

Path Dependence during the Fifth EU Enlargement: Comparing East-Central and Southeast Europe

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1. Introduction

On the 1st of May 2004 the European Union (EU) admitted ten new members – the largest single enlargement of this regional integration bloc since its creation half-a-century ago. The ten countries that joined the “old members” into the Union were Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Despite the prolonged and complex pre-accession process, and despite the last-minute political crisis regarding the entrance of the divided island of Cyprus in the EU, this was a remarkable historical act of reuniting the European continent after the end of the Cold War. Such an encompassing foreign policy move had as its primary goals the increase of the Union’s economic competitiveness and the improvement of the security of its member states. Parallel to this, enlargement was also aimed at augmenting the EU political and socio-economic clout internationally by bringing in new states, people and regions to its predominantly Western and Central European core.

Despite the 2004 “big bang” expansion having already taken place, the EU fifth enlargement is far from over.¹ It has been expected that, on the 1st of January

¹ See *Copenhagen European Council, 12 and 13 December 2002: Presidency Conclusions*, revised version, Council of the European Union Document 15917/02, Brussels, 29 January 2003, point 14, as well as, European Commission, *Towards the Enlarged Union: Strategy Paper and Report of the European Commission on the progress towards accession by each of the candidate countries*, COM(2002) 700 final, 9 October 2002, point 4.2 and p. 73 and European Commission, *Continuing*

2007, Bulgaria and Romania to also follow into the steps of their East-Central European (ECE) counterparts by joining the Union.² Croatia and Turkey have also been nominated as prospective candidates for membership, and they might get integrated into the EU in the not-so-distant future.³ Moreover, several years before the current expansion towards East-Central Europe and the Mediterranean, and immediately after the end of the Kosovo crisis, the June 1999 Cologne European Council proclaimed the launching of a Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) for the countries of South-Eastern Europe (SEE).⁴ This process has provided an opportunity, albeit in the majority of cases a medium-to-long-term one, to the states from the so-called “Western Balkans”⁵ to apply and, eventually, become members of the Union. Although, till the autumn of 2006, only Croatia has effectively opened accession negotiations under the SAP, this has, nevertheless, been quite a positive signal for the other countries from the region that the EU takes the integration of the Western Balkan countries seriously.⁶ Moreover, after a lot of internal debates and diplomatic negotiations, on 12 June 2006 the European Council decided to follow the positive, albeit full of conditions, *avis* drawn by the Commission in November 2005 and to start accession negotiations with Turkey as well.⁷ In sum, by giving an “enlargement perspective” to the Western Balkan countries and Turkey, the Brussels administration and leading politicians – both East and West – have been expecting that SEE would become more peaceful, prosperous and democratic, while, at the same

Enlargement: Strategy Paper and Report of the European Commission on the progress towards accession by Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, COM(2003) 676 final, Brussels, 5 November 2003, point B.4.1.

² See the *Monitoring Report on the Preparedness for EU Membership of Bulgaria and Romania*, COM(2006) 549 final, Brussels, 26 September 2006.

³ This is especially true about Croatia, while the future membership of Turkey into the Union is met with increasing scepticism by the leaders of certain key EU member states (i.e. Germany, France, Denmark and the Netherlands) and the majority of the European public. See *Croatia. 2005 Progress Report*. SEC (2005) 1424 final, Brussels, 9 November 2005, and *Turkey. 2005 Progress Report*. SEC (2005) 1426 final, Brussels, 9 November 2005.

⁴ The conclusions of the 1999 Cologne European Council with respect to a more coherent EU policy towards the Balkans and the future of SAP have been reconfirmed and expanded by the June 2003 Thessaloniki summit.

⁵ The Western Balkan region includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia (FYROM). See the *2005 Enlargement Strategy Paper*. COM (2005) 561 final, concerning the Western Balkans in particular.

⁶ After FYROM in 2005, most recently, Albania have also been granted a candidate country’s status, while a special Development Fund for the Western Balkans was created under the 2007-2013 financial perspective.

⁷ *Negotiating Framework*, Luxembourg 3 October 2005. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/turkey/st20002_05_TR_framedoc_en.pdf (consulted on 20.10.2006). See also *Turkey: 2005 Progress Report*. SEC (2005) 1426 final, Brussels, 9 November 2005.

time, the 'European Integration Project' could be brought to a completion in its South-Eastern dimension (Zielonka 2000 and 2001; Wallace 2002; Andreev 2004, Andreev and Bechev 2005, Grabbe 2003 and 2006).

On the negative side, however, the late spring 2005 referenda in France and the Netherlands, having rejected the Draft European Constitution, provoked grave concerns among the prospective member states, and Turkey in particular, that the EU fifth enlargement round might be the last one for many years, if not decades, to come. Such fears of postponed or even completely halted enlargement negotiations with candidate countries have not been totally unfounded or, it would seem, that they have not been assuaged by the Western political leaders at the right moment and to a sufficient extent. Obviously, there has been a growing "enlargement fatigue" among the EU elites and citizens after the recent expansion round.⁸ Xenophobia and anti-foreigners' feelings have also been on the rise all over Europe, following the series of terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid and London. Furthermore, the uncertain social and economic situation in key member states such as Germany, France and Italy – although economic recovery has reportedly been taking place in some of these countries – and the unwillingness of most EU budget's 'net contributors' to finance the much poorer and underdeveloped countries from the European periphery have made it virtually impossible to draw new member states, and particularly some larger ones like Turkey, into the Union. At the supranational level, there has been a wide range of unaddressed institutional problems after the blocked ratification of the European Constitution and the expected exhaustion of the "Nice compromise" after the admittance of Bulgaria and Romania in the Union in 2007 or 2008 (Laursen 2006). Finally, the impasse characterising the multilateral negotiations over Cyprus and the ambiguous position of key EU Member States over Turkey's prospective entry into the Union has led to a growing Euro-pessimism and even opposition within Turkey to its government's bid to join the EU (Anastasakis and Bechev 2003; Oktem 2005).

This article joins the debate about the different modalities and rhythm of inclusion of the SEE countries into the EU. Moreover, this piece tries to explain the

⁸ The 15-16 June 2006 European summit, chaired by the Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel, seriously considered the meaning and possible introduction of the clause of 'absorption capacity' during future enlargement rounds (EurActiv 2006). Regarding the shifting, mostly downward, EU public approval of future enlargements, see the regular Eurobarometer surveys, and especially the July

EU enlargement process eastwards and southwards, not as a country-by-country (or sub-regional, for that matter) endeavour, but as part of broader European integration effort. In order to illustrate this, the ongoing enlargement in the Balkans – mainly towards Bulgaria and Romania, as well as towards Croatia and Turkey – is compared with the already completed one in East-Central Europe. From both a theoretical and empirical perspective, *path dependence* is selected as the best-suited method for capturing the dynamics of the process of enlargement in post-Communist Europe, on the one hand, and the post-autocratic and, occasionally, post-civil war situation in the Balkans, on the other. Using path dependence, several, allegedly competing to join the EU, Eastern European countries, which had departed from different starting positions and which have been experiencing both endogenous and exogenous changes on their way towards to full European integration, are analysed. Ultimately, the scope of this study goes beyond the EU fifth enlargement, as it attempts to draw lessons from the experience of some of the more-advanced towards membership accession countries from SEE, like Bulgaria and Romania, to conclude about the future incorporation of the Western Balkans and some of the ENP⁹ countries into the Union.

The arguments of this paper are presented in the following manner: the challenges of integrating the SEE countries into the EU are discussed in the next section. The theoretical premises and different usages of path dependence in the social sciences are introduced in section three. In section four, the actual progress of the SEE and ECE countries towards joining the EU is analysed in a comparative perspective. The final section five presents some conclusions regarding the applicability and usefulness of path dependence for monitoring the progress of the EU current and future enlargements.

2. The Challenges of Enlarging the EU to the Balkans

By overthrowing a host of communist-led regimes in the former Soviet Bloc approximately fifteen years ago, the post-autocratic countries from Eastern Europe have undertaken the prodigious task of performing multiple and interrelated reforms

2006 Special Eurobarometer “Attitudes towards European Union Enlargement”, available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_255_en.pdf (last consulted on 20.10.2006).

⁹ ENP stands for European Neighbourhood Policy. It covers the Eastern European, Caucasian and Mediterranean neighbours of the Union.

in a limited time (Przeworski 1991, Schmitter and Karl 1992; Schmitter 1994; Balcerowicz 1995; Linz and Stepan 1996; Offe 1996; Elster et al. 1998; Bruszt and Stark 1998). Namely, their governing elites undertook the commitments (a) to establish a full arsenal of democratic institutions and practices, such as competitive elections, pluralist political parties, functioning parliaments, independent courts, new constitutions, as well as various practical procedures and legal norms to protect vulnerable minorities, (b) to build market economies, by liberalising the previously-controlled prices and modes of supply of goods, capitals and services, by conducting privatisation of the state-owned resources and encouraging foreign direct investments, and by deregulating and decentralising the public services and administration, and (c) by reforming their respective bureaucracies, through restructuring and implementation of new *habeas corpus*, based on the rule of law, professional ethics and the importance of the individual as a respected citizen. In order to accomplish these complex and often interrelated processes, the ruling elites in post-communist Europe have customarily used two dominant themes to legitimate their everyday and long-term policy decisions: (1) the building of a nation-state, in the case of newly-created countries, emerging out of the former socialist federations, like Yugoslavia, the USSR and Czechoslovakia, and (2) the “coming back to Europe” and joining the wealthy, modern and relatively secure West, in the case all post-communist states with a predominantly European identity. (Linz and Stepan 1996; Von Beyme 1996; Berglund et al 2001; Fuchs and Klingemann 2001; Gill 2002; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeir 2002). Nowhere has the combined goal of establishing their own nation-states within prosperous Europe been stronger than among the Balkan peoples, as they have been living in one of the economically poorest and most conflict-prone regions of the European continent (Wallace 1993; Woodward 1995; Grabbe and Hughes 1997; Rose et al 1998; Hill 2000; Schimmelfennig 2003; International Commission on the Balkans 2005).

Nowadays, despite the considerable amount of work to be completed to satisfy the criteria for membership,¹⁰ the majority of SEE’s governing elites have generally

¹⁰ The official criteria for membership are the so-called “Copenhagen Criteria” (June 1993): 1) stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities, 2) the existence of a functional market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union, and 3) the ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union. (European Council, Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993, Conclusions of the Presidency, SN 180/93). However, there seem to be a much broader set of, often informal, criteria – including the full transposition of the *Acquis*

seen no alternatives for the future of their countries, except for these polities to become full members of the EU (Krastev 2002; Anastasakis and Bechev 2003; Noutcheva 2004; Pridham 2005). However, much like their own citizens, these elites have linked their support for both the SAP and Europe to the hope that the effective joining of the Union could take place in the ‘foreseeable’ future, i.e. between a couple of years and a decade from now at the latest (Featherstone 2004, Andreev and Bechev 2005). Hence, the main question for most countries from the Balkans has not been **whether** but **when** would the next EU enlargement(s) occur. It is also probably indicative of the high domestic importance of such a foreign policy goal, that virtually no discussion has been going on in most SEE countries, with the notable exception of Turkey and, may be, Croatia, **under what conditions** the sixth and further enlargements of the EU would take place and how much they would possibly cost the population of those countries (Sedelmeir and Wallace 1996; Grabbe and Hughes 1997; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeir 2002). A different set of dilemmas, having faced the European institutions and the Commission in particular during most of the previous EEC/EC/EU enlargement rounds, but especially during the current, fifth, one, has been to try to strike a balance between the readiness for membership of the applicant countries and the willingness of the current members for deeper internal integration and the strengthening of the supranational institutions (Wallace 1993; Tsoukalis 1997; Zielonka 1998; Friis and Murphy 2000). Against the background of a growing domestic scepticism towards any new entrants into the EU (see fn. 8) and the instrumentalisation of the “foreigners as threat” theme by various populist and neo-nationalist parties, this has been an increasingly difficult task, especially at this moment of time. Nonetheless, the prospect of offering the candidate states only ‘conditional’ or ‘partial membership,’ which, in other words, would practically mean that the Union expansion would take place “not now” and “probably not under the same conditions,” has had a rather limited appeal for the applicant countries. Moreover, past experience has shown that such strategy not only tended to decrease the leverage of the EU *vis-à-vis* the candidates for membership (e.g. Turkey or Morocco, for instance), but also it reduced the EU’s credibility and weakened its stance in relation to the rest of its international partners and future applicant states

Communautaire in national legislation (as provided by the 1995 Madrid European Council), as well as the possibility of calling for a delay of enlargement because of ‘absorption capacity’ problems on behalf of the current member states (see footnote number 8).

(Smith 1999 and 2004; Hill 2000; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeir 2002, Krastev 2002; Schimmelfennig 2003).

An important concomitant of the “enlargement project” – be it directed towards the Southern or Eastern European neighbours of the Union – is that it might affect different constituencies differently, and may create short- and/or long-term losers both domestically and internationally. First, parts of the West European public and business community have rightly worried, whether the risks of including the SEE countries into the EU, did not exceed the opportunities of economic activity there (Grabbe and Hughes 1997; Smith and Senior-Nello 1997; Ruano 2002; Tsoukalis 2005; Grabbe 2006). The markets of those countries have been in effect so small, the industries vastly undercapitalised and outdated, and the export sector non-specialised, that even single ECE countries, such as Poland, the Czech Republic or Hungary, had higher export share of the EU or world markets than all SEE countries together (i.e. the Western Balkans plus Bulgaria and Romania) (Inotai 2004). Second, a different, although closely related to the past and present economic and social realities, set of concerns has been weak state capacity and the levels of corruption in SEE. State capacity has been a major preoccupation for both insiders and outsiders of the Balkan region. It has been posited that European integration might actually undermine the fragile state structures in the short run and impose heavy financial burden on the emerging economies and public administration (Ganev 2001; Krastev 2002; Blue Bird Project 2003; Tsoukalis 2005; Inotai 2006). Parallel to this, the perceived high rates of corruption and rent-seeking on the part of central and local elites have been a serious problem for foreign investors and potential donors who have had the desire to enter the region (Tisné and Smilov 2004; Mungiu-Pippidi 2006). Third, scholars, studying democratic transitions historically and comparatively, have also speculated that, it has been far from certain that peace and democracy will automatically follow and consolidate in the Balkans, as it has occurred in the wake of, and shortly after, the EC enlargement in Southern Europe (i.e. towards Greece, Spain and Portugal) during the 1980s, for instance, or in ECE recently, for that matter (Friis and Murphy 2000; Dehaene and Krok-Paszkowska 2001; Torreblanca 2001). On the contrary, it has been posited that the wounds might have been too deep and the negative memories too fresh after the Yugoslav conflicts, so that the Balkan people would readily come as good neighbours “united in diversity” together and would start working towards a common European future as had France and Germany done after the end of World

War II (Woodward 1995; Andreev 2003 and 2004; Selo Sabic 2003; Noutcheva 2004).

Overall, the integration of the Balkans in the EU has been perceived as a complicated process for a number of reasons, including political and historical ones.¹¹ Hence, the enlargement towards new member states from SEE could not happen *tutto e subito*, i.e. all at the same time and immediately. However, it might be envisaged that this process would take place one step at a time – i.e. with different subsets of countries joining in first (e.g. Bulgaria and Romania in 2007), while others preparing for membership, while knowing at least that one day they will also accede. Clearly, any “catch-up” strategy for individual Balkan countries to get integrated into Europe should take the particular national and regional circumstances into account, as well as the preparedness of the Union to welcome new members. However, since the process of enlargement is an ongoing and dynamic process (Friis and Murphy 2000; Sjørnsen and Smith 2001), involving both the SEE countries, on the hand, and the EU institutions and its member states, on the other, there is certainly a vast opportunity to learn from the most recent expansions of the Union, including towards East-Central and Southern Europe. Moreover, since both the SEE candidate states and the East-Central European countries had been dominated by different forms of communist rule and dictatorial regimes for several decades before the start of their democratic transformation and integration in the EC/EU, it appears useful to try to compare them.

The main and arguably the most difficult question, however, is which is the most suitable method of conducting such a research. The problem here is not to merely compare the SEE countries with the East-Central European ones, but to discover the ‘modality’ or common path of accession to the Union, which presumably exists at a particular point of time and historical juncture (i.e. at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, as well as after the collapse of communism and the thriving of globalisation and different regional integration processes). A closely related and equally important problem is to reflect on the speed of achieving one’s political objectives along the road of accession into the EU structures. In order to best describe and analyse the SEE enlargement in a comparative perspective, it seems appropriate to use a variant of **path dependence** theory that may explain empirical

¹¹ Enough to mention the serious difficulties that Greece encountered immediately before joining the EEC (i.e. during the 1979-1980 period), while the troubles of Bulgaria and Romania have still not been over a few months before their accession on 1 January 2007.

reality. Political scientists have in principle used different methods, derived from path dependence theory, in order to account for the emergence of a particular set of political institutions and institutional relationships (North 1990; Pierson 1996 and 1997). However, in other social science disciplines, and especially in economics, path dependence has been applied more broadly, i.e. to explain alternative choices in mostly uncertain situations (Arthur 1989 and 1994; Goodstein 1995). For instance, when there has been a competition between unequally resourceful actors, seemingly ‘unexpected’ outcomes have been clarified through path dependence analysis. The next section provides a detailed overview of the theoretical assumptions and possible applications of different path dependence models.

3. Why Path Dependence?

The enlargement of the EU has never been a linear process, with clearly defined beginning and end points, but, rather, a randomly developing and difficult-to-predict venture (Torreblanca 2001; Schimmelfennig 2003; Grabbe 2006). Consequently, it might be presumed, that this process could best be described by means of path dependence,¹² which, as an empirical research model, primarily cares for uncertainty in dynamic situations. A central hypothesis underlying this approach is that the previous decisions and unexpected occurrences would play an important role later on during any path-dependent process. For this reason, time and *tempo* are also seen as important factors in determining the success of this type of social analysis. Path dependence does not specifically look for the presence of certain benchmarks (i.e. institutional structures and norms) and decision-making outcomes. On the contrary, it tends to prioritise chance and, occasionally, second best or, even, third best options, as it often happens in international relations and politics in general. That is why, this kind of analysis is endowed with its own predicting logic and offers a particular methodology of keeping track of different-in-scale and -complexity processes, which is different from the already known methods of describing enlargement.¹³

¹² Ulrich Sedelmeir has recently published a book (2005), referring to path dependence during enlargement. However, his approach is quite different from the one applied in this paper; he reviews EU enlargement policy from a constructivist and a historical institutionalist perspective.

¹³ Actually, enlargement has rarely been tackled from a theoretical perspective. It has mostly been approached descriptively – i.e. in terms of particular EU policies and policy outcomes (i.e. CFSP, trade,

Path dependence theory places a special emphasis on several crucial elements of and sequences within this sort of processes, such as the relevance of the initial conditions and the point of departure, as well as the emergence key junctures or 'points of equilibrium.' For instance, as regards the most recent enlargement, it might be presumed, that a set of initial conditions was certainly very influential during the earlier periods of EC/EU–Eastern European relations, such as before and immediately after the collapse of communism in 1989-91. Then, there was a general lack of information about the countries on the Eastern side of the former Iron Curtain as well as about the real intentions of the major actors participating in the process of European integration. Later on, however, the signing of important bilateral treaties between the EC/EU and the Eastern European countries (the Europe Agreements), and the adoption of a set of enlargement criteria (the 'Copenhagen Criteria') placed this process firmly on track and reduced uncertainty greatly. However, the occurrence of several major political crises in the broader external environment of the EC/EU, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the outbreak of ethnic and civil-military conflicts on the territory of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, had a considerable impact on the evolution of the EU relations with Eastern Europe. This had arguably had a strong influence on the development pattern of the Union's foreign policy towards the region, especially with respect to a prospective enlargement eastwards.

3.1. Theoretical antecedents and recent developments in the use of path dependence theory

As already mentioned, the notion of path dependence looks for the existence of a few key determinants, such as the presence of initial conditions and points of equilibrium, while the participants in this kind of social processes try to assure competitive advantages for themselves. It is usually presumed that several actors compete for scarce resources, including time, to achieve the same or a similar set of goals. Along the track to completing their objectives they influence each other and/or

ENP, or conditionality, compliance and profitability) – and, mostly, from the point of view of one set of actors, i.e. the member states and related subnational actors, the EU institutions or the acceding and potential applicant countries. For exceptions, albeit sometimes partial, see Friis and Murphy 2000, Wallace 2000, Sjørusen and Smith 2001, and Schimmelfennig 2003.

are influenced by external actors and forces. This is occasionally named a “positive feedback” or an “increasing return” mechanism (Arthur 1990 and 1994). Quite often, however, these presumably ‘competing’ actors do not actually compete directly, but indirectly – by following alternative paths. This **endogenous change** results in the creation of new ‘points of equilibrium.’ A similar set of results might also be achieved through **exogenously-induced changes**, or shocks, emanating from an external influence. As a result, there is a persistent uncertainty regarding the relative importance of endogenous and exogenous factors. Moreover, because of the ‘bifurcations’ along their path, “**lock-ins**” or “points of no return” are created. They prevent the principal actors to achieve their initially planned objectives and, eventually, they may end up at different points with dissimilar results. This situation is graphically presented in diagram 1.

Paste Diagram 1 about here!

Despite its relative complexity as a set of theoretical assumptions and specific terminology, path dependence models are aimed at helping scholars to track intricate processes and account for unexpected and divergent outcomes. In the broad social science literature path dependence is used to support several hypotheses:

- (a) the timing and sequence of the process matter;
- (b) large consequences may result from relatively unrelated events;
- (c) a wide range of social outcomes is often possible, however insignificant a factor may initially appear to be.

In political science, there have been several authors who have used path dependence to describe time-sensitive and indeterminate socio-political processes (Perow 1984; North 1990; Jervis 1993; and Andreev 2003). Paul Pierson is probably the one who has contributed to clarifying the theoretical meaning of path dependence mostly (Pierson 1992 and 1993; Pierson and Leibfried 1995). At the same time, he has also been the one who has consistently applied this theoretical model in relation to the study of European integration (Pierson 1996, 1997 and 1998). His research has predominantly focused on “broad theories European integration” (Pierson 1998: 28) and the application of path dependence to macro-political analysis. More specifically,

he has used the assumptions of path dependence theory to conduct research in the well-established field of historical-institutionalism in the European integration studies.¹⁴ According to him, “historical institutionalism cuts across the usual sharp dichotomy between rational choice and non-rational choice work, drawing on research within both traditions that emphasises the significance of temporal processes.” (Pierson 1998: 32) In this sense, the perception of social processes as uncertain and dynamic ventures, unlike the commonly-held vision of them being “efficient historical processes” (March and Olson 1989: 5-6), offers a fresher and more challenging perspective to the study of European integration. However, Paul Pierson has never explicitly conducted research on EU enlargement. He, nevertheless, admits in one of his publications that, “path dependence may occur in policy development as well, since policies can also constitute crucial systems of rules, incentive, and constraints.” (Pierson 1993: 607-8) Despite a quite broad understanding of political institutions as policy structures and their associated norms, Pierson’s interpretation of enlargement as the fusion between a specific EU policy and the process of institution creation related to European integration, which enlargement is indubitably part of, might be a good basis for future research (see fn. 13). In this sense, path dependence presents an interesting viewpoint towards studying the operational dichotomy of enlargement being both an independent EU ‘external policy’ and a sub-process of European integration (Schimmelfennig 2003; Andreev 2004b).¹⁵

3.2. Path dependence and the EU fifth enlargement

Since path dependence theory stresses the relevance of time and timing, it is very important to establish the sequence of political events and the periods that they delineate. As already mentioned, it is crucial to look for points of equilibrium as well. The first key point is the ‘point of departure’. It marks the beginning of the processes

¹⁴ Paul Pierson defines historical institutionalism as a scholarship, which is *historical* “because it recognises that political development must be understood as a process that unfolds over time,” and which is *institutionalist* “because it stresses that many contemporary implications of these temporal processes are embedded in institutions – whether these be formal rules, policy structures, or social norms.” (Pierson 1998: 29)

¹⁵ It should be mentioned, however, that the historical institutionalist perspective is only one of the many possible perspectives toward the theorisation of enlargement (see fn. 12). In case of its usage, however, both the ‘background conditions’ and temporal phases of enlargement should be made clear. Otherwise, there is a danger of confusing the final and intermediary goals of enlargement, on the one

and, simultaneously, establishes which are the ‘initial conditions.’ Various other equilibrium points are formed through endogenously- or exogenously-induced changes. Finally, the ‘point of arrival’ marks the completion of the processes and, thus, provides a vantage point to estimate whether the initially established goals have been achieved.

As regards the unravelling of the EU fifth enlargement, several observations could be made in relations to the use of path dependence theory. First, it should be pointed out that, alongside the eight East-Central European candidate states, there were two SEE ones – Bulgaria and Romania. Secondly, although having completed transition to democracy from seemingly the same ideologically dominated autocratic system, there had been different degrees of the ruling elite’s allegiance to the Communist doctrine and the personification of political power. Market liberalisation and the respect for the rule of law among the ten Eastern European countries were quite dissimilar under the previous regime as well. That is why, the initial conditions of the current enlargement have to be carefully selected and analysed. Thirdly, there have been different sets of actors participating in the process of enlargement. Broadly speaking, these are the EU and its member states, on the one hand, and the applicant countries, on the other. There is also a multitude of various other societal and transnational actors with less permanent influence over enlargement. Hence, there could be quite diverse, and sometimes opposite, points of view towards regional expansion as, for example, of the EU insiders and outsiders, of the national and supranational institutions, and of the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of this process.

In order to analyse the current process of enlargement, let us simply consider four key elements of path dependence: the initial conditions, the point of departure, the points of equilibrium and the possible ‘exogenous shocks.’ In a recent publication (Andreev 2003), the author has posited that a real beginning for the EU fifth enlargement was the adoption of the so-called “Copenhagen Criteria” on June 10, 1993 (European Council 2003).¹⁶ The main condition for selecting this event as a ‘point of departure’ has been that after the stipulation of this set of criteria for including new member states, the enlargement process has been put firmly on track and has become virtually irreversible. It was, in other words, a moment when the EU

hand, and the quite separate process of institution-creation *pace* enlargement in the same or related policy fields, on the other.

¹⁶ For the precise wording of the Copenhagen Criteria, see footnote 10.

and its member states and the Eastern European countries established contractual relations and from which it was very difficult for one of the parties to retreat from leading enlargement negotiations.¹⁷

A correct understanding of the initial conditions may provide a prime explanation for the occurrence and sequence of certain events after the beginning of any path dependent process. In the case of the EU-ECE European relations before the summer of 1993, such events could have been of a historical, economic, political, social, ethno-cultural or other nature. It is very difficult to establish which group of factors has contributed most to decision-making as regards enlargement in the EU and its Eastern European partners after the adoption of the “Copenhagen Criteria.” However, it could be hypothesised that in the first couple of years after the collapse of the communist system, some of the most urgent priorities of the political elites in ECE were connected with abolishing the former authoritarian regime, with completing successful transitions to democracy and with rebuilding their respective economies. Moreover, it could be presumed that the EU and its member states continuously kept track of these changes and became decisively involved in many fields of social transformation of the new post-communist countries.

Apart from the point of departure, the points of equilibrium include the decisions taken by the EU Heads of States and the supranational bureaucracy at different international summits, which have been concerned with enlargement after the period 1989-91 onwards. The candidate states from Eastern Europe have been in no position to negotiate with the EU institutions and member states better conditions or precise dates for accession on equal footing (Zielonka 1997; Smith 1999; Grabbe 2006). However, one should also keep in mind that there has been a substantial difference in the nature of backing on the part of some of the Western actors. For instance, the Commission and European Parliament have in general been much more predisposed towards quicker and more efficient enlargement, while the EU member states have only conditionally been so (Avery and Cameron 1998; Zielonka 1997 and 2001) For instance, these latter have acted as ‘motors for enlargement’ only in the case of some of their neighbouring Eastern or Southern European states or regions,

¹⁷ The oft-cited case of the delayed approval by the EU of the Turkish application to open accession negotiations is no exception to the rule, because since the early 2000s it has been very difficult for the EU to halt the progress of this process solely on the basis of the ‘Copenhagen criteria,’ even though they might eventually become stricter or be modified for future member states.

whether they have had geo-political and economic interest to enlarge the Union.¹⁸ As a result, occasionally ‘sub-optimal’ solutions were found to the existing problems, which, in turn, have shifted the general equilibrium points of the enlargement process. Finally, one should not forget that the current enlargement has been the most comprehensive since the creation of the EEC in the mid-1950s. That is why, managing various and sometimes competing interests at different levels of governance, has constituted a “complex juggling act” for the majority of European actors. (Friis and Murphy 2000)

Looking back at the history of EU-Eastern European relations over the last fifteen years, one could see that there were two major international political events, or exogenous shocks, which substantially changed the attitude and behaviour of the EU institutions and member states towards ECE and helped launch the current enlargement eastwards. The first was the downfall of communism, i.e. the period 1988-89 in Central and Eastern Europe, and 1990-91 in the former Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The second was the military conflict in Kosovo (1998-99). While the former represented a condition *sine qua non* for beginning of more active EU-Eastern European bilateral relations, the latter was a major military and humanitarian crisis, in which a number of EU member states and applicant countries from Eastern Europe were directly involved. During no other period, including the armed conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, comparable situations as the collapse of Communism and the Kosovo crisis were perceived as truly European issues and have become the preoccupation of both Western and Eastern European governments to the extent that they would be ready to resolve them in common and to intervene with military force. On these two occasions, a consensus was reached both at the supranational and national level that it was imperative to act immediately, in order to provide an adequate response to the challenges that arose. Another important factor was that the EU elites and those of its member states had ultimately understood that enlargement and, to an extent, even the promise of enlargement, could serve as a powerful foreign policy instrument. In this fashion, the member states were able to convince the current and prospective applicant countries

¹⁸ It is indicative that until the very end of the accession process (i.e. 1 May, 2004), Greece threatened to block the Fifth EU enlargement, if Cyprus was not admitted to the Union, albeit a divided country between Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

to resolve their internal and inter-regional problems peacefully and in a less costly for the EU way.

4. Comparing the ECE and SEE. Implications for Future Enlargements Beyond 2007

As has already been pointed out, so far, the EU fifth enlargement has mostly been influenced by the political and social developments concentrated in two relatively short periods of time: firstly, during the early 1990s and, secondly, between the late 1990s and early 2000s (Andreev 2003). The first period has spanned the moment of the collapse of communist rule in Eastern Europe (1989-91) with the adoption of the so-called “Copenhagen Criteria” (June 1993), while the second has reflected the period after the military conflict in Kosovo (1998-99) until the December 2002 IGC decision to enlarge the EU towards the CEE-8. In the previous section the significance of both the collapse of communism and the Kosovo conflict for European integration and enlargement has been explained. However, some further elucidations are necessary as to what differentiated impact these “exogenous shocks” have had on the progress of the EU fifth enlargement in ECE and SEE.

In the case of Bulgaria and Romania, the successful overthrow of the previous regime and the start of political and economic transformation have been decisive for the EC/EU to open accession negotiations with them in the early 1990s. Although these two countries have been perceived as to a certain extent lagging behind the ECE group of post-communist applicant states, they have gradually been included in all EU programs and, when possible, have never been kept apart from the “Višegrad Four” and the Baltic States.¹⁹ The stipulation of the Copenhagen Criteria in June 1993 has been another occasion to symbolically and formally reiterate that the ten post-communist candidate countries would be treated impartially and according their merits by the EU. This relatively unproblematic situation with the enlargement process has continued until the publication of the *Agenda 2000* by the European Commission in the autumn of 1997 (European Commission 1997). In this first

¹⁹ The only notable exception has been the EC/EU visa policy and the inclusion of Bulgaria and Romania into the so-called “Black List” of countries needing a visa to enter the Schengen territory. Eventually, the situation was gradually rectified in the early 2000s for both countries – but it took

“Enlargement Progress Report”, it became clear that the ten candidate states from Eastern Europe would be divided into two even groups – one more advanced and one a little bit further behind.²⁰ Such a separation was logical, although the criteria for differentiating between the individual countries were eventually quite arbitrary (Grabbe 1999; Zielonka 2001; Andreev 2003). The whole process became further politicised as some of the EU-15 member states were openly in favour of certain candidate states, while some the separations of countries by the European Commission, such as that of Estonia from the other two Baltic States and the one of the Czech Republic from Slovakia, were questionable from a geo-political point of view as well.

The subsequent military conflict in Kosovo created a powerful political impulse for dealing with the post-communist and post-civil war environment in Eastern Europe, and the Balkans in particular, more actively. Thus, a comprehensive enlargement was gradually mulled by the EU political elite and, as a consequence, this policy was tried ‘to be sold’ to the European citizens as a conflict-prevention measure. During the Helsinki IGC in December 1999, the EU decided to open accession negotiations with the remaining ECE candidate states, as well as with Bulgaria and Romania. In order to further stabilise the Balkans and recognise its role during the Kosovo conflict, the EU Heads of State also decided to offer a chance to Turkey to start accession negotiations in 2005, provided it managed to show substantial progress in meeting the “Copenhagen political criteria” before that date. During subsequent IGCs (i.e. Nice 2000, Laeken 2001 and, finally, Copenhagen 2002), it became clear that Bulgaria and Romania, having mostly had problems with their economies and the judiciary, would be left out from the rest of the post-communist countries that would join the Union in 2004, but not out of the Fifth Enlargement Round. Depending on the progress achieved, it was provisionally decided that they could join the Union sometime in 2007 or 2008. Parallel to this, in April 2004, Croatia was also granted the status of an “accession country” by the EU Commission.²¹

almost a decade longer to lift the visas for most EU countries, compared with the ECE and Baltic states for instance (Grabbe 2006; Smith 1999 and 2004)

²⁰ The first, more advanced, group included Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. The second group featured Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia. In 1998, Malta had temporarily suspended its application to join the EU.

²¹ European Commission, *Opinion on Croatia’s Application for Membership of the European Union*, COM(2004) 257 final, Brussels, 20 April 2004, p. 120 (Conclusion).

Finally, the problem of enlarging the EU to new SEE countries should also be considered. The prospective sixth and further expansions of the Union towards the Balkans and other countries from the European neighbourhood can partly be compared to the almost completed EU Fifth Enlargement Round. However, if one adds to the original SEE ‘enlargement group’ of Bulgaria and Romania, the current and future candidate states from the ‘Western Balkans’ plus Turkey, the analysis of this process becomes quite complicated. Path dependence will certainly help in describing and theorising this prospective development, but, nonetheless, this method would have its limits. Despite that the recent communist past and other sub-regional social and political legacies constitute ‘initial conditions’ for all SEE countries (without Turkey and Greece), one should also take into consideration the decisive effects that the civil wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina have had on the political and economic development of these countries, as well as the influence these conflicts had had on the European public opinion. The situation has been arguably worse for Serbia and Montenegro, while the unresolved problem with the international status of Kosovo, has had repercussions on neighbouring countries such as FYROM and Albania. In this sense, it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to establish a common “point of departure” for all Western Balkan states vis-à-vis European integration. However, this latter can be described as a “stop-and-go” process. The efforts of the FYROM government to simultaneously resolve its domestic political problems and to open accession negotiations with the EU have been a good case in point, that, occasionally, this is quite difficult and may slow the integration of the country in the European structures. A similar set of problems, related to state-building and international political legitimisation, has been encountered in other parts of the Balkans as well.²² This has, in turn, made political analysts and EU decision-makers careful about either predicting or rapidly advancing future enlargements. Domestic political and socio-economic difficulties within the current EU member states have also exacerbated the situation as to go against new enlargements beyond the actual fifth one.

Both from an empirical and theoretical point of view, any comparison between the ECE and the present and future SEE enlargements should take all of the above

²² Bosnia and Herzegovina and the province of Kosovo, which have been UN protectorates for some time now, have also repeatedly expressed their willingness to join the EU. Ironically though, the EU

factors into account. Diagram 2 unravels graphically this complex process by pointing to the impact that enlargement has on two sets of countries – A and B. The first group “A” designates the ECE candidate states, while group “B” features the SEE countries among the post-communist applicant states.

Paste Diagram 2 about here!

Although the “Copenhagen criteria” allegedly continue to be crucial for the ‘Western Balkan’ candidate countries, a real “point of departure” for them might probably constitute the Cologne IGC (June 1999), which confirmed *“the readiness of the European Union to draw the countries of [South-eastern Europe] closer to the prospect of full integration into its structures.”* (GAC 1999) As regards the re-invigorated candidacy of Turkey, such a starting point is the December 1999 Helsinki EU Summit, when the European Heads of State decided to offer an applicant status to Turkey. In order to further understand the dynamics of EU enlargement in the Balkans, students of enlargements should closely monitor any path dependence developments after these dates, i.e. the emergence of new “points of equilibrium” and “shocks,” for all SEE countries, including the ones which, like Bulgaria and Romania, are in a process of acceding to the Union.

5. Conclusion

The main goal of this paper has been to explore a possible model of analysing regional integration enlargement processes in general and the EU fifth enlargement in particular. The “theoretically neglected” by EU scholars subject of enlargement (Wallace 2000) has been approached neither from the perspective of an extraordinary/ ‘historical’ event in EU foreign policy making (Moravcsik 1993 and 1998), nor from the perspective of a functional extension of the EU market and security borders (Schmitter 1969 and 2002; Wallace 1993; Friis and Murphy 2000; Sjursen and Smith 2001; Schimmelfennig 2003). In this paper, enlargement has predominantly been considered as a series of path dependent events and sub-processes, which occasionally

has been among the main responsible for the political and economic survival of these two polities *via* its police missions and social and economic programmes there.

had something to do with each other, but most of the time developed randomly and produced unexpected outcomes. In other words, the focus here has been less on the content and technical modalities the enlargement policy itself, but more on the sequences within European integration after the end of the Cold War and the process of the EU Eastern enlargement strictly speaking.

Path dependence – as a selected method of describing and analysing the EU fifth enlargement – could be characterised as being less of a full-fledged theory of enlargement, but more of a medium-range model (or, even, a mere analytical tool) of tackling the issue of expansion of regional integration arrangements in a methodologically sound and accurate way. Furthermore, but quite central to any of the research hypotheses developed in this paper, regarding the unravelling of regional integration and enlargement in particular, has been the fact that the predictions offered by this model have been probabilistic and working over a relatively limited period of time (i.e. short- and medium-term). This has mostly been pre-determined by the uncertain nature of any path dependent process, enlargement included, which involved a multitude of actors that strove to reach different points of equilibrium and disequilibrium depending on the situation. Overall, path dependence attempts to capture the dynamics of enlargement, as the latter, being predominantly a political process, has depended on various endogenous and exogenous shocks that might have occurred in its internal and external environment over time.

From an empirical point of view, different aspects of the EU fifth enlargement in East-Central Europe compared to Southeastern Europe have been investigated. Although the majority of SEE countries have been covered by this study (with the notable exception of Greece, which has already been an EC/EU member state since 1981), only Bulgaria and Romania have been part of the fifth wave of expansion of the EU. In fact, with the virtually certain inclusion of both countries on 1 January 2007, the fifth enlargement will be over and the geographically isolated until now Greece will be linked to East-Central and North-Eastern parts of Europe by land. According to the path dependence model advanced in this paper, it has been presumed that several powerful exogenous shocks in the EC/EU external environment have played a role to take the decision to expand both towards ECE and SEE. The sequence and conviction with which the invitation to join to the EU has been extended to the potential member states from the former Communist Bloc has vastly depended on the effects that those shocks have had on the EU-15 and the supranational institutions.

Notably, the collapse of the communist system in 1989-91 and the military conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-95) and the province of Kosovo (1998-99) in particular, led to major political breakthroughs to include (or exclude, for that matter) certain ECE and SEE countries from the enlargement process. Moreover, the production of key institutional documents by the European Council and the Commission, such as the Copenhagen Criteria (1993), the Europe Agreements (the first half of the 1990s), the *Agenda 2000*, and the yearly opinions on the preparedness of individual applicant countries (starting in 1998) have helped not only to launch, but also to streamline and occasionally to catalyse the enlargement process.

As regards the rest of the SEE countries aspiring to join the EU, such as Turkey and the Western Balkans, the effects of previous decisions that have been taken at the European level with respect to the EU fifth enlargement have also been noteworthy. For instance, the December 1999 Helsinki Council decision to open accession negotiation with all 12 applicant countries from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, irrespective of their having previously been place in the so-called 'first' and 'second' waves of enlargement, has also contributed to the EU-15 leaders take the bold step to make Turkey an official candidate for membership. Furthermore, the SAP for the Western Balkans, was created not only in response to the Kosovo crisis and, hence, in view of the political and economic stabilisation of the region, but also in order to prevent the creation of stark divisions between individual countries in the region (i.e. Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania) and the rest of the Balkans which hoped to join the Union in the nearest possible future.

Although the commentaries in this paper do not go much beyond the date 1 January 2007 (i.e. the end of the EU fifth enlargement), it is possible to imagine that some of the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the actual path dependent model would work for countries from the prospective sixth and further enlargements. As concerns Turkey and the Western Balkan states, it is certain that the Copenhagen Criteria will still be valid, although the conditions stipulated in them might be expanded and modified. The recent European Council summit in Salzburg (2006) has for instance made such an attempt to actualise the accession criteria by including an "absorption capacity" clause. Despite the fact that some EU member states have seen the accession of Turkey – a large and predominantly Muslim country – as a major stumbling block in order to carry out with further enlargements, there has been a

consensus at the European level that the expansion of the Union should not completely halt after the incorporation of Bulgaria and Romania. On the contrary, the Western Balkan states have been assured their place in an enlarged EU, albeit in some more distant future, while positive signals have also been sent to a number of the ENP countries, such as Ukraine, Moldova and some of the Caucasus states, like Armenia and Georgia. It might be assumed, however, that a series of ‘endogenous shocks’ on the EU-25 or -27 domestic scene, such as the negative referenda on the Draft European Constitution in France and the Netherlands in 2005, as well as the rise of xenophobic and populist parties in various EU member states, would considerably slow down and possibly derail future enlargement attempts. The same is true with respect to the increasingly unstable security situation in the Middle East and parts of Asia that may, in turn, adversely affect the political and economy situation in Europe (i.e. in terms of “exogenous shocks” such as military debacle, terrorist attacks, immigration waves, economic slowdown, etc.). In this context, even the relatively pro-enlargement stance of the European Commission and the promise to apply strict conditionality would not assuage popular fears that the expansion of the EU would lead to a ‘dilution’ of the European Integration Project and to substantial social and political losses for the ordinary people.

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Diagram 1.

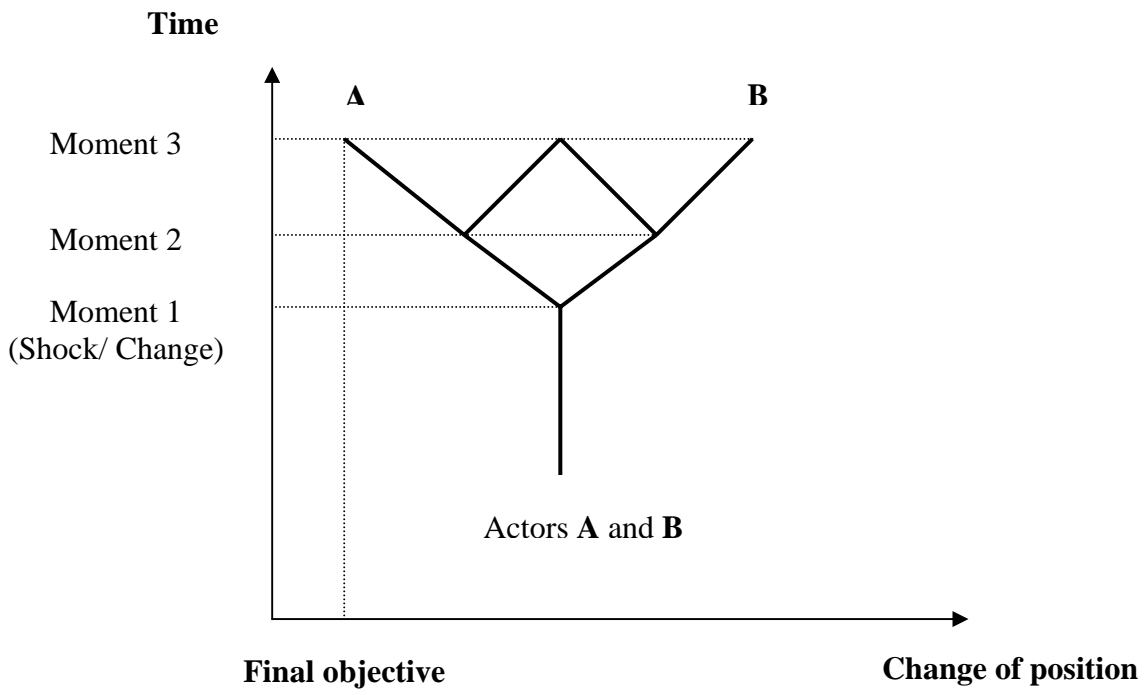


Diagram 2.

