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Online Program and Book of Abstracts

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*7th International Balkan Summer School*

# CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN THE BALKANS: EU & MIGRATION

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14-17 JULY 2025

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**ONLINE PROGRAM / BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**

**INTERNATIONAL BALKAN SUMMER SCHOOL (IBSS)**

**CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN THE BALKANS:  
EU AND MIGRATION**

14-17 JULY 2025

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## About International Balkan Summer School

The International Balkan Summer School, titled “Contemporary Challenges in the Balkans: EU & Migration” offers an intellectually stimulating and immersive platform designed specifically for postgraduate students and emerging scholars. This program delves deeply into critical, contemporary issues that shape the social, legal, political, and economic landscape of the Balkans, with a particular focus on the intricate interplay between migration dynamics and the European Union’s evolving role in the region. By addressing these pressing challenges, the summer school provides participants with a unique opportunity to engage in thought-provoking discussions that are grounded in both theoretical frameworks and real-world case studies.

The program is meticulously tailored to cater to an academically inclined audience, fostering a vibrant environment of robust scholarly discourse. Through interdisciplinary approaches, it encourages participants to examine complex migration patterns, regional policies, and the EU’s influence on governance, integration, and security within the Balkans. In addition to structured lectures and seminars delivered by leading experts in the field, the summer school includes workshops, panel discussions, and networking opportunities, further enhancing the academic and professional growth of its attendees. By offering a platform to explore the historical, geopolitical, and cultural nuances of migration and EU relations in the Balkans, the program equips students with a comprehensive understanding of the region’s challenges and their global implications.



## About Balkan Studies Foundation

The Balkan Studies Foundation is the continuation of the Fettah Efendi Education and Thought Association, which was founded in September 2016 by young academicians, students, and young businessmen based in Skopje. It has been reorganized under a different institutional framework due to the expansion of activities carried out under the association's umbrella and the necessity of including all of the Balkans. Between 2016 and 2022, it conducted thousands of educational activities and undertook significant research and publication endeavors. Since September 2022, it has continued its activities through research centers, training centers, and publishing houses under the name of the Balkan Studies Foundation.

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## About South East European University (SEEU)

South East European University (SEEU) is a private, non-profit higher education institution consisting of faculties, centers, and institutes as integral parts, specializing in socio-economic sciences. The mission of the University is defined in its Statute. SEEU seeks excellence in teaching and research within the higher education system of the Republic of North Macedonia, offering equal opportunities to all based on impartiality and merit. One of the key elements of the University's mission includes active cooperation with universities in the Republic of North Macedonia as well as internationally. The main aim under which the university is governed and managed is to contribute to higher education in the Albanian language, promoting mutual interethnic understanding. SEEU aims to provide a multilingual and multicultural approach to teaching and research, developing study programs according to broad European and international standards.



### About Oranje Instituut

Since the 1990s, Muslim academics in Europe have worked to provide high-quality theological education, benefiting thousands of students and professionals. To continue this legacy, the “Oranje Instituut” was established in 2018, aiming to elevate theological education with expert teachers and accumulated knowledge. The Oranje Institute values transparency, openness to feedback, collaboration, ethics, productivity, and innovation. It promotes independent theological education, prioritizing consultation and building on past successes. The objectives of the Oranje Institute are to educate productive, original-minded students who respect differences; unite experienced scholars to advance research, scientific knowledge, and innovation while adhering to ethical values; collaborate with educational institutions to enhance staff training, develop methodologies, and address issues in non-formal education; and publish academic journals and host activities to foster academic and student development.

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### About HUN REN Centre for Economic and Regional Studies

The Institute for Regional Studies (RKI) of the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies (CERS) is Hungary's foremost research institution dedicated to regional science. With four scientific departments located across the country—in Pécs, Budapest, Kecskemét, Békéscsaba, and Győr—the Institute combines national reach with in-depth local expertise. This structure enables a nuanced understanding of spatial processes and regional disparities across diverse territorial contexts.

RKI conducts interdisciplinary research on the spatial distribution of natural, social, and economic resources, with a particular emphasis on addressing territorial inequalities and fostering balanced regional development. Its work is grounded in the integration of multiple social science disciplines, including economics, geography, sociology, political science, and law. As the central hub of regional science in Hungary, RKI plays a pivotal role in shaping policy-relevant research and advancing theoretical and applied knowledge in spatial and regional studies.



## About ADAM (Ankara Center for Thought and Research)

The primary goal of the ADAM is to build the necessary infrastructure to cultivate the ideal individual for our time across all fields, with a focus on solidarity and cooperation to achieve this aim. ADAM seeks to enhance the quality of human resources by supporting their academic, social, and cultural development. The institution prioritizes educational, research, and project activities within a framework of human consciousness and conscience, aiming to transform the collective wisdom and historical richness of our region into a synergistic force, fostering a “community of intellectuals” dedicated to advancing beauty and excellence in every domain.



# Lecturers



## **Prof. Dr. Sead Turčalo**

Sead Turčalo is an associate professor and has been the dean at the University of Sarajevo's Faculty of Political Science since 2019. He completed his Ph.D. in 2014 and teaches courses on such topics as geopolitics and international security. His recent books include *Popular Geopolitics* and *Intercepted Conversations: Preparations for War*. Dr Turčalo has been the lead researcher for Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Horizon 2020 PAVE project and currently holds the same role on a Horizon Europe project entitled *Re-Engage*. He successfully completed a leadership development program co-organised by the Faculty of Political Science and Stanford University. Dr Turčalo consults for various domestic and international organisations, including the OSCE, IOM, and IRI. He is the vice president of the Atlantic Initiative and serves on the editorial boards of several academic journals.



## **Prof. Dr. Admir Mulaosmanović**

Admir Mulaosmanović, born in Sarajevo on July 1, 1973, played an active role in the Bosnian War, initially joining the Territorial Defense and later the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He holds a degree in History from the University of Sarajevo and completed his postgraduate studies at the University of Zagreb, specializing in the political and economic history of Bosnia and Herzegovina. His doctoral research at the University of Zagreb focused on the political trajectory of Alija Izetbegović. He has held positions at the Institute for History, University of Sarajevo, and served as a lecturer and dean at the International University of Sarajevo from January 2020 until January 2023. He also served as an advisor to the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He is an accomplished author, having published several books and numerous scholarly articles. Currently, he is an associate professor at the Department of Political Sciences and Public Administration at Balikesir University.



### **Prof. Dr. Mimoza Dushi**

Mimoza Dushi holds a PhD in Geography with a specialization in Demography from the University of Pristina, Kosovo. She is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Pristina, and formerly served as Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs at the University of Gjakova (2015–2019). Her research focuses on migration, labor mobility, brain drain, and integration, with a particular emphasis on the Western Balkans. Dr. Dushi was Principal Investigator of the ICM-RRPP project (2014–2016), where she led comparative research on migration flows from Kosovo to Germany and Switzerland. Most recently, as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at George Washington University (2023–2024), she expanded her research to examine the experiences of Kosovo Albanian migrants in the United States.

She has extensive fieldwork experience, particularly in qualitative research with external migrants, and her scholarly work has contributed to both theoretical and policy debates on migration and development. Dr. Dushi is the author of numerous peer-reviewed articles, with recent publications in the *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* and *GeoJournal*. Her work is regularly presented at national and international conferences and is widely recognized for its relevance to current migration challenges in Southeast Europe.



### **Prof. Dr. Mevludin Ibish**

Prof. Dr. Mevludin IBISH is born in Skopje, North Macedonia. He has finished his bachelor degree in the Faculty of Law, department of Political Sciences at the University of St. Cyril and Methodius (2006), Skopje, Macedonia. He got his master degree in the University of Bologna, Faculty of Political Sciences (2009), Italy and he achieved his PhD degree in the Faculty of Law (2014), Novi Pazar University, Serbia. He is a Full Professor at the International Balkan University, Skopje, North Macedonia. In the same University, he was the Vice Rector for Education, Academic Affairs and Institutions for more than three years between 2015-2016 and 2022-2024. He was a Professor at Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University-Turkey for 5 years (2015-2020). He is also the founder of the Balkan Research Center within International Balkan University (2023). His expertise of research and analyses are the Balkans, Turkey, the region of Caucasus and the Middle East, given a special attention to new political and regional concepts, political history, political parties, society and religion and political systems. He has written articles, reports and Op-Eds as well as has given interviews to several media on the Balkans and Turkiye, and the Middle East with regard to their political developments, integration, democratization, civil-military relations, political culture, as well as EU integration processes and the Western Balkans. He has participated in many regional and international conferences as well as panels referring to the Balkans and their relationship with Turkiye, Balkan politics and its development, International Relations and the Balkans, and the EU policies over the Balkans. Mevludin IBISH is also involved in discussions and analyses that evolve in the international relations with special focus to the decline of liberalism and the reinforcement of realism and defensive realism as well as observing the role of the International Organizations in the world political dynamics. Professor Mevludin Ibish with his expertise is also engaged in the private sector and holds the position of the CEO Advisor in the regional company Dauti, for more than 10 years. He is also a Board member at ALBIZ Foundation from 2013 and he is a Co-founder of Solicity, a consultancy Agency (2022). Mevludin IBISH speaks eight languages, lives in Skopje, North Macedonia; he is married and has three children.



### **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Krasniqi**

Ibrahim Krasniqi is a distinguished academic and expert in strategic management, public governance, and sustainable development. With over two decades of experience in higher education and public service, he currently serves as Associate Professor at the University of Haxhi Zeka in Peja, Kosovo, where he teaches entrepreneurship, EU project management, and international business. Krasniqi holds advanced degrees from leading institutions including the University of Salzburg (Postdoc in International Economics and Public Management), Clausthal University in Germany (PhD in Strategic Management), and the Rochester Institute of Technology in the USA (MSc in Strategic Management and Innovation). His academic journey is enriched by visiting professorships at the University of Salzburg, Sapienza University of Rome, and Ludovika University, among others. He has published extensively in international peer-reviewed journals on topics such as energy transition, AI in education, leadership, and economic development in transition economies. His contributions extend to several policy-shaping roles, including as advisor to the Kosovo Assembly and government ministries, and as a senior expert for EU Commission and Swiss-funded programs. He was a key contributor to Kosovo's Water Resource Management Strategy (2017-2036) and has led numerous projects in economic policy, local governance reform, and SME development. Krasniqi is also a sought-after keynote speaker, most recently addressing AI and sustainable development in emerging economies. He is multilingual, fluent in English, German, and Albanian, and certified in project management, energy optimization (MARKAL), and e-governance. With a career rooted in both academia and applied policy, Dr. Krasniqi bridges theory and practice, making lasting impacts in public sector reform, regional development, and capacity building across the Balkans and beyond.

# Researches

1. Busejra Daci: *EU Migration and Integration Challenges in the Balkans*
2. Bilgehan Oğuz: *A Comparative Analysis of the Integration Process of Morea Immigrants: Examples of Antalya and Kuşadası*
3. Alexandros Zyka: *Understanding the unknown: Exploring the bilateral relations between Greece and Albania and its effect on the Albanian prospect for EU membership*
4. Şengül İnce: *Balkan Countries' Goals and Challenges in EU Enlargement*
5. Lorenca Bejko: *Eurocentrism and the Balkans: Political and Legal Dynamics in European Integration*
6. Arben Meta: *Democratization and Local Governance in the Balkans: Challenges and European Influence*
7. Georgios Antonopoulos: *Russia in the EU's Backyard: How Russian Influence in Serbia Challenges EU Enlargement in the Balkans*
8. Amina Hadžić: *The Western Balkans as a Buffer Zone: Migration, EU Integration, and Geopolitical Calculations*
9. Samir Sinanović: *Identity in Transition: Migrant Integration and Cultural Adaptation in the EU*



# PROGRAM

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### 14 July 2025- Monday

10:00 - 10:20	Opening remarks Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bujamin Bela
10:30 - 12:00	Keynote Speaker: Prof.Dr. Sead Turčalo, <i>Migration and Security Challenges in the Western Balkans</i>
13:30 - 14:30	Lecture I: Prof. Dr. Admir Mulaosmanović, <i>The Impact of Migration on Historical Trends: Contemporary Migration Challenges</i>
14:45-15:45	Lecture II: Prof. Dr. Admir Mulaosmanović

### 15 July 2025 - Tuesday

10:00 - 11:00	Lecture III: Prof. Dr. Mimoza Dushi, <i>Bridging Generations and Borders: Migration, Integration, and Diaspora Engagement in the Balkans</i>
11:15 - 12:30	Lecture IV: Prof. Dr. Mimoza Dushi
14:00-15:30	Workshop 1: Migration, EU and Balkans
	Busejra Daci: <i>EU Migration and Integration Challenges in the Balkans</i>
	Bilgehan Oğuz: <i>A Comparative Analysis of the Integration Process of Morea Immigrants: Examples of Antalya and Kuşadası</i>
	Samir Sinanović : <i>Identity in Transition: Migrant Integration and Cultural Adaptation in the EU</i>

### 16 July 2025 - Wednesday,

10:00 - 11:00	Lecture V: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Krasniqi, <i>Economic Disparities and Migration Dynamics: Analyzing the Role of EU Integration in Shaping Migration Trends between the Balkans and the European Union</i>
11:15 - 12:30	Lecture VI: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Krasniqi
14:00-15:30	Workshop 2: EU, Politics and Challenges
	Arben Meta: <i>Democratization and Local Governance in the Balkans: Challenges and European Influence</i>
	Lorenc Bejko: <i>Eurocentrism and the Balkans: Political and Legal Dynamics in European Integration</i>
	Georgios Antonopoulos: <i>Russia in the EU's Backyard: How Russian Influence in Serbia Challenges EU Enlargement in the Balkans</i>

### 17 July 2025 - Thursday

10:00 -11:15	Lecture VII: Prof. Dr. Mevludin Ibish, <i>EU at the Crossroads: Between an Active Global Competitor and a Passive Global Spectator</i>
11:30-13:00	Lecture VIII: Prof. Dr. Mevludin Ibish
14:00-15:30	Workshop 3: EU Enlargement and Balkans
	Şengül İnce: <i>Balkan Countries' Goals and Challenges in EU Enlargement</i>
	Alexandros Zyka: <i>Understanding the unknown: Exploring the bilateral relations between Greece and Albania and its effect on the Albanian prospect for EU membership</i>
	Amina Hadžić: <i>The Western Balkans as a Buffer Zone: Migration, EU Integration, and Geopolitical Calculations</i>



# ABSTRACTS

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# EU Migration and Integration Challenges in the Balkans

**Busejra Daci**

*PhD Student, Istanbul University*

**Abstract:** The Balkans region, long recognized for its complex geopolitical landscape, is currently facing a series of contemporary challenges largely influenced by migration dynamics and the European Union (EU) integration processes. Migration in the Balkans has become a pressing issue due to the region's geographic location, serving as a gateway between the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. The influx of migrants and refugees has placed immense pressure on Balkan countries, which are often ill-equipped to handle large-scale migration flows due to limited resources and infrastructural challenges. This has led to significant social, political, and economic strains within these countries, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and creating new tensions. The role of the EU in shaping migration policies in the Balkans is critical. The EU's externalization of border control policies, including the implementation of stringent migration management strategies, has had profound implications for the region. Through agreements such as the EU-Türkiye deal and various bilateral arrangements, the EU has effectively outsourced its border security responsibilities to Balkan countries, making them frontline states in the broader EU migration strategy. This approach has raised concerns regarding human rights violations, the militarization of borders, and the adequacy of support provided to Balkan nations to manage these complex issues. Furthermore, the aspiration of Balkan countries to join the EU adds another layer of complexity to the migration discourse. The EU membership prospects act as both an incentive and a pressure mechanism for these countries to align with EU standards and policies, including those related to migration and asylum. However, the path to EU accession is fraught with challenges, including political instability, corruption, and socio-economic disparities, which are further compounded by the ongoing migration crises. This paper research the socio-political and economic impacts of EU driven migration policies on the Balkan region, assessing the effectiveness of EU Balkan cooperation in addressing these challenges, explore the multifaceted issues at the intersection of migration and the EU's influence on the Balkans, particularly emphasizing the region's strategic position as a crucial transit corridor for migrants and refugees seeking asylum or better opportunities in Western Europe. It underscores the necessity for a comprehensive and coordinated



approach that balances security concerns with the protection of human rights and the promotion of sustainable development. Ultimately, the study calls for enhanced solidarity and collaboration between the EU and the Balkan states to navigate the complex migration landscape, ensuring stability and prosperity for the region.

**Keywords:** Migration, European Union (EU) Integration, Balkans




# A Comparative Analysis of the Integration Process of Morea Immigrants: Examples of Antalya and Kuşadası

**Bilgehan Oğuz**

*Phd Student, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University*

**Abstract:** The migrations that occurred as a result of the great land losses experienced in the Balkan geography during the last period of the Ottoman Empire were one of the most important issues of the 19th century. The migrations that occurred individually or collectively during this period brought about important developments in social, economic and cultural terms. Another migration event that occurred from the Balkan geography was the migration to Morea. This process, which started with the 1821 Morea Rebellion, resulted in the massacre of thousands of people and the displacement of thousands of people from their homes. In this sense, it is seen that Morea immigrants migrated to the capital Istanbul, the coastal cities of Western Anatolia, some Aegean Islands and the Antalya district in order to establish a new life during and after the rebellion. The immigrants experienced difficulties in terms of food, shelter, adaptation etc. in the regions where they settled. As a result, the state and the local people tried to eliminate these difficulties with the support they provided to the Morea immigrants. The integration process of the immigrants to the region where they were settled is at least as important as the rebellion process and the migration event. At this point, communication and interaction between the groups have an important place. Because migration is not only a geographical displacement movement, but also a combination of dynamism and differences. Although it creates areas of conflict, competition and sharing on one hand, it also creates the energy and synergy that will enable the solutions of the tensions that arise. Ultimately, it emerges as a result of the change and transformation of the social structure. The integration process of the Mora immigrants in their new living spaces did not progress at the same pace in every region. For example, the integration processes of the Mora immigrants who came to Kuşadası and the Mora immigrants who came to Antalya went through different stages. The geographical location and the impact of the events that caused the migration in the region were effective on this situation. The integration process of the immigrants in Kuşadası matured later than in the Antalya area. So much so that the local people in Kuşadası kept the Mora immigrants away from all kinds



of shopping. However, exchanging girls was not welcomed. The immigrants even created another cemetery of their own due to this distance between them and the locals. In Antalya district, another area where the immigrants migrated, there was initially a distant relationship between the two groups. This situation, just like in the Kuşadası example, mostly emerged in the spoken language. Apart from this, the cultural differences between the immigrants and the local people also caused a distant approach. In the relations of the Mora immigrants who settled in Antalya with the local people, there are no incidents that reached such a large dimension or even caused a separatist event as in the Kuşadası example. Despite the differences that emerged between the two groups at the beginning, all segments of the society got used to living together over time. The integration processes experienced in the regions to which they migrated both affect the new lives of the immigrants and the social, cultural, political, etc. aspects of the region. In this respect, it is an issue that needs to be evaluated how quickly the integration between the regions progresses and what kind of effects this process has on the region. In this study, Kuşadası and Antalya districts where the Mora immigrants migrated were selected as sample settlement areas. A comparative study was attempted while addressing the integration process in these settlement areas.

**Keywords:** Ottoman, Balkans, Morea, Antalya, Kuşadası, Forced Migration, Integration.



# Understanding the Unknown: Exploring the Bilateral Relations Between Greece and Albania and its Effect on the Albanian Prospect for EU Membership

**Alexandros Zyka**

*MSc holder, University of Piraeus*

**Abstract:** One of the most interesting-and unexplored-aspects of the Balkan peninsula is how Greece and Albania view of each other and how does this affect the Albanian attempt to join the European Union. Without a doubt, Greece and Albania in the recent years began to have closer relations, due to the fall of communism in 1991, and the mass migration of Albanians to Greece that followed. The presence of the national Greek minority in Albania, however, not only affected-and still do-their bilateral relations, but also they are connected to the EU Enlargement. Taking all these into consideration, the purpose of this paper is to examine and to track the connection between all these aspects. The introductory part will attempt to present the relations between Albanians and Greeks since the Berlin Congress of 1878 and the formation of Albanian state in 1912. The exact number of Greeks in Albania is still unknown, because not only the former Ottoman rule didn't count its subjects by nationality, rather than religion. This didn't change until the Second World War and the prevail of the Albanian communists, who tried to organize the Albanian society in modern terms. After the fall of communism in 1991, the mass migration from Albania-which included a huge number of Greeks-had an important impact between the two countries due to the fact that they tried to re-establish their bilateral relations in the new post-cold war terms. The limitations though that are implemented by the Albanian government in the remaining Greeks, are observed by the Greek government and as a result it puts restrictions to the Albanian prospect of joining the EU.

**Keywords:** Greece, Albania, European Union, Integration



# Balkan Countries' Goals and Challenges in EU Enlargement

**Şengül Ince**

*Bursa Technical University, Department of International Relations, MSc Student*

**Abstract:** This study examines the membership aspirations of the Balkan countries in the context of the European Union (EU) enlargement movements and the problems they face in this process within the framework of constructivism. While constructivism focuses on the role of organizations in international relations, it also emphasizes that enlargement movements in the system are possible through the implementation of common norms, identities and values in the new member states. In this direction, a process that does not completely ignore material interests and prioritizes normative values is dominant. The EU's growth movements, which started with limited countries, increased the number of members over time and focused on enlargement movements. The organization, which became a global power in the following periods, stands out with its union-specific criteria and institutions and adopts strategies in the fields of law, politics and economy. From this point of view, the enlargement strategies realized by the EU have turned into an effort for the Western Balkan countries, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Albania, which gained their independence after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, to join the membership. The Western Balkan countries, which have achieved candidate country status as a result of reforms in political, economic and social areas, have also faced difficulties in the accession process due to various factors. These challenges include internal political and economic problems, bilateral disputes between countries and external factors such as the EU's enlargement fatigue. The difficulties encountered in this direction have led to setbacks in relations with the Union. However, in the ongoing process, the Western Balkan countries' efforts to adapt to EU norms in areas such as democratization, human rights and the rule of law have progressed positively. The Western Balkan countries wishing to join the Union put forward these norms, which must be fulfilled for accession, as a strategic goal and see them as positive gains. From this point of view, the aim of the study is to analyze the goals of the Western Balkan countries in terms of accession and the problems they face in the EU enlargement movements.

**Keywords:** European Union, Enlargement Movements, Western Balkan Countries



# Eurocentrism and the Balkans: Political and Legal Dynamics in European Integration

**Lorenca Bejko**

*Dr., Institute of European Studies, Diplomacy and regionalism*

**Abstract:** The political and legal relations between the Balkans and Eurocentrism are shaped by historical legacies, geopolitical influences, and European integration processes. Eurocentrism, as a framework that prioritizes Western European norms, has influenced the political structures and legal frameworks of Balkan states, often through conditionality mechanisms tied to EU accession. This paper examines the impact of Eurocentrism on Balkan governance, legal harmonization, and regional stability, highlighting the challenges of external influence versus local agency. While Europeanization has driven legal reforms and institutional development, tensions arise from historical narratives, sovereignty concerns, and differing political traditions. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for assessing the Balkans' evolving role within the European legal and political order.

**Keywords:** Eurocentrism, European Integration, Legal Harmonization, Governance





# Democratization and Local Governance in the Balkans: Challenges and European Influence

**Arben Meta**

*PhD Student, Institute of European Studies*

**Abstract:** This study explores the complex dynamics of democratization and local governance in the Balkans, focusing on the interplay between indigenous political traditions and the transformative influence of European integration. Through a comparative analysis of case studies across the region, the research examines how EU conditionality and external pressures have shaped reform processes, while also considering the enduring impact of historical legacies and socio-political structures. The findings indicate that although EU-led reforms have spurred significant institutional changes and enhanced governance frameworks, challenges such as corruption, clientelism, and uneven economic development continue to hinder the full realization of democratic practices at the local level. This paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the dual pressures faced by Balkan states as they strive to balance local governance imperatives with the normative standards of the European Union, highlighting both the potential and limitations of external influence in advancing democratization.

**Keywords:** Democratization, Local Governance, EU



# Russia In the EU's Backyard: How Russian Influence in Serbia Challenges EU Enlargement in the Balkans

**Georgios Antonopoulos**

*Master Student, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences*

**Abstract:** Since the early 2000s, the European Union's enlargement policy has been its most effective tool for expanding its influence in the Western Balkans. However, in recent years, as the EU struggles with “enlargement fatigue,” this policy has become slow and inefficient, creating windows of opportunity for third countries to exploit. One of the most prominent actors taking advantage of these shortcomings is Russia, which has managed to consolidate its foothold in Serbia, countering EU influence and obstructing Belgrade's accession path. As a result, Russia's geopolitical strategy in the Western Balkans—particularly in Serbia—has emerged as a direct challenge to the EU's enlargement policy. This paper examines Russia's ambitions in the Balkans through Hans Morgenthau's theoretical framework of national interests, illustrating the region's significance in Moscow's broader geopolitical strategy. The findings demonstrate that Russia perceives the Balkans as a crucial front in its effort to limit Western expansion. By analyzing Russia's strategic objectives and the means employed to achieve them—such as diplomatic support to Serbia on the Kosovo issue, energy dependency, military cooperation, and soft power projection—the study highlights the Kremlin's role as a disruptive force in Serbia's EU accession process. By consolidating its influence in Serbia Russia aims to maintain the country's strategic ambiguity, ensuring that Belgrade remains politically and economically dependent on Moscow and thus making EU accession an increasingly challenging prospect. The study's conclusion underscores the significant negative impact of Russian influence on the EU's enlargement policy. By applying Morgenthau's theory of national interests, this paper offers a framework for analyzing Russia's geopolitical strategy and its implications for Serbia's European path. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on EU enlargement by highlighting the interplay between external influence and regional integration challenges. Furthermore, the study indicates that unless Brussels adopts a more proactive and cohesive enlargement strategy, Russian influence in Serbia will continue to undermine the EU's long-term objectives in the Balkans. Therefore, a revitalized and strategically coherent EU enlargement policy is essential to counteract Russian influence and reaffirm Brussels' role as the primary external actor shaping the Balkans' geopolitical future.

**Keywords:** EU Enlargement Policy, Russian Influence, Western Balkans



# The Western Balkans as a Buffer Zone: Migration, EU Integration, and Geopolitical Calculations

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**Abstract:** The Western Balkans occupy a key geopolitical position between the European Union and major migration routes from the Middle East and Africa. As a region aspiring to European integration, it faces challenges posed by EU migration policies, which often treat the Balkans as a buffer zone for controlling migrant inflows. This paper will analyze whether the EU enlargement policy is influenced by a strategy of keeping the Balkans outside its borders to more effectively manage migration pressures. The paper will examine key factors shaping this dynamic, including security policies, readmission agreements, and the treatment of migrants in the Balkans. It will explore the role of Frontex, bilateral agreements between the EU and Balkan states, and pressures from EU member states that oppose further enlargement. Special attention will be given to the region's economic and political instability, which further complicates the European integration process and raises the question of whether the EU deliberately delays the accession of the Western Balkans to maintain it as a buffer zone. Through an analysis of migration policies, regional initiatives, and EU relations with Western Balkan countries, this paper will explore the potential balance between European integration and migration strategies. It concludes that the EU's current approach to the Balkans reflects a broader geopolitical interest—migration control without commitment to an accelerated integration process.

**Keywords:** EU Enlargement Policy, Migration Control, European Integration



# Identity in Transition: Migrant Integration and Cultural Adaptation in the EU

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**Abstract:** Migration has become one of the key socio-political issues of the 21st century, particularly within the European Union (EU), where diverse migration flows challenge existing models of integration and cultural adaptation. This paper explores how migrant identity evolves within the EU, focusing on the dynamic processes of integration and assimilation, as well as the socio-cultural transformations occurring within migrant communities and host societies. The central thesis is that integration is not a linear process but a multidimensional and reciprocal interaction between migrants and their new environments, shaped by policies, public perceptions, and personal experiences. The paper analyzes key factors influencing migrant identity, including language acquisition, access to the labor market, social networks, and the role of diasporic communities. While some migrants undergo relatively smooth integration due to structured policies and inclusive societal attitudes, others face challenges such as discrimination, cultural alienation, and inconsistent policies across different EU member states. The concept of “cultural hybridity” is particularly relevant, as many migrants navigate between preserving their cultural heritage and embracing new societal norms. This process often results in hybrid cultural expressions that enrich host societies while simultaneously creating new social tensions. Furthermore, the paper highlights the role of EU policies in the migrant integration process, analyzing frameworks such as the basic principles for immigrant integration and national strategies in different member states. It also examines how the rise of nationalist movements and anti-migration rhetoric impact integration efforts, creating an environment where assimilation is sometimes expected at the expense of cultural diversity. Finally, the paper emphasizes that successful integration requires a balanced approach that values both migrant adaptation and the openness of host societies. By promoting inclusive policies, intercultural dialogue, and addressing socio-economic barriers, the EU can better manage migration challenges and harness its potential for cultural and economic development. These findings contribute to the broader discussion on migration, identity, and social cohesion in Europe.

**Keywords:** Migrant Identity, Integration, European Union (EU)



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