: complete dictatorship)

Source: Freedom House 2020, 2023

The necessity to further consolidate and improve the functioning of the country's democratic institutions, which after 2014 considerably deteriorated in all the Western Balkan states (as well as in many EU member states, particularly in Poland and Hungary – Table 1)[11] certainly exists, but it has never been the main reason for their slow progress in the accession process. Compliance with the SAP conditions and other requirements raised by EU strategic visions (mainly formed under the decisive influence of the largest EU member states) on stability and security in the region, primarily defined by the EU's stances on the resolution of the 'hot political-stability issues' in the region[12] have always been at the core of the EU's accession conditions for Western Balkan candidates. Both the opening of Croatia's accession negotiations in October 2005 and the signing of Serbia's Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU in 2008 were postponed (and Serbia's SAA also frozen immediately after it was signed in April 2008) due to these two countries' lack of cooperation with the ICTY in The Hague in delivering

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[10] This term is used, throughout the paper, without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244.

[11] See also Keil 2018 and Goraand Wilde 2022.

[12] Most notably the Belgrade-Priština dispute over the latter's declared independence, the Bosnia-Herzegovina intra-ethnic disputes regarding the country's constitutional order and North Macedonia's disputes with its neighbours about its name, national identity and language (for more details see Petrovic 2017 and Petrovic and Wilson 2021).

their citizens accused of war crimes to the Court. Similarly, the Council postponed its response to the Commission's recommendation to grant official candidate status to Serbia from December 2011 to March 2012 due to Serbia's unsatisfactory progress 'in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue' on issues arising from its refusal to recognise Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008 (European Council 2011). Furthermore, although the Commission had recommended to the Council to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia already in 2009 (European Commission 2009) the Council has continued to block the opening of accession negotiations with this country until the present day. The main reason for this was not related to the country's democratisation or respect for the rule of law but, it was the Greek veto over North Macedonia's former constitutional name 'the Republic of Macedonia'. However, after it officially changed its name in 2019, Bulgaria's veto over North Macedonia's national/ethnic identity and language became the primary obstacle to opening accession negotiations with this country, nearly 15 years after the European Commission declared it ready in 2009 (Petrovic and Wilson 2021; Vankovska 2020).

That the EU has largely prioritised its (member states') stability-security goals in the Western Balkan region over advancing democracy standards and other necessary socio-economic reforms that could indeed transform EU norms and prepare Western Balkan candidates for membership became obvious after the European Commission began to include requirements related to regional political stability in the accession negotiation process. Although the Commission has traditionally been responsible for carrying out the administrative-technical aspects of the accession process related to the candidates' capacity to meet EU standards and norms defined by the Copenhagen conditions, in the accession negotiations with Serbia (opened in 2014) an additional chapter on the resolution of Belgrade's relations with Priština was included. This additional 'stability-security' accession condition was later applied to all candidate countries in the Commission's 'new' Enlargement strategy for the Western Balkans of February 2018 (European Commission 2018, 3-8) through the requirement that the Western Balkan candidates have to find "definitive solutions to disputes with neighbours" and solve them "as a matter of urgency" as the EU "will not accept to import these disputes and the instability they could entail".

While the insistence on re-establishing good-neighborly relations has been at the core of the SAP since its very beginning, such a firm request for the resolution of disputes between the candidate countries and their neighbours as the de-facto accession pre-condition had never been imposed on any candidate country in any of the previous enlargement rounds. When Cyprus was admitted into the EU in 2004 it was not asked to solve its (still) unresolved dispute with Turkey over its

partition on the northern (Turkish) and southern (Greek) part, nor was Croatia asked to resolve its (also still ongoing) dispute with Slovenia over their maritime border before it joined the EU in 2013. As Petrovic and Wilson (2021, 202) argue, this accession pre-condition has "in contrast to all other Copenhagen and post-Copenhagen accession conditions broadened the scope of its fulfilment beyond the capacity and competency of the [candidate] country governments". In fact, it enables an EU member state that has a bilateral dispute with an EU candidate, to hold up the latter's accession bid until their dispute is resolved to the former's satisfaction, even before the Commission's recommendation comes to the Council. Whereas earlier, a member state could have blocked a candidate's accession bid only in the Council, after the Commission had submitted its recommendation about this candidate's progress in accession (as was the case with the Greek veto over North Macedonia's name) the Commission's 2018 Enlargement strategy and the new enlargement methodology adopted in February 2020 (European Commission 2020) allow this to happen already during the accession negotiations process. Given the level of difficulty in finding solutions to bilateral disputes in the region (both by the countries involved and by the EU through its initiatives that have so far failed to resolve any of the Western Balkans' hotspots), an EU member state can now hold up one's accession negotiations indefinitely.

The European Commission, formed in 2019 to be, in words of its President Ursula von der Leyen, a "geopolitical Commission" (European Commission 2019) and the new enlargement methodology of 2020 have further strengthened the involvement of the Council and individual member states in the accession negotiations process and prioritisation of their political preferences in it (Petrovic and Tzifakis 2021). Final confirmation that the EU's enlargement into the Western Balkans (and generally Eastern Europe) after 2013 is merely a foreign policy tool for achieving the stability-security or other national interests of EU member states, with no real intention of guaranteeing membership status to candidate states (compare Anghel and Dzankic 2023; Dopchie and Lika 2024)[13] came with the sudden 'expansion' of the enlargement process to the Eastern Partnership

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[13] Currently, the two regional frontrunners – Montenegro and Serbia have been negotiating their EU accession for 12 and 10 years respectively with no sign of their closure in the foreseeable future. Albania and North Macedonia, which were the last of the WB states to open accession negotiations in 2022 (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Priština are the only two parties which are still awaiting it) have not yet opened any of the (30+) negotiations chapters. For the sake of comparison, Croatia took 5.5 years to negotiate its accession with the EU, Romania and Bulgaria took a little less than 5 years and the countries which joined the EU in 2004 negotiated their accession 4.5 years (but Slovakia, Latvia and Lithuania less than 3 years – see Petrovic 2017).

countries in 2022. Exclusively motivated by the geo-political interests and/or political preferences of (most of) its member states, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 the EU promptly decided to do something that it has 'stubbornly' refused to do since the creation of the Eastern Partnership in 2009 – to offer a membership 'carrot' to participating states. In this way, the Eastern Partnership, as a specific instrument for transferring EU norms and influence to neighboring countries, ceased to exist, and its participating countries became subjects of the EU's enlargement policy and process, which have been, more or less, exclusively driven by the geo-political priorities of EU foreign policy and the *realpolitik* of EU member states.

The Eastern Partnership becoming 'geo-political enlargement'

On the eve of the 2004 'Mega-enlargement', EU leaders attempted to formulate a more strategic policy approach towards their soon-to-be eastern neighbours as well as the existing Mediterranean ones that would further encourage their democratisation and support socio-economic development and prosperity without the "enlargement promise". The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was first outlined in the Commission Communication to the Council and the European Parliament (EP): "Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: a New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours", known as the Wider Europe Communication (European Commission 2003). It was followed by a more developed Strategy Paper on the European Neighbourhood Policy of May 2004. The official discourse of the ENP emphasised the value-driven logic of the EU's attempt to export its democratic norms and governance standards to the wider neighbourhood. The ENP's main instrument was the 'action plan', which was to be agreed between the EU and the partner country. A particular plan's prime task was to identify priorities of cooperation between the two parties, particularly regarding the partner country's agenda for political and economic reforms, with short and medium-term priorities of 3 to 5 years (European Commission 2015).

The idea that the ENP can be used as an effective promoter of EU norms and interests in the respective countries was questioned very early. While, like in the EU enlargement process, the basic mechanism for diffusing EU norms to partner countries within the ENP is political conditionality, the reward is much more limited than that provided by accession with its full membership benefits (full participation in EU decision-making, voting rights, access to funding etc.). EU assistance for social and economic development to countries included in the ENP has been primarily

provided through comprehensive Free Trade Agreements aimed at improving terms of trade, the economic environment and the investment climate as well as strengthening democracy and assisting some system reforms. However, the fact that the ENP conditionality mechanism were largely copied from the enlargement process but without guaranteeing the most important award of prospective membership has been seen as a very serious shortage of this policy approach (Cremona and Hillion 2006; Schimmelfennig 2010).

The European Commission itself also realised very early on that some important weaknesses were present in the ENP. In its reports on the progress of the ENP in 2006, the European Commission (2006) noted the lack of an impact on regional conflicts and democratic reforms and the modest amount of financial support. Drawing on these weaknesses of the ENP and their strong desire not to remain on the eastern frontier of the EU for very long, new EU members from ECE (especially the Visegrad group 4 states – Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czechia) and the Baltic states started pushing for an 'open door policy' and offering a 'European perspective' to countries within the ENP that were willing to accede to the EU in the future and ready to accomplish the accession criteria (Wojna and Gniazdowski 2009). Although the timing for such an initiative was far from ideal due to the simultaneous emergence of enlargement fatigue among the western EU members and the global financial crisis, the new EU members viewed the ENP as a tool to reinforce reforms that would prepare Eastern European countries, such as Ukraine and Moldova, for future membership. As pointed out by the Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, 'we all know the EU has enlargement fatigue. We have to use this time to prepare as much as possible so that when the fatigue passes, membership becomes something natural' (Goldirova 2008).

Eventually, the ECE and Baltic promoters of closer EU relations with the countries of the eastern neighbourhood were able to persuade the other members of the EU to introduce changes to the ENP in 2009. The EaP was officially endorsed by the adoption of the "Declaration by The European Council on the Eastern Partnership" at the Brussels Council meeting in March 2009 (European Council 2009) and then officially launched during a special summit held during the Czech presidency in May 2009 (Council of the European Union 2009). In its document on Eastern Partnership of December 2008 the European Commission (2008, 3) emphasised that the EaP "will be based on mutual commitments to the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, and the principles of the market economy" and it outlined five priority areas for reinforcing bilateral relations: a new form of agreement, the prospect of negotiations to put in place deep and comprehensive free trade areas, progressive visa liberalisation, the enhancement of cooperation in the areas of security and

energy security, and the EU's support for social development. A new contractual framework for cooperation was also proposed with the introduction of the Association Agreement (AA) and the establishment of a 'deep and comprehensive free trade area (DCFTA) [with] the highest possible degree of liberalisation' as a particularly important part of it.

Some analysts, and even more so political leaders, in the ECE and Baltic states who initiated the partnership initiative argued that the notice of 'association' brings a really new dimension in the relationship between the EU and the countries of its eastern neighbourhood (see e.g. Hillion and Mayhew 2009). However, apart from the very moderate increase of financial support and veiled (but relatively often used) references in the related documents to the possibility of membership,[14] it is hard to find any particular mechanisms incorporated in the EaP that would additionally stimulate the partner countries to comply with EU conditions (or demands) regarding the directions of their political and economic developments. Despite talk of 'association' and these veiled references, the EaP was not able to offer "the most attractive 'carrot' – EU membership [but only] a [more] liberalised access of goods and persons to the EU" through the DCFTA (Schimmelfennig 2010, 332).

While, in the period 2010-2022, the EaP contributed to intensifying political cooperation, economic ties, and people- to-people links between the EU and the three most advanced EaP states – Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia[15] –the impact of the EaP on transferring the EU's core norms (foremost peace, democracy and the rule of law) to participant countries were at best disappointing. Aside from the outbreak of hostile relations between Ukraine and Russia after the Maidan Revolution of 2014 which have been all but promoting peace and security in the region, a brief look at the data presented in Table 1 shows that none of the countries included in the instrument were able to improve their generally very negative democracy scores throughout the period. Even worse, Ukraine, which was (after the Orange Revolution of 2004) the most democratically advanced of the six countries in the late 2000s, underwent significant backsliding during the 2010s, and in 2022 it was significantly below the entire WB territory except of Kosovo. The other two 'advanced' EaP countries, Georgia and Moldova continued to have even lower democracy scores than Ukraine. Moldova though made a

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[14] Primarily in expressions such as 'supporting aspirations for closer ties', 'a closer relationship' and 'deepening relations' rather than offering specific promises.

[15] All of which signed their AAs, with the DCFTA with the EU in 2014 and established visa free travel regimes for their citizens to the EU in 2017 (Moldova in 2014).

modest improvement and Georgia (after some improvements achieved in the first half of the period) ended the period with the same democracy score as in 2010.

Armenia remained behind these three countries (slightly improving its score in the early 2020s) and significantly ahead of Belarus and Azerbaijan, two countries which the Freedom House's *Nations in Transit* has labelled as "Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes" since the early 2000s, and where the dictatorial grip on power has been further 'consolidated' over the last decade. Clearly, the promotion of democracy, rule of law, respect of human rights etc. in the EU's eastern neighbourhood through the EaP has not been working. Despite this reality, the European Union's officials and the heads of state or government of the 27 EU members signed a Joint Declaration with the representatives of all EaP countries (except of Belarus who earlier suspended its participation in the EaP), including Azerbaijan's president/dictator at the last Eastern Partnership Summit (held in Brussels on 15 December 2021), where, among else, they agreed to be "bound by our joint determination to further strengthen democracy and the rule of law in our societies" (Council of the European Union 2021, 3). Moreover, further in the text is a statement (point 10) in which the EU "welcome[s] progress in the ongoing negotiations between the EU and Azerbaijan on a new comprehensive Agreement" (Council of the European Union 2021, 5). However, the irrelevance of the EU's normative power and the transfer of its norms in its relations with the EaP countries, as well as in the enlargement process, became fully evident after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Although EU membership was not labelled or even announced as a possible outcome of established cooperation in any of the documents on the EaP, and despite both countries' (very) problematic democratic record, the 'geopolitical' European Commission recommended, and the European Council granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova only three months after the Russian invasion took place in February 2022. The following developments: the final opening of the accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania in July 2022 (17 and 8 years respectively after the EU granted them candidate status), the granting of candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 2022 and the European Council's decision of 14 December 2023 to grant candidate status to Georgia and (already) open accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova (which actually occurred in June 2024) have been labelled by the European Commission (2024b, 1) as "a new phase with fresh momentum" of the enlargement process. In the same vein the new-old President of the Commission has declared that 'enlargement will remain a top priority of the new Commission' (European Commission 2024b). A cynic could comment that if 'enlargement will remain a top priority for the new Commission' in the same way as it was for the

old Commission, then one can safely conclude that the EU will continue to use the enlargement process as a tool for promoting and protecting the geo-political priorities of its common foreign policy and political interests of its member states without any serious intention to complete the accession process for any of the candidate states.

Indeed, neither the European Council's latest conclusions of June 2024 (2024) nor the most recent Commission's document on enlargement of 30 October 2024 (European Commission 2024a) give any targeted dates or timelines for completion of the accession process with any of the candidate countries. There is no announcement about this even for the most advanced candidate country - Montenegro, which has so far opened all the negotiation chapters, but has closed only three of them (and all before 2019). Moreover, similarly as it was in 2006 (with the 'first' tightening of the Copenhagen conditions), 2011[16] and more recently in 2018 and 2020 when the 'new' enlargement strategy and new enlargement methodology were introduced to 'enhance' the enlargement process and better prepare the candidate countries for membership, the European Council of June 2024 announced a 'new round' of 'internal reforms' and the need for another change in the rules of the enlargement process. In section VII of its conclusions "Roadmap for future work on internal reforms", the European Council (2024, 12) stresses the necessity of (further) internal reforms of the Union to "address key questions related to its priorities and policies as well as its capacity to act in the face of a new geopolitical reality and increasingly complex challenges". The following 'clarification' that "[t]his work should advance in parallel with the enlargement process, as both the Union and future Member States must be ready at the time of accession" (European Council 2024, 12) obviously announces additional requirements for the candidate countries and a further postponement of the enlargement process.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the EU's prompt inclusion of Ukraine and Moldova (and later Georgia) in the enlargement process, the latter has 'absorbed' the Eastern Partnership (with the inclusion of the 'carrot' of membership) aiming to more effectively address security concerns, geo-political interests and regional priorities of EU member states. The promotion and spread of EU values and norms to the candidate countries with the ultimate goal of preparing them for membership in the Union hardly play any serious role in the current process of EU enlargement.

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[16] When the 'three pilar process' for another tightening of the Copenhagen conditions for WB candidates was launched to ensure "a stronger focus on addressing fundamental reforms [in the candidate countries] early in the enlargement process" (European Commission 2014, 1).

Conclusion

Designed as foreign policy instruments aimed to promote and transfer the EU's core norms into its immediate European neighbourhood, the EU enlargement process and the Eastern Partnership have been largely, and after 2007 exclusively, used to advance the political-security goals of EU member states. Democracy building in the targeted countries, especially in the EaP region, has failed spectacularly. Although the enlargement process is, due to its powerful 'carrot' of a membership promise, more likely to succeed in promoting EU norms and values than the EaP, EU leaders decided to give up on Normative Power Europe in Western Balkan accession after the completion of the 2004/2007 enlargement round. They have used the enlargement process in the Western Balkans and the membership promise given to WB states to address the stability-security challenges in the region (and advance their, largely futile, initiatives for their resolution) rather than to effectively encourage further democratisation, respect for the rule of low and successful adoption of other EU norms in these states. Likewise, the recent 'merging' of the EaP with enlargement instruments,[17] was exclusively done to more effectively address the security and geo-political interests of EU member states in the region. It can hardly be expected (or even hoped) that this 'merging' will produce any better results for the EaP countries than the 'old' enlargement process has for the Western Balkan states regarding both its contribution to more effective transfer of EU norms and its ability to secure regional peace and political stability in the partner countries. Only a substantial change in the political climate and attitudes in leading EU member states could revise this gloomy prediction. However, such a change seems very unlikely in the foreseeable future.

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[17] After the EaP has been bolstered with the membership promise and three EaP countries were suddenly and speedily accepted as candidate countries for EU membership.

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Milenko PETROVIC

KAD MOĆ *REALPOLITIKE* NADJAČA MOĆ NORMI
– PROŠIRENJE EVROPSKE UNIJE U ĆORSOKAKU

Apstrakt: Polazeći od pozitivnog iskustva uključivanja osnovnih načela Kopenhaških pristupnih kriterijuma (1993) na postkomunističku političku i ekonomsku demokratizaciju u prostoru srednje-istočne i baltičke Evrope, Ijan Maners je odredio 'evropsku normativnu moć' kao sposobnost Evropske unije da širi svoj međunarodni uticaj putem normi, pre nego putem političke moći svojih država-članica. Autor navodi da je, od početka ispoljavanja zamora za proširenjem sredinom 2000-ih, relevantnost evropske normativne moći u opadanju, te da je *realpolitika* ponovo postala osnovni faktor odlučivanja u spoljnoj politici Evropske unije. U nedostatku jasnih izgleda za pristupanje Evropskoj uniji, brojne političke inicijative vezane za stabilnost i bezbednost Zapadnog Balkana (ZB) ostale su bez većih rezultata. Autor zaključuje da je naglo 'uvećanje' procesa proširenja nakon ruske invazije na Ukrajinu (i to na zemlje koje su u manjoj meri nego ZB ispunjavale norme i standarde članstva u EU) dodatno potkopalo evropsku normativnu moć u korist (slabe) političke moći i realpolitike u odnosu s tim zemljama. Takav pristup nema dobru perspektivu da obezbedi regionalnu stabilnost, efikasno promoviše mir i demokratiju, niti pruži mapu puta ka članstvu u EU.

Ključne reči: Evropska unija, normativna moć, proširenje, Zapadni Balkan, Istočno partnerstvo, članstvo u EU.