DISCUSSION PAPER

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Rethinking the Balkans

Incongruities of State and Nation Building, Regional Stabilisation and European Integration

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2004 – State of Affairs in the Western Balkans[*]

The outcome of the elections in Serbia and the recent violence in Kosovo have demonstrated dramatically, albeit not unexpectedly, that the passing of time and intensive international involvement have failed to alleviate nationalist obsessions among protagonists of the Serbian and Albanian questions in the Western Balkans. Together with socio-economic stagnation, resilient nationalism in Serbia and the aggressive disturbances in Kosovo constitute a vicious circle. Radicals determining the political agenda corner moderates and reform politicians. The eventual discrediting of these nationalist agendas is bound to waste many more valuable years in addition to the lost decade of the 1990s.

However, almost one and a half decades after the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation, a decade after the Dayton Peace Agreement and half a decade after the Kosovo War, the era of violent nationalism and ethnic cleansing seemed to recede into the past. Democratically elected and reform-oriented governments, committed to regional and European integration as common projects, are in power in each country and entity of the region. Outbursts of ethnic violence had been contained and the main post-Yugoslav state-building arrangements upheld. The time seemed to have come for the paradigm shift from reconstruction and stabilisation to sustainable development and integration. An optimist might even add that macroeconomic indicators have changed for the better, with all countries and entities featuring substantial economic growth rates. Regional co-operation, moreover, is picking up pace and the Stability Pact scheme of bilateral free-trade agreements is nearing completion. Last, but not least, Croatia's application and positive avis added credence to the solemn promise of an EU perspective for the Western Balkans, as restated at last year's summit in Thessaloniki. Croatia is a convincing demonstration of the reform stimulus provided by the European perspective.

A pessimist, however, would point to the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic as a sad reminder of both the pervasiveness of organised crime in the Balkans and the utter fragility of political consolidation. Numerous unresolved issues of nation and state building keep the European crisis managers on high alert. The conflict potentials of resurgent nationalism are exacerbated by "weak economies" with income levels below 15% of the EU average (with the exception of Croatia) and without tangible progress towards sustainable

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development. All in all, prospects that other countries will be able to follow Croatia's and Macedonia's example and sign a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (let alone, graduate from such an agreement) in the near future are dim.

Evidently, any verdict on the current state of affairs in the Balkans depends to a large extent on the perspective. If the perspective is the past decade with the bloody Yugoslav wars of succession, much has been achieved. However, if the perspective is the projected future qualification of the Western Balkans for EU membership as the final stage of the transition to pluralist democracy and market economy, a long and arduous road still lies ahead.

Root Causes and Future Prospects

Contrasting views on the prospects, time frames and the necessary strategies to bridge the current gap between the Western Balkans and the enlarged Europe of Twenty-five are premeditated by diverging assessments of root causes and regional specifics. Views range from the assumption that the real evil genius is the Balkans' bad reputation of ethnic strive and backwardness to the claim that either the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia or structural historical factors reaching back to Ottoman times got the Balkans off the beaten track of post-communist transition.

The recipes for success vary accordingly. Some would argue that the Balkan countries have to be treated as normal transition countries in need of some additional resources, patience and support to catch up. Catching up usually begins with nation and state building much along the lines of what other European nations accomplished one or more centuries ago. Others would object that the Balkans seems to be rather oblivious to the application of the standard instrumentarium of transformation and association assistance. Arguably, Croatia was destined to make it, with or without international guidance and assistance, whereas intensive international engagement has failed to achieve a decisive breakthrough in Kosovo or Bosnia-Herzegovina. The culprit for the disparities within the region may be either the more massive and unresolved conflicts of the 1990s, the modernisation gap Yugoslav socialism failed to eradicate or the inadequacy of the current international regimes in Sarajevo and Prishtina.

The "Western Balkans" is a 1998 Brussels construction. Nevertheless, since the early 1990s shared legacies from authoritarian rule, traditional societies and ethnic confrontation have set developments in the region apart from the transition process towards pluralist democracy and market economy in East-Central Europe. The destructive and inconclusive process of state and nation building emerging from the disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation obviously factors into the loss of relative advantages as a basis for democratisation and market reforms. The structural weakness of the state in shaping societal dynamics constitutes another major legacy. Generic explanations, however, tend to gloss over the distinct profiles of the individual cases, ranging from state weakness without unfinished state building in Albania to inconclusive state and nation building in Serbia. Generic Balkan trends also fail to acknowledge the heterogeneity of outcomes, ranging from Croatia fulfilling the preconditions for EU accession negotiations to other states and entities failing to meet basic European criteria. The perception of a shared past is a divisive rather than an integrative factor, whereas the shared EU perspective has induced and facilitated some regional cooperation initiatives. From a European perspective, the positive avis of April 2004 for Croatia will precipitate a redefinition of the "Western Balkans", exempting Croatia from the region as it exempted the EU accession states of Romania and Bulgaria five years ago. Whether Croatia's "graduation" marks the erosion of the Balkans as an ignominious enclave in Europe or whether it merely

brings an reputedly ancient and fundamental divide to the fore again is pivotal to any credible strategy.

In line with diverging assessments of root causes and future prospects opinions on international assistance and guidance tend to diverge too. If the consolidation of the Balkans is considered the basis of the process of emulation and catch-up that must be allowed to run its course, (too much) international interference seems inappropriate. Others might argue that, considering the havoc they wrought in the recent past, the region requires particularly comprehensive and intensive external interference in these processes of state and nation building. Historical lessons indicate that a constructive handling of ethnic confrontations requires a supranational authority. Both might agree that the deficits in good governance and economic development could be compensated for by additional assistance, infrastructure projects and foreign investment. Sceptics, however, persistently point to the unintended consequences of external assistance and guidance to weak states, ranging from aid dependency to political de-legitimisation. The qualitative asymmetries between regional realities and European/international strategies consequently might result in part in vicious rather than virtuous circles.

The Balkans in Europe

Realities in the Balkans and Europe *anno 2004*, however, tend to be more complex and causalities less distinct. Neither the Ottoman legacies nor the ethnic wars of the 1990s can be considered in isolation. Similarly, "the Balkans" as a pejorative term is informed by realities in a historical region with some common traits, but also reproduces these perceptions and realities. Irrespective of all debates on culprits and causalities, what counts are strategic options of *hic et nunc* – in Europe and in the Balkans. The current constellation of a Balkan enclave in an enlarged European Union does not allow for a catch-up of 19th century nation building or 20th century state building in selective isolation whilst striving to enter the mainstream of European political and economic transition on the brink of the 21st century.

Conversely, albeit European proximity and demonstration effects have exerted decisive influence during most epochs of Balkan history, in current circumstances the imposition of Western blueprints of state and nation building is as much a fallacy as the a-historical catch-up approach. Unlike East-Central Europe where the agendas of post-communist transformation and European integration could be handled largely consecutively over a period of fifteen years, the Western Balkans are currently treated with an amalgamate of stabilisation, transformation and integration strategies. The congruence and applicability of the three strategies thus becomes a pertinent issue for both Europe and the Balkans. For the Balkans, moreover, there is no aloofness from overarching globalisation and European integration, thus precluding a catch-up approach as a time-out from current developments and norm setting. For Europe, the Balkans challenges the paradigm of transition as well as the sequencing of transition and EU integration. Thus, neither is the Balkans an outsider to Europe nor can Europe pretend to be an outsider to the Balkans. Europe and the Balkans are inextricably linked, both historically and prospectively. Alas, the incongruencies and disparities are none the less real.

Although it remains to be seen how and when the three Southeastern European candidate countries will be able to follow in the footsteps of Eastern enlargement 2004, the Western Balkans constitute a strategic challenge for both national and European policy-makers that cannot be met by replicating Eastern enlargement. In the current state of affairs incongruencies abound. State weakness and the predominant concern of state and nation

building tend to seriously hamper international engagement by not providing matching indigenous counterparts with corresponding institutional capabilities and policy priorities. Conversely, elites and constituencies throughout the region increasingly share a European orientation, but indigenous political and structural constraints tend to run counter to European priorities and conditionalities.

The discussions at the second Balkan Forum roundtable "Integrating the Balkans" in July 2002 seemed to suggest that the Balkans was ready for a major step forward: Moving from stabilisation to integration was largely seen as a matter of the EU providing the right sets of instruments and coherent policies. Since then, trends and events – in particular the Thessaloniki Summit in June 2003 and the positive avis for Croatia's candidate status in April 2004 – indeed announced the paradigm shift from stabilisation and reconstruction to European integration and sustainable development. On the other hand, reform progress and political normalisation in most of the region fail to meet expectations – despite massive assistance and the acclaimed ultimate incentive of the European perspective. For most states and state-like entities, state and nation building still constitutes the prime agenda. Thus, the key question remains whether stabilisation, transformation and integration are either synergetic or incongruent policy agendas – both from a national/regional and from a European perspective. As neither catching up by rigorously implementing the traditional nation and state building agendas nor reproducing the EU enlargement agenda corresponds to current realities and past legacies, the search is out for sincere policy options matching Balkan and European potentials and constraints.

State and Nation Building – the Learning Curve

Nation and state building in the Western Balkans was marked by emulation of Western prototypes, combining the French model of the centralised state of citizens with the decentralised German nation-state and eventually territorialising ethnicity in multiethnic states. With the post-communist conflicts of the 1990s, external interference in processes of sovereign statehood achieved a new quality. Although regional stabilisation as a guiding principle links Dayton to Belgrade and Ohrid to UNSC Res. 1244, the actual sovereignty arrangements for ethnically divided societies vary widely. The variety of arrangements demonstrates both the specificity of each case and the learning curve of the international community. Balancing the representation of *etnos* and *demos* under the overall objective of a consolidated order of states is a 21st-century challenge that cannot be resolved by reference to and replication of classic Western modes of nation and state building. The Western ideal of multiculturalism was largely a response to the ethnic clashes in the Balkans. Throughout the 20th century, the ideal of the homogeneous nation-state and the invoking of conflicting historical and ethnical claims to certain territories and populaces has equally failed to produce a consolidated outcome in the Balkans, to say the least.

Nation and state building does not allow for time warps and catch-up strategies if only because local constituencies have been exposed to political rhetoric deifying the territorialisation of ethnicity and the homogeneous nation-state for decades and centuries. Irrespective of the question whether the political focus on national statehood is a root cause of state weakness and ethnic conflict or rather a compensation strategy for existing reform and legitimacy deficits, constituencies do matter. Surveys throughout the region indicate that socio-economic prospects constitute the key concerns of the populace. Unlike issues of national sovereignty, however, these socio-economic concerns and actual economic growth barely translate into reform constituencies. Reform governments tend to be democratically

dismissed by the voters at the next elections and replaced by any political alternative, sometimes nationally oriented coalitions. Typically, nationalist parties are less exposed to the mood swings and frustrations of the electorate as their agenda of scapegoating and stirring up ethnic hatred is detached from the constraints and compromises of day-to-day policy-making.

The unrivalled popularity of the European perspective has meanwhile indulged virtually all parties to proclaim the compatibility of their nation and state building program with European integration. The principles of regional stabilisation and the consolidation of the order of states is rarely presented or perceived as a precondition for European integration. Existing incongruities between national projects and European objectives are covered up. Too often, constituencies have been captivated by nationalist and anti-reform programs. Constituencies thus remain a key disincentive to constructive dialogue and strategic compromises on issues of national sovereignty in and among ethnically divided societies.

In the Balkans, neither the ideal of a democracy based exclusively on individual rights nor the rigorous implementation of national self-determination provides the acclaimed silver bullet. Balancing a modest institutionalisation of ethnicity with the strengthening of state functionality without provoking a cascade of new claims is the real litmus test of political acumen and farsightedness. As a matter of fact, current proposals for the territorialisation of ethnicity in the Balkans relegates inter-ethnic cooperation and coexistence either to the level of informal local communities or to the level of international relations between sovereign states. The deadlocked Belgrade-Prishtina negotiations, the recent outburst of violence in Kosovo and the strenuous process of functional centralisation in Bosnia bear witness to the persistent predominance of the ethnic principle. Contrary to common wisdom this predominance does not imply a "natural" inclination disqualifying the concept of a multiethnic state as such. Respect for and integration of minorities has to be the bottom line for any state with a credible claim to "European-ness." The actual implementation of this basic principle is not a matter of finding the magic formula, but rather of acknowledging that a degree of generosity in decision-making by the majority and constructive participation by the minorities are key.

Democratic and Territorial Ethnicity

Along the same lines, political will and vision – not the sophistry of legal or historical arguments – are critical to putting a halt to a Balkan cascade of new claims and actions triggering further state fragmentation and ethnic state building. As much as any change to the status quo of territoriality and sovereignty may be interpreted as a precedent for other claims, it may also constitute a disincentive. Logically, each claim for ethnic self-government (statehood or autonomy) adds to the justification of similar claims by newly created ethnic minorities within newly created entities. The Kosovo Albanians' claim to independence adds to the Kosovo Serbs' claim to autonomy or partitioning. The Mitrovica concept of a further territorialisation of ethnicity adds to corresponding temptations for Muslim, Albanian or Hungarian minorities in Serbia. There is no logical or "just" end to the spiralling logic of ethnic state fragmentation but state functionality and regional stability. These principles, however, hardly ever feature in the debated considerations and plans. The international community's learning curve started with the comprehensive institutionalisation and proportionalisation of ethnicity in Bosnia, while current wisdom (i.e. the Belgrade and Ohrid Agreements) cautions against minority vetoes and ethnic decentralisation. Overall, recent experiences in democratisation, decentralisation, the institutionalisation of ethnicity and resolving status issues have forcefully demonstrated the fallacies of replicating either

Western models or Balkan traditions in the weak states and ethnically divided societies of the region.

Democratisation as a key objective for the future of the region highlights similar dilemmas for both local and international strategists. The dilemmas of international interference in local processes of democratic opinions and policy-making culminate in the "quasi-protectorates" of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Democracy as a basic mechanism of electoral accountability of political leaders constitutes a fundamental European norm. With legacies of ethnic conflict and captive constituencies, however, the ideal of a democratically responsive political elite may conflict with the ideal of responsible policy-making. Democracy as the comprehensive institutionalisation and implementation of good governance certainly is a key priority of international strategies for the region, but has proven largely elusive in the Western Balkans. In sum, for lack of a vision beyond the national interest, positive synergies between electoral democracy, separation of powers, good governance and regional stabilisation are no forgone conclusion.

Recently, decentralisation has become a favourite strategy to boost democratic participation and circumvent deadlocked status issues by combining ethnic and civic representation. In the 20th century, in Southeastern Europe centralisation in state building failed to produce "strong" functional states, but rather generated regional and ethnic conflicts. Today, the three complementary objectives of decentralisation tally with European norms. Firstly, enhancing political participation and involvement of reform potentials and constituencies from the local level in national politics. Secondly, a closer connection and communication between the demands and needs of the local population generating immediate feedback and pressure on local decision-makers who can be made responsible for the results of their policies. Thirdly, the integration and inclusion of ethnic minorities and their demands for self-government on a sub-state level. For weak states of unfinished nation building, however, decentralisation can be both a source of (new) strength and a process of devolution sapping the limited policy-making capacities of the central state, even without ethnic dimension. In ethnically divided societies, no decentralisation can be ethnically blind, but neither should decentralisation pave the way for dysfunctional segregation instead of enhancing state functionality. The risks of sliding state fragmentation and ethnic segregation in the Balkans cannot be eliminated by referring to past successes of decentralisation in other parts of Europe. Arguably, a tailor-made devolution of competencies taking the ethnic as well as the functional specificities of sub-state regions into account may contribute to state consolidation and a reduction of conflict potentials. Again, political will and confidence building are key.

"Europe," moreover, sends mixed signals as far as the (de)centralisation of state competencies is concerned. The European Union itself is a prime example for the divisibility of sovereignty, subsidiarity and "fuzzy statehood." On the other hand, the new outer borders of the EU are increasingly perceived as hard borders by adjacent regions and cross-border minorities. In the 2004 accession states the EU has consistently championed a strengthening of regional and local self-government. At the same time, not unlike accession negotiations, the Stabilisation and Association Process builds up the position of the executive vis-à-vis the legislative, the central government vis-à-vis regional bodies. The various EU association or pre-accession strategies and instruments typically presuppose a fully functional and sovereign state as counterpart. At the same time, the EU actively upholds less-than-sovereign entities in the case of Kosovo or Bosnia and Herzegovina and advocated a "fuzzy" state edifice in the case of Serbia and Montenegro as a lynchpin of regional stability and a halt to further state fragmentation. Evidently, the classic nation-state is the typical clientele of the EU and its integration processes, but in the Balkans the current state of affairs contains a "catch-22"

dilemma of a trade-off between EU compatibility, regional stability and state functionality: EU integration is no substitute for state functionality, nor does regional stability produce state functionality – occasionally they even appear to be mutually exclusive.

Similarly, international organisations and the EU in particular object vehemently to any further territorial institutionalisation of ethnicity e.g. in schemes for the federalisation of Macedonia or the cantonisation of Kosovo. On the other hand, the international attitude towards models of de-territorialised ethnicity has been rather reserved too, as indicated by reactions to the Hungarian status law or various patronage relations between nation-states and "their" minorities in neighbouring states in the Balkans. Again, not the legal sophistry of the arrangement, but rather the confidence on both sides that proposals for devolution or fuzzy statehood are not intended as a first step towards state fragmentation and further ethnic territorialisation, but rather as a flexible accommodation for ethnic rights without impairing civic democracy and functional statehood. A functioning state – i.e. balancing powers, resources and needs, while providing all its citizens with rule of law and other social and economic framework conditions – remains the key prerequisite.

Beyond Status Questions

All due attention for unresolved status questions or unconsolidated sovereignty arrangements ought not to detract attention and energy from key impediments for future development – impediments beyond current status questions. The absence of unresolved status questions is by no means a guarantor of progress in political and economic transformation, as developments in Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia demonstrate. Obviously, an answer to the status question does not qualify as a reply to the key questions of modernisation and post-communist transformation.

Despite the significant economic growth of recent years, most macroeconomic and socioeconomic indicators concerning trade balance and de-industrialisation; unemployment and poverty reduction; corruption and organised crime; as well as regional disparities and social inequality do not bode well for future economic sustainability, let alone "economic prosperity." The lost decade of the 1990s has not only worsened preconditions for economic development, but also sapped popular motivation for the hardships of transition, while paradoxically heightening expectations of a prosperous future. Unresolved status questions certainly have a negative impact on attracting foreign direct investment, ensuring international credits and implementing privatisation, but the case should not be overstated. The pervasive problem of corruption and organised crime, moreover, is not a regional tradition, but rather a global phenomenon with a typical concentration in the weak states of post-communist or post-imperial regions. The priority tasks of improving state functionality, public administration and legal frameworks are quite unrelated to the status issue – they can and should be tackled prior to any status arrangement.

Typically, the vision of future prosperity is a frequent theme in speeches by both local leaders and international representatives. Locally, it usually features either as a natural consequence of a national self-determination solution to the respective status question. Conversely, in international and European statements it features as the reward for consistent reform efforts and corollary of European integration. These visions may heighten the already hypertrophic popular expectations, but not the chances of sustainable development. Due to historical-structural deficits and competitive disadvantages in post-communist transition, all realistic socio-economic scenarios for the region have to be modest and long-term and thus loose much of their mobilising power. Current economic setbacks are blamed either on the local

political leaders' lack of political will and vision or on the internationals' unwillingness to settle for an ethnic answer to the status question. Yet, both pointing fingers tend to overestimate agents to the detriment of underlying structural dilemmas and constraints.

The Next Decade – Conflicting Agendas

Contrasting the current state of affairs in the region to the national and European strategies seems to indicate that agenda conflicts and idealised strategic objectives persist on both sides. Incongruencies exist not only between the *European* strategic agendas of stabilisation, transformation and integration, but also between the *national* agendas of statehood, transformation and European integration.

In the case of East Central Europe, stabilisation was at most a sub-agenda of political and economic transformation. By the time EU integration and accession negotiations became the dominant issues on the political agenda, post-communist transformation had long passed the political point-of-no-return and the economic bottom. In the case of the Western Balkans, stabilisation was the initial and high-priority agenda institutionalised in the Stability Pact. The parallel institutionalisation of a Stabilisation and Association Process represented the projected paradigm shift from reconstruction and crisis management to sustainable development and European integration. Thus, in the case of the Western Balkans stabilisation, transformation and integration are three parallel, equally important and inextricably linked agendas. For a variety of reasons the transformation process lacks indigenous momentum. Objective and subjective reasons include the disadvantageous structural preconditions, the lost decade of the 1990s, unfinished state and nation building, weak statehood and hypertrophic popular expectations and the remoteness of the EU perspective. The EU, however, has proven its value as anchor and stimulus for an indigenous reform process, but has not (yet) become a development agency in its own right. The trade-off between concentration of economic growth projects and stabilisation-related distributive assistance essentially points in the same direction. Administrative capacities and thus absorption capacities for external assistance and guidance are a key deficit and hardly amenable to external remedies. Thus, rather than in *more* assistance, room for improvement has to be found in a better prioritisation, targeting and more local ownership.

Despite the EU's increasing engagement in crisis management and post-conflict governance, stabilisation strategies are essentially alien to the EU. The Stability Pact covers a number of conflict-related priority issues that find no match in the instruments of the Stabilisation and Association Process – refugee return, reconciliation, etc. At least in principle, the open regional approach of the Stability Pact is often at odds with the bilateral, conditional approach of the EU. EU conditionalities are mainly linked to the criteria of integration leaving few options to link stabilisation to meaningful sanctions and attractive incentives.

The EU, moreover, is likely to become more stringent in the interpretation and application of its accession criteria – partly because of the state of affairs in Southeastern Europe, partly because of deficits in the implementation of enacted laws in East Central Europe that will become apparent after accession. In fact, ICTY cooperation, the Dayton, Ohrid and Belgrade Agreements as well as minority protection and refugee return already constitute specific conditions for the Western Balkans. Typically, the EU continues to develop new policy areas that come with new standards to be met and new reforms to be implemented. "Europe" thus remains a moving target. At the same time, EU funding for the Western Balkans is typically "frontloaded" and decreases with basic stabilisation and the completion of reconstruction. Funding is not likely to increase in the 2007-2013 budgets. Conversely, the ten new

members; the two 2007 candidates with roadmaps and enhanced assistance; and Croatia with candidate status will all take full advantage of the EU. The gap between the Europe of 28 and the Balkan enclave is bound to increase considerably.

Local political decision-makers may easily feel left alone with the incongruencies of the EU agendas of stabilisation, transformation and integration. Despite the assumption of complementarity and synergies, they face hard choices concerning a plurality of instruments, conflicting options and unranked priorities. Local agendas of national statehood, transformation and European integration, however, tend to be incongruent, too. Insisting on a maximised option of ethnic statehood certainly jeopardises both economic progress and EU integration for the region as a whole. The best integration instruments may or may not be equally effective and purposive for the key objectives of the development and transformation agenda. A premature implementation of the full EU acquis may unnecessarily limit policy options and waste political energy more urgently needed in transformation management. A generic European vocation shared by next to all parties in each country tends to obscure the basic conditions of EU integration and the incompatibility of some national agendas. Caught between seemingly unmovable counterparts both internationally (imposed conditionalities and directions) and domestically (illusive support bases and political consensus), the model of EU integration often seems more convenient than the hardships of the transition process.

If external factors are as vital for the future of the Western Balkans as most strategies have it, prospects are bleak, to say the least. Evidently, the time has come for a rethinking of strategies by and for the Balkans. The optimism generated by the apparent success of physical reconstruction and basic stabilisation in the post-conflict phase is wearing thin. The paradigm shift from reconstruction to development, from stabilisation to transformation and integration as well as the reproduction of the successful Eastern enlargement strategy in the Balkans, however, raise a number of fundamental questions that have yet to be answered.

Consequently, it becomes increasingly clear that it is a fallacy to treat the Western Balkans as a case of delayed or catch-up transition that is essentially comparable to East Central Europe. Most likely, neither additional time nor additional funding per se can replicate the apparent success of Eastern enlargement in Southeastern Europe. What sets the Balkans apart may be structural phenomena dating back to (pre)-communist times, the legacies of post-communist conflict or the current mismatch of weak states and strong international assistance. Despite best intentions and well-tried policies, the current strategies for the Balkans, somewhat paradoxically, seem to place the ball in the EU's court. Rethinking, however, not only involves current European policies for the Balkans as largely modelled after the strategies and instruments of EU Eastern enlargement, but also local policy-making. The EU perspective is often (ab)used as a substitute for stringent national reforms and constructive regional policy-making. Although its enclave position in Europe and solemn promises secure the EU perspective for the Balkans, there is no guarantee against losing out in the on-going process of European integration. Time is of the essence.

Europe's inclination to perceive and remodel the Balkans to its own image is as much in need of rethinking as the Balkans' inclination to treat Europe as expedient for local contradictions and incongruities.