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SUMMARY of Phd THESIS

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Iasi, 2012

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THE ACCESSION OF THE COUNTRIES
OF THE WESTERN BALKANS TO THE
EUROPEAN UNION. AN ALBANIAN
PERSPECTIVE

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SUMMARY OF THESIS

Europe was the scene of major events at the end of the 20th century. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War have profoundly altered the order of existing policy, marking the fall of the old models of the balance of power in the world. In this new context, the process of enlargement in order to unify the whole Europe and create a prosperous, secure and stable area through the inclusion of the countries of the South and East Europe (Western Balkans), Iceland and Turkey constitute the main focus of the EU policy. So the problem is the integration of those countries, whose economic and political realities are different.

The Western Balkan countries are in different stages of the process of integration into the European Union. The increased integration of South-Eastern Europe into the EU, should be based on tackling the key-issues of that region. This process must mark a change in politics and economy of the Balkans, from Balkanization to Europeanization. Concerning the wish of Western-Balkan countries to become members of the Union, one argument may be the fact that they are located in the neighbourhood of other EU Member States and by giving them an European perspective represents the best method for promoting reforms and for the continuation and consolidation of

democracy, stability and prosperity in the region, being for the interest of entire Europe.

This paper aims to explore the issue of relations between Albania and the European Union in the light of the complex accession negotiations, by analysing the history of relations between the two parts, taking into account the specificity of the Western Balkans region, as well as the process of integration, with all the benefits and costs involved.

This paper considers this a topical theme of interest at European level, both in academia, as well as political - institutional or among European citizens. Now, after many years since the countries of Central and Eastern Europe became full members of the EU, all attention is focused on EU enlargement towards the Western Balkans, as the next step in the project of unification of the old continent. EU actions in the Western Balkans is working as a process of transition from the first imperative of stabilization to the long-term goal of integration into the EU.

The theme approached concerns the theoretical justification of the process of enlargement of the European Union in the Western Balkans, the complex process of accession of Albania to the EU, the conditionality of this process, as well as the ongoing negotiations to join EU. We will also take into consideration the controversy and challenges that were

encountered in this endeavor of Albania to achieve the European objective and last but not least the current situation of Albania-EU negotiations on getting the status of candidate state for integration.

The choice of the theme of study had implications at the current reality on the strategy of enlargement in the Western Balkans and in particular the long negotiating process for accession to the European Union.

The subject of the paper concerns the enlargement of the European Union and the way that leads a State to the integration into European structures, and in particular an analysis of the relations between the countries of the Western Balkans and the EU in the light of future accession. An EU enlargement process carefully managed leads to stretching peace, democracy, the rule of law and prosperity in Europe.

Reasoning that stood at the basis of this thesis needed, on the one hand, the conceptual definition of the key elements for further investigation, with focus on *European integration*, *the EU enlargement process* or the concept of *Europeanization*, and, on the other hand, the formulation and verification of the assumptions which formed the basis for designing the paper. Defining theoretical concepts helps us to create an overall picture and to focus on the topic itself, namely the possibility of a future enlargement of the European Union to the Western Balkans as

well as the implications of this process on the entire European space.

With regard to the future enlargement of the European Union, some answers must be found to relevant questions such as: *Has come the time to speed up the integration process? And if so, in what manner? How and when will consider the EU that potential candidate and candidate countries will accede to EU membership?*

In this paper, I propose to build an overall picture of the elements worth to be taken into account when we discuss about how or when will Albania join the European family.

The plane used for the research work focuses on the use of analytical method applied at a level of generality, with the objective of capturing the elements related to the essence of any society, to attain a private analysis on Albania.

Concerning the methodology proposed for the thesis, I started from the premise that scientific research must be multidisciplinary and therefore it was necessary to combine the various research methods. From a methodological point of view, I have used the classical methods of scientific research such as: analysis of criticism of politics, analysis of the content of documents, historical analysis and comparative analysis method.

Scientific novelty of this paper consists in the fact that an ample analysis has been developed on the countries of the

Western Balkans from political, historical, economical and national ethnic (as well as potential conflict - integrational) perspective. The thesis studied the way in which events in the Western Balkans can be predictable, in order to be able to prevent a negative evolution around Europe.

Also, the analysis of stages completed by Albania in the process of political modernization (political parties, civil society, democratization, economic and political development) may contribute to the identification of solutions/answers to issues related to the integration of the country into the European Union. Research theme tackled can clarify certain aspects relating to the political evolution of Albania and the "road" to integration.

The structure of the work is determined by the theme and objectives envisaged in the preparation of the issues tackled, and the importance of the subject in debates at european level. The content of the thesis is developed in five chapters divided into subchapters, followed by conclusions, bibliographic notes and annexes. The paper also includes figures, tables and accessories designed to complement the information presented in the blame.

I. THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ENLARGEMENT PROCESS

In the first chapter we considered necessary the presentation of the contextual framework and an introduction in the spectrum of EU's enlargement policy, as well as a brief overview of key concepts that will be useful during the work. So, I paid attention to the concepts of *european integration*, *europeanization* and the evolution of the process of enlargement of the European Union.

By the decision of enlargement of the European Union taken at Helsinki, Europe has unveiled a new model of development that is based not on the ability of a single country, but on an entire geographic region, this is both a way of realization of the „project of unification of the old continent”, and an oversize of the space/market, increasing the power of influence. It has thus passed from a mainly economic, geopolitical process to one mostly dictated by the present realities.

Each expansion of the European Community with a country or group of countries is different than the others. States wishing to become members of the EU have to go through a difficult process of adopting and implementing the *acquis*

communautaire and to fulfil the requirements of accession established by the European Union.

For many years, the analysis of European Union was in fact combined with the study of European integration process. This analysis was focused mainly on the debate between neofunctionalist and intergovernmentalist schools, taking charge from each approach a set of assumptions about the nature and implications of EU policy. But the difficulty of fitting the european project strictly into one of these theories is given by the of the unfinished character of the integrationist process.

II. WESTERN BALKANS: the ROAD to EUROPE

The second chapter refers to the relations between the states of the Western Balkans and the European Union, from the beginnings of their cooperation so far, subduing these relationships to an analysis from the perspective of accession of these countries to the EU. In addition, we present the conditionality which involves the process of enlargement of the EU with the Western Balkans states, as well as the development and status of the accession negotiations.

Processes of agreement between the EU and the Western Balkan countries have gotten a bilateral character, extremely bright, along with the introduction of the European Partnerships

as instruments of support to Governments in the reform activities, so that the preparation for a possible accession to spend in an organized and coherent framework. But the pace is approaching the EU differs considerably from one country to another.

In terms of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, as an instrument of EU policy for the Western Balkan states, it represents an agreement between the EU and a third country, which constitutes a framework for further cooperation, in which case we can speak of preparation for accession. Usually, the EU signed such agreements in exchange for concessions made by third countries in terms of the necessary reforms and changes in the political, economic and commercial area, as well as in that of human rights. Instead, the EU granted them free access to EU markets and financial or technical assistance.

In the Summit of the European Council in Thessaloniki (June 2003), were opened to the Western Balkan countries the prospect of accession, in time, to the European Union.

III. THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL MODERNIZATION IN ALBANIA, 1918-1948 (political, cultural, socio-economic factors)

In the third chapter we will address the process of political modernization of Albania, starting with the acquisition

of national independence and its evolution as an independent state until the fall of the Communist regime, through the analysis of political, socio-economic and cultural factors.

The concept of political modernization represents a shift from the traditional system to a system of organization of the state, from the traditional organization of the traditional State to a state represented in the organization. All this process of change is definable in terms of the emergence of new social institutions which deal with social order and stability, which gives this order.

Albanians have gone through many attempts throughout history, who had intended to create a distinct identity and a specific way of adapting to the challenges of history. History of modern Albanian politics begins with the formation of national idea, almost at the same time as the national movements of the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula, culminating with the proclamation of the independence of Albania, in November 1912.

IV. THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION OF ALBANIA

In chapter four we treated the democratization of Albania, the process of transition from the totalitarian regime with the democratic transformations that require such an approach, as well as an analysis of the institutional political

system in Albania. We also make reference in this chapter to the characterisation of the civil society in Albania.

Since the 1970s and 80s, democratization has been conceptualized as speech, set of institutional changes, the form of domination of the political elites, control system, dependent upon the exercise of power and application of global solidarity, and the list can go on.

Contemporary democratisations include both failures (for example, partial democracies, problematic or pseudo-democracies), as well as successes (consolidated democracies). As the democratisation evolve, it became apparent that, although some countries were conducting a successful transition toward democracy, others crushed, and many entered (and remain) in the category of problematic democracies.

In the case of Albania, establishment of democracy began in 1992, when political pluralism and democratic elections were allowed and has had regard to the transition from a controlled economy to a market economy. The concept of democracy is closely related to the transition paradigm concerning democratization as a process which moves from the removal of an authoritarian regime, following a transition period towards democratic consolidation. In the present case, however, such an approach does not help us understand the dynamics of Albanian

democracy, because it ignores the complexity of the policy constituting the so-called democratization process.

The paradigm of transition do not provide the space necessary to understand what is going on, politically speaking, in Albania, considering that the political process is the cause and effect of failed democratic requests in this country.

V. NEGOTIATIONS ON THE INTEGRATION OF ALBANIA INTO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Chapter five is dedicated in particular to Albania in order to review the negotiations for EU integration, capturing the monitoring by the European Commission on the progress registered by Albania to join, a description of the financial assistance received from Albania as pre-accession funds of the EU over time, as well as an analysis of the Albanian public opinion with regard to the integration of the country into the European Union.

Bilateral relations between Albania and the European Union have been established since 1991, after the first free elections, in the form of economic and trade agreements. Since 2001, Albania benefits from financial support from the EU, via several forms of professional assistance/tools, that serve for the democratization of Albania and its integration in the EU. The

support and assistance of the Union contributed in great measure to the progress of the economy and the promotion of democracy and the rule of law in Albania during the years of transition.

In this chapter we take into consideration the progress made by Albania in the implementation of the commitments made by the albanian government in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in accordance with the Copenhagen political criteria, in view of the accession to the European Union, progress monitored by the European Commission.

Because of the importance given by the candidate and potential candidate countries to the process of integration into the European Union, it is useful and at the same time necessary to know the perceptions/opinion of albanian citizens on the future of Albania's integration into the EU.

The paper ends with a chapter of **conclusions** specifically dedicated to finding, on the topic of integration tests.

Some important conclusions would be:

- If until now the accession of new members to the European Union was made in the context of a favourable political and economic climate, at the moment, the European Union is driven by a wave of pessimism, due on the one hand the problems internally, while on the other hand pressure at international level.

- Experience of integration in the EU is offering an argument in favor of regional cooperation as a major road towards security, stability and prosperity for all the peoples who live in the Western Balkans. The logic of expansion establishes an approach according to which the strategic perspective of accession for the countries of the Western Balkans would definitely reduce the threats to stability in this part of the region, with positive effects on the whole Europe.

- Context of EU policy towards the Western Balkans has changed in 2005, when the European Union's relations with the countries of the Western Balkans have been moved from "the foreign relations" policy in the segment of "enlargement", considering that it is now time for a new stage in the pre-accession process in the region.

- In comparison with previous expansions, for the Western Balkans the EU has extended its conditionality requirements for accession; thus, the Copenhagen criteria have been supplemented by other criteria, such as political participation and promotion of regional cooperation and good neighbourhood relations; full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

- The EU pursues a strategy tri-directional in the Western Balkans, namely: to stabilize, transform and integrate those countries into the EU structures. These three directions of action

are considered as being parallel, equally important and closely related to this regional setting in South-Eastern Europe.

- Designing entire country profiles highlight the issues on which it found solutions for the Western Balkan states to become Member States of the European Union: the demographic and geographical reasons, religious, economic, geopolitical arguments, institutional representation, without skipping those that concerns democracy: human rights segment.

Advantages of accession of Albania to the European Union are easy to be found, for both sides, in economic, social (cultural) and geo-political terms. The European Union and Albania stands in front of a large opportunity. To take advantage of this opportunity, Albania must continue decisively its process of modernisation, economic reform and a full democracy.

In the context of the process of transformation of Albania in a market economy would appear costs anyway, the effect of EU accession could be rated as positive, long-term benefits being higher than costs.

The countries of South-Eastern Europe find themselves in different stages of integration process into the European Union. The increased process of integration into the EU of South-Eastern Europe, should be based on the approach of the key problems of the region. Until now, all the countries of the Western Balkans have become or potential applicant countries or candidate

countries, but the new round of enlargement is far from being completed.

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