

Iceland's Neighbours in the EU Entry Queue: Contrasts or Parallels in EU Enlargement to the North and the South-East

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Abstract

In 2009, Iceland finds itself negotiating for EU entry alongside a group of 7 candidates and potential candidates from the Western Balkans. All are much poorer than Iceland and suffer from the legacies of regional conflict, ethnic division and under-development, plus specific weaknesses of governance, law and order. However, all the Balkan applicants have a clear majority of public opinion in favour of the EU and (except for Serbia) a cross-party consensus on accession. The severity of their problems makes EU and NATO membership their only hope and chance of a peaceful future, and also provides the main motive for the EU to grant their wish. Indeed the EU practises a policy of 'conditionality', using the lure of accession as leverage to make them improve their ways. Iceland does not have the same life-and-death importance for the EU unless, eventually, in the context of Arctic strategy. Several EU states have made clear they would not wish Iceland to 'jump the queue' past the other candidates. There may be lessons here for Iceland's handling of its own negotiations.

1. Introduction

When the European Union's (EU's) Commissioner for enlargement, Olli Rehn, handed over Iceland's entry questionnaire for EU membership in Reykjavik on 9 September 2009, he already had quite a lot of practice in such operations. Most recently, on 22 July in the same year he had been in Podgorica, capital of Montenegro, to hand over an even longer questionnaire to the small Western Balkan nation – independent since June 2006 – which had applied for full membership in December 2008. The negotiating processes with these two states have been added to the Commission's work-load together with those on membership for Croatia, which has been negotiating since 2005. The Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia, FYROM, also formally applied in 2005 but its accession talks have not started yet, not least because of Greek opposition;¹ while Albania applied in April 2009. Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina (often called BiH for short) have both already signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU, a recognized major step towards entry and the equivalent of the 'Europe Agreements' that smoothed the way of new Central European members entering the Union in 2004.

The two most problematic states in the Western Balkans, Serbia and its former province of Kosovo – which declared independence unilaterally in February 2008 but is not yet recognized by all EU members² – are not entirely outside the enlargement process either. Both are recognized as 'potential candidates', although

- 1 The US, Turkey and some other states recognize this country simply as 'Macedonia' – the name it gives itself in its constitution – but Greece disputes its historic right to use the name and is holding up FYROM's accession both to NATO and the EU for that reason. The European Commission for its part has made clear that it believes FYROM deserves to start accession talks at once. Since FYROM is the approved usage in the EU, UN and other international settings, that name will be used for the country in the present text.
- 2 Among EU members, Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain have not recognized the independent Kosovo.

the legal complications on Kosovo require a footnote in official EU statements noting that it is being handled on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 1999.³ Kosovo's *sui generis* position is further reflected in the fact that it has been allocated a 'Stabilisation Tracking Mechanism' (since November 2002) rather than an SAA, while the European Commission is due to report further in late 2009 on the practicability of its EU entry. However, the many factors of instability remaining in the former Yugoslav space make it hard to be sure whether the present league-table of procedural progress will also dictate the order in which states actually join. For instance, on 15 July 2009 the European Commission recommended that Serbia as well as FYROM and Montenegro should be allowed visa-free travel for its citizens into the EU from January 2010, noting that the traditionally more West-friendly Bosnia-Herzegovina still raised problems over passport integrity and crime (Vucheva, 2009).⁴

Regardless of who wins the race in South-Eastern Europe, it might seem to be a pure historical accident that Iceland's application for full EU membership finds itself on the table for processing alongside those of three small-to-medium-sized Western Balkan states and with four more close behind in the queue. Iceland's existing relations with the EU are immeasurably closer and on a more equal basis, thanks mainly to its membership of the European Economic Area since 1994 (and of EFTA earlier). Its vital statistics as a nation, shown in Table 1 below, present a quite different profile: though its economic indicators would look less glowing if 2009 figures were used. It comes not from a zone of recent conflict but from the Nordic 'zone of peace' that remained one of the most calm and stable in Europe even at the height of the Cold War – incidentally allowing Iceland itself to refrain from ever establishing armed forces. The motives and political circumstances of the Icelandic decision to apply for full membership of the Union are not only distinct from those of the other states, but possibly unique in European history.

Would it be right to conclude, then, that Iceland's case has nothing to do with the others and that there are neither direct substantial linkages, nor possible tactical ones, between them? The purpose of this article to test that assumption and show that it would not be entirely safe, especially if it leads to the conclusion that Iceland

3 This was the resolution authorizing the UN administration of Kosovo and empowering the UN to continue negotiating on Kosovo's political future. It is acceptable to the non-recognizers of Kosovo independence because it states the validity of the existing boundaries of Serbia (actually Serbia-Montenegro at that time). Further joint positions of EU countries on the future of Kosovo are in para. 13 of the GAERC conclusions of 7 Nov. 2005, Council of Ministers document 13622/05, text at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/Council_Conclusions-External_Relations-7.11.2005-BH.pdf.

4 Croatia already enjoys visa-free status. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania naturally complained about their exclusion from this decision while Kosovo was said to be left out for technical reasons. The Commission has now said it will consider extending the measure to Albania and BiH in mid-2010 if they make sufficient progress.

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will win membership more easily and possibly sooner. To probe the matter further, the following sections will ask, respectively:

what are the key facts about the Western Balkan applicants and their reasons for seeking full EU integration?

how do their prospects for entry, including the toughest issues in their individual negotiations, compare or contrast with those of Iceland? and

in terms of the EU's broad enlargement strategy – as seen by key member states – are these two sets of applications really distinct and unrelated? And what is their respective importance in the 'core' Europe's next phase of growth?

The last section may also point to some lessons for Iceland itself.

Table 1. Vital Statistics.

	Area in sq. km.(millions)	Populat- ion ⁵	Total GDP ⁶ (US\$ bn)	GDP per capita (US\$)	Unem- ployment ⁷
Iceland	103,000	0.306	12.71	41,800	1.6%
Albania	28,748	3.64	21.81	6,000	12.5%
Bosnia-Herzegovina	51,187	4.61	29.70	6,500	29%
Croatia	56,594	4.49	82.39	18,300	13.7%
FYROM	25,713	2.07	18.78	9,100	33.5%
Kosovo	10,887	1.80	5 (2007)	2,300 (2007)	40% (2007)
Montenegro	13,812	0.67	6.81	10,100	14.7% (2007)
Serbia (minus Kosovo)	77,474	7.38	80.34	10,800	18.8% (2007)

Source: CIA World Factbook.

There is, of course, one more set of accession talks currently in the Commission's hands: those with Turkey, which began formally in October 2005 although Turkey had made known its wish for membership decades earlier. The Turkish case⁸ will be left aside in this study, not because it is unimportant but because it falls too far out of the frame of any reasonable comparison. While Iceland and all Balkan applicants are relatively small – Serbia, the largest, having less than 7.5 million inhabitants – Turkey is a nation of 77 million people with a key strategic location lying between the present EU territory, Central Asia and the Middle East. The complications that have dogged Turkey's accession and which, among other things, caused talks on 8 of the 35 specialized chapters under negotiation to be suspended by the EU side in December 2006, arise from unique factors in Turkey's external relations (notably

5 2009 estimates except where noted

6 All GDP figures use purchasing power parities and are 2008 estimates except where noted

7 2008 estimates except where noted

8 For a reliable factual summary on EU/Turkey see the 'EurActiv' site at the College of Europe, <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-turkey-relations/article-129678>.

with Cyprus and Greece but also Armenia) and in its internal governance.⁹ There is also far more widespread and specific opposition to Turkish entry in the public opinion of several member states, such as France, Germany and Austria, than has yet surfaced in relation to Iceland or even the Western Balkan applicants. At most, the full set of potential entrants could be said to be linked by the question of alleged European ‘enlargement fatigue’, as noted in the final section below.

2. Western Balkan Profiles and Motives: ‘Coming in from the Cold’ or the Heat?

The first impression given by Table 1 above, suggesting a totally different level of development between Iceland and the Western Balkan applicants, is not misleading. Even if Iceland only won full independence in 1944 and had suffered great poverty and hardship in earlier periods of history, it gained ample practice in self-government from the nineteenth century onwards, and after World War Two shared in the Nordic region’s favoured status as a region of exemplary democracy with above-average economic and social standards. Even after the havoc wrought by the financial collapse of 2008, the latest measure of Icelandic GDP per capita – an IMF estimate of US\$35,757 for 2009 – puts it still above the EU average of US\$33,700, while Icelandic citizens continue to receive high ratings in international polls measuring ‘happiness’. In strategic terms, as noted, Iceland has spent its independent life either under strong US protection or (in post-Cold War years) in an environment of low military activity and much-reduced tension. Whether the new Arctic agenda will change that is discussed further below.

The story of independent states in the Western Balkans, by contrast, began in violence when the assassination of a Habsburg Archduke in Sarajevo triggered the First World War in 1914. The post-war settlement created a state known first (in 1918) as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and more simply as Yugoslavia from 1929. All the states occupying the region today eventually broke out of this Yugoslavian framework, with the exception of Albania which won independence from the Turkish Empire in 1912 (but suffered an Italian takeover from 1939-1944). The deconstruction of the Former Yugoslavian state may be traced back to the death of Marshal Tito in 1980 but speeded up after Slobodan Milosevic took power in Belgrade in 1989, triggering a series of bloody and cruel conflicts with outrages against humanity on all sides. The break-away of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1991 sparked the Balkan wars continuing up the Dayton settlement of 1995, and Serbian repression in Kosovo led to hostilities in

9 The Islamic affiliations of most Turks are often cited here but also important are the unusual role of the military in decision-making, the unresolved issues about the ethnic Kurdish minority, other human rights questions such as freedom of speech, and the level of economic and social development which – it is often feared – could produce a massive migration of Turkish labour into the European continent in the event of EU entry.

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1999 where NATO took the lead in fighting Milosevic and the UN assumed control of the province up to its self-declared independence in 2008. Only Slovenia's departure, in 1991, and Montenegro's decision on independence in 2006 were carried through without bloodshed: and Slovenia's early 'escape' explains why it was the only local state able to join NATO and EU together with most of Central Europe in Spring 2004.

Even before 1914, the geographical area of the Balkans had been notorious not just as a battlefield between different European powers and empires, and between Christian and Islamic civilisations, but also for its relative poverty and under-development. Poor governance and ethnically divided populations had something to do with this, but also the region's location as a strategic 'hinterland' or 'borderland', its rugged terrain and poor communications, and its lack of any significant natural resources. These problems continued to dog the post-World War Two Yugoslavia even while it enjoyed strong central leadership under Tito and cordial relations with the West. Arguably, the very fact that Communist Yugoslavia stayed outside the Warsaw Pact denied it the experience of working within a multilateral framework (however Soviet-dominated and abusive) that made the transition to integration in democratic Western groupings – with the implied readiness to compromise on sovereignty – smoother for Central European nations further North. Since 1989, the local economies have suffered further from the direct effects of war, including political and physical blockages to normal trade and complementary development between neighbours; from external sanctions in the case of Serbia; and from the indirect effect of international interventions (peacekeeping forces, periods of international administration and humanitarian aid) that have build up a damaging habit of 'aid dependence', stifling and distorting normal free-market development. The effects are by far the most grave in Kosovo with its 40% unemployment rate, but also serious in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Last but not least the global economic crisis of 2008-9 has hit Western Balkan prospects both through direct financial damage in some cases (e.g. Serbia), and through the general slackening in European growth. Even Croatia, now the single strongest economy in the region with its US\$18,300 GDP per capita, compares poorly with Slovenia's US\$29,600, though it is well above the Bulgarian figure.

The phenomenon of external 'occupation' remains significant in the region and is a factor setting it apart from any previous zone of NATO/EU enlargement.¹⁰ Bosnia-Herzegovina is host to an EU peacekeeping force, EUFOR Althea, which took over the task from NATO in 2004, together with an EU police reform mission, a High Representative created at the time of the Dayton process with governor-type powers, a EU special representative and an OSCE administrative team. Kosovo is in a process of transition from the UN framework (UNMIK) to EU

10 Details of all the international missions referred to in this paragraph can be found in the SIPRI Multilateral Peace Missions database at <http://www.sipri.org/databases/pko/pko>.

tutelage as regards civilian administration,¹¹ but also houses the NATO peace-keeping force KFOR and an OSCE mission. Small civilian teams from the OSCE are also present for monitoring purposes in the other five Western Balkan states, while all the previously warring territories are subject to a special internationally monitored arms control regime based on an annex to the Dayton settlement and subsequent Florence Agreement.¹² It is hard to see a country entering NATO and/or the EU while still subject to the more intrusive kinds of international mission that restrict it in the full exercise of sovereignty. Thus for Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo in particular, conditions must improve enough to make direct administrative controls and peacekeeping by the international community redundant before they can realistically expect to join the two institutions as normal states (European Commission 2009b).¹³

2.1 Motives for integration

This statement of the Western Balkan republics' worst problems also, however, conveys precisely why they should covet EU and NATO membership. Belonging to both would convey a hallmark of 'normality', true independence, respectability, and an equal voice in European affairs with their former enemies and peaceful neighbours alike. It would put an end to the image the Balkans have been saddled with, at least since the 19th century if not for longer, as the main powder-keg and cockpit of European wars. The obligations of membership can be seen as 'golden chains' restraining the nations and their elites from falling back into old bad habits, just as Germany and Italy were restrained after World War Two and Spain, Portugal and Greece were confirmed in democratic habits after their authoritarian episodes.¹⁴ Belonging to NATO offers a guarantee in particular of non-war with other members, the use of national forces for exclusively respectable common purposes (including peacekeeping in other people's wars), and protection against possible outside interference.¹⁵ EU membership holds out promise of a boost to economic

11 The EU mission is known as EULEX and has a target strength of around 2000 including police, judicial and customs experts.

12 Signed in June 1996, text at

http://www.racviciac.org/downloads/treaties_agreements/aIV.pdf.

13 The Commission document cited here ('Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009 2010') states in so many words that Bosnia-Herzegovina cannot apply to the EU so long as it needs the externally provided 'Office of the High Representative' (OHR) – on which more below.

14 This would also apply to possible factors of conflict that have not burst into the open yet such as the idea (disavowed by Albania's present leadership) of taking Kosovo and parts of FYROM to build a 'greater Albania'.

15 As things stand now, external strategic threats do not loom large for the Balkans compared with the risks of intra-regional conflict and the non-traditional dimensions of security (crime, smuggling, disease, environmental damage etc). With Romania and Bulgaria now fully integrated and Turkey aiming for the EU, the region is no longer on

growth and employment through free trade, improved infrastructure, and the input of EU funds for regional and social development. Even if it took some time for the more backward Balkan economies to respond to the stimulus, their surplus working populations could more easily and legally seek employment in other lands – and help the home economy with their remittances – as so many Central Europeans have done since 2004. Finally, both NATO and the EU are these days very attentive to standards of democracy and general governance in their newest member states and this holds out the hope of irreversible improvements in political standards, control of crime and respect for human (including ethnic) rights.

The happy position of Slovenia today proves that an ex-Yugoslav nation can become a fully-functioning member of the European family: so these hopes and dreams do not lack all foundation. While the same broad arguments apply to all Western Balkan applicants, however, there are nuances in their national motivations, and their popular and political attitudes, that make it worth briefly summarizing and comparing their starting points.

The following sub-sections review the countries in alphabetical order, covering both official policies and the evidence of public opinion. Table 2 offers a first glimpse of the latter, and it is worth noting the intriguing point that in South-East Europe, people's sense of being a 'part of Europe' does not follow any obvious ethnic or religious logic. The Albanians, who are more likely to be Muslims and have had the most separate history for centuries, appear to feel very close to Europe both in their own country and elsewhere. By comparing other responses it becomes clear that people are likely to feel most kinship and trust towards Europe if they regard the EU itself as looking on them kindly, and (in some cases) as being their main protector against local oppression.

2.2 Albania

The latest Albanian parliamentary elections in 2009, though not free from controversy, gave victory to the Democratic Party which has identified EU entry as a top priority and major part of its mandate (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, 2005). This position is in fact shared on a cross-party basis, the main reasons cited being the importance of integration for stabilizing the Balkans and – on top of NATO membership already achieved – for securing Albania's own future. Albania has been notorious for internal lawlessness and social backwardness, and the leadership sees EU membership both as an incentive to overcome these problems and a guarantee that they will stay

a strategic borderline and even the scope for Russian mischief-making is very limited. To the extent that Serbia may still look for Russian involvement and backing, however, that same factor must be of concern to Serbia's neighbours; and Russia has of course been one of the main campaigners against international acceptance of Kosovo's independence.

Table 2. Popular Attitudes to the EU in Western Balkan States.

(All figures are percentages of respondents)

	What is your view of EU membership?		Do you feel a part of Europe?
	<i>Good thing</i>	<i>Neutral or Don't Know</i>	<i>Very or Extremely</i>
Albania	83	10	50
BiH	48	42	28 (Croats) 21 (Bosniaks) 10 (Serbs)
Croatia	29	64	24
FYROM	66	31	49 (Albanians) 28 (Macedonians)
Kosovo	89	8	72 (Albanians) 15 (Serbs)
Montenegro	57	27	29
Serbia	58	35	23

Source: Gallup Balkans Monitor 2009: Focus on: EU Perceptions (2009).

overcome (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, 2005). Public opinion polls reflect great support for this strategy, with 71% of respondents expressing a high degree of trust in the EU, which is only slightly less than the trust felt in NATO and a higher level of trust than in Albania's own government. In 2006, 84% of Albanians explicitly supported joining the EU, and 83% in 2008. As already noted, a high percentage also felt themselves 'close to Europe', and this may be because a growing number – 67% in 2008 as compared with 46% in 2006 – are convinced the European Commission really wants them to join. However, views on the timetable are realistic, with a majority expecting membership not before 2018.

2.3 Bosnia-Herzegovina

The Dayton agreement gave BiH a uniquely complicated structure, with two federated entities that retain much administrative autonomy even in matters of security: a Bosniak-Croat one, and a Serbian one (Republika Srpska) that still looks towards Belgrade. The current top three governing parties, led respectively by Silajdzic, Radmanovic and Komsic, stand respectively for the Bosniak, Croat and Serbian ethnic groups. Even if most leading parties profess support for a European solution, international observers agree that the country needs much further strengthening of its central institutions, and reconciliation of the parties, before it can be ready to negotiate with a single voice let alone take on the burdens of EU membership. On the other hand, it can be argued that – rather as in the case of Belgium – for a country with such stubborn internal divisions, the EU offers the only hope of preserving its territorial unity at all. BiH clearly has far still to go to attain official candidate status, and its course over the next decade is hard to predict;

but the Balkan enlargement process can hardly be seen as complete, nor can a true regional peace be assured, without solving this particularly tough conundrum.

A growing number of Bosnian respondents are becoming more pessimistic about their European prospects. In 2006, 66% believed EU membership to be a good thing, but only 48% in 2008 (including just 34% of Bosnian Serbs); while the number believing that the EU wants them to join fell from 58% to 46% in the same short time. The country's ethnic divisions come through clearly in the polls, with just 16% of respondents in Republika Srpska expressing themselves friendly towards the EU as against 55% in the Bosnian Federation. Only 10% of Bosnian Serbs identify with Europe, as against 21% of Bosniaks and 28% of Croats. Not surprisingly, most respondents in BiH do not expect to join the EU until 2020 while 16% – the highest proportion in any state of the region – think they will never join.

2.4 Croatia

The Croatian Foreign Ministry website states that “Full membership in the European Union as a core of stable peace, democratic freedoms and economic developments, is one of Croatia's basic foreign policy goals” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Croatia, 2009). Only the EU can provide a “favourable environment for stable development, prosperity, social security and welfare for all citizens of Croatia”, and can guarantee peace and reconciliation for the whole region by parallel integration of Croatia's neighbours (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Croatia, 2007). In the Croatian Parliamentary elections of 2002, “all political parties voted in support of joining the EU” (MFA of Croatia, 2007) and all parties remain loyal to that aim at the present advanced stage of negotiations, in spite of their other important differences and perhaps some yet-unspeoken reservations (EU Profiler 2009). The government's official aim has been to conclude the talks by the end of 2009.

It may seem contradictory that popular support for entry has decreased lately, from 35% in 2006 to 29% in 2008, while those with a neutral position rose from 27% in 2006 to 38% in 2008. There are various explanations, including the observation that other former candidate countries have seen a drop in popular support shortly before entry, though usually not to such low levels. Other factors may include frustration with a series of contentious obstacles and conditions put in the way of Croatian entry, most recently the unexpected border demarcation difficulties raised by Slovenia (see more below). Also, one of the region's lowest scores on ‘identifying with Europe’ (24%) was recorded in Croatia, while just 39% of respondents see the EU as friendly to Croatia and the number believing that the European Commission wants them to join fell from 55% in 2006 to 48% in 2008. As to the expected effects of membership, Croatian respondents do not expect to gain large improvements except in the control of corruption, and only 9% believe it will bring a stronger guarantee of national identity – perhaps reflecting the fact that Croatia's territorial integrity is no longer in real danger and its economic standards are already the region's highest.

2.5 FYROM

FYROM contains a volatile mix of ethnicities, with particular scope for conflict between the majority speaking a Slavic language and the Albanian minority. In the early 2000s, small preventive military deployments were made to the country first by NATO and then the EU amid fears of a spillover from the violence in Kosovo. Consciousness of these problems lies behind Skopje's stated government policy that only through EU and NATO membership can "the long-term stability, security and well-being of Macedonia" be assured (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Macedonia, 2009). All political parties backed this position and had EU membership as part of their platforms in the latest parliamentary elections. As to public opinion, 84% of FYROM respondents (the highest figure in the Balkans) see the EU as the way to peace and development, not least because 30% of them fear their country may suffer an open conflict or war in future. However, there is some divergence between ethnic groups on the issue, with 84% of FYROM's Albanians but only 57% of Macedonian nationals having a positive view of the EU. Moreover, if FYROM could only join NATO and the EU by giving up its own preferred name of Macedonia – as Greece demands – 67% of the Albanian population would accept that bargain while 95% of Macedonian nationals would disagree.

2.6 Kosovo

Kosovo owes its very existence today to the West's military action against Milosevic and subsequent international protection, so it is not surprising that its government's programme since the declaration of independence includes full membership of the EU. This position has all-party support but remains relatively low on the agenda given the young republic's many other problems, including a disaffected Serbian minority and continuing risks of inter-communal violence. The Serbian minority seeks reunification with Serbia, which intends also one day to join the EU so that the ultimate European destination is not the real divisive issue. However, the country's outstanding level of EU-phoria is clearly a phenomenon of the ethnically Albanian Kosovars. According to the latest Gallup poll, they were the only group in the Western Balkans to have raised their approval rating for the EU between 2006 and 2008 – from 87% to 89% – while fully 95% now want EU membership. The proportion of Kosovo Albanians who believe the Commission wants them to join also rose from 64% in 2006 to 82% in 2008. By contrast, only 23% of Kosovo Serbs believe the EU is friendly towards them (though this is up on the 2006 figure), and as few as 9% of them want Kosovo to be accepted as an EU member – which would of course imply irreversible approval of its independence.

2.7 Montenegro

Montenegro is the region's smallest state, with not much more than twice Iceland's population, and also the newest having gained its independence through a referendum in 2006. Its peaceful separation from Belgrade was itself mediated by EU diplomacy, and not surprisingly the government sees EU membership as a vital safeguard for the future. According to the Foreign Ministry's strategy statement,

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ensuring EU entry is now seen as “the most important task in external and internal aspects” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, 2008). The purpose of the latest elections was precisely to get a popular mandate for the entry negotiations and no political party opposed that aim, though there are some qualms related to the EU in general. The main opposition parties feel the EU has interfered in internal politics to boost the long-serving Djukanovic as the only leader who can guarantee the state’s steady progress towards Europe. Objectively, however, the state’s economic history since independence has been good and the outlook is positive, even for minority groups. Six out of 10 people in all ethnic groups support EU accession, aside from the Montenegrin Serbs where only 36% see EU membership as a good thing. Around 6 in 10 Montenegrin respondents in the Gallup poll were convinced that gaining independence helped the country’s chances of becoming an EU member, the point being that Serbia has much more obvious external and internal issues to overcome.

2.8 Serbia

Serbian grievances against Western Europe dating from the two periods of open war since 1989 were sharpened again by most EU nations’ support for Kosovo’s declaration of independence in 2008. However, when that issue led to the fall of the year-old governing coalition, the ensuing elections were narrowly won by the ‘For a European Serbia’ coalition made up of the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party of Serbia. Their argument is that the Kosovo issue can be solved on better terms after Serbia joins the EU itself, and they are positively striving to cooperate with Brussels in order to improve Serbia’s ‘bad man of the Balkans’ image. Membership has thus become “a priority and a strategic long-term goal.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, 2007). As for the political opposition, the Serbian Radical Party and the Democratic Party of Serbia are formally opposed to continuing negotiations with the EU unless the latter recognizes Kosovo as an integral part of Serbia, but they are not against the idea of membership as such. Popular attitudes are rather positive on the EU, in contrast to some other international organizations. 60% of Serbian respondents believe that EU membership will benefit Serbia, and 67% of young people and 78% of university graduates are in favour of joining. However, only 23% of respondents in the Gallup poll said that they identified with Europe, no doubt due to the legacy of both earlier and recent wars and maybe (in some quarters) a lingering pro-Russian or pan-Slav sentiment.

For comparison, the story of *Iceland’s* EU application goes back only to August/September 2008. Before then, any thought of membership was firmly rejected by the Independence Party which dominated governments for two decades, and the issue was set aside by consent when that party went into coalition with the pro-European Social Democrats (Samfylking) in May 2007. It was the exceptionally brutal impact in Iceland of autumn 2008’s global financial crash that suddenly boosted popular support for attempting EU entry, with the idea above all of gaining a financial shelter through eventual membership of EMU. The withdrawal of the

Independence Party from government and the confirmation of a Left-Left coalition (Social Democrats plus Left Greens) in the election of April 2009 opened the way for the government to place an EU application officially in its programme, but the Left Greens remained opposed and the parliamentary vote to go ahead with the application was won (by 33 to 28 and 2 abstentions) with the support of some votes from smaller parties instead. This makes Iceland the only current applicant besides Serbia to have such divided party views and such a narrow parliamentary majority for its EU strategy. As for public opinion, the pro-EU camp has dwindled since the first shock of the crisis – also because of the strong feelings generated by the Icesave issue, which has become associated with the EU in many people’s minds.¹⁶ As of September 2009 only 33% of Icelandic respondents stated themselves still in favour of entry, with 17% Don’t Knows – a lower level of support than even before the crash (Morgunblaðið 2009b). These figures, plus the notorious sensitivity for Iceland of the fisheries dossier, have already made many observers question whether the government can win the referendum it has promised to hold on approval of the eventual negotiating results. They also help explain why Olli Rehn in his public speech at Reykjavik on 9 September stressed that joining the EU was more than “a marriage of convenience”, and urged the Icelandic authorities to actively “tackle myths with facts” in explaining the accession process and its results to the public (Rehn 2009c).¹⁷

3. Issues and Prospects in the Accession Process

Table 3 (below) sets out in more detail where the various Western Balkan states have got to, compared with Iceland, in their individual relationships with the EU as well as NATO. One thing that stands out is that Albania and Croatia have already (on 1 April 2009) been accepted as full NATO members, while FYROM would also have entered then were it not for the name dispute with Greece. There have already been five cases in Central Europe where states were able to join the Alliance some years earlier than the EU – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Romania – and this is not difficult to understand. The practical impact of NATO obligations within the country is not major and the required standards are not so hard to meet, relating mainly to the basics of democracy, military doctrines, a minimum degree of ‘interoperability’ with other NATO forces, and (in practice) the

16 In brief, this issue concerns deposits received by the Icelandic bank Landsbankinn through high-interest-bearing ‘Icesave’ accounts in the UK and Netherlands. After the economic crash account-holders could not withdraw their money but were partly recompensed by their own governments, who are now demanding settlement of the accounts from Iceland over a longer period. At the time of writing in early December 2009, the Icelandic Parliament (Alþingi) had still not finally approved the inter-governmental deal negotiated and re-negotiated for this purpose.

17 He also quoted the old Norse poem *Hávamál* to warn Icelandic negotiators against over-confidence: ‘Among the bold the bully will find/Others as bold as he’.

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absence of ongoing conflict. From the applicant country's point of view, being in NATO immediately brings a strong guarantee of no-war, including with its nearest neighbours, but does not demand huge new efforts especially from a small state.¹⁸ EU membership by contrast requires acceptance of nearly 90,000 pages of the legal *acquis*, with standardized regulations covering every aspect of national life, as well as the obligations built up in new contexts such as joint border and travel management (Schengen), common foreign, security and defence policies, and eventually membership of Economic and Monetary Union.

What Table 3 (underlines is that Balkan countries' rates of progress towards the EU do not rest mainly on economic standards or other conventional measures of strength: in fact some of the smaller and poorer ones seem to be moving faster. This reflects the complicated set of other factors – strategic, political and systemic – that still haunt the enlargement process in a conflict-scarred part of Europe that is maybe also more prone than most to chronic historical resentments. Two such types of obstacles have already emerged from the country comparisons in the previous section:

- identity- or territory-related disputes with existing EU members: i.e. Greece's objection to bringing in a state called 'Macedonia', and the unexpected problems raised by Slovenia in 2009 over Croatia's sea boundary (which however have already been largely cleared away as a block to negotiations);¹⁹

- delays in 'normalization' of national status and sovereignty in those territories hardest hit by the Balkan wars, i.e. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. International efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina are now focusing on promoting constitutional change to strengthen the central government to a point where the Office of the High Representative (created by the Dayton agreement) could be abolished and the EU would gradually take over supervisory functions from the UN and OSCE. That process is also underway in Kosovo, but the continued presence of (and need for) a NATO armed force, as well as the refusal of 5 EU states and several EU neighbours to recognize the new republic, are major complications to say the least.²⁰

18 Iceland set an extreme example in this regard by becoming a founding member of NATO without armed forces.

19 Bulgaria also contests whether there is a separate 'Macedonian' language.

20 The Commission's latest analysis (European Commission, 2009b) notes that the controversy over Kosovo's status is also starting to hamper progress in the sub-regional networks covering the Western Balkans region, which have an important role for economic development, soft security management and also 'training' in EU-type collaboration.

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Table 3. NATO and EU statuses (*list of abbreviations below*).

	EU Status	NATO Status
Iceland	Applied 07/09 Awaiting avis	
Albania	Also: EEA member, Schengen etc Potential candidate, SAA ratified 04/09 ²¹	Member Member
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Potential candidate SAA ratified 06/08	PfP 12/06 'Intensified dialogue' 04/2008 Preparing IPAP
Croatia	Candidate, negotiations started 10/05	Member
Kosovo	Potential candidate under UNSCR 1244/99 'Stabilisation Tracking Mechanism' since 11/02, Commission feasibility study due autumn 09	
FYROM	SAA since 04/04 Candidate since 12/05 Negotiations not started	PfP 1995 MAP since 1999 04/08: "will start accession talks when name issue settled" ²²
Montenegro	SAA since 10/07 Applied 12/08 Awaiting avis	PfP 12/06, 'Intensified dialogue' 04/08 Preparing IPAP
Serbia	Potential candidate SAA signed 04/08 Preparing IPAP	PfP 12/06

Abbreviations used: EEA (EU) = European Economic Area,

SAA (EU) = Stabilisation and Association Agreement, MAP (NATO) = Membership Action Plan,

IPAP (NATO) = Individual Partnership Action Plan, PfP (NATO) = Partnership for Peace.

21 In October 2009 (same report cited in notes 13 and 20 above) the Commission said it would be willing to start drafting an opinion on Albania, moving it towards official candidate status, if the Council of Ministers agreed.

22 Full formula in statement from NATO's Bucharest Summit April 2008: talks to start "as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the issue over the country's name has been reached with Greece".

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To the category of conflict legacy issues may be added the issue of cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) which was created by the UN in 1993 to try war crimes committed on all sides in the Balkan wars. Both Croatia and Serbia have been accused of dragging their feet in surrendering major criminals and the issue of Ratko Mladic is still a big one for Serbia, though the seizure of Radovan Karadzic in July 2008 was an undoubted breakthrough. As of late 2009 the ICTY is still complaining about Croatia and this has become one of that country's last few unresolved negotiating issues, though there is some debate in European quarters over how far EU decisions should be held hostage to this factor.²³

Other generic difficulties that affect all local states' entry to the EU may be summed up as:

1. General weaknesses of governance including constitutional shortcomings, political corruption including misconduct in elections, and the lack or weakness of reform in structures relevant to security, law and order, border protection and fulfillment of international obligations. BiH has the most obvious problem and was told starkly by Olli Rehn in a speech of 24 July 2009 that the country "will not be able to join the EU with its present constitution" (Rehn 2009b). Problems of Security Sector Reform (SSR) are however also serious in Serbia, Kosovo and elsewhere,²⁴ and the European Commission is starting to invest more heavily in 'civil society' in the hope – among other things – of increasing bottom-up pressure and monitoring of the reform process (Rehn 2009a);
2. Issues connected to the rights and treatment of ethnic minorities. The main problematic cases have been mentioned in the country survey above, and a tough issue even for the more 'peaceful' republics is proper representation of minorities in governmental and security-related structures. Handling of the Roma is also a sore point in this region, as elsewhere in mid-central Europe;
3. Organized crime, local lawlessness, economic corruption and smuggling: this has been a problem everywhere in the Balkans and, combined with the developmental setbacks already mentioned, has created some of Europe's largest 'black economies'. Before Djukanovic improved Montenegro's standing in Western eyes that country was sometimes referred to as a 'Mafiocracy'. The EU has become extremely sensitive to this issue since the admission of Romania and Bulgaria to full

23 There is a huge literature on this subject but an interesting example is Rangelov (2006), who argues that the international community has been too obsessed with the ICTY as such and underestimated internal 'truth and reconciliation' processes. The ICTY has also been charged, rightly or wrongly, with bias between nations.

24 There is also a large literature on this topic but an interesting new initiative within the region, aiming at detailed and objective standards for comparing Serbia's case with its neighbours, is being carried out by the Belgrade-based Centre for Civil-Military relations at Belgrade, <http://www.ccmr-bg.org/>. For SSR in general, see the website of the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces, <http://www.dcaf.ch>, and on EU policies, Spence and Fluri (2008).

membership in 2007, which some now see as premature since those nations' problems of lawlessness and corruption had not been fully solved at the time and have not magically cleared up in response to entry either. The issue is more than just one of values and principles, since poor law enforcement and border control in the Balkans keeps open a dangerous channel for drugs, arms smuggling, illegal migration, and human trafficking into the heart of Europe, coming both from the area itself and from points East and South. This helps to explain why lifting visa restrictions has become such a hot topic: the Commission may be attracted to it as a way of boosting applicants' morale and their economic prospects, but an over-generous policy would carry real security risks, as well as perhaps sparking popular backlash within European societies that already feel swamped by immigration.²⁵ The association of migrants from new member-states with crime and disorder has, indeed – as the Commission admits – done much at popular level to discredit the idea of enlargement generally (European Commission 2009b).

More issues could be cited, but these are enough to underline the *prima facie* contrast with Iceland's case. Olli Rehn pointed out in his speech of 9 September at Reykjavik, after handing over the entry questionnaire, that "As Iceland is already deeply integrated with the EU through the EEA and Schengen, it is already implementing major parts of the *acquis communautaire*" (Rehn 2009c). Elsewhere he had estimated that Iceland could immediately fulfil the requirements of about 75% of the negotiating chapters, or 23-24 in all. The difficult issues in the Icelandic negotiations are generally seen as ones where Iceland feels best qualified to manage its own resources and may be tempted to hold out for exceptions from EU standards, rather than ones where the EU considers Iceland not good enough: notably fisheries management and agriculture. True, Iceland is in a serious economic and financial mess, and the EU would need watertight assurances that the country had taken the necessary steps for greater future discipline as well as recovery before it could gain accession, let alone think of joining the Economic and Monetary Union. But it could also be argued that since EU members have shared the damage caused by Iceland's faulty credit and debt management – the UK and Netherlands in the Icesave connection, and others who have been under pressure to help bail Iceland out – the EU would benefit on balance from taking a strong hand in this small nation's future management.

Be that as it may, there is one fundamental difference between the negotiating dynamics for Iceland and the West Balkans candidates respectively. The integrated Europe has many changes it wants to see in South-East Europe for its own purposes, and some things that it actually fears, up to and including a fresh outbreak of war. Ever since the early 2000s when the notion of membership for former Yugoslav states started being seriously considered, the idea of 'conditionality' has been a part of the EU's strategy to achieve the transformations it seeks in South-East Europe

²⁵ It is relevant that many EU countries have already been asked to absorb considerable numbers of refugees from the area, and these have not always been easy to integrate.

and to control the risks (Dobbels 2009). It starts from the premise that the lure of EU membership is one of the few things strong enough to help former Yugoslav populations escape from their history and mend their ways forever. This is more than a pious hope since so many potentially dangerous issues between and within Central European states were successfully overcome with the same leverage in the period 1989-2004. Thus specific steps forward in the approach to membership have been held out, often successfully, as the rewards for specific improvements by Balkan states on all the crucial issues mentioned above. But using EU membership as a carrot implies that the applicant must be allowed to eat the carrot when the right conditions are fulfilled. In this sense, the very weaknesses of the Balkan candidates have locked them into a uniquely strong co-dependence with core Europe where membership now looks like the only logical outcome, however long it takes. Iceland, by contrast, made its own decision to apply because of a pressing set of national concerns, which – despite the comment at the end of the previous paragraph – are not fully or directly shared by its European neighbours and which could in principle also be solved in other ways. Reykjavik is thus more clearly the *demandeur*: and if it could be argued on the one hand that absorbing it would cost the EU little, on the other hand Europe may not think it worth paying any very high price for that result.

4. The Broader European Perspective

This brings us to the final question of where Iceland, as a Northern applicant, and the applicants from South-East Europe respectively fit into the 'grand design' of EU enlargement for the 21st century. The first point to stress is that public enthusiasm for more enlargement has been low since 2004, partly because of a perception that the EU's 'Big Bang' in that year was not fully prepared and caused difficulties both within the 'new' and 'old' member states. The latest Eurobarometer opinion poll (No. 71, taken in June 2009 and published in September) shows opposition to enlargement running at a level of 46% for the EU as a whole with only 43% in favour, which is typical of the last few years. New member countries (including Slovenia) are much more favourable with 64% for and just 21% against, while opposition is strongest in Luxembourg, Austria, France and Germany. It is fair to say that European élites and governments often see the case for expansion more clearly, regardless of nationality – as, interestingly enough, younger Europeans also seem to do. Yet the hurdles for applicants have also been steadily raised at official EU level since the 'Copenhagen criteria' for entry were first defined in December 1993.²⁶ Since 1995 the EU has sought assurance that a new member's govern-

26 These require a new member to have democratic institutions, a free market economy robust enough to cope with exposure to the single market, and "the ability to assume the obligations of membership, in particular adherence to the objectives of political, economic and monetary union."

mental and administrative apparatus is up to enforcing the full set of EU obligations. It now requires to be convinced also that the Union itself can cope with the burden of each new entry without losing its efficiency, accountability, financial solvency and ability to make further policy breakthroughs. This helps to explain why small applicants with limited impact may get an easier ride, but the more pro-integration EU members will carefully examine even these to ensure they do not have any idiosyncratic positions that could lead them to veto future advances – a problem highlighted by painful experience in the case of Cyprus.²⁷ Finally, some EU members including France have taken a firm position that they will not accept further accessions until and unless the EU is able to implement the Lisbon Treaty, a long-delayed measure designed to strengthen the Union notably by reinforcing its central political leadership.²⁸

In geo-strategic terms, the Russia/Georgia hostilities in mid-2008 brought to a head the growing feeling among both NATO and EU members that the extension of membership to former Soviet territories (other than the Baltic States) poses exceptional difficulties and may not be helpful to contemplate in the near term. The EU has accordingly overhauled its Eastern partnership policies and is seeking alternative ways of promoting reform and stability along its whole Eastern front, including Russia itself. Since expansion across the Mediterranean has never seriously been considered,²⁹ that leaves only the South-East and the North (potentially Norway and the Faeroes³⁰ as well as Iceland) as possible fronts for advance. It has already been explained why the majority of EU governments feel it necessary to press ahead in the Western Balkans, whatever the delays and costs. Is there any comparable strategic driver in the North?

Evidently, EU leaders do not need to fear inter-state war, genocide, other political atrocities, loose border control, or serious mismanagement of other new security challenges from the countries on their Northern flank. To the extent that they wish to cooperate on shared challenges and seek joint profits they can do so already through the EEA, Schengen and a number of other programmes that the Nordic non-members have joined, including a very far-reaching alignment of Norwegian and Icelandic external policies with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and frequent inputs from those countries to EU peace operations. The EU's Northern Dimension policy created at the Helsinki European

27 Since its accession in 2004, Cyprus's strong views on Turkey have not only complicated the Turkish accession dossier (which some other members might welcome) but also contributed to costly blockages in EU-NATO relations as a whole.

27 Details at http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/index_en.htm.

28 The original EC Treaty gives only 'European' countries the right to apply, and in 1987 an application from Morocco was rejected because it was considered to lie outside geographical 'Europe'.

30 The Faeroe Islands adopted a parliamentary resolution against membership when Denmark voted on EU entry in 1973, and were allowed to opt out of virtually all EU commitments – as was Greenland in 1985.

Council of 1999 was re-invented in November 2006³¹ to allow more intensive dialogue and cooperation with Norway, Iceland and Russia on economic, developmental, soft-security and other practical problems that are special to Europe's Nordic/Baltic zone. The EU also supports and works within two independent regional organizations, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and Council for Baltic Sea States, for similar purposes.

The one new angle where the EU itself might be seen as a *demandeur* is the prospective development of the Arctic (or High North) zone as a result of further ice melting due to climate change, which could offer lucrative openings for new exploitation of hydrocarbon deposits and ice-free shipping lanes, but is also expected to heighten geo-political tensions among the nations who have territories and sea-bed claims around the Pole. In November 2008 the Commission published a first outline of a proposed Arctic strategy for the EU (European Commission 2008),³² looking for a significant European role in resource exploitation but also in safeguarding the environment, local populations and maritime safety, and suggesting among other things that the EU should seek a collective observer status at the Arctic Council (where all Nordic states are already members). The role the EU sees for itself in this context is broadly in line with Icelandic and Norwegian interests and could indeed help these smaller states to defend their positions vis-à-vis the superpowers, while avoiding the risks of provocation that would arise if Europe expressed itself mainly through a NATO presence. However, the argument in this case could be reversed to suggest that the EU might promote its strategy far more effectively with Iceland as a full member, giving it an institutional and regulatory foothold right in the middle of the Atlantic approaches to the new development zone. Assuming the Council of Ministers will broadly agree with the Commission's vision, this could provide a motive for EU members who think strategically but are not natural patrons of the North (notably France) to support Icelandic entry, and even be ready to pay a somewhat higher price for it.

How do these considerations on Europe's Northern and South-eastern flanks balance out? So far, the only EU governments that have commented on the relative merits of the two enlargements have given a clear reply. On 27 July 2009 when EU Foreign Ministers approved the start of the entry process for Iceland – in record short time after receiving its application – Carl Bildt (currently holding the Council Presidency for Sweden) made a point of saying that the EU must “give a new impetus to the European integration process in the Western Balkans” over the coming months; while Olli Rehn stressed that Iceland could expect a “fair track” rather than a “fast track” (i.e. no preferential treatment)³³. French Foreign Minister

31 Details and relevant documents are at

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/north_dim/index_en.htm.

32 For more on this and other issues in the paragraph see Bailes (2009a) and Bailes (2009b).

33 Specifically, he has often suggested that Iceland might at best join simultaneously with Croatia – note, not before it.

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Bernard Kouchner, speaking at a press conference in Brussels, went further to state that “It would be a political error to put Iceland before the Balkan countries” (SE Times 2009); and the French Europe Minister Pierre Lellouche, visiting Iceland shortly after, repeated that it would be wrong to let states jump over others in the entry queue (Morgunblaðið 2009a).

France’s stress on the Balkans is, of course, a long-standing position coloured both by strategic thinking and by traditional sympathies with Serbia in particular,³⁴ but it also reflects a more principled concern not to let decisions on handling diverse applicants be swayed by prejudgements of an ethnic or cultural kind. While Northern European states may feel a more unashamed kinship with Iceland, Icelanders themselves would be unwise to sweep such considerations aside; to show too much confidence in their own ‘superiority’; or indeed to insist too hard on concessions that the EU community may not have sufficient incentive to make. To sum up the reality as it looks in late 2009, Iceland on balance seems to need the EU more than the EU needs it; while the need of the weaker Western Balkan states for Europe is more fully balanced by Europe’s need to transform and discipline them, with the final aim of “regional stability in the interest of Europe as a whole” (European Commission 2009a).

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