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Entering the European Stage?
Roles in Enlargement

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Abstract

Enlargement is one of the EU's most significant and successful policies with an external dimension. Throughout the years, the EU has helped transform the states of southern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe. For years now, it has stalled, fallen into fatigue that paralysed the European side and removed any incentive for the candidates' side. Among the candidate countries, Montenegro is the most promising candidate, the frontrunner. Using the role theory framework, this thesis is going to analyse what motivates EU enlargement. The fundamental roles, value-based and interest-driven roles will give way to an analysis of key obstacles to enlargement and how the EU's policy performance concerning that is motivated by either or both of the roles. Generally speaking, both roles play a crucial role in enlargement. They often build up on one another and are closely interlinked. Nevertheless, a key question remains with regards to the overall dominance of either interest-driven or value-based motivators.

Keywords: Enlargement, Role Theory, Europeanisation, European Values

Streszczenie

Rozszerzenie jest jedną z najbardziej znaczących i skutecznych polityk UE o wymiarze zewnętrznym. Na przestrzeni lat UE pomogła przekształcić państwa Europy Południowej i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej. Od wielu lat znajduje się ona w impasie, w stanie zastoju, który sparaliżował stronę wspólnoty europejskiej i pozbawił motywacji stronę kandydującą. Wśród krajów kandydujących Czarnogóra jest najbardziej obiecującym kandydatem, faworytem. Wykorzystując teorię ról, w niniejszej pracy przeanalizowano motywy rozszerzenia UE. Role podstawowe, role oparte na wartościach i role oparte na interesach staną się podstawą do analizy kluczowych przeszkód na drodze do rozszerzenia oraz tego, w jaki sposób polityka UE w tym zakresie jest motywowana przez jedną lub obie role. Ogólnie rzecz ujmując, obie role odgrywają kluczowe znaczenie w procesie rozszerzenia. Często opierają się one na sobie nawzajem i są ze sobą ściśle powiązane. Niemniej jednak kluczowym pytaniem pozostaje kwestia czynnika motywującego oraz tego, czy jest on oparty na interesach czy na wartościach.

Słowa kluczowe: Rozszerzenie, teoria ról, europeizacja, wartości europejskie

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Contents

Table and Figures

Entering the European Stage? Roles in Enlargement

Enlargement has been accompanying the EU since its origin. After the horrors of the Second World War, the founding members of the European Union wished to prevent any new war of that scope by uniting coal and steel with the declared goal of eventually uniting the European continent economically and politically. From the initial six member states, the Union grew to a maximum of 28 member states. This steady widening of integration was accompanied by a deepening with new treaties and competencies. This "*implicit bargain*" (Barysch, 2006, p. 79 ff.) has been crucial in developing the EU to its current level of depth and width in integration. Arguably, however, the most recent enlargement wave broke that consensus by a failure to deepen the integration while taking an unprecedented step of widening. The failed Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe could have been the movement that the Union now lacks. Nevertheless, enlargement has also proven to be a highly effective policy. Firstly, it supported the transition of Southern European countries like Spain, Portugal and Greece after the ends of their respective dictatorships. Then, it was a significant force aiding in the rapid transition of Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC). The latter being a strong indicator of the transformative power of a determined Europe. The rapid democratisation of the Central and Eastern European countries would not have happened as quickly if Western organisations like NATO and, crucially, the EU had not offered their hand with the conviction that they did. Now, however, 18 years after the first eastern enlargement, this process has essentially come to a standstill. For nine years, no country has joined the EU and no candidate is really shaping out as a forerunner for membership in the upcoming years.

The enlargement process of the eternal European problem child, Turkey, has been moving away from concrete membership prospects, essentially reaching a standstill. The countries grouped as the Western Balkans (WB)[1] seem to offer a more hopeful perspective. Regardless, they too, remain far from membership prospects. Bosnia Herzegovina is in a state of perpetual internal conflict, with a new flaring up of the conflict in early 2022 and Kosovo's international recognition is a hugely controversial issue and remains unrecognised by five EU Member states. Hence, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and North Macedonia remain as candidate countries with actual potential for acceding to Union in the upcoming years.

Lastly, the most recent hopeful is the *Association Trio* emerging from the Eastern Partnership (EaP) of the EU. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine had demanded a closer attachment to the EU based on the cooperation in the EaP framework. For the most part, the EU reacted rather distantly, but the war in Ukraine created a whole new dynamic: all three states have submitted an application for EU membership and, in particular as it relates to Ukraine, there are strong voices to fast-track their accession

It is, however, the Western Balkan states, their membership aspirations or "*European perspective*" (e.g. European Commission, 2021) and more specifically, what motivates the EU to attach a certain salience to pressing for further enlargement that will be the focus of this thesis. Nevertheless, this thesis' findings will likely prove relevant for the Association Trio, if their path to accession is to move forward.

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[1] Meaning Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia

Research Question and Structure

The thematic focus of this research lies on the EU's enlargement to the Western Balkans. This complex topic offers a multitude of research possibilities, being a very popular topic of research for both highly respected researcher (Börzel & Schimmelfennig, 2017), PhD dissertations (Erny, 2015) and Master's theses (e.g. Audenaerde, 2021). This thesis will approach the topic by analysing what motivates the EU to press for enlargement and more specifically, what different motivators mean for the EU and how those may result in conflicting preferences and reflect an internal conflict of the EU itself. For this, a theoretical framework of role theory will be employed, and the research questions tackled by that will be

> **RQ**: *"How does the EU's role performance in enlargement negotiations with the Western Balkan countries reflect internal divisions between value-based and interest-driven considerations?"*

> **SRQ1**: *"Which roles motivate the EU's role performance when faced with obstacles to enlargement?"*

> **SRQ2**: *"Which roles motivate enlargement and to what extent is there a role conflict?"*

The upcoming sections will first provide an overview of the academic debates in which this thesis will intersect. This will be followed by a discussion over the methodology, case selection and data collection and eventually a role analysis. The findings from that analysis will then be put in context taking into account the previously discussed literature.

EU Outreach to the Western Balkans

EU Enlargement to the Balkans

The first notion of an EU perspective for the Western Balkan countries was made in the context of the 2000 Zagreb summit between the EU, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Slovenia (European Commission, 2000). The last point of the final declaration states that *"The prospect of accession is offered on the basis of the provision of the Treaty on European Union, respect for the criteria defined at the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993 and the progress made in implementing the stabilization and association agreements, in particular on regional cooperation"* (ibid., p. 2). This focus on regional cooperation has been a crucial concern for the entirety of the accession process to the current day. In that sense, it was perceived as a potential obstacle for a group-based accession – according to which all states would have to establish good relations before any accession would be feasible. On the other hand, it also served as a call to action for the region's states to *"address cross-boundary issues jointly, rather than as an obstacle to individual accession"* (Petričušić, 2005). At the time of the summit, the EU had already engaged with the CEEC that would join the EU between 2004 and 2007 with "Europe Agreements" and laid the groundwork for the future European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Throughout the 90s, though, the main motivation for interaction with the states of the Western Balkan was rather of a humanitarian nature.

While the 2000 summit set the stage and first issued a potential European perspective for the Western Balkan countries, the successive 2003 Thessaloniki summit became significantly more specific. In contrast to the early Eastern Neighbourhood of that period, the European perspective of the Western Balkans was a clear reason for the summit and the introduction to the summit refers to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia

and Montenegro as *"potential candidates"* (European Council, 2003). Whereas the Zagreb summit mentioned accession as a possibility on the side, this summit's final declaration takes accession as the main motivator and outlines the obstacles blocking the participating countries' path to accession. Nevertheless, while the EU states emphasised their unequivocal support to the Balkans' European perspective, the following years largely showed how that particular time period was largely dominated by the accession of Central and Eastern European countries that was taking shape. As a consequence, it took 15 years for the next high-level summit between the EU and the Western Balkans to occur.

In terms of debates around enlargement, the years following up on the Thessaloniki Summit were dominated by paving the way for the CEEC. Afterwards, enlargement was overshadowed by internal and external turmoil due to the global financial and Eurozone crisis. With Europe barely having stabilised from that crisis, Croatia then joined the EU. Depending on the definition employed for the Western Balkan region, it could be considered the 3rd Balkan country to join the EU after Slovenia and Bulgaria. Nevertheless, this was the last visible move in terms of enlargement. Since 2013, there has been little progress.

Montenegro and Serbia have been negotiating since 2012 and 2014 respectively. While chapters have opened and some (provisionally) closed, there is no clear sign of when those negotiations may be finalised. Albania and North Macedonia on the other hand are waiting for the official opening of negotiations, which have been blocked by first Greece due to the name of the country now known as North Macedonia and then by Bulgaria due to several cultural, historical and ethnic concerns. After those years of crises, 2018 saw the first major EU-Western Balkan summit in Sofia. Notably, one of the countries frequently named as Balkan that has successfully joined the EU. Regardless, the summit did not deliver a significant impetus to accelerate the reform

process of the WB. In fact, it may have been one of the clearer signs of both enlargement and accession fatigue (Medjak et al., 2019). Moreover, the discourse employed in its final declaration (European Union, 2018) is notably vaguer than the already relatively vague phrasing of the Thessaloniki declaration. While the EU reaffirms in both declarations "*its unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkans*" (European Council, 2003 & 2008, para. 2), the 2003 declaration doubles down on this by clarifying that "*The ongoing enlargement* [… *of the Central and Eastern European Countries*] *inspire and encourage the countries of the Western Balkans to follow the same successful path*." (European Council, 2003, para. 2). This presents a more decisive "*European perspective*" than the 2018 summit, which largely pushes all responsibility for the success of the enlargement process on the shoulders of the candidate countries: "*Building on the progress achieved so far, the Western Balkans partners have recommitted to the European perspective as their firm strategic choice, to reinforcing their efforts and mutual support.*"(European Union, 2018). Besides WB civil society being let down by the summit (Medjak et al., 2019), academic publications addressing this summit are scarce and those that exist paint a gloomy picture of European unity on this front (Rexha, 2019, p. 238f.). Notably, the inclusion of Kosovo in that summit led to a Spanish boycott of that summit, also questioning the cohesiveness of EU foreign policy.

Now, while (on the surface level) there has been little progress in past years, it seemed as though the von der Leyen college put enlargement back on the agenda in a drastic departure from its predecessor's stance on EU enlargement (cf. Wunsch, 2019). Notably, after a French veto against opening accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, the EU reworked the enlargement methodology to increase its credibility, predictability, dynamism and strengthen its political steering (Várhelyi, 2020). The following summit of late was supposed to be held in Zagreb

in 2020 but instead was moved online due to the COVID 19 pandemic. This came just a few months after the presentation of the new enlargement methodology but otherwise doubles down on the rhetoric employed and points included in the Sofia declaration of 2018. Again, the EU *"reaffirms its unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans"* (European Union, 2020) and, yet again, the declaration contains no mention of any more specific parts of that dimension. Nevertheless, a minor step up from the previous summit is the inclusion of the intention of the EU and Western Balkans to host regular high-level meeting summits to accompany the accession process. This is reflected in the summit hosted by Slovenia in 2021. This summit was different insofar as it is the first summit since 2003 that makes an explicit mention of the prospect of enlargement for the WB countries, as opposed to merely reaffirming the unequivocal support for the European perspective, adding: "*The EU reconfirms its commitment to the **enlargement** process and its decisions taken thereon, based upon credible reforms by partners, fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits.*" (European Union, 2021). Moreover, as opposed to previous summits, this declaration seems to distribute the responsibilities for the WB's reform efforts more evenly. Whereas previous declarations largely tasked only the candidate countries with reforming according to the EU's expectations, this declaration engages
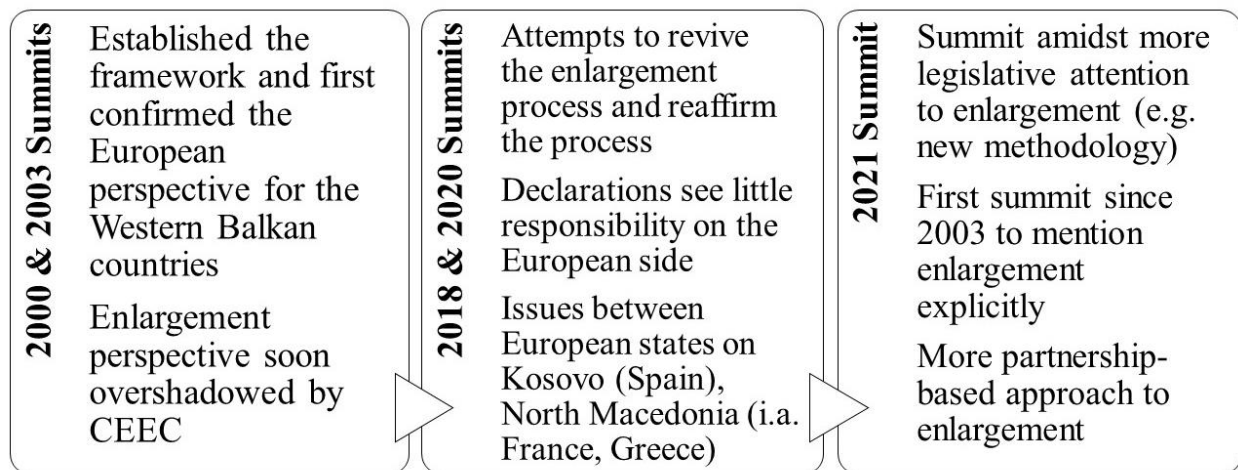

Figure 1 Overview over Summits held between the EU and the Western Balkans

more deeply with how the EU can support the process by including more mentions of concrete actions that will be taken by the EU rather than reiterating the reforms needing to be realised by the candidate countries (cf. *"tailor-made and comprehensive approach"*, European Union, 2021, par. 23). Furthermore, the declaration appears to emphasise a more partnership-based approach, with more mentions of *"partnership"* (e.g. par. 7, 22), *"dialogue"* (par. 19, 27) and *"work together"* (par. 20, 28). Figure 1 provides a very brief summary over the different summits held and the relevance of each to the larger picture of the progress of enlargement.

Berlin Process

The increasing cooperation in the EU framework goes to show that the EU is raising the relevance of the Western Balkans as a priority region. Another indicator of this development is intergovernmental processes, most notably the Berlin Process. The Berlin Process was an initiative launched in 2014 by six EU-Member states[2] (joined by four additional EU MS over time), as well as the six Western Balkan countries[3] to maintain the integration dynamic and the Europeanisation progress of the Balkans in light of the announcement of President Jean-Claude Juncker that there would be no further enlargement under his administration (2014-2019). The key focus of the Berlin Process lay on *"[advancing] the EU's agenda in three dimensions including the a) economic growth and connectivity, b) good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, and c) civil*

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[2] The UK participated in the process, initially as an EU member and continued participating after its exit from the EU. Four additional EU member states would join over time

[3] Meaning the four candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) as well as the potential candidates Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina

society development and people-to-people connectivity" (Rexha, 2019, p. 242). In particular, intergovernmental scholars are likely to praise the Berlin Process, as it proved the ongoing commitment of key governments to EU engagement with the region (Nechev et al., 2018). Even though Commission president Juncker was clear in communicating that no enlargement would take place during his tenure, the ongoing commitment of EU member states as influential as Germany and France served to maintain some of the reform dynamics. On the other hand, critics, mainly stemming from a neo-functionalist tradition have gone as far as calling the Berlin Process the *"death of enlargement as we know it"* (Musliu, 2021, p. 1) and consider Juncker's statement the last nail in the coffin of enlargement in times of widespread enlargement and accession fatigue. Nevertheless, while there is only limited research on the Berlin Process as such (Griessler, 2020; Musliu, 2021; Nechev et al., 2017; Rexha, 2019, pp. 242–244), there appears to be a tendency to evaluate it more positively than critics like Musliu. The latter argued that it was largely used to employ *"orientalist and balkanist tropes" and serves to replace EU enlargement towards the countries of the Western Balkans"* (Musliu, 2021) for the time being. The other side of the debate highlights that the process served not to replace enlargement policy but to complement it. The key engagement of member states provides *"highest level of political support"* (Tota, 2020) to carefully defined projects, while the EU continues supporting the reform efforts of the Balkans on a larger scale. Hence, it is *"an additive and complementary process, essentially anchored in the EU's normative approach to membership and regional competitive and growth strategy"* (Marciacq, 2017).

EU Outreach between Values and Interests

   With respect to the research question and the key focus of this thesis, this overview of the summits held and initiatives realised by the EU aids in uncovering the dilemma between value-based and interest-driven motivators in enlargement. This dilemma will be dealt with in greater detail at later stages of this thesis, nevertheless, it should be noted that value-based considerations seem to be trending upwards, whenever the EU finds itself in a comfortable spot in the greater political picture. Once, however, other crises take the forefront, enlargement becomes more of an interest-driven affair.

   The final declarations of the different summits and intergovernmental initiatives held in the last 22 years give a good indication of this. Enlargement was explicitly mentioned in two periods of relative geopolitical calmness – 2003 and 2020. Of course, the latter was in the midst of the COVID pandemic, but geopolitically it was relatively calm. In that sense, the larger geopolitical context gives indications of whether the EU is willing to engage in stronger or weaker rhetoric with the Western Balkans.

    In the context of widespread enlargement euphoria given the success of the transformation of the CEEC, with their accession just across the corner, the 2003 declaration engages in rhetorical action making it clear that the path taken by the CEEC would be open to the Western Balkans as well. In 2018, such affirmations are effectively absent and EU leaders' rhetoric is heavily focused on the obligations of the Western Balkans to reform and comply with EU conditionality.

   Having thus set the stage by discussing the crucial developments in enlargement of the last 20 years, the next section will establish the academic debates the remainder of the thesis will intersect with and contribute to.

Debating Enlargement: Overview over key lines of academic literature

Enlargement in Crisis

It requires little analysis to establish that the EU's enlargement policy is in trouble. There is a plethora of articles that state -- or pose the question - that enlargement is **dead** (Musliu, 2021), **doomed** (Barysch, 2006) or **demised** (Wallden, 2017). This section will engage with existing literature to establish the reason(s) for the current situation of enlargement policy, then discuss the tools that are available to the EU and candidates, followed by explaining the theories that will find application in the later parts of this thesis.

A frequent and very dominant debate whenever it comes to enlargement concerns the widening and deepening debate. For much of the early history of the EU, there was an implicit bargain between two camps of political actors, wideners and deepeners. According to this bargain, steps widening (read: enlarging) integration should be accompanied by steps deepening it (Barysch, 2006, p. 79). Following that logic then, the bargain was at least stretched beyond reason if not broken altogether during the Union's first eastern enlargement. While integration widened from ten to the twenty-seven Member States, there was no significant step in deepening integration. Even though the wideners had a big bang enlargement, the deepeners had but a small hint of widened integration: the Treaty of Lisbon. It strengthened the European Parliament and increased the scope of fields with majority-based decision-making, but overall, it meant no significant step further.

A different side of the debate considers the difference between wideners and deepeners to be less clear cut than what was said earlier. Indeed, widening may as well be a predictor of deepening (Heidbreder, 2014). It is particularly in large scale enlargement negotiations such as

during the *Big Bang* enlargement that the Member States may confer additional competencies to the Commission, thus resulting in deepened as a consequence of widened integration.

On the other hand, a concern frequently uttered by those sympathetic to a more deeply integrated European Union is the effectiveness of EU decision-making, a system set up for a relatively homogenous political union. The EU decision-making procedure that was already prone to working slowly before the 2004 enlargement could become even slower and less effective with 28 member states, as so many people, politicians and academics feared (cf. Toshkov, 2017). Applying the EU-15 decision-making system to EU-25/EU-27/EU-28 is then frequently mentioned as the cause of enlargement fatigue, connected through the concept of integration capacity, which according to some was just exhausted at the end of the last enlargement round. Recent developments in enlargement support this indication: the French veto against taking up negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia could be largely construed as a concern over the EU's ability to act after further enlargement. Moreover, the most recent EU-WB summit declaration emphasises this again: *"We also recall the importance that the EU can maintain and deepen its own development, ensuring its capacity to integrate new members."* (European Union, 2021). While academic literature does not necessarily indicate that this fear is well-founded with no proof of institutional deadlock post-enlargement, (Börzel et al., 2017; Emerson et al., 2006; Toshkov, 2017), it is indeed a frequent concern among a significant number of deepener as well as politicians – at the very least as a superficial reason to objecting to enlargement.

On this note, the discussion about enlargement capacity deserves additional attention. Fundamentally, integration capacity refers to the capacity to integrate third countries into the EU. Initially, the concept found its origin in EU publications as absorption capacity, which prompted immediate discussion among scholars (Emerson et al., 2006), defining it and questioning the

legitimacy of the concern. Subsequently, absorption capacity was changed to integration capacity in an attempt to de-politicise the concept and avoid the criticism attached to it. The 2014-2016 research project MAXCAP kickstarted renewed interest in the term and following that period, it found increased academic interest. In an attempt to operationalise this vague term, researchers have proposed diverging definitions of the concept. Emerson et al (2006) for example propose six dimensions[4], while Börzel, Dimitrova and Schimmelfennig (2017) limit it to two (internal and external integration capacity). In any case, the inclusion of the term integration capacity in EU documents was one of the clearest indicators of enlargement fatigue.

The subsequent studies on integration capacity from a multitude of perspectives (e.g., Börzel et al., 2017; Dimitrova & Kortenska, 2017; MAXCAP Policy Task Force, 2015) were quite clear in demonstrating its relevance. Enlargement fatigue after all has been a frequently observed companion piece to enlargement (O'Brennan, 2014). Since the early days of European integration, different degrees of enlargement fatigue were observable, notably de Gaulle's repeated vetoes to an EC membership of the United Kingdom or Mitterand's hesitancy against Spain's and Greece's accession in the 1970s (ibid., pp. 223f.). Nevertheless, it reached an entirely new level as fallout in the aftermath of the 'Big Bang' enlargement in the 2000s and the failed Constitutional treaty in 2005.

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[4] Capacity of the goods and service markets to absorb new member states; Capacity of the labour market to absorb new member states; Capacity of the EU's budget to absorb new member states; Capacity of the EU institutions to function with new member states; Capacity of society to absorb new member states • Capacity of the EU to assure its strategic security (Emerson et al., 2006, p. 9)

Scholars arrive at different conclusions about the deliberateness of this enlargement fatigue. While some argue that political elites in the EU strive to purposefully obstruct enlargement by insisting on an *"ever-increasing burden of asymmetric adjustment on candidate states and much more frequent interventions by EU Member States to 'protect the integrity' of the accession process"* (O'Brennan, 2014, p. 10), others assess it with more nuance and see it rather as a consequence of pessimism over the success rate of the ongoing enlargement negotiations on the one hand and of domestic developments on the other. One significant factor in this regard is the rise of the far-right during the 2010s accompanying an ever-increasing radicalism of the anti-EU discourse (Juberías & Blazhevska, 2017). Arguably, it was in and around 2004 that the fervour of enlargement died down. Ever since, crisis chased crisis in Europe and beyond: the failed constitution put European integration as such into question, the financial and Eurozone crisis the common currency and according to some, the migration crisis questioned European humanitarian values, while the COVID pandemic questioned European solidarity. Among all of these crises, it is of little surprise that member states, as well as EU institutions, put less emphasis on enlarging and rather focused on dealing with the crises present.

Indeed, it was roughly twelve years between the breakup of the Soviet Union and the accession of countries like Poland and Czechia. In contrast, it has now been over twenty years since the end of the Yugoslav Wars and none of the Balkan countries (with the exception of Slovenia and Croatia) are anywhere close to joining the EU. Now, while this comparison may not be completely appropriate or adequate, a crucial factor that contributed to the quick transformation of the CEEC was rhetorical action by the EU and its member states (Schimmelfennig, 2001).

Essentially, so is argued, the drivers of enlargement at the time, or wideners (see above), were able to "*shame the enlargement brakemen by decrying the discrepancy between the EU's*

liberal rhetoric and its uncompromising association policy. Caught in a rhetorical trap, the enlargement brakemen had to eventually consent to Eastern enlargement to save face" (Mehlhausen, 2016, p. 7). Following this logic and bearing in mind the points made above with regards to the summits in Sofia and Zagreb, as well as the enlargement fatigue, this may be a crucial dimension missing in current enlargement negotiations: due to the lack of a political consensus on enlargement, it has become difficult to repeat the same pattern of rhetorical entrapment as preceding the big bang enlargement. While there are certainly similar normative arguments made by the respective commission presidents on the Europeanness of both CEEC and the Western Balkans, this rhetoric has landed in the case of the latter on more critical reception and did not result in the same success of rhetorical entrapment, which is reminiscent of the failure of rhetorical entrapment with regards to Turkey in the late 2000s/early 2010s (Saatçioğlu, 2012; Schimmelfennig, 2009).

Enlargement in Action

In this section, the main instruments and particularities of these instruments are going to be discussed. Firstly, conditionality will be subject to discussion including the extent to which it proves successful in its objective of inducing reform in the candidate countries. In a second step, additional, alternative instruments will be discussed. Here, in particular, socialisation and other informal means of inducing reforms will be in focus.

Fundamentally, conditionality refers to the offering of incentives in exchange for democratic reforms in the form of a 'carrot and stick scenario' (Richter & Wunsch, 2020). In combination with a credible membership perspective, this tool has proven to be a highly effective short-term instrument for inducing reforms in the case of the CEEC (Arista & Schimmelfennig, 2010). Nevertheless, several scholars have pointed out and any observer could tell that this effect has not been effectively replicated in the case of the Western Balkans (e.g. Fagan et al., 2015; Fererro-Turrión, 2015; Richter & Wunsch, 2020). One major contribution to this decreased effectiveness of conditionality is, of course, enlargement fatigue. The lack of interest of member states and EU institutions to engage with enlargement for much of the 2010s severely damaged the credibility of an accession perspective for the Balkans and thus the effectiveness of conditionality. Moreover, Schimmelfennig's external incentives model shows that credibility is one of the crucial dimensions affecting sustainable reforms (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004). With new provisions requiring referenda on EU enlargement in member states like France, this credibility is severely under threat (Zhelyazkova et al., 2019).

In lieu of accession as conditionality's carrot, other rewards like visa liberalisation and preferential trade agreements are effective as well in ensuring compliance with the EU's acquis (Trauner, 2009). Nevertheless, while in selected fields, candidate countries may still comply even

if they have a vague membership perspective at best, overall, the likelihood for long-term effective adoption of EU conditionality is reduced when the perspective of membership is removed from the equation (Elbasani, 2008). Furthermore, the compliance itself is increasingly a rather surface-level compliance. Meaning that while the candidates' governments adopt legislation to formally comply with EU conditionality, the adoption alone does not result in the same degree of democratic transformation as it did in the case of the CEEC (Richter & Wunsch, 2020). Seeing how uncertain perspectives of membership may *"erode the power of enlargement conditionality in the region"* (Elbasani, 2008), it should offer little surprise that the very conditional enlargement perspective and the ever-tightening enlargement criteria result in a very slow enlargement progress overall.

Conditionality is often likened to a carrot and stick scenario – the lacklustre progress of the Western Balkans according to this strand of literature may be attributed to the limited size of the carrot and an ever-growing stick as a contrast (Petrovic, 2020). Besides the decreasing efficiency of conditionality with the decreasing size of the carrot, the very nature of conditionality also has become subject of scrutiny, as studies have started linking it to state capture and consolidating undemocratic tendencies instead of fighting them (Richter & Wunsch, 2020). State capture and corruption is one of the key issues facing the candidate countries on their path to EU accession. The nature of the pressure exerted by conditionality allows for existing informal networks to double down on their power. Consequently, not only are there indications that conditionality is losing effectiveness due to limited incentives, there are also indications that the main instrument used to affect democratic reforms may contribute to a worsening an already poor situation. Nevertheless, it remains to be said that this connection between conditionality and state capture remains a very understudied field with only one published article having dealt with that so far.

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However, supporting arguments for the potential side effects of conditionality are also made insofar as the connection to state capture is a recent addition, but rule of law conditionality has been linked to superficial adoption rather than full implementation and similarly to Richter & Wunsch, the author here argued that the conditionality could result in a deteriorating situation (Kmezić, 2019).

Enlargement in a value-based Context

Having thus discussed the crucial elements of the literature on enlargement *per se*, this section will address the second dimension of the theoretical framework for this study – EU values and the EU's transformative power in the context of enlargement. The relationship between enlargement and the EU's values, by extension also its identity, has been a heavily researched topic for a long time. The first crucial dimension, and likely one of the more influential contributions on this topic concerns the above-mentioned rhetorical action. By emphasising the EU's constitutive values, enlargement could be framed as a highly normatively charged affair, which contributed to pushing forward the accession process of the CEEC. Moreover, enlargement is not only centred on EU values as a fundament, but also reflect on the EU's values and identities. Specifically, on the discussion about the identity of the EU and its own "*Europeanness*" (Sjursen, 2006, p. 214). If Europe is built on the foundational, fundamental values mentioned in Art. 2 TEU, then the extent to which it assesses third states' fitness to join the club by their adherence to those values reflects strongly on the extent to which the EU judges itself by those same values and how **European** the **European** Union indeed is. This question is also approached by the strand of literature discussing the **power** of Europe.

Initially, Civilian Power Europe (CPE) was introduced to analyse Europe's foreign policy between the major powers east and west of it (Duchêne, 1973). In the highly charged minefield of the Cold War, Europe offered a starkly different perspective on international politics by emphasising 'civilised politics' over confrontational, military-focused politics as exemplified by the major powers of the Cold War. While Duchene correctly pointed out this contrast between the USA and Soviet Union on the one hand and Europe on the other, it also was not necessarily a decision based on rational choice considerations to stick to civilising tools and remain a Civilian Power. It was rather a reflection of the state of European integration at the time (Nunes, 2011, p. 4). Moreover, the notion of Civilian Power does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with a lack of armament. As even the ongoing armament through the CSDP and initiatives like PESCO can serve civilian or civilising goals (Smith, 2005). Since non-military means can serve non-peaceful means (e.g., using the EU's weight as a trading bloc to force compliance with its preferences). However, further criticism of the term was triggered due to the post-colonial/neo-colonial sentiment attached to the word civilising as employed by researchers succeeding Duchene, likening it to "*soft imperialism*" (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2005).

With Normative Power Europe (NPE) then, Ian Manners (2002) addressed the question of European norms and values and how they contribute to EU foreign policy. NPE argues that the EU is fundamentally a treaty-based entity whose *raison d'etre* is the prevention of another large-scale war on the European continent. This alone serves to establish the EU as a unique case in international relations. Normative Power Europe was introduced after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of regimes across Eastern Europe, notably not due to the power of force, but the "*collapse of norms*" (Manners, 2002, p. 238). This focus on norms persists throughout Manners' arguments: due to the normative set-up of the EU and its leadership by example, it is able to "*shape*

conceptions of 'normal'" (p. 240). While CPE emphasised the non-militarised nature of Europe's power, NPE laid its focus on norm diffusion and to study the EU according to what it is rather than what it says or does (Manners, 2002, p. 252). While CPE finds its historical context in the bipolar world of the Cold War, NPE finds its in the post-9/11 period, in which many scholars and policy practitioners criticised Europe's "*over-reliance on 'soft power'*" (Nunes, 2011, p. 5). Four years after his initial paper on NPE, Manners returned to the subject and questioned whether the EU would be able to remain a normative power in light of the growing militarisation: "*As the EU acquires more military capability it could become more tempted to use short-term military responses instead of its traditional reliance on long-term structural conflict prevention and transformation.*" (Manners, 2006, p. 194).

Once NPE entered the spotlight and became a frequently cited and used concept (see Whitman et al (2011) and the over 5,000 citations of Manners' original article), the field widened, and a grand scope of researchers proposed new directions for the field. One of the more notable suggestions came from Aggestam (2008). She proposed the term 'Ethical Power Europe' (EPE) and while Manners emphasised studying what the EU is rather than what it says or does, Aggestam suggests studying what the EU says and does rather than what it is. It was a pertinent discussion when she introduced the concept, and in light of the EU's Strategic Compass, debates on strategic autonomy, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and increased defence integration, increased scrutiny over the EU's action becomes relevant. Indeed, analytically approaching the EU's performance and preference formation lends itself to employing the civilian, normative, and ethical power framework despite the growing militarisation of the Union. Policy documents and concrete actions show in theory and practice that the EU prefers to act ethically, with civilian instruments, in a normative framework rather than utilising its military force (Nunes, 2011, p. 14). Principal sources

of criticism stem largely from realist scholars who disagree with the very premise of NPE arguing its very base, CPE, was already a "*contradiction in terms*" (Hyde-Price, 2006, p. 218), as the emphasis on soft power and non-military means was predicated on an environment created by third actors with military means outside of the control of Europe. Consequently, according to neo-realism, the EU is merely a tool used by its member states to achieve their preferences by employing tools of both soft and hard power. Moreover, if EPE was to be an accurate depiction of the EU's foreign policy, realists outline a "*tragic*" fate for Europe: "*either the EU will be left as a weak and ineffective actor […], or it will indulge in quixotic moral crusades – with the risk of hubris leading to nemesis.*" (Hyde-Price, 2008, p. 29). Hence, Europe should not strive for an ethical foreign policy per se, but rather include ethical considerations in its hard-headed calculations about how to best achieve its preferences weighing its interests against the balance of power and the different existing goals of competing actors.

Conclusion: Literature on Enlargement

The previous three sections outlined and analysed three different aspects and broad literature trends of enlargement. The first issues encountered in the current set-up of enlargement include debates between deepeners and wideners, enlargement and accession fatigue, as well as that over absorption capacity. The second section approached the literature on the enlargement policy itself and the pitfalls encountered by conditionality. The third section, then, discussed how enlargement factors into the discussions on European values and approached a few of the modern theories on European value-based action from Civilian to Ethical Power Europe. Before approaching the theoretical framework for the remainder of this thesis, this section will briefly outline the implications of the preceding sections for the analysis.

The EU's enlargement policy finds itself in a difficult, conflictual position between values and interests. For much of the 1990s and the early 2000s, the EU was dominated by a highly optimistic spirit with regard to enlargement. The largely successful transformation of the CEEC led to discourses that were framed in very ethical contexts. EU leaders and observers alike rhetorically pushed for enlargement which concluded with the Romanian/Bulgarian duo acceding in 2007. At that point, however, the fever had receded, and the normative discourse evolved into a discourse of apathy and disinterest. Instead of arguing for enlargement to the Western Balkans on the basis of common values, European brotherhood or other value-based buzzwords, the discourse shifted and began emphasising the obligations of the candidate countries. Rhetorical action was essentially non-existent; enlargement policy received little (positive) public attention. In short: the dominance of value-based motivations in enlargement made way for interest-driven enlargement. In this sense, voices doubting the usefulness of the Western Balkans became stronger than those arguing in favour of their accession. However, since the new European Commission took office, there appears to have developed a new dynamic with a new enlargement methodology, three new states aspiring to membership and new high-level exchanges between EU and Western Balkan leaders.

This new dynamic provides a new venue for research that this thesis will aim to fill. By analysing the current key motivators for enlargement between values and interests, the previously mentioned academic debates will find an adequate addition through the use of role theory.

Role Theory

Role theory finds its origin in behavioural sociological research. Fundamentally, it reflects the theatre analogy that an actor is expected to behave in such a way that it reflects their role as assigned by a script in their respective setting. Alternate conceptions of role theory refer to masks assumed by the actors (Aggestam, 2006, p. 12). What went on to become a highly influential article, Holsti (1970) introduced role theory into foreign policy analysis (FPA). Notably, Holsti discussed how policy-makers perceived themselves, and which roles they assigned to themselves. The primary conclusion drawn from his work suggests that foreign policy-makers "*are neither completely free choosing agents, nor is their behaviour entirely determined by external structures*" (ibid., p. 13). As Aggestam puts it: role theory analyses a "*situated actor, whose behaviour is guided by both rules and reasons in foreign policy*" (ibid., p. 14).

In the context of understanding the EU, this understanding of a situated actor allows further exploring of thematic areas such as the question of EU actorness, of whether the EU's foreign policy is more than the sum of its parts. In recent years, role theory has been applied to questions on widening and deepening in Germany (Tewes, 1998), global environmental negotiations (Delreux & Ohler, 2021) as well as EU/China relations and public diplomacy (Song & Ai, 2022). This range of cases provides hints that there are valuable explanations to be found by role theory. Moreover, in a world that is increasingly dominated by values and identities, role theory offers a significant toolkit to aid in understanding distinct identities, national foreign policy cultures and influences on both.

This upcoming section is going to explain the distinct part of role theory: namely, ego and alter role conceptions, role sets, role performance and role conflicts. This will serve as an important prelude before applying the theory to the case study of enlargement to the Western Balkans.

Within sociology, there are two dominant research strands of role theory – interactionists and structuralists. This division has found its way into international relations and FPA as well (Klose, 2018; Tewes, 1998). The key difference between both schools lies in their perspectives of the creation of roles and how those factor into behaviour – structuralists argue that roles are largely defined by the environment the actor is situated in, whereas the interactionists believe that structure is not as determining and instead argue that the creation of roles emerges from constant interactions between the actor and the environment. While there is some debate about interactionist and structuralist role theory, the former is the dominant strand in FPA and international relations (Tewes, 1998, p. 118). Consequently, roles are conceived from an *ego* and *alter* perspective. These are two distinct but intersecting processes. In the literature, they are described differently: Some refer to role expectation and role conception (e.g. Aggestam, 2006), others refer to *me* and *I* agency (Klose, 2018)and a third group refers to ego and alter perceptions (Delreux & Ohler, 2021). They, nevertheless, refer to similar conceptions of the same notion: the conception or roles from the two distinct perspectives.

The first perspective, *ego*, refers to the self-imposed roles the actor has towards itself. It is generally made up of different values, norms and traditions, as well as the actor's identity and thus represents a subjective conception of the world and the subject of analysis. Crucially, depending on the salience an actor attaches to the respective issue, they may have more or less 'wiggle room' to adjust the role and position.

The second perspective, *alter*, then refers to the roles other actors prescribe to the "*role-beholder*" (Aggestam, 2006, p. 18). This is often based on political culture or on being a member of certain institutions (e.g. being a member of the Council of Europe). The second, alter, dimension of role conceptions are what other actors perceive to be the appropriate behaviour of a certain actor.

Moreover, besides the roles expected of a given actor from third actors, in the context of FPA, or when analysing states' roles in general, a third key dimension is "*domestic factors like popular opinion, historical memory and […] norms, values and expectations*" (Tewes, 1998, p. 119). As such, third actors as well as domestic audiences pose their normative expectations of the ego, based on which they expect them to behave in a certain manner (Aggestam & Johansson, 2017, p. 1209).

Certainly, applying this framework to the EU presents its own set of issues, notably a question similar to the oft-debated question on Europe's actorness in foreign policy: Is there an EU foreign policy or is it merely a collection of 27 different foreign policies? Similarly, the question may be posed if the EU has an individual role or if it is merely the collection of the member states' roles. In this, some argue that the EU institutions play a significant role by working on converging the individual member states' roles, resulting in a coherent role aspiration that then may be realised into a proper role conception (Klose, 2018, p. 1148).

The combination of the *ego* and *alter* perspective, the role conception and expectation leads to the role performance. Effectively, the roles serve as a predictor of how an actor can be expected to act in their respective environment and vis-à-vis other states. This predictability is, however, conditional on *a few* factors: firstly, it depends on the number of roles a respective actor inhabits. The more roles there are, the more difficult it is to predict a role performance. Moreover, if the roles are indeed identified correctly, there is still a human factor, where the polity may inhabit certain roles, but the extent to which these roles are internalised by individual policy-makers nevertheless differs (Chelotti, 2014). A political actor or policy-maker who has their role less internalised may be more likely to pursue a different set of roles than an actor who is extremely convinced of their roles. Hence, this internalisation of roles is not only a predictor of performance but also of policy stability. The more a policy-maker internalises their role(s), the more likely it is

that the resulting performance (i.e. policy) is more stable. In any case, harking back to the question outlined above and in the particular case the EU offers to role theory, the coherence of role performance provides an additional avenue of analysis. Namely, that it appears that performance coherence "*seems to depend on the degree of integration reached in each specific area of policy*" (Lucarelli, 2006, p. 47). Hence, a highly supranational field will likely result in a more coherent role conception and performance than a more intergovernmental field.

As alluded to above, policy stability is inherently linked with role performance. Hence, the last crucial dimension of role theory discussed in this chapter is role conflict. Role conflicts exist in two broad types: intra- and inter-role conflicts. The former occurs when the *ego* and *alter* role conceptions diverge, the latter when two or more roles of an actor prescribe different actions (Harnisch, 2011, p. 8). Either conflict can find expression in either ambiguous and/or indecisive policies – e.g. the so-called 'German vote' in the Council (Beichelt, 2007), which may be read as an expression of role conflict between the constitutive parts of government coalitions – or, more likely, in policy change. Inherently, actors have a desire for "*consistency and cognitive stability*" (Aggestam, 2006, p. 23) and hence strive to overcome role conflict.

After the upcoming chapter on methodology and data collection, the analysis chapter will contain the role analysis, discussing the role conception and expectation; role performance and conflict. Nevertheless, based on what has been written so far, some preliminary expectations for that analysis can be inferred from the literature. The overarching theme of this thesis is to understand what motivates enlargement between values and interests. Consequently, the key roles that will be looked for and analysed are value-based and interest-driven. These roles, so will be argued, are the key motivators. For value-based roles, indicators will likely be drawn from the interviews and supplementary data, containing references to normative motivators, most notably

the values from Article 2 TEU. On the other hand, the interest-driven role will feature indicators

based on geopolitical, economic or other material interests from interviews and supplementary

data. This overview can be found in the table 1 below.

Role	Indicator	Source
Value-based	Values from Article 2 TEU: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, human rights, minority rights	Interviews, supplementary data
Interest-driven	Geopolitical, economic and other material interests	

Table 1 Roles and Indicators based on Theory

Research Design & Methodology

Having thus discussed the relevant academic debates that the remainder of this thesis will

intersect with and explained the theory that will be used as a foundation for the analysis, this

section will dive into how the analysis will be approached and moreover, discuss the weaknesses

and strengths of the approaches used. The chapter is structured in the following manner: first, the

research design of the thesis will be described, followed by an examination concerning the case

selection. This will be followed by an explanation of the conceptualisation and operationalisation

of the key roles. The third part will deal with the data collection and finally, this chapter will

include a discussion on the validity and reliability of the approach employed.

The approach employed for this research is a case study employing the role theory

framework. Having this 'fixed' theoretical framework suggests a certain deductive notion to the

research, which appears uncharacteristic for a qualitative study (e.g., Lewis, 2003, p. 48f.; Merriam,

2009, p. 15). Nevertheless, as it is being employed in this research, role theory does not impose

strict hypotheses and the research design used here is not closed off to the introduction of new

concepts and ideas. Consequently, the name is misleading as instead of aspiring to be a theory, it

is indeed a theoretical framework (as alluded to in Aggestam, 2006; Klose, 2018), guiding the

research, providing the "scaffolding or underlying structure" of this research (Merriam, 2009, p. 66).

Case Selection

As the research focuses on EU enlargement, there could realistically be three groups to use as a research population: candidates of accession past, present or future – the most relevant group is the current group of candidates: Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey. However, future accession candidates such as Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine may benefit from this research, but their path remains highly unclear, so the current five countries remain as a group to select a case from.

Turkey would certainly be an interesting case study, but as negotiations have effectively come to a standstill, it would be largely irrelevant to use it as a case study, since one of the objectives of this study is to understand when the European future of the candidate country may be realised.

Consequently, the candidate countries that are lumped together by EU terminology as the Western Balkans remain. Each of them finds themselves in very distinct situations: Serbia and Montenegro have both been at the negotiating table for nearly ten and eight years respectively and between them, Montenegro is currently considered the frontrunner in negotiations. Meanwhile, Serbia has been attempting to maintain close proximity to both Russia and the West. In light of the war in Ukraine and Serbia's reluctance to join Western sanctions against Russia, it seems that Serbia's EU aspirations may, too, be called into question, as members of the European Parliament have called for a halt of accession negotiations and members of the European Commission

reiterated the expectation that candidate countries align their foreign policy, in particular in moments as important as right now (Dunai, 2022; European Western Balkans, 2022).

On the other hand, Albania and North Macedonia are presently in a sort of limbo. They are official candidates (as opposed to Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina), but so far the European Council has been blocking the opening of negotiations. Meanwhile, North Macedonia in particular appears to have undergone many of the necessary reforms for EU accession. A source involved in the accession process implied North Macedonia would likely be considered the frontrunner ahead of Montenegro if the European Council was to greenlight the opening of negotiations.

As this research focuses on the ongoing negotiations, effectively Albania and North Macedonia are removed from consideration as well. Consequently, the choice would fall between Montenegro and Serbia. Prior to the war in Ukraine, Serbia would have offered itself as a critical case (Patton, 2015). As indicated by Patton, the relevance of analysing a *critical case* lies in the fact that if the observed phenomenon is true for this outlier, then it must be true for others as well. Serbia is the country with the lowest foreign policy alignment to the EU (56%) and EU accession in the country is very controversial, with recent polls indicating that opposition to joining the EU has achieved majority status for the first time ever (Katy Dartford & AP, 2022). In addition, it is far more controversial politically than in Montenegro. Serbia's prime minister Aleksander Vucic's proximity to Viktor Orban likely causes some concern among more liberal-minded politicians in Europe. However, in light of its continued resistance to joining EU sanctions, it is difficult to foresee how Serbia's membership may develop. It may evaporate into thin air, EU states like Poland and the Baltic countries may stall its progress indefinitely, or, alternatively, it may reassess its stance and join the sanctions. Nevertheless, in the current context, it is far too much of a 'moving target' to be a subject of analysis for this thesis. Naturally, it could prove relevant for other topics

or research approaches, but for the topic of this study, its EU future is too ambiguous to include Serbia as a case study

Thus, Montenegro remains as the last suitable candidate for the case study. Besides being the last alternative, it also offers the largest amount of data given that it is the country with the longest track record of negotiations (besides Turkey). Moreover, it (as well as Albania) maintains a full alignment in its foreign policy with the EU, which is a crucial indicator for overall convergence of political priorities in the bigger picture, whereas North Macedonia is at 96% alignment and Serbia – as noted above - only at 56% (Georgi Gotev, 2021). Theoretically, it is therefore an "index" case, because it is the first in its population (the countries of the Western Balkan) that has started negotiations with the EU (Patton, 2015, p. 217).

Conceptualisation & Operationalisation

A fundamental requirement for the analysis of roles is a careful and deliberate conceptualisation and operationalisation of the roles. This section will discuss both these processes.

The first role under analysis will be referred to as a **value-based role**. This role is informed by the EU's normative aspirations as explained above. Fundamentally, it refers to the extent to which the EU's performance in enlargement negotiations is based on its values (Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union, 2012, para. 2) and related ethical considerations. Besides the values laid down in the Treaty, norm diffusion (Manners, 2002) and such normative processes are considered as well.

As it is a frequently made point by EU policy makers and often alluded to in policy documents, the *ego* conception of this role can be extracted from policy papers by analysing the enlargement packages of the EU and doing a basic discourse analysis of key policymakers. Content

of interviews will be considered for the analysis of *alter* role expectations and for triangulation of data obtained from official sources. The role performance of the value-based role is largely based on interviews that were conducted with policy-makers from the EU institutions and stakeholders from Montenegrin civil society (more in the Data Collection section). By contrasting the perspectives from both sides, it will be established to which extent there may be an intra- or inter-role conflict.

The second role is named the **interest-driven role**. This refers to the extent to which the EU's performance in role negotiations is based on political and economic interests that may or may not diverge from the posited values. This may relate to geo-political considerations and to observing how the EU behaves when it notices shifts in candidates' relations with other actors, or its positions with regards to accelerating the process based on economic considerations.

Naturally, this role is much less documented in official documentation since it would directly prevent any potential for normative actions. Consequently, the bulk of the analysis will be based on the interviews. Regardless, both documents and discourses of officials will be considered, as well as secondary literature to support the claims made for the role conception. For this role, in particular, the interviews conducted with experts from, and data obtained relating to Montenegro should be a valuable source, as Montenegro is likely to take a more critical stance toward the EU in the negotiations than the EU officials themselves. Thus, the analysis of both the *ego* and *alter* role conception will be largely based on the interviews while consulting policy documents and secondary literature will serve for triangulation purposes.

Data Collection

The principal method of data collection for this research is semi-structured expert interviews. A simple research guide (Annex 1) was developed that served as a guide through the interviews. Overall, a total of five interviews was conducted: three interviews with experts from the EU context and two civil society stakeholders from Montenegro. The interviewees from the EU side were one civil servant from the European Commission's DG Near (COM), and two policy advisors of two different political groups in the European Parliament (EP1 and EP2). The sampling method employed was a purposeful sampling focussing on concrete expertise. Besides, an attempt was made to reach as wide a diversity as possible in terms of representation of different institutions and political *coleur,* to reduce the degree of bias.

On the other hand, the interviewees from Montenegro (ME1 and ME2) each lead a significant civil society organisation in Montenegro and have a background working with or on the enlargement negotiations. Sampling for them followed a similar design to the one for the interviewees from the EU side. However, establishing contact proved more cumbersome (see below). In addition to the interviews, document and discourse analyses (Annex 3) provide a second source of data that will be employed to triangulate the data against one another and allow for a critical reading of the information obtained. Table 2 provides an overview of the conducted interviews, including the interviewees' source of expertise, the mode of conducting that interview and a general summary of the focus points of those interviews. The detailed transcripts and the interview guide are found in the appendix.

Reference Date	Source of Expertise	Mode of Interview	Key Points made
COM 22/03	Working for DG Near; Focus on Montenegro, formerly Serbia	In-person	• Focus on both Serbia and Montenegro: similarities and differences • focus on the EU perspective • Highlight: obstacles as identified by the EU
EP1 25/03	Works for a large political group in the Western Balkans division	Phone Call (no video)	• Uncertainty over the honesty of the Euroatlantic orientation of Montenegro's government (pre
EP2 23/03	Works for a large political group in the Western Balkans division	In-person	• The perspective of the European Parliament
ME1 29/04	Head of a large CSO	Videocall	• The perspective of Montenegrin civil society • Criticism of EU stabilocracy
ME2 29/04	Head of a large CSO + member of chapter 23 negotiating team	Zoom Call (no video)	• Perspective from negotiating table • Focus on rule of law issues

Table 2 Overview of Interviews

Shortcomings and Issues

The principal issue encountered in the data collection phase was finding interviewees and establishing contact with them. Several potentially relevant interviewees were identified but would not respond to my outreach to them. These included the ambassadors of Montenegro to Poland and the EU as well as members of the EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) from both sides – EU and Montenegro. Moreover, three out of five interviews were not conducted in person. Two out of these were conducted without access to a video function. This lack of a face-to-face dimension of the interview resulted in being less successful in establishing a well-functioning research relationship (Yin, 2016).

On the other hand, the nature of this thesis is highly interpretative, with the potential for different conclusions drawn by different researchers. Moreover, this interpretative nature is also problematic, because it increases the likelihood that my own biases affect the results. Moreover, the limited amount of interviews makes the data further susceptible to the interviewees' biases as well. The additional data from news sources and other documents may contribute to warding off these unwanted biases, but nevertheless, they are presenting issues in the design of this thesis.

Validity & Reliability

Considering the validity and reliability are crucial dimensions ensuring quality throughout any study's progress. However, these terms originating from quantitative studies need to be taken with a grain of salt when applied to qualitative research. The latter emphasises interpretations rather than statistical correlation and therefore calls for a more nuanced approach to assessing its validity. Nevertheless, qualitative research, too, can and must be held to a high standard of quality. Validity and reliability may be concepts strange to qualitative research, but not entirely foreign (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003; Merriam, 2009). In order to affirm the validity of this research, I will apply the choices or dimensions of qualitative validity outlined by Yin (2016) and discuss them on a choice-by-choice basis.

The first dimension is **trustworthiness**. He describes it as a process implicitly instilling confidence in the methods used to generate the data. This concern is particularly pertinent when for studies in which data is based on field work or extended observations. A second side to this pertains to the authenticity of the data. Concerns regarding trustworthiness are inherent to most studies based on interviews. Semi-structured interviews, always require a certain leap of faith. Nevertheless, while conceptualising this study, efforts were made to reduce biases by including a

variety of interview partners and contacting relevant experts from several different parts of the political spectrum (civil society, national governments, and EU institutions).

A second step to increase validity is triangulation, which directly relates to the preceding point. Conventionally, triangulation is associated with data triangulation, while there may be up to four distinct methods of triangulation: triangulation with additional qualitative sources, mixed-method triangulation, researcher triangulation and theory triangulation (Patton, 2015, p. 502). In this case, in particular, triangulation of qualitative methods is being used. The principal method of the inquiry is the semi-structured interviews, which are triangulated by the use of document analysis and by the use of secondary literature. Moreover, the five interviews allow for intra-method triangulation, by contrasting comments made by each interviewee the trustworthiness of each can be ensured. On the other hand, the approach this study is going for does not favour a mixed-method approach. Consequently, the second method falls away. Method four will be applied implicitly by exchanging theses with fellow students to peer review and add critical comments.

The next choice relates to validity in greater detail. According to Yin, "*a valid study is one that has properly interpreted its data so that the conclusions accurately reflect and represent the real world that was studied.*" (2016, p. 88). Accurate reflection, however, is difficult to establish in a relativist research tradition that emphasises ever-changing, constructed realities. Nevertheless, by making transcripts and notes of the interviews available[5], as well as being transparent over any additional source used for the analysis (Appendix 3), anybody is provided with the tools to assess

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[5] With the exception of parts of said notes and transcripts that would violate the confidentiality clause of the consent form

how valid this research is in that sense. In other words, given these tools, any researcher, assuming they have "*the same lens or orientation*" (Yin, 2016, p. 88) should be able to arrive at similar conclusions as outlined in the analysis section.

Role Analysis: Enlargement and its Obstacles

      After having discussed the academic debates and theoretical issues this thesis is going to intersect with and outlining the approach employed in the data collection, this chapter will explain the main argument of this thesis – the role analysis. This section is going to proceed along the lines outlined in the

Role Theory chapter: First, the focus lies on role conception, detailing how the EU perceives and constructs its role(s) in enlargement, followed by role expectations delving into the alter perspective, how third-parties perceive the EU's role(s). In a third step, the analysis will deal with the role performance and explain the ensuing inter- and intra-role conflicts. After this role analysis, the implications of the preceding findings will be discussed, and it will be considered how they fit into the larger discussion on enlargement policy and the debates outlined above.

Role Conception

To understand the EU's *ego* role conception, it is crucial to pay attention to both arguments made in publications on enlargement and the discourse applied by EU officials. Most EU publications on enlargement emphasise the place that the EU's values hold in their own right, as an inherent interest of each individual state and for their citizens, as a tool for progress on other key aspects of the negotiations and as they key metric for measuring progress. In fact, the 2020 Revised Enlargement Methodology focuses on precisely the rule of law as a key variable of accession. It is the chapter on rule of law that is opened first and closed last in the negotiations. Moreover, other values fundamental to European integration find emphasis throughout the enlargement packages and publications. Notable examples of these are solidarity and 'good neighbourly relations'.

Solidarity between EU member states is one of the most fundamental tenets of EU law and a prerequisite for integration and the European project as a whole. Throughout the COVID pandemic, the EU treated the Western Balkans as privileged partners extending solidarity to them with means of support ranging from the *COVAX* facility to medical equipment through instruments like *rescEU* and monetary assistance through a solidarity fund as well as consular assistance for

citizens of the Western Balkan countries living abroad. Good neighbourly relations as emphasised in the documents is yet another normative criterion for EU accession. This is naturally a serious concern for countries like Kosovo and Serbia or North Macedonia and Bulgaria. Naturally, the former is more salient than the latter, given the history of war, the repeated flaring up of conflict on the border and the controversy of recognising Kosovo's independence even among EU member states. Nevertheless, as can be appreciated in the ongoing delay of North Macedonia's beginning of accession negotiations, good neighbourly relations form a crucial foundation for effective cooperation within the framework of the EU.

Lastly, a key concern for the EU in its proceedings with all candidates is relating to the political factors of the candidate countries. Each state has slightly different issues in this field, but they all have in common that political factors are key issues preventing them from advancing towards accession. Interviewees have indicated that in the case of Montenegro, a key concern among the political factors is political stability ever since Milo Dukanovic was voted out of office. His government is a key representation of stabilitocracy: neither democracy nor real stability. But it presented itself as a source of stability for the region and therefore was appealing to the EU seeking stability above everything else in the countries. Other issues relating to the political factors are concerns about freedom of expression, religion and media, as indicated by this interviewee upon asking them about the freedom of media in the Western Balkans: *"Well it's bad. I mean, it depends on the country, but it's bad everywhere. But in some countries, Serbia, I think is the worst."* (Interview EP2). Moreover, the relation between freedom of religion and European integration was further outlined by another interviewee as Montenegrins "*fighting for their Montenegrin orthodox church that is separate from the Serbian orthodox chuch. [It's Serbia] meddling in Montenegro's affairs."* (Interview EP1)

Overall, this analysis with regards to the value-based role conception shows that the EU's reports and publications clearly emphasise the role of the rule of law as the chief metric against which progress is measured. Moreover, values like solidarity and political freedoms found explicit expression in the interviews conducted, indicating the salience attached to these values.

For the interest-driven role, the emphasis lies on indicators of strategic, geopolitical and other material interests. Firstly, the normative aspirations of the EU in the context of enlargement appear to be watered down to some extent, as values are repeatedly presented as tools to achieve harder interests like a strong market economy to expand the internal market and foster internal political and economic stability. Indeed, stability and a well-functioning market economy are deemed key interests for the EU in many cases superceding value-based motivations. In that sense, the EU presses for fundamental democratic, political and economic reforms to achieve economic growth and stabilise the countries for EU accession, bearing in mind that one of the Copenhagen criteria is the ability to compete in the market economy. Besides, the EU documents under analysis bear repeated mention of enlargement being a key **strategic interest** for the EU and the candidate countries as such. Strengthening values such as the rule of law and political liberties consequently becomes a strategic interest, when it results in combatting corruption, limiting state capture and increasing equality. Moreover, from the Union side, supporting the Western Balkan's accession is also centred on ensuring their support in managing migration flows through the so-called Balkan route and the fighting terrorism. Moreover, the support of the candidates' economic development is also presented as a geostrategic investment and a strategic interest for the EU, since economic growth increases stability on the continent. The latter was the most frequently interest mentioned throughout the interviews. The indication of enlargement being a **geopolitical** investment reaffirms the European concern over the growing influences of third countries exerting malign influence in

the region: "*there's no vacuum in nature. So, when we are not present, actively present, then we will prolong enlargement and some other actors will be our place, which is actually indeed happening through economic investments on behalf of China and some other means by Russia*" (Interview EP1).

This ego analysis has shown that for the EU both values and strategic interests converge on enlargement. Initial indicators imply that value-based roles serve as an initial motivator providing the general framework for enlargement and providing the key unit for measuring progress with rule of law, while the interest-driven role seems to reflect the long-term motivators since values are seen as tools for economic and political transformation and the fighting of corruption and state capture. Strengthening EU values like transparency, accountability and the rule of law has the potential to support the fight against corruption and state capture, which is one of the most significant issues all over the region. Reduced corruption, then, improves the attractiveness of the candidate countries for foreign investments. Since the EU countries are regularly (among) the most active investors in the region, this reflects the EU's strategic, and economic interests.

Role Expectation

The *alter* perspective, or the role expectation to the EU's enlargement policy is largely detailed through publications of newspaper articles, as well as through interviews with experts from the Montenegrin side of the enlargement negotiations. Consequently, this analysis will account for two sides to the role expectation medallion: the expectations held by the negotiating partners and their societies, as well as the expectations held by third parties, opinion makers and media.

The expectations towards the EU are largely centring around the EU's capacity to be credible and engaged in its enlargement policy and attempts to support reforms in the candidate countries. In this sense, societal actors in Montenegro are keen on emphasising the relevance of not only supporting reforms at a political level but also on a societal through more direct engagement with Civil Society Organisations (CSO). EU political actors grant credibility and authority to incumbent political leaders if they meet exclusively with the current government and leave aside the opposition or other actors of the political and societal sphere. In other words, concerns voiced by Montenegrin Civil Society related to how "*the EU was understanding stabilisation in the wrong manner. Stabilisation does not refer to being supportive of the authorities with whom you can have direct and very quick communication. Stabilisation means helping the entire society to be more inclusive, to be sustainable etc. So basically, previous approaches, stabilisation of the EU has brought something that we all call stabilitocracy. This is neither democracy nor stability.*" (Interview ME1)

In that sense, cynics argue this stabilitocracy helps keep the Western Balkans at arm's length because it will likely prevent the deeply rooted reforms necessary for eventual EU accession. As alluded to in a previous chapter, not only does this political engagement support anti-democratic tendencies but also the very set-up of the conditionality policy supports anti-democratic tendencies of corruption and state capture in the candidate countries (Richter & Wunsch, 2020). Hence, the first key role expectation is the support of a pluralist society in line with Art. 2 TEU by engaging with civil society actors and a wider range of political actors besides the incumbent government to include as large a share of society in the reform process as possible. The latter is also crucial, as well implemented reforms to accommodate EU conditionality may contribute to breaking monopolies and the informal networks established by those in power.

Besides, EU integration is also perceived as a highly geopolitically charged process. Designing the policy as a geopolitical process instead of a value-based one could help Europe project strength to its rivals and other states competing for influence in the region. Concerns such as food security, influence spheres, war mongering Russia and encroaching China should make Europe assertive enough that the integration of the Western Balkans, as well as the Association Trio should hold value in its own right and strengthen the EU politically in its conflict with its rivals. By integrating these countries, the EU would issue a statement that it is willing to defend its vision of a world order based on values, human rights and rules based multilateralism. In this sense, the quick integration of Bulgaria and Romania – despite the frequent criticism of that enlargement having been premature – was a strong move geopolitically, since it supported the geopolitical claim of Europe in those countries and supported stability on the continent at large. With this in mind, economic considerations should be put on the back burner. Economically "they will catch up" (Gotev, 2022).

Consequently, this second key role expectation is that enlargement should be dominated by geopolitical concerns and be considered a guarantor for stability on the European continent. By establishing a stable Europe, this stability will have implications for the larger geopolitical scope. Being assertive in the immediate neighbourhood will allow Europe to be equally stronger in designing, protecting and maintaining a world order in its image

Thirdly, political will has been frequently named as a concern that third parties and WB state and society are concerned with from the EU side. Enlargement fatigue is a concept determined and discussed far and wide. Candidate countries are faced with the daunting task of implementing the necessary reforms for EU accession, which change the state structure and mentality in a way that one interviewee likened to "*changing completely the mentality of the people and society […]*

You can compare it with a personal. For example, if you are trying to change something that you don't like about yourself. That's horribly difficult. And that' s what we are trying to do as a society" (Interview ME2). This change is difficult enough, but in addition to this, candidates are faced with a political will that is very much in doubt. Regularly, EU officials and representatives of national governments issue comments putting into question enlargement and whether there is a place for new countries in the EU (e.g. Macron's 'European Political Community', Juncker's 'no enlargement until 2020' etc.).

This rhetoric implies a lack of political will, which erodes much of the work pro-European forces in the Western Balkans have put into advancing the reforms: "*that very moment all our attempts to push the government were completely broken*" (Interview ME2). While there is certainly a split between the Member States in terms of their political will and commitment to enlargement, there is also between the Member States on the one hand and the European Commission and Parliament, on the other hand, with the European institutions being far more proactive. The Commission leading the negotiations and the European Parliament frequently supporting them and passing resolutions in support of the enlargement process. Nevertheless, the split between the Member States and the European institutions leads to the candidate countries facing serious issues over whether there is indeed a carrot attached at the end of the stick, or whether the carrot is indeed just a picture of one held up to induce reforms. Consequently, the third expectation held by third parties and WB CSO is that the EU engage more credibly proving its political will with regards to enlarging, including credible benchmarks.

Finally, besides these concrete expectations held by third parties, implicit expectations of the EU's performance in enlargement are additionally based on its treaties and legislation. In this sense, "*Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to*

promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union." (Art. 49 TEU), this paragraph implies that irrespective of material or political interests, EU accession should be largely based on values. The membership criteria as laid out in the Council Conclusions in Copenhagen 1993 (or the Copenhagen Criteria) (European Council, 1993) already relativise this value heavy approach. According to this, besides values, the economic and political interests of the EU are key criteria for joining as well. This, as well as the increased focus in the EU's monitoring on alignment with key policy objectives in Foreign and Security Policy, may indicate a trend, wherein the EU's roles may be expected to offer less emphasis on value-based and more on interest-driven roles.

Table 2 below provides an overview of the different roles, their indicators and their respective key sources broken down into role conception and expectation.

	Value-based roles	Interest-driven roles	Key Sources
Role Conception	- Rule of law - Solidarity - Freedom of Media, Expression, Religion	- Stability - Economic interests (state capture, corruption) - Migration & Terrorism	- Interviews (COM, EP1, EP2) - Documents (Appendix 3.1)
Role Expectation	- Support for pluralism - Enhanced credibility	Enlargement as geopolitical investment	- Interview (ME1, ME2) - Documents (Appendix 3.2)

Table 3 Roles and Indicators based on data

Obstacles to Accession and their Motivation

Based on the previously established roles, it is now relevant to analyse whether the EU indeed performs according to these roles, which role is dominant and whether or not they stand in conflict with each other, between expectation and conception or whether they are largely synergetic. By drawing on the interviews and reports by the European Commission, three key issues standing in the path of Montenegro's accession to the EU are identified and will serve as a basis for the analysis of role performance.

The prime concern agreed upon by both sides of the negotiating table relates to political factors. Principal among those is political instability. Since Milo Đukanović was voted out of office in 2020, the political landscape in Montenegro has been markedly unstable. While under Đukanović, Montenegro's status of democracy was questioned, he nevertheless had contributed a significant level of stability and an unquestionable Euro-Atlantic orientation. Since 2020, there have been difficult periods of government formations, boycotts of elections and most recently a caretaker government until the formation of the most recent coalition. This political instability is a key issue because of its inherent links to predictability in the enlargement negotiations. The

negotiation partner of an unstable system is less likely and willing to implement the necessary reforms that the EU may demand, because they have little motivation to engage in policies that pay off only over the long-term. On the other hand, it is also linked to the rule of law, which, as mentioned before, is the key metric of progress that Montenegro is judged against: "*no further chapters will be provisionally closed before [the interim benchmarks on the rule of law are] reached*" (European Commission, 2021, p. 2). This link lies in the weakness of state structures, which are susceptible to corruption (particularly in small states like Montenegro), which systematically undermines the rule of law. Finally, political instability also implies challenges with respect to another key issue: political will. Arguably, political will – on both sides – is one of the most fundamental obstacles on the way to accession. Political will is a key predictor of the extent to which the EU is willing to engage with Montenegro, on the one hand, and of the extent to which Montenegro is willing to implement the necessary reforms on the other. The former of the concerns have been repeatedly mentioned to be one of the key issues that the EU perceives in Montenegro. Consequently, it is here that the EU is engaging with Montenegro.

However, the degree of instability may also reflect a lack of presence by the EU. Both political stability and political will are issues that the EU has all the means of addressing, but so far has failed to do so for the most part. Indeed, an enhanced engagement with the region on a societal, as well as political level would go a long way in showing that the EU indeed has the political will to let Montenegro join the Union and support it in finding its way. In the meantime, the ambiguous strategy employed over the last years has led to an ever-increasing number of Montenegrins being doubtful about their European future. This, naturally, does not support the building of confidence and the will necessary to impose reforms as deeply rooted as the reforms necessary for EU accession.

Besides the strictly political factors, corruption is one of the most persistent features common to all of the Western Balkan countries. This is where the motivation for enlargement shifts to a more interest-driven, material-based nature. Nevertheless, it remains tightly linked to political will. The current system of Montenegro shows many features of widespread corruption and state capture. The elite has little incentive to comply with EU requirements. To do away with those, it requires effective and persistent pressure from civil society and the EU itself to enact the reforms necessary to combat corruption and state capture. Therefore, it is in the EU's very own strategic interest to provide a credible accession perspective, to empower pro-European civil society to mobilise against the corrupt practices of the political elite and informal structures. Conversely, the opposite severely undermines any progress made. When former Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker famously announced a halt to enlargement after Croatia's accession, it severely affected the societal efforts to move candidate countries closer to accession: "*by saying there will be not no enlargement until 2020, that's what Juncker said at some point and that very moment all our attempts to push the government were completely broken because... and there are a lot of similar comments that EU politicians are making, and I think by doing that they are not fully aware of their responsibilities as to European politicians*." (Interview ME2). These statements effectively encourage the consolidation of corrupt practices and state capture. Further, they prevent any effective action against it and strengthen the forces supporting the consolidation of corrupt elites and orientation towards other powers – powers like Serbia, Russia or China.

This obstacle is by far the clearest example of a heavily interest-driven forum for EU action. Key actors attempting to exert influence in Montenegro are China, Russia and to a lesser extent Saudi Arabia and Turkey. China's involvement is seen as highly critical by a large number of European actors and has resulted in a very problematic situation of economic dependence for

Montenegro. Indeed, Montenegro built its first-ever motorway from Bar to the border with Serbia. The loans granted to Montenegro from China, however, perceived initially as a no-strings-attached kind of deal, now has put Montenegro in the position that it struggles re-paying the €1 bn debts in light of the economic crises as a result of the COVID pandemic and the Ukraine war. While Montenegrins tend to downplay the impact of this economic dependence and increasing ties, Western leaders see this development as highly critical.

Besides Chinese influences, Serbia and Russia jointly are a serious source of contention. Naturally, the war in Ukraine may complete change this, and the extent to which the war in Ukraine impacted Russia's means of influence in its *sphere of influence* (sic) is an interesting and relevant research venue, but not appropriate in this context. In any case, the Montenegrin identity is a very young one. Within regions, towns, villages, families, and friendships, there are significant cleavages between Serbian and Montenegrin identities. While there is a clearly growing trend towards nationalism (cf. rejected independence referendum 1992 and accepted referendum 2006), Serbia still holds a significant influence over Montenegrin politics, with roughly 28% of the Montenegrin population identifying as Serbian (2011). This leeway causes problems for the European orientation of Montenegro for two reasons: on the one hand due to Serbia's proximity to the Russian regime and on the other due to what Aleksandar Vucic has coined "Greater Serbia". While the Serbian population now has a majority against EU accession, the extent to which this popular opinion is replicated in Montenegro is disputed. On the other hand, what is not disputed, is Serbia's ambitions in the region. "Greater Serbia" or "Serbian World" aims at uniting all ethnic Serbs in the Western Balkans in one country with Vucic as its leader and Belgrade its capital. It comes as little surprise that other states in the region are not approving of those ambitions. Indeed, it does not stoke confidence in ideas like the *Open Balkan Initiative,* which proposes an economic

union akin to the EU for the Western Balkans as a *dress rehearsal* (to remain in the role theory theatre allegory) preparing for EU membership.

One interviewee commented, "*there is no vacuum in nature*" (Interview EP1), which is the concern held by *the West*. In this sense, the lacking political will from the European side made way for engagement from other sides. The geopolitical investment made in the midst of the enlargement fervour of the mid-2000s by admitting Bulgaria and Romania is considered by many to be a big mistake: In national debates, Bulgaria and Romania are frequently pinpointed as problematic EU member states, because of corruption and abuse of social security systems. Even the European Court of Auditors did not deem them ready for EU membership at the time (Gotev, 2016). Nevertheless, allowing their accession proved the EU's ambition to be a serious player in the area and contributed to stabilising the region. Moreover, allowing Slovenia, Bulgaria and Croatia to join the EU acted as a symbolic gesture that the EU is indeed open to the remaining countries of the Western Balkan. This is the path that the EU should follow according to observers: If the EU indeed wants to ensure stability in the region, maintain access to the Balkan markets, defend and promote its values and prevent additional armed conflicts, it should perceive enlargement as a geopolitical process. Supporting the notion of an interest-driven process in this sense.

The three issues outlined in this section, issues of political, economic and external dimensions, show that the EU's actions in enlargement are highly situation-dependent concerning the extent to which its actions are based on one role or another. For the most part, the roles appear to build up on one another: the political obstacles indicate that the EU employs the value-based role to maintain some strategic interests such as stability and an avoidance of armed conflict. Moreover, strengthening value-based approaches would support its interest in reducing corruption and state capture. On the other hand, in the external dimension, it is argued that it is in the EU's

very own interest to engage in enlargement. By emphasising an interest-driven approach, it can safeguard its own values **and** strategic interests on a larger scale.

Role Conflict

Having thus outlined how the distinct roles inform the EU's performance with regard to those three broad obstacles in enlargement, this section will turn towards dissecting the extent to which there may be occurring role conflict and the implications that conflict has on policy.

As mentioned above (see

Role Theory), there are two broad types of role conflict: inter- and intra-role conflict. A key inter-role conflict lies in the overarching theme of influence vs. values in enlargement: Observers and the EU alike are in a constant struggle to determine the extent to which one of the two finds dominance over the other. On the one hand, rule of law is the key metric according to which the European Commission measures the candidates' progress. On the other hand, given the lengthy negotiation process, the EU runs the risk of losing any good will that may have been extended by the candidates toward their eventual accession. Consequently, there is a conflict here between the EU's long-term geopolitical interests and its identity as a value-based organisation. Moreover, using the rule of law as a key-value and measuring unit for the negotiation process opens another venue for conflict, insofar as an inherent characteristic of the rule of law is the difficulty of measurement: *"[The Rule of Law is] not that operationalised. So, you can't objectively say how much is enough. […] Is it 5 cases of organised crimes? 20 cases?"* (Interview ME2). This opens the door for political decision-making and therefore feeds into the larger debate on deepening and widening. Conversely, insisting on the technicalities of the enlargement process with no concrete time frame has the potential to discourage political reform and the willingness of the candidates to comply with the most crucial value-based reforms. Thus, this conflict may lead to a deterioration in both dimensions: the interest-driven and value-based one.

With respect to intra-role conflicts, there are conflicts found in both roles. To begin with, despite employing a value-based rhetoric, the *ego* role conception of the value-based role focuses significantly on the obligations of the candidate countries in the negotiations and for a long time has failed to consider how the EU itself may contribute to a credible perspective. By invoking normative aspects at face value alone, it has over time failed to convince its negotiating partners that the carrot remains at the end of the stick. While the *alter* role conception emphasises the role

of credibility in the value-based role expectation process, this is largely absent on the conception side, resulting in a mismatch.

On the side of interest-driven roles, there is a considerable intra-role conflict between geopolitical interests and economic interests. As regards the latter, economic interests are closely linked with concerns over the widespread state capture and corruption in the candidate countries, including Montenegro. Preparing candidate countries to bear the duties of an EU member state including competing in the market is one of the key tasks of the enlargement policy. On the other hand, it is of immense importance for the EU to tie the candidates close to it, in order to avoid them falling into the traps of other powers. For the stability on the European continent, as well as European unity, it is of crucial importance to ensure that the immediate neighbourhood of the EU does not stray too far from EU influence toward Russia and China. In this sense, several observers have remarked that economic interests (and value-based considerations by implication) should be put on the backburner in favour of a hard geopolitical *realpolitik*. In light of the war in Ukraine, arguments have risen in frequency claiming that economic dependence is changed more easily than political dependence and that the long-term cost of having countries in the Western Balkan orient themselves towards China or Russia will outperform the costs of supporting their economic catch-up. Moreover, the conflict between economic and geopolitical interests is argued to represent a conflict between short- and long-term gains. Moreover, considering the EU's ambitions to be a geopolitical actor, it is crucial to first get the neighbourhood in order. As a strong regional actor, the EU will be more capable to project its power on a larger scale and be an influential global player.

At the moment, the EU finds itself emerging from an enlargement related slumber after years of fatigue. Russia's return to realist politics of spheres of influence has triggered some degree

of reassessment over the EU's own sphere of influence. At the same time, the role conflicts outlined above trigger are likely to have contributed to the EU's sense of paralysis in the last few years. As outlined in the theory chapter, political actors have an inherent desire for policy stability and role conflicts tend to lead to initially ambiguous or undecisive policy. The enhanced debates on enlargement seem to indicate some degree of policy change to accommodate the transforming external circumstances. Montenegro, as the frontrunner of the current accession process, stands to benefit from this situation. The new government may offer an impetus for increased reforms. Indeed, this new government has strong incentives to pursue reforms since one of the chief motivators to oust the previous one was the stagnating progress in enlargement negotiations. In any case, compared to the previous Commission the increased attention to the candidate countries appears to indicate a growing awareness of the issues for a long time inherent to the enlargement policy.

Role Conflict, Performance and Enlargement in Context

The previous section outlined how values and interests motivate the EU's actions in enlargement. This section now is going to discuss the implications of the findings. To begin with, it is clear that enlargement remains in crisis. For years, the EU has been stuck focussing on internal and external crises while neglecting its immediate neighbourhood and the implication of those crises for the countries of the Western Balkan. Nevertheless, recent years have given an impetus for increased integration. In particular the war in Ukraine caused both sides to reassess their positions on enlargement: the EU is aware that there is "no vacuum in nature" (Interview EP2). If it does not engage with its candidate countries, it will likely lose them to Russia losing relative influence in the region. At the same time, the Western Balkan countries themselves are struggling

with the flipside of that question, namely the broad question of where to align: Euro-Atlantic, Russian or Chinese orientation? Whereas Serbia seems to be more inclined to choose the Russian perspective, Montenegro appears inclined towards the Western perspective.

While the most recent Montenegrin government appears motivated to achieve real progress in the negotiations, deeply rooted systemic issues remain, severely affecting the enlargement process. Among the most notable of these issues lies enlargement fatigue. Employing a largely interest-driven approaching to enlargement may indeed offer an exit from the prevalent issues of enlargement fatigue. While its origins – both enlargement and accession, are manifold, emphasising that it is in both the EU's and the candidate's strategic interests to pursue enlargement can create a trigger for a renewed dynamism in enlargement. Current discourse from the Montenegrin side is already expressing renewed optimism in light of the new government and of the renewed interest-based enlargement dynamic in light of the Ukraine war. Now, while the European Commission has made it clear that even in the current geopolitical situation, there would be no shortcuts, emphasising the place held by values in enlargement, the geopolitical situation nevertheless has the potential to incentivise enlargement critical member states to rethink their position and support a stronger approach to integrating the Western Balkans. Because, whereas enlargement critical states like France for example prefer a deepening of the Union before widening, ensuring the continued ability to the act of the EU, they may nevertheless prefer the Western Balkans in a slightly worse functioning EU over losing all influence held over the region to other influences.

Likewise, the 'Big Bang' enlargement of 2004 and 2007 is usually what caused the understanding that enlargement is the EU's most successful foreign policy. While many other critical foreign policy moments came and passed with little decisive action by the EU, in

enlargement, the added value of the EU became visible. The EU managed to support a rapid transformation in the CEEC from communist satellite states to functioning members of the EU. This enlargement, although more than doubling the EU in size, went by largely unquestioned. This near-unanimous support had two main components: a new geopolitical situation and a geopolitical vacuum through the fall of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, there was decisive, value-based rhetorical action that impeded organised opposition to widening the Union. These two factors mirror the dichotomy of roles outlined in this thesis and, similarly, they are found to a lessened degree in the Western Balkans. The Russian war of aggression resulted in a radically changed European continent. As written above, states are in a new position of having to make a core decision on whether to align with Russia or the EU. In this sense, by attempting to expand its territory, Russia has created a new sense of vacuum in parts of Europe. Thereby forcing states to commit where they previously toed the line. Conversely, the changes brought upon Europe by the fall of communism, exemplified by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, will likely be remembered as more significant than the war on Ukraine. Consequently, the new geopolitical situation in 2022 is radically different, but not quite as different as the one in 1990.

On the other hand, the decisive rhetorical action that supported the accession of the Central and Eastern European countries continues to be mostly missing. While there are indications that more emphasis is being paid to the Western Balkans, there is no sense of rhetorical entrapment fast-forwarding their accession. Hence presenting a certain cognitive dissonance of emphasising a value-based approach, but not fully committing to it. On the other hand, the degree of rhetorical entrapment employed preceding the 2004 enlargement, may be a unique case, because the CEEC were undoubtedly *European.* The case of Turkey shows that rhetorical entrapment does not always occur. The cases of Turkey and Iceland further show that the enlargement policy does not always

result in accession. Conversely, rhetorical entrapment is being employed arguing with highly normatively and emotionally charged words that Ukraine is fighting for Europe and that the blood of the thousands of Ukrainians dying in the war should give them the right of joining the EU. This highly value-based, emotionally-charged claim resonates far throughout Europe and at the forefront, political actors are struggling in refuting this argument. However, no such argument or discursive strategy is being employed for or by the Western Balkans. Thus, rhetorical action is not dead and rhetorical entrapment may still be employed, but in the case of Montenegro, proponents of enlargement are yet to find the right angle to support its accession.

Montenegro is, moreover, riddled with corruption expressed through, among others, state capture. These are structures that even the most motivated governments are likely going to struggle in removing. Furthermore, they also severely inhibit any real progress in accession reform. Some experts compare the changes required by enlargement related reforms to the changes a person may undergo to alter some characteristics about themselves they are unhappy with. In this scenario, some require outside help to support the reform. In this sense, the EU's enlargement policy may represent this outside force that incentivises the person in question to change for the better. Even if enlargement is a long way off, it remains in the very own interest of the states to undergo the reforms prescribed by the EU to achieve a more equal and democratic society with a rigid rule of law footing. In the role theory framework, corruption is related to both material interests and value-based ideals. On the one hand, corruption affects the performance of a state as a stable, market economy. In this sense, directly conflicting with European economic interests. It is in no state's interest to introduce more states riddled with corruption into the EU. On the other hand, corruption is also closely linked with concerns over the rule of law and transparency, both of which are key values the EU aims to promote. The former is the key metric of progress in EU accession, while

the latter has emerged over time as a crucial aspect of the EU's day to day function. Insofar, corruption is an example of the EU's roles in enlargement working hand in hand.

Despite being a repeatedly emphasised key metric for measuring progress in the accession talks, the rule of law features remarkably little definition. This may be either an oversight or a deliberate play to further politicise the enlargement process. Arguably, there are means to operationalise the rule of law, like the rule of law checklist of the Venice Commission for instance, but in the context of enlargement negotiations, there appear to be no such concrete operationalisations as indicated by an interviewee familiar with the negotiations on the rule of law. According to the interviewees, this is largely perceived as yet another way of inserting control by EU member states into the enlargement negotiations, indicating an additional dimension to the value/interest role dichotomy, namely that within the roles themselves, there may be additional intra-role conflict concerning the extent to which enlargement is being supported.

In other words, this might be an indicator that largely positive interest-driven and value-based motivations are nevertheless divided over whether they lead to supporting enlargement or not. States and individuals exhibiting traits of pro-Europeanism and supporting European values can nevertheless be staunchly opposing enlargement, because they fear that admitting more states from Southeastern Europe may lead to a further undermining of European values. On the other hand, supporters of European strategic autonomy, of the European internal market and other material interests may be nevertheless opposed to admitting the Western Balkan states out of fear that they would contribute to a further policy cleavage about foreign policy preferences (e.g. Montenegrin dependence on China or Serbia's proximity to Russia), or a weakened and more systematically corrupt European economy through their admission.

On a different note, the EU's chief policy instrument currently employed to incentivise the necessary reforms is conditionality. However, as explained above conditionality is not without flaws. Consequently, it may be time for the EU to reconsider the use of conditionality for relatively well-advancing candidate states. A well-advancing state may indeed rather benefit from softer approaches to enlargement. As argued by some observers, it is now less the EU that can exact the relevant changes, but up to the states. Hence, a steady process of socialisation may be more promising than solely the employment of conditionality. Moreover, this would further support the notion outlined above that a more value-based approach has the capacity of supporting stability and thereby having values support both the normative identity and strategic interests in the long run. (In-)formal involvement of well-advanced candidate states in EU projects and initiatives would go a long way toward proving the EU's credibility, which is one of the key issues from the candidate's perspective right now. After years of fatigue and stagnating progress, the public in Montenegro and the other candidates are becoming increasingly sceptical about the honesty of the "European perspective". Many are doubting the reality of enlargement. The involvement of candidates in EU projects would show the willingness of EU states to actually integrate the Balkans into the polity and politics of the EU and will allow domestic governments in the Western Balkans to implement additional reforms. On the other hand, a more regular point of contact will allow for informal adjustment of the candidates' politics to the EU and for the EU to adjust to the actors of the candidates on many different levels.

Finally, enlargement has been termed a key policy area in which the nature of the EU as a polity is distinguishable. This notion was the starting point of this research and provides the fundamental question that this analysis aims to tackle. What this division expresses about the inner conflict of the EU itself. Moreover, the key tenets of NPE and EPE crucially factor into the

discussion over the extent to which the EU acts in a manner that is value-based, interest-driven or some combination thereof. Furthermore, a question remains regarding the extent to which the EU's performance and the role conflicts indicated above relate to Civilian, Ethical or Normative Power Europe. The EU as a unique norm and treaty-based actor offers a unique perspective to its candidates and neighbours. By placing a stark emphasis on political criteria and the rule of law, it places significant emphasis on diffusing its norms to the candidate countries in the tradition of NPE. Conversely, even in geopolitical obstacles to accession, the EU features clear cases of being motivated by ethical considerations. Engaging in actions that are driven by concrete material interests is nevertheless frequently based on advancing the goal of norm diffusion and supporting democracy, the rule of law and stability on the continent.

Conclusion

This thesis has laid a foundational stone for applying the role theory framework to the enlargement negotiations. In this case between the EU and Montenegro, while also employing a larger perspective over issues facing the whole region. The two key roles: value-based and interest-driven, provide valuable insight into the EU's motivation in implementing its enlargement policy.

Discussions about the accession of the Western Balkans have been accompanying the EU for well over 20 years now. The initial vague promise made in 2000 and 2003 was soon followed up on by the accession of Slovenia, Bulgaria and Croatia. The countries of the Western Balkan though fell into a pit of disregard for many years. While they were passively on some political agendas, they never took up any spotlight. Moreover, they encountered the misfortune of being candidates in the time period succeeding the 'Big Bang' enlargement and during a time ripe with crises of a wide scope of types. Besides the issues inherent to the economic and Eurozone, migration, Brexit and COVID crises, they also triggered the side effect of the EU looking inward and putting enlargement on the back burner. This was further accompanied by concerns over the EU's ability to act in light of a vastly increased number of member states. Concerns over the EU's absorption capacity held by political leaders were reflected in academic literature and while the extent to which enlargement effectively affected the EU's capacity to act is doubtful, it has nevertheless been a defining feature of academic debate over the past years.

Internal enlargement related conflicts persist not only with regard to absorption capacity and enlargement fatigue. Divergences occur with regards to widening and deepening, which is a cleavage largely existing between member states and to some extent between the European Council and the European Commission. Finally, a dividing line as regards enlargement is the one that was subject in this thesis: values and interests. With the aid of the role theory framework, it

was shown how different European actors as well as actors from Montenegro perceive the EU's roles and consequently its identity as regards enlargement. Both values and interests play their own significant roles and are employed to differing degrees in different contexts. Insofar, this relates to the second sub-research question, that both interest-driven and value-based roles motivate enlargement. Moreover, role conflict is found, firstly, in determining how these roles stand in relation to each other and which one is overall dominant. Moreover, the lacklustre operationalisation of the rule of law as one of the values gives way to a politicisation of enlargement and increased conflict between values and interests. Within each role, on the other hand, conflict is found with respect to the difference between conception and expectation of the roles, as well as the divergence of different interests. Finally, both value-based and interest-driven roles have the potential to be employed in an enlargement sceptical fashion, which would result in another key intra-role conflict for both.

In the face of obstacles to enlargement, different obstacles require different roles as they are distinctly capable of tackling those issues. The three particular types of obstacles identified show how a flexible application can be promising in finding solutions to the most pressing issues preventing effective progress. Overall, there are clear indicators that the interests-values dichotomy is not as clear cut as was assumed at the outset of this thesis. There are certain areas and fields where instead of being in conflict they appear to be rather harmonious, building up on and supporting each other. Nevertheless, it remains a difficult question to debate which one is more likely to dominate the enlargement related identity of the EU. While there are notable divisions between emphases on interests and values, similarly relevant are divisions between wideners/deepeners and sceptics.

There are significant issues faced during the research process that is partly due to the general structure of writing a thesis and partly missteps done by the author while planning and executing the thesis. To begin with, it took significant time to prepare the interview guide, and have that approved by this thesis' supervisor and by the university's ethics board. Then it also took considerable time to contact the relevant experts, convince them to agree to the interview and set a date. Moreover, the overall political context was a huge obstacle to me, as many of the experts on the EU side are working on both Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood, as in Ukraine. The latter, naturally, caused them to be even busier than they would usually be and hence some politely refused to give interviews to Master's level students.

Secondly, the set-up of the European Politics and Society Master's made it harder to start working earlier on the thesis, as there was no way to establish contact with a supervisor early on. Besides this, a significant issue was also the lack of experience in working with interviews as the main source of data, as it proved that the data obtained from the interviews was indeed valuable, but insufficient for a more well-rounded analysis. Had the interviews been conducted earlier, there would have been the option to have two rounds of interviews with many of the interviewees to contrast the given data at different stages of the research process.

Lastly, the limited number of interviews (5), also means that there is a lack of generalisability in this research. Moreover, triangulation proved difficult as there was little secondary data available focussing on the themes of enlargement negotiations, roles and identity. Therefore, much of what has been written here would need to be taken with a grain of salt. The interview transcripts attached in the appendix can provide some insight into the context, but additional research in this field will be crucial in order to confirm the arguments proposed.

Regardless, in light of the political developments facing Europe with the war in Ukraine and the geopolitical *Zeitenwende* (engl: turn of times, as termed by German chancellor Olaf Scholz), it becomes ever more important for Europe to consider what to do with its immediate neighbourhood. It is therefore pertinent to analyse the EU's policy performance using, among others, the role theory framework to better understand the dichotomy of values and interests, their intertwining and conflicts. Moreover, for a better understanding of EU policy performance, a more nuanced approach to the EU as a whole is necessary. For instance, the degree to which individual member states and institutions are drivers or brakepersons of enlargement and their relative power over one another within the complex negotiating framework of the EU would be a crucial venue for research. Moreover, it has been documented that the European Parliament is very capable of "*naming and shaming*" the Member States and the Commission into certain actions, but the extent to which this has been done in recent years has received little attention. To conclude, enlargement in 2022 is steadily rising in importance. Political leaders and academics need to rise to the occasion and support the process by, on the one hand, guiding and supporting the candidates towards EU membership and, on the other, providing the relevant backbone to this complex policy by approaching it from different theoretical, methodological and contextual angles.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Opening

- Can you explain to me in your words how you are involved in the enlargement process with the Western Balkans?
- How do you perceive the current progress of Montenegro to EU accession?
- Why do you think there has been no significant progress on enlargement, i.e. why has no candidate for accession managed to join the EU in soon to be 10 years?

Main Part

- Based on your work, what do you perceive to currently be the biggest obstacle to enlargement?
- On the flipside, what is the EU's biggest motivator for further enlargement?
- Do you believe the revised enlargement methodology will serve for a quicker accession process?
- Did backsliding on the rule of law by more recent member states like Poland or Hungary make the EU more hesitant to pursue enlargement with full energy?
- How do institutional concerns over the EU's decision-making capacities with 30 member states instead of 26 factor into actively nudging the negotiations forward?
- How does the presence of geopolitical rivals in the Western Balkans affect the EU's motivation to support the progress?
- How do geopolitical considerations and rivalries vis-à-vis China and Russia factor into how the EU defines its position?

Closure

- Do you personally believe that the next five years will see a new EU member state?
- After all we have talked about, is there something you consider pertinent to add?

- For my further research – is there an additional source – in the form of potential interviewees or other data - you could guide me to that could offer an additional valuable perspective on the research?
- Thank you very much!

Appendix 2: Interview Transcripts

COM

Interviewee COM refused to be recorded. Therefore, the data from that interview is based on notes

taken during it.

- Montenegro has all chapters open
- Interim benchmarks to be met for Rule of Law, Chapters 23 & 24
- Fight against corruption, money laundering
- Media Freedom + Reform of the judiciary (+ judiciary appointments)
- Coalitions of Pro-Russian/Serbian + Centre-Right + Centre-Left against DPS
- Instable government right now → Caretaker
- Hiccups in the implementation of sanctions
- Not grouped together – merit principle
- Montenegro most advanced among all WB countries
- Ukraine crisis may show that further engagement is needed
- Serbia aligned with UN GA resolution
- Serbia public opinion very pro-Russian
- Accession process about stability
- Perception of presence of foreign actors → cognitive dissonance
- Geopolitical rivalries: intensified efforts when other presence is detected, but reforms have be done → no shortcuts
- Attempt to anticipate vulnerabilities → food programmes, vaccine distribution
- Much funding for civil society, also of high relevance in accession process
- Funding for EED as well
- Joint Consultative Committee with civil society organisation
- Serbia: government attacking civil society organisations
- CSO well developed in Montenegro → Some CSO that resemble think tanks
- Some very relevant and present CS actors
- Most challenging is political factors → recent boycotts of parliament; rule of law → nepotism and state capture big issue
- Freedom of Expression → Attacks on journalists
- Lack of independence of public broadcasters
- Serbia: Many tabloids close to government

- Serbia and Russia sanctions → Revised enlargement methodology allow one country to block the opening/closing of any cluster of chapters
- Revised Enlargement Methodology: indeed has potential to speed up enlargement process.
    - Of late the dynamic has slowed down (e.g. Montenegro has all chapters open and nothing of note is happening right now)
    - Methodology motivates candidates to focus reforms and intensifies engagement from EU and candidate side
    - Guarantees one intergovernmental conference per year
    - More dynamic and predictable
- Institutional concern: Also the EU needs to be prepared. There will be no accession until decision-making rules are revised
- Poland + Hungary → Focus on Rule of Law for new candidates
- It's all about engaging/involving with Montenegro before stability falls apart. Enlargement creates stability in the region and for the continent at large
- Remaining issues: Freedom of religion. Small country → low administrative capacity. Highway Financing.

EP1

LP: Great. Yeah, so basically the topic of my research is to look at what motivates enlargement or what motivates the EU to enlarge and, in that context, I'm looking at the Western Balkans and more specifically at Montenegro as a case study of a candidate country. And it's – (EP1: Yes, please continue.). I was firstly interested in how you perceive the current status, the current progress of Montenegro and its path to EU accession

EP1: Um, okay, just a very short introduction. I was really, as I told you, glad that you got in touch with me. Since, me myself, I was a PhD Student for eight years exploring the role of ideas in politics and my case study was western Balkans as well and I also have to do some of the so-called elite interview techniques and some other things that are really hard to obtain so I'm very much willing to help and hope hoping to help you since I've been in the same situation. Regarding enlargement - always in our work we cite and quote Montenegro as it's now nearly a cliche, but it's continued continuously used as the best case as example the most advanced country in the Western Balkans. The first one to join, you know, Montenegro has always been given the success story in the Western Balkans. All in all? I mean, me as well I also perceive it as a success story compared to other countries in the neighbourhood, but I'm not quite certain that all this positive remarks would come to fruition or would result in a speedy accession process, unfortunately. Do you need to know something more specific? Please ask.

LP: Um yeah, I think that's also something that I've been hearing a lot. Is that Montenegro is currently considered the frontrunner among the Western Balkan countries. But also, there have been some issues in the recent past. I think one person commented that more issues with freedom

of religion and freedom of expression, being under attack to some extent. What do you perceive as a big, as a big obstacle? As an obstacle to enlargement in the case of Montenegro, and maybe also a larger trend in the Balkans.

EP1: Well, there are two aspects to this question. There is more like an internal and external threat. It's like in a SWOT analysis. The internal threat coming from inside the country. I think it is that change of government. We know Mr Djukanovic was, some people even said that Montenegro was not in a state of full democracy, because for so many years, Mr Djukanovic was in power in some way or the other. But one thing was for sure with him, that he had a very strong Euro-Atlantic agenda, and his government had no doubt about NATO orientation and EU orientation and where Montenegro should belong, while I'm not quite certain that with the current government, no matter what they might pay lip service to: NATO EU and etc. But you know, there is a very strong pro-Serbian factor in the government. And you know, the general lack of Serbian proper alignment with EU CFSP and even now with the war in Ukraine and all that, Serbia is the only European country that is not supporting the sanctions and is the only European country that is I'm not counting Belarus of course but it's the one that is more non-compliant with the EU FS Policy. And this also reflects on Montenegro because it's, unofficial of course. I mean, this is not official but it's a government that is very much, kind of, you know the opposition In Montenegro. The former opposition was Pro-Serbian and pro-Russia the relations with Serbia and that's why I think, honestly speaking that is a factor that hinders the euroatlantic integration of Montenegro. No matter this is not on the news, no matter this is not. They would always declare they are supporting, another things is how much they are working towards it? Especially I mean if this is not the case for EU membership, this would be the case for - I mean they are NATO members, but

this government is not so keen on this NATO Membership, this is my impression. And the same with the role of the orthodox church. The Serbian orthodox church that has been used to stir up internal conflicts within the country. You are probably following the ??? of the patriarch in the old capital Cetinje, which he was put by helicopter against the protest by people, because They want to have, you know, fighting for their Montenegrin orthodox church that is separate from the Serbian orthodox church. So, to conclude this, I think that Serbian meddling in Montenegro's affairs. And through this also, government is a problem for EU integration.

LP: So that, Is that also. So, the Serbia's meddling as you put it, that's the external dimension that you mentioned.

EP1: Yes. It's external and internal at the same time. Because I'm not saying that the government in Podgorica is a proxy to the Serbian government, which is the case to Republica Srbska in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It's not the same. But there is a strong connection I would say between... I mean because now there Is a slight change in the government, but those last governments after Mr Djukanovic fell out of power, those recent governments have a stronger connection to Belgrade that's for sure, and they are, I wouldn't say aligning policies, but I would say consulting. And this is The external and internal threat at the same time, because you know there is this project called Srbski Mir, which means Serbian world, which is very common to Putin's Ruskie Mir, which means Russian world and this Srbski Mir, this project, actually, it envisions the creation of, they are not calling it a greater Serbia, but in a way connecting all Serbian lands. I mean culturally, economically whatsoever. But in Election This is also very close to the Milosevic idea of creating a greater Serbia and this includes parts of Montenegro - or not if not the

full country -, parts of Kosovo, where in northern Kosovo the Serbian minority lives, the whole Republica Srbska in Bosnia-Herzegovina, so this is something that directly threatens the territorial integrity of Montenegro. This is, I mean, you can read about this project Srbski Mir and what idea it has, because to some factors in Serbia, Montenegro is not a separate country or nation, but to some factor in Serbia, it's just part of the Serbian nation. And it's true that like 30 or 40 percent maybe 30 more or less, 30 nowadays of people born in Montenegro consider themselves as Serbs. But the larger majority of people in Montenegro self-identify as Montenegrins and in Montenegro, this is largely a political, not only an ethical but also political statement. Because one of my best friends was from Montenegro. They are all the same. They are from the same family from Podgorica, but their father self-identifies as Serbian and the mother as Montenegrin, one of the brothers as Serbian and my friend as Montenegrin. That's why I'm saying this thing runs deeply within families. No matters, they are the same people, I mean they were not born in Belgrade, they have the same kind of roots, history and development. Some people even within families in Montenegro have different ethnic identities and this is changing as well. The more Montenegro is independent, the more there's the less there is influence from Belgrade and the more this Montenegrin kind of nationhood is strengthened and the idea of independence. But there is a problem as I said from this external danger from this Mr. Vucic, Srbski Svet and the idea is that Montenegrin's are not a separate nation, but they can be, you know, be parked in some future, whatever, a large Serbian state or if not a large Serbian state, at least under a big economic or cultural influence. I don't know what they exactly envisioned through this project and how they see it working in other ???.

LP: That sounds a bit like the narrative that Putin employs with regards to Ukraine.

EP1: It's quite similar. And I know that the referendum in 2006, it was a very narrow margin. I think pro-dependence was something like 51 or 52% to 48 or 49. But since then, this has solidified and like now I as I told you like probably 60-70% of people altogether don't identify as Serbians and they don't favour, the Serbian Pro Serbian agenda, but you still have, at least one, third of people that have this kind of. I mean, I'm not saying that everybody that self-identifies as Serbian has this agenda, but at least you have at least 1/3 of people in Montenegro that self-identify as Serbians still. So, this is also a factor that can be exploited by other factors, other external factors.

LP: Okay. Okay. Okay, now it's taking step back to the enlargement process. This is very interesting to say the entire identity thing. Very fascinating. I never heard about this Serbian world. But what is your role in, within the parliament and the EPP group? And what is, what are you doing within the context of enlargement. How are you involved in the process?

EP1: I'm advisor to the EPP Group. I'm advisor in the foreign affairs Committee and all of us, like we are like five advisors and a couple of assistants. We are covering the whole world. So under my remit, I'm responsible for the four Western Balkan states, all like Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and I'm also responsible for some other states that I'm not discussing now, because like this is not the topic of the interview, but the role of an advisor in AFET in the EPP group is to actually work with members on reports, to propose amendments with them, to give them advise what is in line of The EPP group and what is not in line of the policy of the group, to co-ordinate with assistants of the members, and with members on different issues and to provide information when asked upon request. We are quite flexible, quite independently

working, but at the same time, there is the common, you know, EPP line, on certain issues. That is kind of guiding the work and Currently there is this four six Western Balkan reports at the same time That parliament is producing and for the Montenegro report it is Mr. Bilcik on the EPP side. So I'm working with his office and possible amendments. And actually, we have finalised now the amendments on the Montenegro report and we are waiting for a shadow meeting. I don't know how much you have been in the parliament and how familiar you are, after all the groups have made their amendments, then there is a shadow meeting, where from all the different political groups the members and advisors meet and then negotiate compromises out of those amendments and then those compromises and texts get voted in the AFET foreign affairs committee. If it's successful, then it goes to plenary and the whole report is then voted by all members and then it becomes the finished document.

LP: And so, the most crucial part of your role then is this report? This annual report?

EP1: Not really? I mean, this is just one aspect of it. Anything that, for example, you probably should understand it like anything that is dealing with our countries. (Yeah. Okay) and that could be the report, that could be any intervention. Anything that we are like the experts on certain countries and delegations, because there are also delegations in our unit, like this is something like Delegation for European Parliament Relations with Kosovo for example. This is separate from the committee where you do reports and you do substance work, while in the delegations parts there are representatives of these countries meeting with certain members and they have their own workings. So, anything that deals with these countries, the advisor is responsible for these countries. He has to, for example give advice to between 20 and 30 member.

The EPP members that are members in the AFET committee, which are like nearly 20 and the substitutes are like, I think 7 or 8. So, all in all for those 30 members, if there is some connection to, for example, I'm also responsible for Switzerland, for Andorra, and some other countries, not only Western Balkan states. If there is something that pertains to these regions and countries, you have to provide assistance and advise on, so it's not only reports, is more by country base.

LP: Okay. Okay. But um, so since I guess you're working right now heavily on that report, what is your perspective over the progress. Has there been any significant progress in either direction by Montenegro in the past year, since the last report?

EP1: Yes. Yes, there is a progress. Montenegro, but also there are some delays and especially the backslidings are precisely in this area of foreign policy alignment and also in the area of the stability of the institutions, because we are used to have very stable and predictable states with relatively stable institutions, but this is not the case now. Which is more unpredictable, you see with the change of government - I mean change of government is normal in democracies, but it's a quite unstable government. A relatively thin majority in parliament as well and also, like, you get this Bosniak, for example, minority party that wants to be part of the government and couldn't. There is a bit of misrepresentations in the current, in terms of democratic representation in the current democratic setup. And also, you have backsliding in terms of this Chinese influence about this [name of the highway] that Was financed by China with one billion dollars. And you know, this is a whole other story with China's economic coercion that now Montenegro cannot pay its debt and becomes more and more economically connected to China, because of this economic influence for this project and some other projects. So, there is also like a bit of a lack of progress

of organised crime and especially drug trafficking, cigarette trafficking, which is more of an issue for Montenegro. There was an action actually last year in the city of Mojkovac against cigarette smuggling, which was greeted by the report. There was an amendment for this. There will be an amendment for this one. But still, the problem of drug trafficking, of cigarette trafficking is significant for Montenegro. So, organised crime is a problem. Freedom of media, as with all Balkan countries is not on the highest level. So, there is a lot to be to be desired in in this area as well. So, I would also recommend that you connect, if you still have time, to the assistant of Mr Bilcik. (I, I emailed them, but I had - I didn't get a response from the office.) This is Laura. She is also, because she's working as EPP shadow rapporteur of Mr. Bilcik. She's the assistant Laura [Last Name] that is working on the report. So, all in all, I would say after a lot of kind of quite some few years of success and improvements, I would say, I'm not saying there's like, really, really big backsliding, but I would say there is backsliding in the progress of Montenegro.

LP: Okay. You mentioned Montenegro's, sort of, dependence on China and to some extent. How does this presence of geopolitical rivals to the EU like, China and Russia in the Balkans, does that effect, the EU's enlargement policy?

EP1: It does to a great extent. Because especially after the war inn Ukraine started, I mean there's always been this talk that we shouldn't leave space for China, turkey, Russia... Some even mention Saudi Arabia... Because there's no vacuum in nature. So, when we are not present, actively present, then we will prolong enlargement and some other actors will be our place, which is actually indeed happening through economic investments on behalf of China and some other means by Russia. And of course, Turkey through Muslim religion in those areas where in Bosnia,

in Kosovo, in some other areas, where Albania, where there is these Muslim majorities. So finally, the EU has, I think it was like a wakeup call. I mean, before it was more of a talk. We shouldn't do this and this but because to be honest, in a lot of members states and I would even name some of them like France and Denmark, even if it's not explicitly said, There is not much support of enlargement nowadays. And it's because some people in certain member states are against enlargement and of course politicians in those member states are trying to comply, not only with Brussels but also with attitudes in their respective national audiences and the electorate. So, all in all, my impression is that in some member states there's not a big enthusiasm for enlargement with Balkan states. But after this thing that happened with war in Ukraine, I think this will influence enlargement and it could speed up the process at least. For... I'm not saying that it will result in a very speedy acceptance of membership of certain members states, but it will definitely, in my opinion, speed up the, negotiation process for certain member states

LP: Yeah, and especially in the case of France, that was my understanding that especially under the presidency of Macron, there have been a lot of concerns about, especially in the council of the EU, to come to decisions where there's so much, you know, unanimity-based decision making. And a previous, interviewee of mine, suggested that there could not be any more enlargements before there have been thoroughly revised decision-making procedure, especially in the Council. What is your view on this?

EP1: There are, they were at the end of the last term and also, they were those views that the decision-making should be changed to not be for important things like unanimous, but there should be something like 2/3. There were different opinions like certain percentages or to have

different members States have different rights in a way like with some getting more weight, but none of those has come to fruition and I Don't think honestly that This can easily happen because actually the biggest value of the EU is actually That all member states have a say. So, on certain issues, as much can like Germany, say as the biggest member state that much can Malta say as the smallest member states. That's why in certain areas, this has given democratic legitimacy to the EU so far. But it's true that in certain aspects, this hinders some decisions on the EU level. But honestly, I don't think this could be changed easily especially by smaller member states. There should be, there would be a huge outcry and If something like this has been undertaken.

LP: Okay. And then a different perspective. How do you evaluate the effect that the revised enlargement methodology had on the enlargement process?

EP1: I Think that the revised methodology gives a chance to member states to really advance faster if they really want to do things and not simulate that they are doing things. But at the same time, it gives the member states the right to prolong much longer than the previous methodology. They can just say that something new has happened and they need to reopen something that is already closed. So, I think it's a double purposed thing. I wouldn't say I cannot actually say if it's going to speed up the process or speed it up, but I would say it gives more security to member states to control the speed of the process and to reopen it when they want. Even more, I would even say that it might actually prolong enlargement. Not so much speed it up. Maybe, only if the member states are really performing well and are really producing results, no one could kind of hinder the process but as we know the Balkan states are not performing so well as we would like to. So, this could be used, the small pace of reforms could be used to prolong the process.

I wouldn't say indefinitely, but just for minor reasons. That's my view on this. Probably, that's why Mr. Macron was happy to introduce this methodology, because it gives security that there is more control over the process of enlargement. Because before when you closed the chapter, it is done, you cannot reopen. And now you can. And this can, you know what it means. (Can potentially take go forever. In that circle.) Precisely. So, there is no yes or no to that question. It depends on the member states mostly now. So, the only tool the Balkan states can have in that is to really perform well. So, it is good in a way that it really like makes an incentive to perform better because now it's much easier to stop you because, when a chapter was closed in the past, you could stop performing well and now this is not the case, because you have to keep up the standard. So, in a way, it's producing reforms, but there is another obstacle that Member states can prolong indefinitely, so it depends. Depends on the will of member states and depends on the role of the applicant countries.

LP: Mm-hmm. Yeah. And one more question. How much do you believe that recent backslidings and more newer member states affect the enlargement process? If you look at Poland or Hungary or the rule of law concerns in those countries. Do those have any effect on the extent to which the EU is willing to really engage in enlargement?

EP1: I think, it does of course it does influence enlargement. Since many aspects, a new member states have made some decisions, especially you mentioned Hungary and Poland, you remember the budget that was held hostage. The new budget for the MFF. So, but it's not - it does affect the new enlargement countries, but I don't think it's the main obstacles, honestly. I think the main obstacle is the thing that I spoke earlier, the public opinion in certain member states. And I

don't know how much this has been influenced in general that they were too many new members for a shorter period of time. So, I don't know how much this is due to countries like Poland and Hungary, or it is more like a fatigue, enlargement fatigue of too many too soon. If you know what I mean. And also, this coupled with the immigrant crisis and all the things that happened recently too. I mean it's not new member states that - it's not their fault, but, you know, those immigrants that came from the wars in the Middle East, Syria and... They manage to instigate in societies this more conservative, more protective more, you know... And also, this COVID disaster that happened, you know. Those, all those factors, kind of work to solidify closing kind of attitudes in my opinion that they, in some member states, people become more concerned with how to repair our house, you know, before enlarging it. You know, this, you said some of your other respondents said that this deepening before enlarging. That we need to deepen and see how things are after Brexit, with all these crises, that we need to make the EU stronger within before expanding it more. So, I think it's more, I come. When you say enlargement fatigue, it's more like, because you double the size of countries for a very short time and this created, a completely new picture, and it's a more time of a reflection before many member states would like to experiment with even enlarging four. So, I'm not saying it's bad, I feel there is such a perception that we need to solidify within before expanding outside.

LP: Yeah, yeah. I, I read about the implicit bargain between deepeners and wideners and that that's essentially a consensus, that was broken before the 2004 enlargement. That was it.

EP1: You're right. Absolutely. If I just wanted to add sorry to interrupt you, I just wanted to add that the war in Ukraine could change things. It's too early to say is too early to tell, but I

think It could work as a wake-up call. And okay, we don't have too much of reflecting within, we need to speed up for the process of getting those countries in the heart of Europe on board with us, because you see what happens and what could happen. And I already hear this around me by members and people that the Western Balkan integration should be sped up.

LP: Hmm. Yeah, do you believe that this could that? I mean you we see already that there is a lot of solidarity all over Europe with Ukraine. Do you also think that this could then also lead to a change in the public perception, because you mentioned that some countries have a public opinion that is against enlargement? Maybe do you believe there could be a change in that as a consequence of the war?

EP1: Depends how this is presented by politicians in member states and by media. If this is connecting, and if this message can be well translated by a media through politicians that we need now to act fast. That we need to... There's no time for reflection but we need to act fast and change our perceptions to get these countries closer to us. If this is done Well... I don't think it will happen per se, on its own. It's - I think this there is work to be done in the member states, especially in those that are most against enlargement and that this message should be conveyed to those societies. And I think this could happen because most politicians that are dealing with enlargement, of course, are and not only with enlargement, see the grand picture and see that actually, those things are connected, and we cannot afford to have a black hole in the centre of Europe which leads to destabilisation of all others. There was this perception that we have all the time in order to wait. Now, there is the perc- I'm not saying if this is the case or not, it's just the perception. But now the perception is we don't have much to leave to vacuum. We have to act.

LP: Yeah, I mean it's a frequently said now that we are in a new era of geopolitics, so that could also mean a new era for EU enlargement

EP1: Yes, we never know that if we are going to have a new war, a cold war, iron curtain... We don't know how this will end. If we are going to get again divisions in Europe. I read somewhere that a new iron curtain is falling in the continent. But just the boundaries, the scope of this Iron Curtain goes to different countries now. Now with Eastern Europe being on the west. (Yeah) And, you know Russia, Belarus and some other countries on the other side. So, this might be the case, maybe we are witnessing at the moment, this new division of Europe for I don't say for decades to come but you never know.

LP: Hmm. Um, Okay. Okay. I'm pretty much out of my questions that I had noted down. Is there something that you would think would be relevant to add? That I haven't asked you.

EP1: I think for you it would be very much useful to read about two things: One is connected to Chinese Economic coercion. There is a very good paper on Chinese influence in the Western Balkans. I will try to find it for you, probably not today. I'm sure I had it somewhere. In the meantime, you could be looking yourself as well. It was something by EPRS and it was on Chinese economic influence in the western Balkans. It was like 60-70 pages. And it's country by country and i think it's going to be very useful to you, especially the part about Montenegro and how China is using its economic leverage to influence politics and policies. This is one thing and the second one, I am going to try to find an article on Srbski Mir. It was in the media, a newspaper

article in English about this Serbian world. And from this article, you can start digging more and exploring more, because I think to get to understand Montenegro and western Balkans better, It's not really possible without those two things. Yeah, Of course, Russian influence as well, but there are a lot of more information on this one. And Serbia, in some aspects is a proxy of Russia in terms of some foreign policies. So, if you read about, I think it's very important that you read about the Srpski Mir because it also... This is something that also relates to developments in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Montenegro, so those three countries. And it also allows to understand some processes, which are not very visible without this. So, I think it will help you to deepen your knowledge of why certain things happen in that way in Montenegro. And what could we do with such leverage

EP2

LP: And yeah. So, for my master's thesis, I am working on a topic related to the enlargement process, negotiations between the EU and the Western Balkans. And what interests me most of all is what motivates the EU to enlarge, especially to the Western Balkans right now, using Montenegro as a case study. I was initially looking at Serbia as a case study but given recent developments I'm not I've become uncertain how relevant the case Serbia may be in the years to come. Can you in your own words explain to me how you are involved in the enlargement process?

EP2: So, I work for European Parliament, but more specifically for the XXXX group which is one of the seven political groups of parliament. XXXX. And I work in foreign affairs committee here for the XXXX and on enlargement issues. So, Western Balkans, Turkey… previously, Iceland. So, what we do is in the parliament, generally, we do annual reports on the candidate countries and

possible candidate countries or future candidate countries. So, basically all the Western Balkans and Turkey, currently. And we do bilateral meetings with them. So that is an inter-parliamentary committee, delegation whatever they are called with all the member countries - With all the candidate countries. So, we meet regularly two times a year, three times a year. Well, depends on COVID was more difficult. Then there are loads of different other activities this by the parliament. So, like let's say, Serbia, we have a Jean Monnet dialogue, It's called Interparty dialogue in Serbia. In North Macedonian it's Jean Monnet dialogue. Our kind of effort to help them mediate between the political parties in those countries. They can't get along. They can't agree on issues in the parliament in the government. I mean, so we go there, we meditate between them, that's another important thing. Then we and Montenegro, we have so-called citizens' forum. I think it's called I wasn't there, But So we bring different citizens together and do a discussion round what they want from the EU and then present the document. Then we do all kinds of different study programs for the politicians in the country or seminars, or we bring here youth or also young politicians. And so, those are different programs in the parliament. Now, in the XXXX group, we also do a lot of events besides those, what I mentioned. We have relations with our sister party in all these countries we have a sister party. Either in some cases it's official in some cases it's not maybe official, but we cooperate with some party and we do lots of events with them: Seminars, exchange programs, stagiaires… Not him, but previously I've had stagiaires from the region. Then we do study visits there also from the group. The group president, or some group high ranking MEPs are going there on a visit of the XXXX group that also visits of the parliament. So, there are so many different layers, what we do here. Tonight, We have, you heard, we have the North-Macedonia prime minister here. So, we have two meetings with him. The group leader meets him and then some other group members. He is from the XXXX family. He's official sister party. He's a new

guy. Nobody of us has met him before, he just became prime ministers and yeah. (So, I suppose you are to going to talk about the bridging of the conflict with Bulgaria then.) Yeah. Well, we can't do much about it. Because it's a bilateral thing but they obviously we shall speak about it.

LP: And how do you perceive the current progress of Montenegro in its path to EU membership?

EP2: Well Montenegro is, definitely the most frontrunner so to say of the of the candidate countries. I mean, they with Serbia are the only ones where the accession negotiations are going on because Turkey's are de facto frozen, and others have not started the accession negotiations yet. But obviously, with the current political troubles in the country, the accession has also a little stalled. So unfortunately, So we have to see if and when they will have a new government. So, then we can maybe concentrate more on the accession negotiations again. So, we have to say that the last year has not been much progress.

LP: I suppose that last two years with COVID, there was not that much progress, and anything really has stalled.

EP2: Sure. But I mean, with Serbia for example, I mean with Montenegro, anyway, all the chapters are open, but with Serbia, we opened some chapters, one cluster last December. So that is some progress, even during COVID.

LP: It is my understanding that in Serbia, there's a large pro-Russian mindset. Are there any socialising activities or any concrete measures that the XXXX group or the parliament is trying to do to curb that, to work more towards pro-European civil society, society in general?

EP2: Well, there are all sorts of discussions, let's be clear. However, the issue with Serbia is that they have elections next week. We are going there to observe the elections and I don't think much changes in the elections. They will, the current government will continue, the current policy will continue. Or if there is much pressure after elections on them, maybe they will change. I'm doubtful, but I've seen surprises before in my life. So, maybe they will change. If they don't change, then we are in a dilemma. So, shall we punish them somehow? There will be clearly some sanctions, punishment, whatever, not sanctions, but let's say, I don't know, hold or freezing of the accession negotiations or I don't know, something will be on the table. So, it can't continue as business as usual. But they obviously we have to also be clear that if we completely cut off those ties as, I don't know, some members of parliament want to, not from our group necessarily, but generally, want to suspend the accession talks or even some go as far as to remove the candidate status, you know? So, then we also have to be clear that they will completely go to Russia and China. So currently we still have some leverage, so we have to find a suitable means for them. But obviously we all know it what's happening there because this didn't happen now when the war started, they always had this issue but now clearly, it's more problematic than before.

LP: Yeah. And talking about China, Russia and the region does that presence in the Western Balkans through investments or other means of influences affect how the EU acts in its enlargement policy.

EP2: You mean the investment from Russia and China.

LP: Yeah. The way of enacting influence really. I mean China, obviously, it does a lot of investments. Something Russia has also other means of influencing. And I mean, especially in Serbia, there's large pro-Russian mindset. And so, it's my understanding that they are very present in the region. And I wonder how this presence affects, how the EU positions itself and acts in its enlargement policy?

EP2: Well clearly, I mean as I said this has been a problem before. Now it's just the war. It just made the problem bigger. And now we clearly need to see what they will do. And then react accordingly. But yeah, I mean it's basically what I already said. The problem is there, we are dealing with it, they have to align when they join align with the CFSP CSDP and sanctions. And then, If they don't, they can't join, it's simple as that. But yeah, I mean Serbia is playing a balancing act, Montenegro also but less, because they are also a strong pro-Serbian, pro-Russian for the current government. The outgoing government is composed of two parties that are pro-Serb, pro-Russian. So, it's clearly a problem, but so far, in Montenegro it's more contained and there is also maybe the media is a bit better than in Serbia.

LP: How's the medias role in it? Is the media reporting a lot on the EU and how is the freedom of media in those countries?

EP2: Well, it's bad. I mean, it depends on the country, but it's bad everywhere. But in some countries, Serbia, I think is the worst. Maybe, maybe it's a bit better in... I don't know North Macedonia, Kosovo now, because before also Macedonia was very problematic with the previous government, not the previous, but there one before the previous one. And So, this is the reality again. I mean, we have to, EP2: we have, they can't join, if they have problems, especially since we have now Hungary and Poland, who are members, and who have the same problems. So now the member states will clearly be very critically looking at these things.

LP: how can the EU properly argue for more rule of law? In the candidate countries when there is now an increasing amount of those issues in the EU itself. Is there a certain sense of hypocrisy then?

EP2: Yeah, but we are also critical about the countries internally in the EU. There isn't the mechanism to solve the issue inside the EU. I mean obviously I don't know what was it. This article seven or eight or I don't remember what, that are these procedures against Poland and Hungary. Yeah, but there are also things going in parallel with them. But yeah, there should be a clear mechanisms what to do in the EU if a member country has a problem. But I mean, look at US. I mean the US had Trump as president to try, I don't know how you call it coup d'état maybe not. But last year 6th of January, that was also not according to the democratic standards so you know it can happen everywhere else.

LP: What do you think is the main reason why the EU seeks to enlarge to the Western Balkans

EP2: Good question. Well, the EU, in the treaties it says everybody who is, all countries in Europe can join if they follow the, I don't know Copenhagen criteria. But obviously for the EU the interest is also, I don't know to become more influential or to include more of the continent in one, I don't know, internal market so it's obviously easier for everybody. I mean, if you go from Finland to Greece and use the same currency, it's nice. Cyprus is the southest, when I look at the map. So, you know, that's the thing and even countries which are not members, Norway and Iceland and Liechtenstein, are part of the economic area. So, you know, it's easy for people, it's and why the EU was created, was to avoid wars. So, clearly now it's a problem there, but then…

LP: Um yeah. In Montenegro specifically, what you perceive as the biggest obstacle?

EP2: Political instability. And also, the links of political parties to all kinds of different structures in the country, which are there. So, you know, So it's, well, questions of rule of law. And all these issues, like, you know the Balkan countries, so the problems are very similar. Every country has its nuances, but it's the post-Communist, post, whatever the Titoism was, socialism. I don't know, probably not post-Yugoslavia. Some countries were more successful, so I'm not… I mean it's the same with all of the rest. Post Warsaw-block, whatever you call it. The post-communist countries. So yeah, you see what's happening in Ukraine. Then We were… I'm from Estonia. So, like 30 years ago, 30 and half years ago, we were still one country with Ukraine and Russia. Things have changed. Yeah, and look where we are and where is Ukraine. So, you know, Unfortunately

LP: Do you think that the war will in a long term lead the countries like Montenegro and Serbia where there is a lot of pro-Russian sentiment to motivate that tendency more? So that there'll be more pro-European voices in the long term?

EP2: I mean, they have, they have a clear choice. Do they want to join the EU or not. They want to join the EU; they have to change. If they don't change then they have chosen Russia or China. They can be there, in the middle of the EU basically, but I mean it's all up to all countries. I mean, Russians are saying that we are trying to enlarge, and We are not I mean it's these countries themselves who want to enlarge in the end. So obviously, we are supporting enlargement and we like it, but we are not forcing anyone to change or to join, so... But if they want to join, they have to fulfil some criterias.

LP: Yeah. Do you believe that concerns over the decidabilities or better, the EU's ability to come to coherent decisions factor into the EU's performance in the enlargement policy? So, concerns over the policy fields where there is still unanimity in the council. For example, do concern over that maybe also lead to slow down negotiation processes.

EP2: Yeah, it's possible. Now, I mean if, as I say, if Serbia doesn't change, it will eventually slow down. It's a matter of time and the exact and slow down. But what is there exactly, looking like a slowdown but there will be as I say, there will be some sanction, punishment, whatever.

LP: So, I suppose it has slowed down already because, I mean, how long has Serbia been negotiating

EP2: True, but Montenegro the same. But Turkey even longer has been a candidate country. And there are countries that didn't join, well, of Norway twice at a referendum. Switzerland, Iceland most recently. So, it's… UK left, so, you know, there are all different options.

LP: Like, two years ago, the revised enlargement methodology was published. Do you perceive any impact it had on maybe leading to a quickened or slowed down process for the candidate countries?

EP2: I mean it was slowed down by the French because they wanted this new methodology. Yeah, I mean, I don't think much has changed. Obviously, there are some nuances and chapters clusters, whatever, you know, it's not a big difference, but in reality… Well, this, I'm not negotiating, I'm not part of the negotiating team so I only can guess, you know, but what it looks like that there isn't much change. It's more about appearances

LP: Do you think there will be any new member state in the next five years motivated?

EP2: But theoretically possible, I would rather say 10 years. Yeah. I don't think we make it for next elections which is already 24, I think. So, definitely not then maybe midterm of the new parliament. So, 26-27, if things improve. Montenegro obviously has a chance. But there's so much to do still. Serbia, I think is more distant and, if not, Macedonia, could get the opening of the accession talks, then they would go fast I would say, never know. But at least, they are, they've been candidates so long and they have done all the acquis alignment and whatever already. So,

clearly, they would be the new front-runner if they would start the accession negotiations. Maybe not immediately, but very quickly. They would

LP: How likely do you think it is that the bilateral dispute between Bulgaria and North Macedonia could be solved?

EP2: What we heard from the Minister on Monday was that they are close to an agreement but maybe we'll hear more tonight from the Prime Minister.

ME1

LP: So basically, I am doing my thesis about Montenegro's EU accession and more specifically what motivates the EU to enlarge. Trying to understand what may be obstacles, what motivates the EU and using Montenegro as a case study. More or less. And, so, my question to you, first of all, my question to you would be about your involvement in the enlargement process. If you could tell me a bit about your work and what you do in that context.

ME1: I'm working in the Civil society and in that capacity both the organisation ... and me personally have been from the very beginning monitoring the process and assessing the progress, proposing different kinds of recommendations both on the Montenegrin stakeholders and for the European Commission and other EU based institutions. So, basically, it's more like consultative and advisory role and plus the one which was linked to the advocacy and sometimes lobbying. But not the one which is decision-making. I mean, I haven't been part of the managerial structure within the process.

LP: And what's your, how do you perceive Montenegro's process to EU accession?

ME1: At the moment, or? (Yes) Well, currently, we are in regression. And it was for quite some time. The process had its quite a dynamic trend at the very beginning of the accession negotiations. There has been a lot of enthusiasm but by the time that scaled down and even before the change of the government in Montenegro, we started to stagnate and with the latest government which has actually been replaced last night, we actually entered regression and it's going to be a huge challenge for the new government how to unblock this process. So basic, I don't see the progress, I see the reverse. In most of the fields regression and in some of the fields stagnation.

LP: do you think that the new government can be very proactive in this? Because, as I understand it, they are forming a minority government and from my outsider perspective it looks like they will have a very difficult path.

ME1: Yes, it is going to be a complex situation. But still, I believe that they will do more than the previous one. Because of a couple of reasons. first of all, all of the people in this government are quite united with the priority which considers accession to the EU which was not the case with the previous one. Plus, there are certain decisions that need to be made in the parliament which this majority, this new majority will be able to pass. And that will also give certain dynamics with the process ensuring it will also have an effect on the other aspects

LP: To come back to the accession process. What do you think is the biggest obstacle currently that you see?

ME1: I think that the lack of the political will has been the main, the biggest obstacle. And when I say lack of political will it's approached from different reasons. The previous government, when I say previous government, I am talking about this decades long government until august 2020, hasn't ... one point, that the progress in EU integration process is actually breaking down the monopolies of their power. And they didn't want it to give up on that and this is when the slowdown started, when they started to protect their own interests in that. With the government which has been just dismissed, the problem was that they haven't been really aligned with the EU values and standards in certain cases. I'm specifically also referring to the fact that there have been decisions, even before Ukraine, which were linked to the sanctions to Russia, which the government was very slow to bring and there have been some people who, in the government, didn't support the EU-Atlantic integration. So, this is why I say political will, because political will is [a key phenomenon] of the process. I mean, if you don't have it, you can't move the institutions, you can't move the processes etc.

LP: I heard from previous people that I talked to that since the change of government that you also referred to, a big concern, especially from EU side, has been political stability in Montenegro. And do you think that this new government could counteract that to some extent to increase stability?

ME1: This is one of their goals, which has been also put in the expose of the PM. The understanding of the complexity of situation and the problems which have been ... in the previous period is something which I found positive in this expose. And addressing the polarisation of the

society and the need to have compromises between different political structures and stakeholders. And at the end of the day, this government is also a huge compromise between many actors. And this by itself is in a way bringing stabilisation, because having all of them included and sharing responsibility is something which is a much better solution than having just a small group being total excluded. They are a minority government, because the actual composition of the cabinet is such that these are the ministers who are coming from the parties of the census or from close to the census, below the census or a little bit above. And supported by some majority party, but it's in the utmost interest even of these big parties that they perform better than the previous government.

LP: What do you believe is the biggest reason the EU wants even to enlarge to Montenegro? What do you think? (Excuse me?) I am just wondering what is your perception over the main, what do you think really motivates the EU to enlarge? For stability, EU reasons, what is your perception of this?

ME1: I think it's not the question that refers only to one reason. I believe that the EU is actually, that some of the reasons why the EU would like the region to help with the accession process is of course to expand its own market and territory and on the other hand to help stabilisation, to help democratisation and in that way also to counter there, what is the, what are the other surrounding countries. Other external influences. that has been a little bit maybe highlighted in the recent period this stabilisation. But for a long time, the EU was understanding stabilisation in the wrong manner. Stabilisation does not refer to being supportive of the authorities with whom you can have direct and very quick communication. Stabilisation means helping the

entire society to be more inclusive, to be sustainable etc. So basically, previous approaches, stabilisation of the EU has brought something that we all call stabilocracy. This is neither democracy nor stability.

LP: And so, you're alluding that the EU has changed its approach. Have they stepped up the engagement with organisation such as yours? With CSO? (Excuse me?) Has the EU stepped up their engagement with CS in the region, in Montenegro? to achieve this engagement with society to a larger than just the government?

ME1: No, they have been there all of the time when it comes to Montenegro, inclusive in that way. But I think that, overall, the policy was not well thought. It's not only about supporting civil society and some of the initiatives. I think it's equally important political support. Let me illustrate it with something that may sound bizarre but it's effective. When the high EU officials are coming to visit the country, I think that they should meet equally other parts of the society, not only officials. Because in the eyes of the people, meeting only officials would be actually support to these officials. And sometimes, you know, in the region, officials are not so nice (laughs). A lot of them have been involved in the corruption and some other misconduct. So, I think that doesn't help the image of the EU being fully concentrated on them.

LP: Is there any, but have you noticed maybe any change in that, or has it been constantly that the EU has been more or less disregarding the society at large?

ME1: There are some changes, I think this is changing, but it is still not, how should I say it, this is still not a well-developed policy.

LP: Have you noticed any changes in EU engagement with the region since the more noticeable backsliding in some of the Eastern EU MS in terms of rule and democracy? Did you notice any change in the EU's approach since?

ME1: If you are talking about recent years, when the backsliding has been noticed, yes. There were, there are, I think that the approach is much more strict that the European Commission reports are also more open and critical in the latest report of the kind, you had some of the sentences which have been really, really harsh. So I think that EU is in that sense changing the language and changing the approach, understanding that the soft approach that they used to have actually doesn't, is not well understood by the stakeholders here.

LP: And in that sense as well, [mumbling] they have turned rule of law as one of the crucial chapters, in particular with regards to the revised enlargement methodology. Do you perceive there to be any notable changes with the new methodology, if that impacts the process in any way?

ME1: Unfortunately, not. Because our decision-makers still did not understand that the new methodology requires more of the changes within the negotiation structure, the approach etc. And due to the political changes in Montenegro, for a long time, the negotiation structure was literally not existing. So this is something which is still to be adjusted.

LP: And in the last years, I also understand that especially in Montenegro there has been increased presence of in particular China investing in infrastructure projects. How is that being perceived in the society? Is that being perceived in the society in Montenegro?

ME1: Different. Most of the people are negative about that because they don't see the use of their presence and work. Otoh, there obviously we had politicians who had some use and who made some deals. But in principle, apart from the fact that our debt has considerably increased due to the highway that the Chinese are making, their influence is much less present than is sometimes underlined.

LP: Nevertheless, do you perceive that to impact the EU engagement with the region? The presence of China and Russia to some extent? (I didn't quite understand that. Sorry?) Whether the presence of powers like China and Russia and maybe other geopolitical rivals or competitors to the EU, whether their presence in Montenegro and maybe also the Balkans at large, whether that impacts the engagement of the EU.

ME1: Not actually. Maybe Montenegro has not been so attractive. I know there has been a lot of talks about Chinese, but this is linked to actually one big project: the highway. When it comes to Russia, they have been meddling for quite some time, but it's very difficult to explain the nature of their presence, because I mean they work a lot undercover and you cannot measure that at the same manner as you would measure some other presences etc. But this is not endangering the EU integration process, which is, I think, very important, because the support for the process is very high and it remains very high. Whereas people do not perceive the support or the

cooperation with Russia and China as being specifically underlined. Also this is something contrary to Serbia, where in Serbia you have a lot of people believing that the most of their investments or grants come from Russia or China and actually it's not true, they come from the EU.

LP: Does this mindset, I assume this also translates to the Serbian minorities in Montenegro, does this influence/affect the pro-EU agenda on the political level?

ME1: Yes and no. I don't think it influences at the level of the state, even though we had this problem in this period now. I am talking about the last year and a half with the new government, where the identity issues have been very present and basically overwhelming everything else. But otoh, if you even look at the support for the EU, you would see that a lot of the Serbs in Montenegro are very supportive for the accession to the EU.

LP: Do you believe, do you have any idea of a timeframe. When do you believe Montenegro may be ready to join the EU?

ME1: That's a very unthankful question. I mean, there have been different projections. I think it's very difficult to predict anything with any certainty. Surely it will not happen as some of our leaders were saying until 2025 or 2026, because it is not even in a technical sense possible. Recently, we had a research where we asked people for instance what they believed. And it's interesting to note that a lot of the people do believe, they do support the EU, but there is an increasing number of those who are very sceptical about the dynamics of ... They think that it's

going to be very slow and there are also some of them who think that it's never. So, I'm not saying never, but it's depending on the decisions and work of the authorities. So, I would say in the best possible case, for 8 or 10 years.

LP: It's understandable that there is a lot of pessimism after 10 years of negotiations.

ME1: But we're already in the first decade. We will celebrate the 29 of June 10 years of EU accession negotiations.

LP: Do you think that maybe the current war could accelerate that though?

ME1: This question has been recently also posted for quite some time in our public, but I don't think so. I think that these are two completely different situations, in terms of what is happening now with Ukraine and even with the questionnaires and all of this support cannot be applied to Montenegro at any point. I think that the EU is showing more openness and enthusiasm, but not in a sense that they will say "okay, we will actually be blind on one eye", for lack of track record in your case. This is not going to happen. So, this is very much on us and I don't think that we as a country and our administration can move this so fast.

ME2

LP: First of all, thank you very much for sitting down with me. I'm doing my thesis about Montenegro's EU accession and about the enlargement process of the EU and using Montenegro as a case study. What I'm particularly looking into EU's motivation. What motivates the EU to

enlarge, what reasons are there. For that I'm interested in the other side of the negotiating table. So that's what I would talk to you about today. Can you tell me how you are involved in the process?

ME2: I'm an official member for the working group for chapter 23. So that's government structure. The government of Montenegro was the first one to include representatives of CSO into the formal governance structure. So, working groups are preparing all the documents related to achieving the milestones in the chapters. For example, at the moment Montenegro is trying to achieve certain benchmarks for chapter 23, so the WG has prepared action plans, has prepared reports and all kinds of information that the Commission requests. That's only part of what I do. I used to work for a think tank, so I was doing a lot of research on the state of play in different areas of negotiations. we are also trying to educate the public, to explain the process to make it less bureaucratic etc. etc. So, in a way CSO here are trying to boost the process, and to contribute to achieving the goals

LP: Thank you very much. Very interesting. Chapter 23 is the rule of law chapter, yes? (Yes. Judiciary and fundamental rights) So what is your assessment of the current state of play of the accession?

ME2: That's a very complex question. About the negotiations in general or 23 (in general, but I'm also interested in chapter 23) Okay. As you probably know, Montenegro has been negotiating for 10 years now and technically in the best way, we are in the middle of the process. And I know that, because as you know each chapter has opening and closing benchmarks and for chapter 23 and 24, we fulfilled interim introductory benchmarks and now we are implementing...

So, Montenegro is currently implementing interim benchmarks for chapter 23 and chapter 24. So, once we fulfil these, which we are not close yet, we will get the final benchmarks for these chapters. So, after we get the final benchmarks, we will have to prepare new documents and then implement new reforms etc. etc. So that's how I know we are in the best case, in the middle of the process and the process is already the longest process ever, except for Turkey. So that's the situation. It's not very good.

LP: Do you expect the new government to radically change anything?

ME2: It might, but there are a lot of ifs. The reforms are very difficult. The political situation is also very difficult because our political elites are not very mature and they always put their interests first, instead of putting public interests at the top of their agenda. So, we will see. We will see. I am not sure that they are fully aware of the complexity of the process, but we will see.

LP: So, what do you foresee to be the biggest obstacle to Montenegro's accession?

ME2: There are two. One are domestic issues, the other one EU issues. I think that for a very long both sides were playing as if they we were willing to make progress with this process. And I think both sides were fully aware that the other side is faking it. so, I think that affected the process negatively. Otoh, Montenegrin political elite was not willing to do the most difficult tasks because they were aware that even if they do that and that' very bad for them, because they have to limit their own power. Even if they do it, they will not make progress and they saw it with the

cases of Albania and Macedonia, who fulfilled the requests a long time ago, but did not make any progress. And the same goes for the Bosnia and Kosovo, for example. Kosovo fulfilled criteria for visa liberalisation many years ago and it didn't happen. So that affected very negatively the process of Montenegro as well. So otoh, Montenegrin authorities did not do their best, otoh the EU did not do their part of the job.

LP: And do you think this is changing? Do you see an improvement, especially on the EU side?

ME2: Well, I am not sure. We will see. It seemed that Ukraine situation changed their perception a little bit, but we will see. As you probably know, the MS are kind of slow in many things. We will see. I am not sure to be completely honest. I think that - I'm not sure. I have been monitoring this process for 13 years now. I think that there is few MS who are simply not willing to allow any further enlargement, but maybe the situation in Ukraine changes that.

LP: It's just my impression from the outside looking in that this new Commission, well it's already three years, but since von der Leyen took office that they seemed to put a stronger emphasis on enlargement, also with the REM. Did any of those summits and the new methodology, did any of that change anything? Improve the process in any way?

ME2: Well, it's first of all. My first answer would be that the new methodology did not change absolutely anything, but at the same time I have to be conscious that in the meantime a lot of things happened in Montenegro. The Montenegrin landscape changed a lot. So even if the new

methodology was really honest and was really honest attempt to improve things, we would not know because we were quite busy with our own problems in the meantime. But even by assessing what is happening in the region, I don't see any positive effects of the new methodology.

LP: You said, "no positive effect", do you see the potential for a negative effect?

ME2: Well, I think that first of all, the new methodology has a lot of different segments. I think that MS got more space for political decisions, which is fine. Because I think that this process has to be genuine on the two levels. One is if the countries are faking the process, they should be able to say this is simply not enough and we are not satisfied, which ... But otoh, they can also misuse it. And as what we saw in the cases of the mentioned of the countries that I mentioned before. So, although I agree that the criteria should be as strict as possible, I think that' sour own interest to feel the highest criteria, because this is the unique opportunity for us to transform our societies and our public administration etc. etc. At the same time, the process should not be that politicised because in that case we are not being given a genuine chance and I think that the process is politicised at the moment and that an elections in the EU are negatively affecting our prospects. of EU future.

LP: Did it cause any - Did it in any way affect the perceptions from Montenegro when in certain countries, I think that in certain countries, I think in Austria and France, further enlargements would be held to a referendum, whenever that was decided, did that cause any reflections in Montenegro?

ME2: No, because nobody sees that as something close. You know, so not at the moment.

LP: Do you perceive that recent discussions and backsliding in the EU on rule of law and democracy affect the engagement of the EU and also the maybe intensity that the EU looks at the rule of law benchmarks? (Sorry, I didn't hear you well) Considering the backslidings in the EU on the Rule of Law and democracy

ME2: I know now, I know now. I think that we're not monitoring that very closely. I cannot say that... I think that our authorities were aware that all problems that we have, the EU also has. Even before, so it's not something that came as a surprise. But I wouldn't say that anybody here says, "oh look, they can do it, so we can do it as well", No. Not in that sense. I think that they are all trying to create false impression that they are aiming at the finest level of conduct.

LP: But do you perceive that maybe from the EU side, they have become stricter on these benchmarks on the rule of law?

ME2: Yes. They are absolutely stricter now than they were before, when we compare our experience with Croatia, which is also our neighbour, it's much more difficult for us, which is fine, which is completely fine. But for example, the rule of law, no matter what I say, it's not that operationalised. So, you can objectively say how much is enough. How much is enough? Is it 5 cases of organised crimes? 20 cases? So, there is also place for political decisions, you know. So, it's much stricter now, and it's less clear how much will be enough.

LP: Another topic that interests me, do you perceive that the presence of other powers like China and Russia for example impact the EU engagement in the enlargement process?

ME2: Certainly, but only to a certain level. In the moment, from the point of view from Montenegro, China is only using its soft power. It's trying to build cultural connections. It has only had one infrastructural project, the building of a highway. We did not document that their attempts of using any of these for political purposes. Unlike Russia, which is trying to influence political processes. At least at the moment, that they simply don't have the support of the society for that, at least not majority. There were certain groups that are pro-Russian, but they are not majority. So, yes. And it is probably one of the things that motivates EU not to fully give up the enlargement policy.

LP: could you say what you perceive as the key reason for the EU to keep on with the enlargement process? You mentioned this now with the geopolitics. Any other thing that would jump to your mind?

ME2: I'm not sure, not at the moment.

LP: One of the issues that was pointed out to me a lot is the lack of political stability in Montenegro. Do you think this is, with this big umbrella government, if you will, is this changing, if this will help regain some political stability?

ME2: It's too early to tell. I'm simply not sure. We had very negative experiences until now. So difficult to say. Who knows, they might surprise us. Otoh, I really cheer for that to happen. I think that this is a unique possibility. It would be really great if they could just put their differences aside and work on the common goal, but until now that was something that we never saw. So, I don't know. I'm not sure what to say.

LP: I think I'm already out of my questions. Is there anything that you would like to add that you think could be relevant that I haven't asked yet.

ME2: So, the nature of the negotiations, it's really complex. I think that many people don't understand is that reforms that we are conducting are changing completely the mentality of the people and society. And that's a really huge task. You can compare it with a personal. For example, if you are trying to change something that you don't like about yourself. That's horribly difficult. And that' s what we are trying to do as a society. And it's terribly difficult and although, on the declarative level politicians say they are for it, they are not for that. Because it's limiting space for them to do whatever they like. Which they could do until now. So, I would say that although I think that 80% of people are pro-European integration, very few of them are genuinely for that, because it would simply change the way that things are done here. Particularly among the political elite, which, for me are both position and opposition. So, it would be better if we had even more pro-EU forces that are working on this and it would be great if MS could understand this and understand how much they are negatively contributing to this and they are diminishing the things that pro-EU forces in the societies are trying to do with their political decisions and they're not being completely honest about the EU perspective of the countries etc. And they are giving mixed

messages all the time by saying there will be not no enlargement until 2020, that's what Juncker said at some point and that very moment all our attempts to push the government were completely broken because... and there are a lot of similar comments that EU politicians are making, and I think by doing that they are not fully aware of their responsibilities as to European politicians. Because we are in the Europe. So

LP: You say, you are working in civil society before. (I still do) You still are. (I used to work only for a think tank. Now I work on different EU projects) Can you tell me something about the extent to which the EU may be engaging with civil society on a societal level to support the accession process?

ME2: It does. It does. Both Delegation and Brussels, they do. But MS don't. That's the problem. I think that the Commission is working really a lot to keep this process alive, but the MS are kind of very distant from this process. They don't see, they don't understand it, but they have an opinion.

LP: What about the Berlin Process? How did you perceive that?

ME2: It's... It was completely irrelevant for Montenegro at least. Except for the few infrastructure projects and things like that, it was kind of an attempt to substitute the real process. It was also a possibility for the political elites to meet with the EU representatives and it was misused for political purposes. But they didn't really worth the process. Because you know after

so many years, we are in the best case in the middle of the process and some of the countries did

not even start. So, its results are really limited.

LP: So, you're expecting Montenegro to take another 10 years roughly, or?

ME2: I hope not, but we'll see.

[Rest of the interview cut]

Appendix 3: Documents supporting the Analysis

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Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form

TITLE OF STUDY

Entering the European Stage? EU Roles in Enlargement Negotiations

PRINCIPAL   INVESTIGATOR

Lennart Paetz

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to analyse what the EU emphasises in its enlargement negotiations with Montenegro and the Western Balkans at large. By establishing the focusses set by the EU in its negotiations with the candidate country, internal conflicts of the EU between value-based and interest-driven considerations will come to light showing allowing an assessment of the EU's nature.

STUDY PROCEDURES

For this purpose, you are invited to participate in a semi-structured interview of 30-40 minutes. According to your preference, the researcher will either only take notes during the interview or additionally record the interview's audio and consequently transcribe it while ensuring the appropriate level of confidentiality. In the case of the latter, the audio recording would be saved on an encrypted external storage device to ensure the largest possible confidentiality and conformity with data protection regulations.

You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose. Furthermore, you are free to withdraw your consent after the interview. In that case, all data on our interview will be deleted and your contributions will not be taken into consideration   for   the   analysis   of   the   research   product.

BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study may provide a more elaborate understanding of the EU's performance in enlargement negotiations and could serve to better understand the enlargement dynamics and could serve in upcoming enlargement negotiations and contribute to the advance of the academic debate on the subject.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Unless you demand otherwise, your responses to this interview will be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

GDPR CONSENT

I hereby give consent for my personal data to be processed in matters pertaining to research project outlined in the Informed Consent in accordance with the **Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 with regard to the processing of personal data and in accordance with the information clause attached to my consent.**.

In accordance with Article 13 of **Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data** (…) ("General Regulations") **the Jagiellonian University informs that**, **the administrator of your personal data is the Jagiellonian University** 24 Gołębia Street, 31-007 Krakow. **A Data Protection Officer has been appointed by the Jagiellonian University who is based at** 24 Gołębia Street, 31-007 Krakow, room nr 5. **The Officer can be contacted via e-mail:** iod@uj.edu.pl **or by phone – 12 663 12 25**. Your personal data will be processed for the purpose of realising the research project outlined in the Informed Consent Form. **Providing personal data is voluntary. Your personal data will be retained** at the most until the 31st of August 2022. The data obtained in the interviews will be anonymised unless specifically requested otherwise. After finalising the research, the recordings will be destroyed. **You have the right to: access the data and demand its rectification, deletion, processing restrictions, transfer the** data, object **to the processing of data, withdraw your consent at any time in cases and under the conditions stipulated in "General Regulations". The withdrawal of consent shall result in** immediate withdrawal of consideration for information shared. **The withdrawal of consent may be sent by email to** Lennart.paetz@student.uj.edu.pl or orally by phone via +49 1522 4665059. **You have the right to file a complaint with** The President, Personal Data Protection Office (UODO) **if you consider the processing of your personal data to be in violation of the provisions of the "General Regulations".**

I hereby confirm that I have read and understood the above information.

CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's   signature   _____   Date   _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____