



## Research Article

© 2024 Alketa Marku and Eva Allushi Teqja.  
This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons  
Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License  
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

Received: 6 October 2023 / Accepted: 25 December 2023 / Published: 5 January 2024

# The European Integration Process of Western Balkans, Time for a New Approach

Alketa Marku<sup>1</sup>

Eva Allushi Teqja<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Center for Scientific Research and Excellence,  
University Aleksander Moisiu,  
Durrës, Albania

<sup>2</sup>Department of Political Science,  
University Aleksander Moisiu,  
Durrës, Albania

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2024-0011>

## Abstract

*The paper tries to prove that the initiatives for the integration of the Western Balkans in EU, both those generated from outside and those from inside the region, seem to be without a clear product. Using Albania as a case study, we compare the effectiveness of the Berlin Process and the Open Balkans in the perception of young people. The paper sheds light on the data and facts which show that the objectives of the Berlin process and those of the Open Balkans are not fulfilled at all. We seek to answer questions like: Was the Berlin process a retaining, encouraging or simply failed strategy? Did the Open Balkans increase division or collaboration in the region? Through the comparative approach, it is demonstrated that integration still seems far away and the challenges that are holding it back are both political and economic ones. Considering the resurgence of old conflicts in Western Balkan countries due to slow processes and the impact of new geopolitical developments on the region, this paper seeks to address whether ensuring the European perspective for the Western Balkans is possible through a targeted intervention of both economic and political measures. Simultaneously, the paper explores the potential for alternative initiatives in this context. It is also analyzed whether these interventions should be imposed from outside the region or encouraged by the region itself. The paper concludes that a rapid European response is required today through new initiatives mostly based on a crucial financial framework and a stronger political approach. Reconstructing the region in economic terms and remodeling the Western Balkan societies could be as successful as it resulted for European states itself after War World II through the Marshall Plan.*

**Keywords:** enlargement processes, criteria, new initiatives, economic solutions

## 1. Introduction

The new geopolitical situations have rapidly brought the issues of the EU enlargement back into the focus of discussions. The need for an accelerated integration process for Ukraine and Moldova, along with a revival of integration efforts for Western Balkan countries not yet in the EU (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia), has been underscored by

Russia's aggression and the potential destabilization of the Middle East following Hamas's attack on Israel, as highlighted by researchers.

The acceleration of Euro-Atlantic integration becomes critical, especially when Russian and Chinese influences in the Western Balkans aim to grow as part of their geopolitical strategies. Some candidate countries, not only of the Western Balkans, are not NATO member countries. The conflict in northern Kosovo and the unstable situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina necessitate the acceleration of integration processes in the Western Balkans. There are still unresolved bilateral and internal issues in the region. The achievements are slow in solving unresolved bilateral issues and accomplishing reconciliation within and throughout societies in the region. The recognition of Kosovo as an independent state by Serbia seems even more distant after the "oath" of President Vucic, that Serbia will never recognize Kosovo.

Geopolitics were also the focus of the 10<sup>th</sup> summit in Tirana held in 2023. The summit of the Berlin process, initiated by the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2014 was held for the first time in a non-EU country, such as Albania. Signals of a growing awareness on the part of the EU come as early as September 2023, when the EU's foreign policy chief, Joseph Borrell, even welcomed a 2030 deadline for the next enlargement, hoping that this will mobilize energies both in the EU and in the candidate states. The question is how to prepare the candidate countries to join the EU and what other steps the Union can take to support this journey. What would help the Western Balkans more is an EU-led economic growth plan, as Van der Leyn proposed in Tirana.

Albanian researcher Arben Malaj (Malaj, 2023) suggests that due to the problematic outcomes from the swift admission of Romania and Bulgaria and growing worries about Hungary and Poland's actions affecting judicial independence and democratic norms, the EU is skeptical about the Western Balkan countries' ability to implement reforms centered on upholding the rule of law and democratic standards. These reforms are seen as crucial prerequisites for advancing further integration steps.

Given the extent of institutional development in the six Western Balkan countries, there is an obvious need for additional institutional mechanisms, which are needed: (i) to facilitate the work of the 6 countries with each other; (ii) to build local and regional consensus; and (iii) to develop the necessary skills within countries to design, implement and oversee the process.

This paper tries to shed light on the obstacles that the European integration process is facing in the region and what are the possibilities for it to succeed. These recent developments are further addressed in order to take appropriate action (in terms of policies and actions).

## 2. Research Method

Methodologically, this paper uses two approaches: first, a comparative analysis of the Balkan countries with regard to political and economic developments; second, a quantitative research method through sampling surveys with closed questions. To know the perception regarding the influence of the Berlin process, and Open Balkan Initiative, the survey asked the participants to rate how the recent developments in the region have impacted them. The survey is conducted in the central part of Albania (Tirana and Durrës region). The questionnaires were filled out by 105 students, (age range 19-23 years old) from January to March 2023. The question format was multiple choice and closed ended.

Based on the data, a macro analysis on the integration prospects and beyond is provided.

## 3. Western Balkans through an Economic and Political Repetitive Cycle

20 years after the Thessaloniki Summit, the question remains whether the integration of the Western Balkans is being hindered more politically or economically. Evaluating the factors, we see that autocratic political elites, which are producing mistrust, division, dysfunctional economy, and depopulation because of immigration, still haunt the region.

It is becoming clear that the slowness of the processes is reviving in an inevitable manner the

old conflicts. The European response appears indifferent and unproductive, as initiatives like the recent one in Berlin have failed to yield the anticipated outcomes. Hence, this paper considers various strategies that the EU could employ to recalibrate the accession of the Western Balkans, notwithstanding the need for sincere reforms in the aspiring member states.

Despite the hope that the region, based on EU standards, would strengthen democracy and the rule of law, the Western Balkans is still suffering from a developmental gap. Also, the rise of authoritarian leaders and their grip on power only seems to increase (Lemstra, 2020). Effective economic reforms have often been delayed since the regional economies are incapable of withstanding the competitive pressures of the EU common market (Bonomi and Uvalić, 2019). According to data, much of the Western Balkan’s economies have remained undeveloped; dependent on aid, loans, and remittances (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Ranking in Global Competitiveness Index 2015-16

		ALB	BIH	MKD	MNE	SRB	WB	EU-11	EU	EU-15
Basic Requirements	1st pillar: Institutions	84	127	52	70	120	91	72	47	30
	2 <sup>nd</sup> : Infrastructure	88	103	78	73	75	83	52	33	18
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Macroeconomic environment	118	98	47	79	125	93	47	59	66
	4 <sup>th</sup> Health and primary education	52	48	76	33	62	54	45	30	20
Efficiency Enhancers	5 <sup>th</sup> : Higher education and training	47	97	46	54	71	63	40	30	20
	6 <sup>th</sup> Goods market efficiency	63	129	33	70	127	84	53	39	29
	7 <sup>th</sup> : Labour market efficiency	97	131	84	74	118	101	68	54	45
	8 <sup>th</sup> : Financial market development	118	113	52	44	120	89	56	53	48
	9 <sup>th</sup> Readiness	89	79	63	55	51	67	37	26	16
	10 <sup>th</sup> Market size	104	97	108	131	75	103	66	54	37
Innovation and Sophistication Factors	11 <sup>th</sup> : Business sophistication	95	125	72	102	132	105	63	39	19
	12 <sup>th</sup> Innovation	118	115	72	102	132	105	63	39	19
Global Competitiveness Index		93	111	60	70	94	86	50	36	23

**Source:** World economic forum’s global competitiveness index historical database

Analyzing this situation, Bieber and Tzifakis (2019) underline that the EU’s unfinished business in the Balkans, coupled with diminished economic membership incentives, has opened the door to various political, economic and security alternatives. In the EU reports (European Commission (2018, 2019), or in US reports (US Department of State, 2023) it is mentioned that countries show clear elements of state capture, including links with organized crime and corruption at all levels of government. The European Commission (2018) observes the lack of progress among the current EU candidate countries. At this point it is clear that further efforts are needed in order to recalibrate the EU accession process.

On the other side no progress will be made without economic growth. According to the World Bank in 2019<sup>1</sup> the Western Balkan countries saw strong inflows of foreign direct investment, record low levels of unemployment and steady economic headway after two decades of decline or at best, stagnation. However, the gross domestic product per capital across the 6 Western Balkan states is still only half the average in the 11 EU member states of Eastern Europe (Table 2). The lack of

<sup>1</sup> World Bank. World Development Report 2019. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2019>

investments in infrastructure, education, innovation, research and development, and culture remains common in most of the Western Balkan countries. European Commission 2022 Report<sup>2</sup> finds that the key problem holding back the region's sustainable and equitable economic growth remains low productivity, reflecting years of under-investment, but also weak institutions.

**Table 2:** Basic Economical Overview. 2020

	GDP per Capita (PPP)	Unemployment Rate	Inflation Rate
MNE	20.567	17.90%	-0.30%
KOS	11.368	24.40%	0.20%
MKD	16.927	9%	1.20%
BIH	15.612	17.20%	-1.10%
ALB	13.818	15.90%	1.60%
SRB	19.231	11.70%	1.60%
WB6	-	12.90%	0.90%

Note: GDP per capita is expressed in USD

**Source:** National authorities and the world bank.

Meanwhile, new challenges are in front of the region. Human capital is needed to advance the required reforms, but for the moment thousands of people are leaving the territory seeking for a better life.

#### 4. Initiatives from Outside and Inside

##### 4.1 The Berlin Process. A journey of challenges and obstacles.

In front of the prolong transition of the WB, we see the so-called “Europe fatigue”. In July 2014 the five-year moratorium on EU enlargement was announced by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. At that moment when Europe was skeptical about the enlargement with the countries of the Western Balkans, it was Germany that in 2014 proposed the Berlin Process to give a new message of hope to the countries of the region, but also to respond to new geopolitical developments.

The Berlin Process was a gesture aiming to show that the countries of the Western Balkans were not forgotten, and an attempt to maintain the pace of integration reforms. At first, the process was expected to last 4 years, but it continued even further. It has several concrete objectives for the countries of the Western Balkans, such as: promoting good neighborhood relations and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, supporting the European integration process for the countries of the Western Balkans, helping the countries of the Western Balkans to overcome challenges which they face, such as economic development, security, rule of law and the promotion of stability and prosperity in the Western Balkans.

This process re-emphasizes the preconditions for benefiting from financial support projects aiming at an economy capable of coping with growing competition within the EU. Through the conditionality of infrastructure investments, the Berlin Process encourages Western Balkan countries to deepen legal and regulatory reforms in line with the *acquis Communautaire*. It has clarified the

---

<sup>2</sup> European Commission Brussels, 12.10.2022 Final Commission Staff working document/ Albania 2022 Report. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022SC0332>

priorities for the WB countries such as: infrastructure gap, youth unemployment, low competitiveness of economies and distant prospects of economic convergence with the EU, slow progress in reconciliation, bilateral issues, education and environmental issues. Regarding investments for the Berlin Process, the main instrument is the "Investment Framework for the Western Balkans". This is a donor coordination mechanism that collects funds from the EU, various financial institutions, bilateral donors, and Balkan governments.

The gradual membership of the countries of the Western Balkans in the European Economic Area remains a primary objective. The EU will rigorously monitor and evaluate the fulfillment of the commitments of the Western Balkans for political and economic reforms. In extreme cases, if commitments are not met, financial support and the integration process would "freeze", even temporarily. The inclusion within the Berlin Process of other regional initiatives by integrating overlapping or parallel projects facilitates the integration acceleration of the Western Balkans (Zeneli, 2023).

#### 4.2 *The Balkan Schengen Initiative. Challenges and obstacles*

Previously known as "Mini-Schengen," Open Balkan, was a new initiative aiming to strengthen regional economic integration. It was undertaken by Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia. The idea refers to regional cooperation to increase trade and improve bilateral relations between the member-states.

The leaders of Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia declared from Novi Sad in 2019 that the concept was to promote regional and economic cooperation among Western Balkan countries.

The doubts for this initiative increased because of the refusal to join Open Balkan by Kosovo, Montenegro, and BiH.

Open Balkan became a central topic of discussions among Western Balkan Countries and not only. This initiative has caused a real division between the regional countries. Kosovo refused to join the initiative, calling it a diversion of its path to the EU. For the Albanian leadership, Open Balkan takes Kosovo further, on the road to recognition by Serbia. (Euro News Albania, 2021). Altogether, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro remained skeptical. They worried that participating in an initiative that was not designed in Europe would have affected their accession prospects.

#### 4.3 *Berlin Process and Open Balkan, the unfulfilled initiatives*

Despite the efforts to pursue a Balkan initiative like Open Balkan, we see that it is the Berlin Process that remains the most important initiative in the integration path for the countries of the region. For some analysts "Open Balkan" is considered a creation of an alternative or challenge to the European Union. According to them, Russia is interested in small Balkan hearths separated from the EU. If the Berlin Process is closely linked with the EU, the Open Balkan initiative is linked with Western Balkans themselves; they will remain 'the masters' of the agreements (Kamberi, 2021). Toby Vogel, an expert on the EU and the Western Balkans based in Brussels, seems to think that both these initiatives share a common philosophy. "The basic philosophy is that the policies of the region are so difficult and divisive, that we must focus on achievable objectives, especially in the field of economy, such as: opening borders, stimulating trade, market integration, movement of people, etc.", says Vogel for Radio Free Europe. (Vogel, 2022). In theory, according to him, the two initiatives complement each other or cover the same thing.

What distinguishes the two initiatives is clearly the number of countries involved. Vogel says that the Berlin Process "came from the top down", namely as an initiative of an EU state for the region, and includes all six countries of the Western Balkans, while the Open Balkans originated in the Balkans. One of the initiators of the Open Balkans is the president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, whose country does not recognize the independence of Kosovo. Vogel says that even the EU, for now,

has a complicated relationship with the Open Balkans, due to the fact that "it is not completely clear what its goal is", given that the Berlin Process exists. In a statement on June 14, the president of the European Council, Charles Michel, said that the EU "will always support all regional initiatives that promote economic development and cooperation", but also "respects the decisions taken by individual states".

Some experts point out that the Open Balkans "is not bound" to any EU standard, unlike the Berlin Process, which has standards set by the 'acquis Communautaire', or EU legislation. Arbëresha Loxha, director of the Group for Legal and Political Studies in Kosovo, says that the Open Balkans may even conflict with the Berlin Process, since "the scope of both initiatives is really the same" (Loxha, 2023).

How far have the two processes gone?

In the framework of the "Open Balkans" initiative, Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia have reached a series of agreements, which are said to be aiming at improving regional cooperation.

The agreements, among others, include the movement of their citizens with identity cards, cooperation in facilitating the import and export of goods, the fight against fiscal evasion, the recognition of university degrees, cultural and tourism cooperation, as well as a memorandum of understanding and cooperation on free access in the labor market. The leaders of the three countries have planned to gradually create a common market for 12 million inhabitants - as many as the three countries have together. From January 1, 2023, however, it has been agreed that the border controls between Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania will be removed.

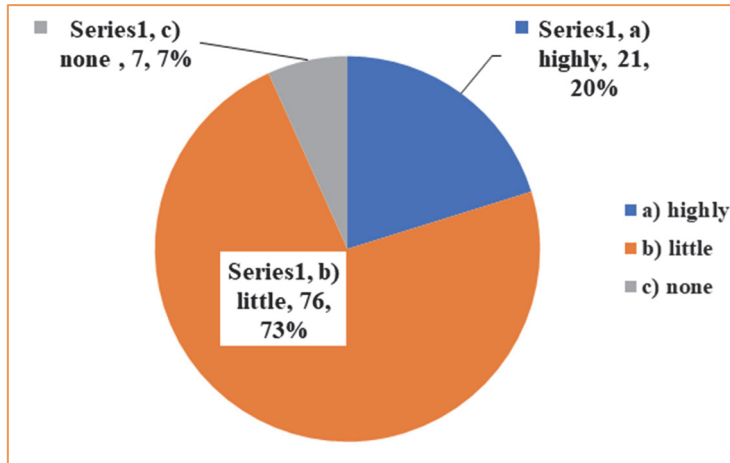
The last meeting within the Open Balkans was held on June 7th and 8th in Ohrid, North Macedonia. But suddenly, Prime Minister Edi Rama on July 1, 2023, from Ulcinj declared that the "Open Balkan" initiative has completed the mission for which it was born, hinting that the initiative has ended. Rama said that "Open Balkan" started as an initiative to push forward the Berlin Process, which will be a priority for the region. For Euro News, Rama added that "The Berlin process is now our main axis" (Euro News, July 1.2023). But what the experts point out is that the Berlin process has not shown the right powers to resolve disagreements in the region, especially those between Serbia and Kosovo and Serbia and BiH. According to Mario Holzner, overall, little has been achieved in relation to the 4 initial objectives of the Berlin Process, (Holzner, 2018).

But why hasn't the Berlin Process achieved much progress?

In almost a decade, the Berlin Process, imposed by the EU, could not create the right spirit for major changes in the region. The autocratic spirit of governance in various countries in the region became an obstacle to the realization of the requested reforms. On the other hand, the Process itself did not commit any qualified financial aid to support the region in the large projects that are required, which mostly have to do with infrastructural projects, in agriculture, education, etc. Meanwhile, the old conflicts in the region are revived during this time, also under the influence of geopolitical developments and have caused that the enthusiasm and trust in initiatives and processes like the Berlin one to decrease significantly.

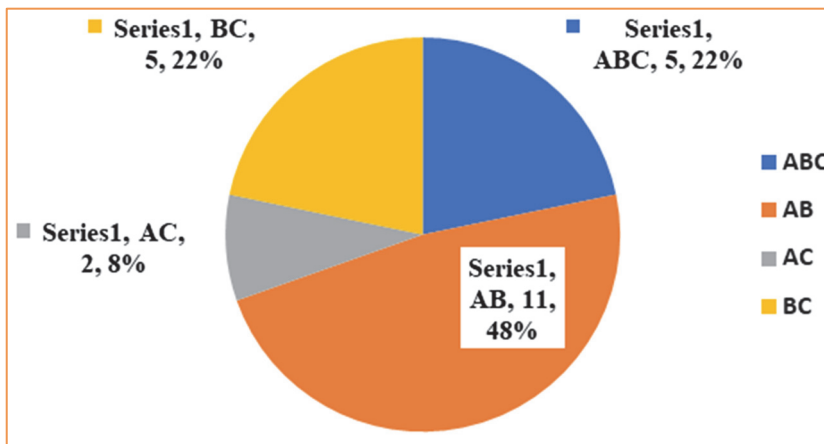
## 5. The Perception of Albanian Youth on the Two Initiatives

We used a survey with a sample of 105 students in the field of political science, bachelor's and master's degree, at the two largest public universities in Albania, University of Tirana and "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës. In order to understand the youth's perception on the influence of the Berlin process, and Open Balkan Initiative, the short survey asked the participants to rate the impact they feel on recent developments in the region.



**Figure 1:** How familiar are you with European and regional initiatives, in which countries of the Western Balkans are involved?

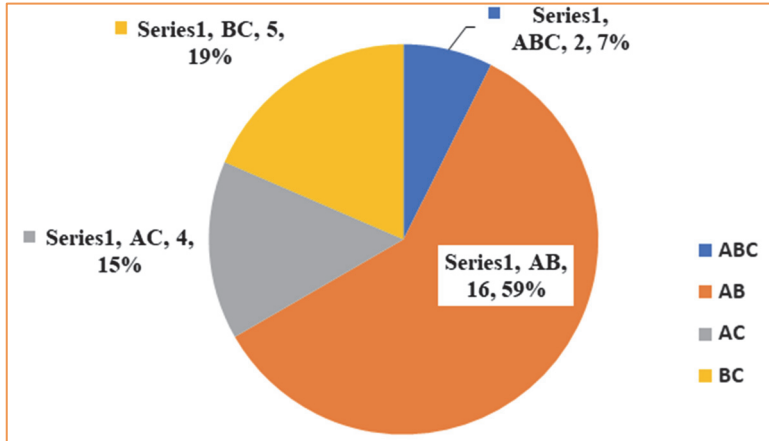
Through the survey we see that asking to the question: How familiar are you with European and regional initiatives, in which countries of the Western Balkans are involved, 76 of 105 interviewers respond A little. Only 46% believe that the Berlin Process and the Open Balkan Initiative should merge into one. According to responses to the surveys and application forms, we see that 88% of them think that should be a new initiative which guarantees faster progress of the integration of Western Balkan countries in the EU.



**Figure 2:** The Berlin process, in your opinion, is focused on: a) regional cooperation; b) cooperation in the fields of economy, transport and energy; c) political cooperation?

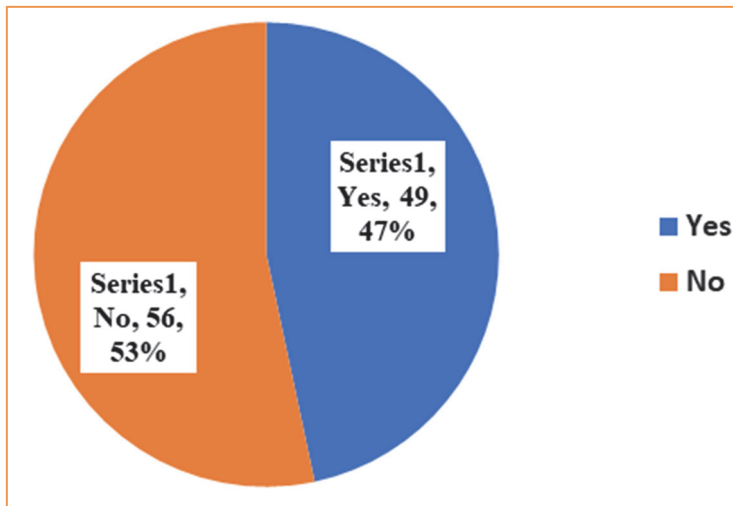
Only 48% of students responded that they know and are familiar with the process. 22% of the students responded with both answers including political cooperation. This could indicate that they have misunderstood political cooperation in the form of political meetings of the leaders of the countries of the region, which are necessary for the first two cooperation's. The other 22% responded

that the cooperation in economy, transport and energy and political cooperation are the focus of this process. Only 8% think that regional and political cooperation are the focus of the Berlin Process. However, 92% of students recognize that the focus in the field of economy, transport and energy is the main point of the Berlin process.



**Figure 3:** The Open Balkan initiative is, in your opinion, focused on: a) economic cooperation; b) political cooperation; c) free traffic of people.

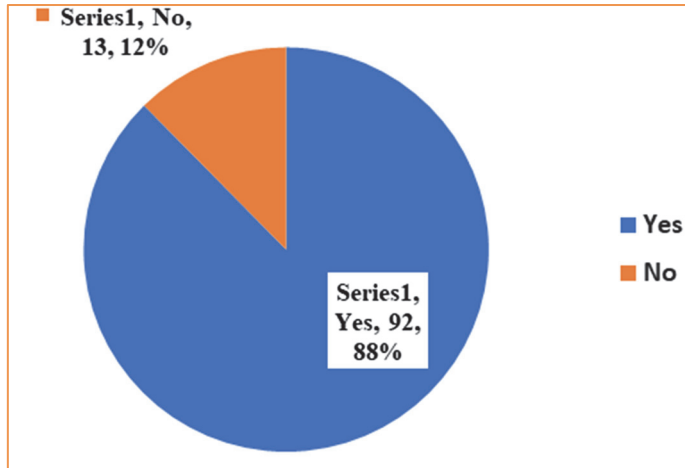
Most students, 59% responded that economic and political cooperation is in the focus of this initiative; 19% think political cooperation and free traffic of people; 15% think economic cooperation and free traffic of people and 7% responded both of alternatives. This shows that even though Albania was one of the three countries that joined this initiative, the students have little familiarity with its approach.



**Figure 4:** Do you think the Berlin process and the Open Balkan initiative should merge into one?



To the question if they think that the Berlin process and the Open Balkan initiative should merge into one, 53% accept the idea, and 47% are against it.



**Figure 5:** Do you think there should be a new initiative guarantying the progress of the integration of Western Balkan countries in the EU?

To the question of if they think that it should be a new initiative, 88% responded yes, and 12% no. This means that the two mentioned initiatives have not had the right effect in their perception and a new initiative is necessary for the progress of the integration of Western Balkan countries in the EU.

## 6. The Main Results of the Survey

From the data, we see a lack of knowledge of initiatives with a focus on integration processes. Only half of the interviewers have enough knowledge on the focus of the Berlin Process. Meanwhile, the Open Balkan initiative seems to be less well known in terms of goals and achievements. Some of the issues identified in relation to the Berlin process have been the lack of information and lack of awareness among young people about such political initiatives. Moreover, the Berlin Process has been observed to be comprehensive in theory, but not in practice. Efforts to encourage and to familiarize the citizens of the region with this Process seem to be stronger by the European Union, than within the countries of the Western Balkans. The majority of respondents are of the opinion that these two initiatives should be merged into one.

## 7. Time for New Initiatives

A quick undeserved membership or an endless extension that leads to a degenerative conflict situation. This is the key problem. From the survey that was conducted with Albanian students, it was observed that the majority support the idea that a new formula is required to enable the rapid integration of the region in the EU. The analysts think that the EU criteria should be the same for the region because the problems are similar.

Emphasis is placed on the need for reforms, mostly in the financial and infrastructure field.

A new scheme with more specific criteria can be defined which would force the leaders of the region to undertake specific reforms clearly addressed with a wider and more direct impact.

On the other side the EU is facing difficulties in addressing the conflicts between two or more

parties in the WB and pursuing strategies to remove those issues from the list of integration criteria.

The other question is whether the monitoring of the fulfillment of the criteria and the achievement of the standards will be done by European institutions or regional mechanisms, which are actors that can follow the stages closely.

Arben Malaj, finds that deepening the EU membership process requires clear and perhaps harmonized political goals to guarantee the four main freedoms, which include: (i) Free movement of goods; (ii) Free movement of services; (iii) Free movement of capital and; (iv) Free movement of people (Malaj, 2023).

Claiming a critical situation due to the massive emigration of young people from BP to EU countries Malaj addresses the most important problem is human capital diminishing and deteriorating in Western BP countries concluding that this complicates their challenges to narrow the large gap in it between EU countries and BP countries. (Ibid).

For analysts like Irena Beqiraj, the first step for strengthening the Berlin Process is for the EU and the governments of the 6 Balkan countries to accept that the process as it is, with a top-down approach, it is impossible to offer an efficient integration. She thinks that the bottom-up approach enables the creation of narratives that inspire and empower social movements thus enabling a large number of small changes, which create the necessary foundation for systemic change (Beqiraj, 2023). According to her, a new strategy can be explored that is also supported by the results of the former communist countries that joined the EU between 2004 and 2013. "An early inclusion with full access to the EU budget of the six Western Balkan countries, understandably accompanied by the necessary conditions, would create a real opportunity for the six countries not only to advance in their efforts to integrate with each other, but also to fulfill the EU entry criteria more quickly" (Ibid).

Mario Holzner from "The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies" has raised the question of what should be done in these conditions? He recommends undertaking the following steps (Holzner 2018):

- The first important change should be the official definition of supporting and accelerating the membership of the Western Balkan countries in the EU as the first and most important objective of the Berlin Process.
- Second, it should be that the process focuses not only on the actors from the Western Balkan states, but also on the actors from the EU. On the other hand, they should also provide the appropriate financial means for a major boost to infrastructure investments in the region.
- The Berlin Process should provide greater financial support to the region to increase economic development and reduce social inequalities.

The best way would be to fully integrate the Western Balkan states into the EU budget process before their full membership.

According to Sanfey et al (2016) there are four main areas that require long-term vision and commitment to head off the risks:

- reform fatigue
- financial sector fragility
- inclusion and demographic trends
- climate change.

As it is underlined in the Strategy Brochure of the Western Balkans, 2019 the European Union should and must explore all avenues for faster integration of the Western Balkans in the run-up to accession, together with its phased accession commitments as defined in the new methodology, (European Commission, 6 February 2018).

The very concrete step is the declaration of support of the growth plan for WB, declared by the President of the EU Commission, Ursula Von der Leyn, with 6 milliard euros in total (Von der Leyn, U. 2023). Von der Leyen said in 10<sup>th</sup> Summit of Berlin in Tirana that the new growth plan would include the opening of the EU's common market to the Western Balkans in areas such as free

movement of goods and services, transport, energy and the digital single market, and would also require deep-rooted reforms.

"These reforms will be accompanied by funding for investment from the EU, if they take place," she said.

According to the EU Commission, a 30 billion-euro economic and investment plan for the region offered by the EU in 2020 has so far triggered investments worth 16 billion euros there (Reuters, 2023).

## 8. Conclusion

EU initiatives in the Western Balkans region have not shortened the region's path towards the EU. The criteria frameworks have changed constantly, while the region seems unable to consolidate democracy by ending historical conflicts. Regardless of the steps forward, the economy is still not vital and close to the required European standards.

Taking democracy and the rule of law seriously is a real challenge not only for the governments, but also for EU institutions. It seems so far that the EU is more interested in how to keep the peace in the region and how to control emigration through these countries, than guaranteeing human rights and transparency there.

The EU should focus on strengthening the states of the region rather than being satisfied with fragile stability. The lessons learned from the enlargement in 2004 can be reconsidered in the new geopolitical situation and can be useful. This approach encourages cooperation between candidate countries.

Enlargement would be the best answer seen in a broader context. We have already shown that the Berlin process and the Open Balkans are not up to the scale to resolve all these issues and move the region forward. A more complex and determined approach is needed to enable the Western Balkans to overcome contradictions and become part of the EU.

## References

- Beqiraj, I., 2023; Procesi i Berlinit ka nevojë të ndryshojë që të jetë i suksesshëm. Telegraf -10 Korrik, 2023 <https://telegraf.al/politike/irena-beqiraj-procesi-i-berlinit-ka-nevoje-te-ndryshoje-qe-te-jete-i-suksesshem/>
- Bieber. F & Tzifakis. N, 2019. The Western Balkans in the world: Linkages and relations with non-Western countries. London and New York: Routledge. Bonomi, <https://www.routledge.com/The-Western-Balkans-in-the-World-Linkages-and-Relations-with-Non-Western/Bieber-Tzifakis/p/book/9781032240909>
- Bonomi, M., & Uvalić, M. (2019). The economic development of the Western Balkans: The importance of non-EU actors. In F. Bieber & N. Tzifakis (eds.), *The Western Balkans in the world: Linkages and relations with non-Western countries* (pp. 36–59). London and New York: Routledge.
- Communication, COM (2018) 65 final, 6 February. A Credible Enlargement Perspective for And Enhanced Eu Engagement with The Western Balkans [https://Neighbourhood-Enlargement.Ec.Europa.Eu/System/Files/2019-03/western\\_balkans\\_strategy\\_brochure.pdf](https://Neighbourhood-Enlargement.Ec.Europa.Eu/System/Files/2019-03/western_balkans_strategy_brochure.pdf)
- European Commission, 2018. *Accepting-the-Past-and-Finding Solutions-for-the-Western-Balkans.pdf*.
- European Commission, 2021. Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, Strasbourg, 19 October 2021, COM (2021) 644 final, 25. [www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2021/10/06](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2021/10/06).
- European Commission, 6 February 2018. A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, COM (2018) 65 final. [ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/policy-highlights/common-regional-market](http://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/policy-highlights/common-regional-market).
- European Commission 17 February 2018. Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the 54th Munich Security Conference. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH\\_18\\_841](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_18_841)
- European Commission, 8.10.2014. Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2014–2015. COM (2014) 700 final, p. 17 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=celex%3A52014DC0700>
- EURONEWS Albania, 01-07-2023. Rama: Ballkani i Hapur e kreu misionin, para kemi Procesin e Berlinit/ <https://euronews.al/rama-ballkani-i-hapur-e-kreu-misionin-para-kemi-procesin-e-berlinit/>

- Euro News Albania (07.11.2021), For it to be an Open Balkan, Serbia will need to change first, said Kurti <https://euronews.al/en/kosovo/2021/11/07/for-it-to-be-a-free-and-open-balkan-serbia-will-need-to-change-first-said-kurti>.
- Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, Berlin, August 2014, <https://archiv.bundesregierung.de/archiv-de/meta/startseite/finaldeclaration-by-the-chair-of-the-conference-on-the-western-balkans-754634>
- Holzner, M. (2018). Investment in the Western Balkans: New directions and financial constraints in infrastructure investment. The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies. Vienna. <https://wiiw.ac.at/investment-in-the-western-balkans-dlp-4705.pdf>
- Joint statement of the leaders of "Open Balkan", Skopje, 29 July 2021 <https://vlada.mk/node/26063?ln=en-gb>
- Kamperi, D., 2021 Open Balkan Vs. Berlin Process– Same, Same But Different? Freedom Journal for Peacebuilding and Transcultural Communication, Volume 2. Issue ¾. <https://eprints.unite.edu.mk/886/1/60-71.pdf>
- Lemstra, M., 2020. The destructive effects of state capture in the Western Balkans EU enlargement undermined Policy Brief Netherlands Institute of International Relations. 2020 [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/202010/Policy\\_Brief\\_Undermining\\_EU\\_enlargement\\_2020.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/202010/Policy_Brief_Undermining_EU_enlargement_2020.pdf)
- Loxha, A., 2023. The Berlin Process as the Best Regional Initiative Moving Forward: A Comparative Analysis. Group for Legal and Political Studies in Kosovo. <https://www.legalpoliticalstudies.org/the-berlin-process-as-the-best-regional-initiative-moving-forward-a-comparative-analysis/>
- Malaj, A., 2023. Ballkani Perendimor. Tre prioritetet e Procesit te Berlinit. Gazeta Panorama <http://www.panorama.com.al/ballkani-perendimor-tri-prioritetet-per-procesin-e-berlinit/>
- Malaj, A., 2023. Procesi i Berlinit, përshpejtuesi i integritet euroatlantik të Ballkanit Perëndimor. <http://www.panorama.com.al/procesi-i-berlinit-pershpejtuesi-i-integritet-euroatlantik-te-ballkanit-perendimor/>
- Reuters.EU urges reforms, single market in Western Balkans to boost membership bids. October 16, 2023 <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/eu-urges-reforms-single-market-western-balkans-boost-membership-bids-2023-10-16/>
- Sanfey, P, Milatović, J and Krešić, A, 2016. How the Western Balkans can catch up . The Berlin Process Info, 2017. Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans. <https://berlinprocess.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Final-Declaration-by-the-Chair-of-the-Conference-on-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>
- Thessaloniki European Council 19 and 20 June 2003. Presidency conclusions. 11638/03. Brussels, 1 October. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20847/76279.pdf>.
- US Department of State 2023 Remarks and Releases – Balkans Region <https://www.state.gov/remarks-and-releases-balkans-region/>
- Zeneli, V., 2023. "Near-shoring" në Ballkanin Perëndimor, për ta kthyer rajonin në aset strategjik të BE. Panorama online. <http://www.panorama.com.al/near-shoring-ne-ballkanin-perendimor-per-ta-kthyer-rajonin-ne-aset-strategjik-te-be/>
- Vogel: Qëllimi i fazës së re është diçka më pak se njohja. 2022. Radio Evropa e Lire. <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/vogel-faza-e-re-e-dialogut-me-pak-se-njohja-/32147303.html>
- World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016, available at: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016/>
- World Bank June 2020. Global Economic Prospects <https://the docs.worldbank.org/en/doc/112641588788257004-0050022020/original/GlobalEconomicProspect>.