

Setting the bounds of the European Union

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Lake Prespa, bordered by North Macedonia, Greece and Albania. ©FlickrAndrey

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A SOVEREIGN EUROPE

How large should the European Union (EU) be? And what shape should it take? These are not new questions but have recently taken on a new form and seek to be answered with a sense of urgency that has been missing for some years.

French President Macron can be held primarily responsible for this shift of emphasis. He wants an EU that is conscious of, indeed self-confident about, its own sovereignty. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's claim to be running a "geopolitical Commission" plays into Macron's argument: she was, after all, his choice for the top job. But a sovereign Union strutting its stuff on the world stage needs to have established a pretty firm view about where its own territory starts and stops, what values it aims to

propagate on the global stage, and which interests it intends to advance vis-à-vis those of its international partners and rivals.

The purpose of assuming EU sovereignty is to better protect the security of its states and citizens. It implies an intention to adopt a more proactive stance. Even if the Union still lacks all the attributes of a federal state, its claim to sovereignty is an important further step in the federal direction. A sovereign polity is in need of a government, and in particular a foreign policy. The innovation of Union sovereignty as a supplement to, if not a substitute for, national sovereignty should also contribute to a strengthening of civic rights that flow from the concept of EU citizenship.¹

THE BRITISH COME AND GO

Needless to say, the other spur to this episode of EU self-assessment is the recent secession of one of its largest and most important members. From the earliest days, the six founding member states of the European Community were committed to the principle of enlargement, notably to include the United Kingdom (UK). In fact, the first twenty years of the Community's life were preoccupied by the problem of what to do with the British. Should the UK join, and if so, on what terms? Britain contributed to this prolonged uncertainty by first refusing to sign the Treaty of Paris, by walking out of the Messina conference which led to the Treaty of Rome, by trying to establish an alternative centre of power on the European continent based on free trade only – and then finally by changing its mind and applying for the full European Economic Community membership.²

Once in, from 1973, the British proved just as destabilising as they had been when out. The UK immediately sought a renegotiation of its terms of membership, held a referendum on whether to stay or go, battled for generous budgetary rebates at the expense of the Six, demanded opt-outs on the single currency, social policy and interior affairs, resisted treaty change that would have moved the EU decisively from a confederation into a federal union, demanded another renegotiation – and held another referendum

in 2016 resulting in Brexit. The EU's current woes are exacerbated by the UK's continuing difficulties in coming to terms with its departure from the Union. The nature of Britain's future relationship with Europe has yet to be determined – but will certainly be special.

Brexit has decisively confounded the Union's historic mission of "ever closer union".

The UK has bungled its secession from the European Union as well as its time as a member. There is collateral damage. Brexit has decisively confounded the Union's historic mission of "ever closer union".³ The rest of the world sees the EU without the UK as being left smaller, weaker and poorer. Internally, the EU 27 are still digesting the impact of Brexit, not only in terms of the budget. Emmanuel Macron, at least, has decided to use the pretext of Brexit to push for EU reform. In insisting on the deepening of integration before further enlargement, Macron returns to the policy of his predecessors Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and François Mitterrand.

WIDER AND DEEPER

In 1969, faced with the troublesome British, the Six settled upon a parallel strategy of widening and deepening. If the Community was to enlarge, it would have to integrate further. The UK must be bound into

a stronger Europe. Ironically, the British supported the further expansion of the EU on the presumption that the addition of more members would weaken the centralising forces of Brussels and blunt the push to federalisation.

In 1993, faced with the break-up of the Soviet empire, a European Council meeting in Copenhagen established three criteria specifying the terms and conditions of enlargement.⁴ New member states, it was decreed, must be able to demonstrate:

1. stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
2. a functioning market economy and ability to cope with the competitive pressure and market forces within the EU;
3. an ability to take on all the obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law (the 'acquis'), and adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

The 'big bang' enlargement of 2004 from 15 members to 25 did not go as smoothly as hoped.

In theory, at least, a country must satisfy the first criterion for EU accession negotiations to be launched. All three should be satisfied for an accession treaty to be concluded. At first the Copenhagen criteria were envisaged as administrative tools to help the EU assess the eligibility of a candidate state, but they acquired a more political interpretation as theory hit the buffers of reality.

In the event, the 'big bang' enlargement of 2004 from 15 members to 25 did not go as smoothly as hoped. The transition from communism took longer and cost more than expected. The capacity of the Union to adopt new members was sorely tested. Under pressure, the Union continued to widen while deepening faltered.

THE DWINDLING QUEUE

In recent years, the threat to block further enlargement would not have had much impact. The Juncker Commission (2014-19) did next to nothing to move the dial on membership. In truth, there was hardly a queue of European countries waiting to join. European Free Trade Association members Norway and Iceland have rescinded their earlier membership applications. Switzerland is a law unto itself and has no intention of again becoming a candidate for EU accession.

Turkey, which applied as long ago as 1987, has declined all opportunities to progress towards accession. It will need the replacement of the regime of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

Ambitious plans came and went to transform the whole nexus of the Union into a federal polity. Gradually the momentum behind political union faded. The single market was created but remains incomplete. The euro was introduced but is still not underpinned by a common fiscal policy. A constitutional treaty was ditched in 2005; its replacement, the Lisbon treaty, remains under fulfilled. Today there are powerful forces within the EU from Central Europe which openly question the liberal democratic values of the West. Some EU national governments and courts directly challenge the supranational authority of the EU institutions.

Today the Copenhagen criteria are discredited as a tool of enlargement.

Today the Copenhagen criteria are discredited as a tool of enlargement. Some candidate countries (notably Turkey) and now even some member states (Hungary and Poland) have slipped back from meeting the first criterion. The exercise of parliamentary democracy, it transpires, can be free in terms of electoral procedure but not fair in terms of political culture. Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are contemporary and not simply historic phenomena. Some ruling parties in EU member states are overcome by corruption and clientelism. And even after Brexit, how many EU governments genuinely adhere to the aims of political and economic union?

One proposal of President Macron is to launch a wide-ranging conference to rectify such matters. The plan for a Conference on the Future of Europe has been taken up by the European Parliament and, albeit less enthusiastically, by President von der Leyen.⁵ Another initiative of the French president is to block further enlargement unless and until governance of the EU has been adequately reformed. At the European Council in October 2019 Macron vetoed the opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania.

by a secular, liberal government to rekindle Turkey's dwindling chances of joining the EU.

Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova have struck recent association agreements with the EU, none of which are held by Brussels to encourage EU membership ambitions – and all of which have provoked reaction from Moscow involving subversion and invasion. Having no qualms about asserting Russian sovereignty, it is clear that President Vladimir Putin will not permit any ex-Soviet state to cosy up further to the European Union. He may also have ambitions to prevent EU membership for the Western Balkans. There Putin vies with Erdoğan to shape events.

THE WESTERN BALKANS

In 2003, in the heady days of the constitutional treaty, a European Council in Thessaloniki determined “to fully and effectively support the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries, which will become an integral part of the European Union once they meet the established criteria”. The Union promised to craft an “enriched Stabilisation and Association Process” as the “framework for the European course of the Western Balkan countries all the way to their future accession”.

The Thessaloniki commitment seemed highly optimistic even in 2003.

The Thessaloniki commitment seemed highly optimistic even in 2003. No part of Europe has been so riven by religious and civil wars, even until modern times. The historic clash between the Slavic, Hellenic and Turkic civilisations seems still alive – sectarian, syncretic and unforgiving. The people of Yugoslavia and Albania suffered a quarter of a century of catastrophe since the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in the 1980s. Towns and villages were sacked, the countryside polluted, and many of those who could leave left.

The region is still very poor. Average GDP per capita for the six countries is only half the average of Central Europe and just one-quarter of Western Europe. According to Eurostat’s 2018 index of GDP per capita, the EU’s poorest country Bulgaria scored 50.8 (EU average 100); Serbia only 39.5.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) launched its accession bid in 2004, followed by Montenegro in 2008, and Serbia and Albania in 2009. Negotiations started with Montenegro in 2012 and with Serbia two years later. The Macedonian bid was frozen because of Greek nationalist objection to the country’s name. After intense diplomatic effort under UN auspices, an accord was concluded on the shore of Lake Prespa in 2018: FYROM became the Republic of North Macedonia. Albania’s bid, meanwhile, was frozen because of the systemic corruption of its rival ruling factions.

THE MACRON PROPOSAL

In November 2019 France published a non-paper “Reforming the European Union accession process”. It was refreshingly blunt:

“Closer ties between the European Union and the countries of the Western Balkans, and their

Kosovo’s independence is bitterly resented by Serbia and is still not recognised by five member states of the EU (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain). It can only be encouraging, therefore, that the new government in Pristina seems more amenable to a rapprochement with Belgrade. Bosnia-Herzegovina remains in a frozen civil war under the civilian and military supervision of the US and EU.

In real terms, Montenegro is the furthest advanced towards completing the formal accession process. Somewhat alarmingly, it has even adopted the euro (as has Kosovo). But several member states will object to the idea that Montenegro should be allowed to join the Union on its own without a regional cohort. The truth is that the prospect of full EU membership is still a distant one for the whole region. The road from the Balkans to Brussels is long and arduous.

For the European Union which prefers its members to be stable and well-ordered nation states, membership bids from small, dysfunctional Balkan states pose a real difficulty.

The Balkans has had no experience whatsoever of secular, liberal democratic states. Across the region where no simple nations exist, state building is still the order of the day. For the European Union which prefers its members to be stable and well-ordered nation states, membership bids from small, dysfunctional Balkan states pose a real difficulty.⁶

The immediate question is whether President Macron will lift his veto on the opening of accession talks for North Macedonia and/or Albania. Other member states, such as Denmark and Holland, are hiding behind France. Their dilemma is real: a negative decision will cause despair among liberal reformers in the Balkans; a positive decision is to risk a hostage to fortune.

effective accession once the European Union has been reformed and made more effective and responsive for its Member States and candidate countries, will also make Europe more sovereign and more united.”⁷

According to Paris, the existing accession process is too slow to deliver concrete benefits for the citizens of candidate states, thereby fuelling emigration. The EU should take a firmer grip on a reformed process based on four principles:

1. Negotiations organised around clusters of policy sectors into which advancing candidates would gradually be drawn;
2. Stringent conditions for effective convergence towards European norms over the long term in the rule of law and economic and social policy;
3. Concrete benefits during the process, particularly through increased financial support;
4. Reversibility of the process to incentivise it and ensure credibility.

Instead of being faced with 35 chapters of EU acquis, each of which has to be separately opened and closed, enlargement talks would be reorganised in seven blocks of policy, opened successively. The closure of each cluster would allow the candidate admittance to certain EU sectoral programmes. Verifiable criteria for moving from one stage to the next would be spelled out precisely and would be “principally based on sustained, irreversible progress in the field of the rule of law”.⁸ Financial incentives could include disbursement from EU structural funds. Access to the single market should be left until the end. A graded and proportionate system would be established to row back from the accession process should circumstances demand it.

THE COMMISSION RESPONDS

On 5 February 2020 the Commission issued a communication proposing an improved methodology for enlargement.¹¹ The document falls well short of revising the Copenhagen criteria but it does go more than halfway to meet the demands of President Macron. The Commission agrees to install a mechanism for reversing the process if necessary. It also accepts the need to implicate member states more regularly and politically in the enlargement process. (Here useful lessons can be drawn from the smooth cooperation between the Commission and Council over Brexit.)¹²

The Commission is right to put greater emphasis on the need for state building in the Western Balkans.

Making the Council more complicit in the progress of accession negotiations will help draw fire away from

France also proposed that the Council should be more closely involved at each stage of the talks, and an annual summit should be organised between the European Council and the heads of the Western Balkan governments.

Disregarding the fact that it is not in the interest of candidates to join a Union which is closed to reform, they insisted that “internal EU reform cannot be a precondition for enlargement”.

Predictably enough, the release of the French non-paper was met with a storm of criticism, not least from Skopje where the government that had signed the Prespa Agreement was destabilised. In December, nine Balkan-friendly member states, corralled by Austria, offered their own non-paper.⁹ Disregarding the fact that it is not in the interest of candidates to join a Union which is closed to reform, they insisted that “internal EU reform cannot be a precondition for enlargement”.¹⁰ The nine proposed instead that the Balkan candidates should be invited to participate in the Conference on the Future of Europe. But the main difference with France was their suggestion that the seven clusters could be opened in parallel rather than consecutively.

the Commission, which has been accused in the past of getting too close to corrupt (and unpopular) ruling parties in the candidate states. More transparency and predictability should be welcomed by both members and candidates. However, the Commission also knows it must not lose control of the technocratic side of the process. It will remain the monitor of the merit-based approach.

The Commission is right to put greater emphasis on the need for state building in the Western Balkans. It accepts the concept of clusters, and agrees to prioritise the cluster on ‘fundamentals’: judiciary, human rights, public administration, the rule of law, governance and financial control. The Commission also foresees that candidate states could be involved in policy making in certain areas, such as Horizon Europe, as well as being consulted more directly on the Commission’s impact assessments, for example, on the Green Deal package in the context of the proposed enlargement.

There should be closer coordination between the political aspects of enlargement and the economic development of the candidates. The importance of the stabilisation and

association agreements can be expected to be enhanced, along with commitment to spend more money through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).¹⁵ The priority for the regional economy will be to attract foreign direct investment for job creation. Olivér Várhelyi, the

Commissioner responsible for the enlargement dossier, assures us that this will be “our investment on our rules”.¹⁴ An investment package will be ready for a summit of the EU 27 and Western Balkan leaders scheduled for Zagreb on 6-7 May.

SOME QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

The new Commission aims to rebuild trust in the enlargement process and to rekindle European aspirations particularly in the Western Balkans. However, as the European Council deliberates about whether to adopt new methodology for enlargement, it should first ask itself some questions.

The Commission communication fails to establish a solid link between the domestic and foreign policy aspects of enlargement. The imperative of binding the Balkan region into the security nexus of the West is not mentioned, and no connection is made between the extension of the Union’s common foreign, security and defence policies on the one hand and NATO’s role on the other.¹⁵ The EU’s embarrassment over the recognition of Kosovo is passed over.

Whereas the French non-paper makes no reference to timetables or deadlines, the Commission proposes that each cluster should be opened and closed within twelve months. In itself, this imposes a curious and arbitrary schedule that may have no relevance either to the pace of the negotiations themselves or to political and economic cycles within candidate countries and the EU 27.

It is also odd that the Commission puts so little emphasis on the need to involve the opposition parties, NGOs and civil society organisations of the candidate states in the accession process. As the British experience suggests, unless EU accession is anchored firmly in domestic politics as a bipartisan policy, reflecting the extraordinary diversity of fragile Balkan society, membership is unlikely to be a durable success. The business of European integration must involve effective checks and balances at the level of the member states as well as that of the EU.¹⁶ Adhesion to the Union *acquis* requires putting in place a regulatory framework within each member state, trusted by the Commission, open to national stakeholders, beyond the reach of ministerial direction, with access to the courts. In the highly partisan and sectarian environment of the Western Balkans, such an essential national consensus will not easily be achieved.

The stabilisation and association process for the Western Balkans places great emphasis on the need for inter-regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. Such would be a first for the Balkans. Does the proposed new methodology build in sufficient ways and means to verify that the desired reconciliation is actually taking place? The EU has been deceived by candidates in the past about their willingness to settle historic disputes – both by the Republic of Cyprus in respect of the Turkish

Cypriot community and by Croatia with regard to the Slovenian border dispute. The disintegration of UK membership of the Union has revealed as nothing else could the political and security sensitivities of the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

The addition of six small and poor states to the 27 current members would have serious repercussions for EU governance.

An immediate problem concerns the application of the new methodology to the accession process already underway with Serbia and Montenegro. How would a shift of the goalposts affect the progress of those already difficult negotiations? One assumes the new practice will be applied in due course to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Will Turkey be expected to follow suit?

Although institutional and budgetary questions can be left until last, it would be unwise for the EU to neglect them. The addition of six small and poor states to the 27 current members would have serious repercussions for EU governance. At the very least, in advance of the next enlargement the European Council should decide to reduce the size of the Commission, as the Lisbon treaty prescribes.¹⁷ This reform would increase the Commission’s efficiency and enhance its supranational authority.

Likewise, the European Parliament should use its right of initiative to introduce a mathematical formula for the apportionment of seats between the member states. That reform would strengthen Parliament’s democratic legitimacy and end the present reliance on unseemly bartering.¹⁸

Furthermore, the system of rotating the presidency of the Council of ministers among the states every six months is no longer viable and should be terminated, with a consequent improvement to the quality of law making under the responsibility of the European Council.¹⁹

The Conference on the Future of Europe would be a suitable forum to discuss and settle all of these institutional matters.²⁰ A successful Conference would make serious preparations for the next Convention that will be called upon in due course to revise the EU Treaties.

THE DOUBTS REMAIN

Not least among the questions that need to be asked of the European Council concerns its own intentions. Is it being honest with the Balkan countries? Do these European leaders remain faithful to the commitment made by their predecessors at Thessaloniki in 2003? The European Council's much-laboured New Strategic Agenda, presented in June 2019, tip-toed around enlargement. Waxing lyrical about the promotion of Europe's interests and values in the world, the leaders said:

“The EU will promote its own unique model of cooperation as inspiration for others. It will uphold the European perspective for European States able and willing to join. It will pursue an ambitious neighbourhood policy.”²¹

For her part, President von der Leyen is more circumspect. She says, “It is in our common geostrategic interest to have the Western Balkans as close as possible to the European Union”.²²

Not least among the questions that need to be asked of the European Council concerns its own intentions. Is it being honest with the Balkan countries?

Adoption of the Commission's new methodology may facilitate membership for the Western Balkans, but it will not settle the question about whether the accession of the six countries to the Union is really in their or the Union's best interests. The Commission declines to entertain any other possibility for the Western Balkans short of full membership. To pose the question, however, is not to doubt the validity of Article 49 TEU which lays down that any European state may apply to become a member. Every Western Balkan country has every right to file its application.

Be that as it may, if the new methodology succeeds in making the member states more engaged in and responsible for enlargement policy, the basic ambiguity at the heart of the Copenhagen criteria will be exposed. For some states, enlargement is an instrument of EU foreign policy. For others, enlargement is more concerned with the integration capacity of the Union. The two objectives will not always be compatible – as the Brexit saga suggests. National priorities, and interests, differ.

As we know, there are also divisions in the Council about the meaning of the rule of law and the EU's role in enforcing it. Hungarian Commissioner Várhelyi denies that there are differences among member states about how to interpret the rule of law criterion in the context of the Western Balkans. The evidence, however, not least from Budapest, suggests otherwise.

Even were there to be unanimity at the level of the European Council in favour of letting in more members, many national parliaments harbour latent hostility to further eastwards enlargement.

Article 49 goes on to say that the accession treaties are subject to the unanimous agreement of all member states, ratified in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements. That is a high hurdle indeed. Even were there to be unanimity at the level of the European Council in favour of letting in more members, many national parliaments harbour latent hostility to further eastwards enlargement. Most members of the European Council head minority or coalition governments whose grip on national parliaments is slippery at best. Several, perhaps many member states, would be sure to hold referendums to ratify the accession treaties in which populist and nationalist parties would have a field day. One recalls how effectively Brexiteers exploited the fear of Turkish accession during the 2016 referendum campaign.

The Netherlands even held (and lost) a referendum on the ratification of the Ukraine Association Agreement. France held a referendum in 1972 on the accession of the UK, Ireland, Denmark (and Norway). In 2005, with Turkish membership in mind, France passed a law to make compulsory the holding of referendums on all EU enlargements, although this has since been modified to give the choice of holding a referendum to the discretion of either the President or National Assembly. Austria has also threatened enlargement referendums. As things stand, Hungary's Viktor Orbán will relish the prospect of calling a referendum to block Balkan enlargement and stem the tide of immigration.

OTHER OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE

The European Union offers no formal category of associate membership to its neighbours. Article 49

leads only to full membership, and, as the UK has recently been reminded, comprises the only route to

that goal. Nevertheless, the Union offers the concept of close association to any interested third country (not necessarily European). Article 8 TEU enjoins the Union to “develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation”.

The UK is being offered a negotiation of a formal association agreement based on Article 217 TFEU.²³ Every recent EU association has at its core a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement plus long-term arrangements for joint governance. If the UK government is prepared to accept what is on offer from the EU, the British association agreement could be the most privileged partnership ever struck with a third country. As things stand, however, Prime Minister Boris Johnson is a man of lesser ambition, and it is rather unlikely that the final EU-UK pact will be a useful model for anyone else.²⁴

The European Union has to learn how to manage differentiated integration across an increasingly demanding, complex, multi-tier Europe.

What could be more attractive is an upgraded version of the type of association agreement struck with Ukraine.²⁵ Such a revitalised Eastern partnership template could be of particular interest to the Turks who share with the British an aversion to the pooling of national sovereignty. For Turkey the prospect of a viable, durable and dynamic association with the EU short of full membership would seem to offer an alternative solution to the present intractable situation.

The European Union has to learn how to manage differentiated integration across an increasingly demanding, complex, multi-tier Europe.²⁶ With Britain outside, the EU’s neighbourhood is no longer just composed of small, weak or poor states. Faced with this newly challenging situation, the EU needs to be well governed at the centre, with a clear strategic direction established by the European Council and a concentration of executive authority on the Commission.

The Austrians and their Central European friends are wrong to imagine that concentric circles of decreasing levels of integration can be well managed without significant political reform. Equally, the Dutch and their ‘frugal’ friends are wrong to believe that the EU can prosper without a steady but significant increase in its budget. By way of its commercial clout and legal integrity, the EU wields enormous normative influence on the world economy, but when it comes to the limitations of Europe’s soft power, the Americans are lucid critics.

As far as security and defence policy is concerned, the European Council harbours divergent views about the utility and future direction of NATO but has not been able to articulate a cogent case for the reform of the transatlantic partnership. A genuinely “geopolitical Commission” would be preparing the heads of government to strengthen the EU’s direct engagement with NATO, taking a lead rather than trotting on behind ill-thought-through decisions of the Atlantic Alliance about its own expansion into former Soviet territory – and near paralysis about its relations with Turkey.

Passive and polite cooperation between the two Brussels-based organisations is an inadequate basis for fresh strategic thinking about Western interests. The EU’s claim to autonomous sovereignty will be spurious if it is content to lease its security and defence to NATO. Donald Trump’s possible re-election in 2020 coupled with the UK’s isolationist stance accentuates the need for a greater EU role in NATO.

A CONTINENTAL STRATEGY

A new enlargement policy must find its place at the heart of the Union’s strategic agenda and be grounded on a hard-headed assessment of the long-term prosperity and security interests of the Union. The strategy must be explained and justified not just at the level of the EU institutions but in national parliaments and public opinion, too. EU citizens deserve reassurance about the boundaries of their newly sovereign union.

It is no longer credible to continue dishing out false hope to prospective candidates for full membership.

Citizens of neighbouring countries are equally deserving of transparency. It is no longer credible to continue dishing out false hope to prospective candidates for full membership. As far as the Balkans are concerned, it has always been dishonourable to pretend we will let them in when they pretend to be ready. Neither diplomatic nor democratic, the age of pretence is surely over.

The EU needs a continental strategy that works at home and abroad – both fulfilling its foreign policy goals and serving to strengthen integration. The whole of the Union’s neighbourhood will be implicated in this strategy. One hopes that one or more candidate states will soon speak out in favour of a stronger, more federal and sovereign Union. A weak Union, ever resistant to reform, will not be able to sustain a strategy across the wider Europe.

The new strategy must recognise, first, that not all of the EU's neighbours want to become full member states and, second, that several of the neighbours who may want to be full members cannot realistically fulfil the terms of membership. For those countries, an advanced association agreement may be the best solution, at least for the medium term. As far as today's EU is concerned, the promise of an association agreement is certainly more deliverable than the mirage of full membership.

The EU needs a continental strategy that works at home and abroad – both fulfilling its foreign policy goals and serving to strengthen integration.

President Macron has prompted a much-needed moment of reflection in the Western Balkans. Let us hope the new EU leadership knows how to use this time well.

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- ¹ Article 9 TEU and Article 20 TFEU.
 - ² The UK signed an association agreement with the European Coal and Steel Community in 1954; see Duff, Andrew, "[Intimate and Enduring: Britain's first association agreement with Europe](#)", *Blogactiv*, 01 September 2016. The UK considered a similar agreement with the European Economic Community and Euratom; see Phinnemore, David (2018), "[A UK-EU Association Agreement: making use of treaty provisions from 1957 originally drafted for the UK](#)", London: The UK in a Changing Europe.
 - ³ Article 1 TEU.
 - ⁴ The criteria were strengthened at Madrid in 1995.
 - ⁵ Duff, Andrew (2019a), "[The European Union makes a new push for democracy](#)"; Brussels: European Policy Centre.
 - ⁶ Populations are Serbia 7m, Bosnia-Herzegovina 3.5m, Albania 2.9m, North Macedonia 2.1m, Kosovo 1.8m, Montenegro 0.6m.
 - ⁷ Government of the French Republic (2019), "[Reforming the European Union accession process](#)"; p.1.
 - ⁸ *Ibid.*, p.2.
 - ⁹ The nine were Austria, Czechia, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Slovenia.
 - ¹⁰ Barigazzi, Jacopo, "[9 EU countries push back on French enlargement revamp](#)"; *Politico*, 13 December 2019.
 - ¹¹ See European Commission (2020), [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans](#), COM(2020) 57 final, Brussels.
 - ¹² See Duff, Andrew (2020), "[Brexit: Getting it done](#)"; Brussels: European Policy Centre.
 - ¹³ The latest proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-27 itemises nearly €1.4 billion for the IPAs.
 - ¹⁴ Speaking at the Sixty-Minute Briefing "Reforming Enlargement Policy?"; 18 February 2020, European Policy Centre, Brussels.
 - ¹⁵ Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia and North Macedonia are not members of NATO. Applications to join from Bosnia and Macedonia are under consideration, along with applications from Georgia and Ukraine.
 - ¹⁶ Vurmo, Gjergji, "[A credible new accession methodology or just a face-saving exercise?](#)"; Centre for European Policy Studies, 12 February 2020.
 - ¹⁷ Article 17(5) TEU.
 - ¹⁸ Article 14(2) TEU.
 - ¹⁹ Article 16(9) TEU.
 - ²⁰ For more on these and other institutional reforms, see Spinelli Group (2018), "[Manifesto for the Future of Europe: A Shared Destiny](#)"; Brussels.
 - ²¹ European Council (2019), [A new strategic agenda 2019-2024](#), Brussels, p.6.
 - ²² von der Leyen, Ursula, "[Doorstep](#)", EU-Western Balkans Informal Meeting, 16 February 2020.
 - ²³ Council of the European Union (2020a), [Council Decision authorising the opening of negotiations with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for a new partnership agreement](#), 5870/20, Brussels.
 - ²⁴ Council of the European Union, "[EU-UK relations: Council gives go-ahead for talks to start and adopts negotiating directives](#)"; 25 February 2020b.
 - ²⁵ Emerson, Michael and Steven Blockmans (2020), "[100 Ideas for Upgrading the Association Agreements and DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine](#)"; Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies.
 - ²⁶ No matter what happens in the course of 2020, the outcome of the British negotiations will further stimulate the burgeoning academic literature on Europe's increasingly differentiated integration. See e.g. Duff, Andrew (2019b), "[Europe after Brexit](#)"; Oslo: EU3D; Fossum, John Erik (2019), "[Europe's Triangular Challenge: Differentiation, Dominance and Democracy](#)"; Oslo: EU3D.

The **European Policy Centre** is an independent, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to fostering European integration through analysis and debate, supporting and challenging European decision-makers at all levels to make informed decisions based on sound evidence and analysis, and providing a platform for engaging partners, stakeholders and citizens in EU policymaking and in the debate about the future of Europe.

The **European Politics and Institutions programme** covers the EU's institutional architecture, governance and policymaking to ensure that it can move forward and respond to the challenges of the 21st century democratically and effectively. It also monitors and analyses political developments at the EU level and in the member states, discussing the key questions of how to involve European citizens in the discussions over the Union's future and how to win their support for European integration. The programme has a special focus on enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans, questions of EU institutional reform and illiberal trends in European democracies.

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