



Maastricht University

## The impact of the Berlin Process on the Western Balkans

Liridon Lika, Postdoctoral Researcher (2020-2022) at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) of the University of Maastricht (UM) in the Netherlands, [Liridon.Lika@uliege.be](mailto:Liridon.Lika@uliege.be)

Visiting Professor and Researcher at the Center for International Relations Studies (CEFIR) of the Department of Political Science of the University of Liège (ULiège) in Belgium.

WORKING ON EUROPE  
PAPER SERIES



### About the Working on Europe Paper Series (WEPS)

The Working on Europe Paper Series is a joint project of Studio Europa Maastricht (SEM) and the Centre for European Research in Maastricht (CERiM) at Maastricht University. This series publishes new research on a wide range of topics in European affairs, stimulating theoretical and empirical interdisciplinary academic debate, as well as promoting dialogue with policymakers, stakeholders and citizens from Europe and beyond.

### About Studio Europa Maastricht (SEM)

Studio Europa Maastricht is a centre for Europe-related debate and research and was set up at the partners of the Maastricht, Working on Europe programme in 2018: Maastricht University, the Province of Limburg and the municipality of Maastricht. With our broad expertise and wide-ranging activities programme, we aim to encourage the public debate and create a focal point where know-how and skills meet and where vision can be developed. We try to find the best answers for the issues which challenge today's Europe, in collaboration with academics, entrepreneurs, NGOs, policymakers, journalists, cartoonists, students, schools and any other interested parties. Our mission is to stimulate active, critical debate with citizen engagement at its core.

### About the Centre for European Research in Maastricht (CERiM)

CERiM is a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence and an interdisciplinary research venue creating synergies and stimulating joint projects and events in the fields of European law, governance, and their respective history. It brings together researchers from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS), the Faculty of Law (FL), and the University College Maastricht of Maastricht University (UCM). CERiM links the FASoS research programme Politics and Culture in Europe with the Maastricht Centre for European Law (FL), and the Montesquieu Institute Maastricht (FL with participation of FASoS). At the same time it bundles individual efforts to increase international outreach and to give a substantial input to the Maastricht University's strategic research theme Europe and a Globalising World. CERiM is one of several centres at Maastricht that bring together researchers from the Faculty of Law, FASoS, and UCM. Other such centres are MACIMIDE, a centre that focuses on migration, mobility, citizenship, development and family life, and ITEM, a centre that seeks to facilitate Euregional cross-border mobility and cooperation. CERiM collaborates closely with both centres in the form of common events and funding applications.

### Working on Europe Paper Series editors:

**Mathieu Segers** (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences / Studio Europa, Maastricht University) – Editor-in-Chief

**Joyce Habets** (Studio Europa, Maastricht University) – Coordinator

**Ivan Rubinić** (Studio Europa, Maastricht University) – Editorial Team

**Clara Weinhardt** (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences / CERiM, Maastricht University) – Editorial Team

**Alexandra Masciantonio** (Studio Europa, Maastricht University) – Editorial Team

**Julia Reinold** (Studio Europa, Maastricht University) – Editorial Team

**Koen van Zon** (Studio Europa, Maastricht University) – Editorial Team

**Joris Melman** (Studio Europa, Maastricht University) – Editorial Team



## **Abstract**

This working paper analyses the impact of the Berlin Process on the Western Balkan states (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) covering the 2014-2021 period. The Berlin Process is a German-led multilateral diplomatic initiative which has been launched in 2014 and supported by other European Union (UE) member states. It is a multilateral intergovernmental initiative which aimed to encourage cooperation as well as the multiplication of contacts and interactions between actors through summits diplomacy. This working paper focuses on the impact of the Berlin Process on the Western Balkans examining the main aspects: regional cooperation, connectivity agenda and reconciliation through the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). In terms of impact, the Berlin Process shows mixed results both in regional cooperation, connectivity in the field of transport and reconciliation.

*Keywords: Berlin Process, Western Balkans, European integration, Regional Cooperation, Interconnectivity, Reconciliation.*

## 1. Introduction

The Berlin Process for the Western Balkan states (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) is a German-led diplomatic initiative which was launched in 2014. The Berlin Process is a multilateral intergovernmental initiative. Initially planned for a period of five years (2014-2018) and under the leadership of a few European Union (EU) member states (Germany, Austria, France, Croatia, Slovenia), the participation of the European Commission and the Western Balkan states, it then extended (Italy, the United Kingdom (UK), Poland, Bulgaria, Greece) and has become a multi-faceted process (a Berlin Process Plus was launched). In other words, the Berlin Process widened and consolidated before becoming a multilateral intergovernmental forum for regional cooperation in the political, economic, social and cultural, interconnectivity and reconciliation fields (Lilyanova, 2016, pp. 1-10; Marciacq, 2017, p. 5).

In term of objectives, the Berlin Process aims to respond to many challenges such as the improvement of infrastructure and economic vulnerability, a better future for the Western Balkan youth, reconciliation, elimination of bilateral disputes and counter the influences of Russia, China and Turkey in the region. In other words, the Berlin Process has both socio-economic and political objectives. It introduced a new way of operating based on annual summits – Berlin (2014), followed by the Vienna (2015), Paris (2016), Trieste (2017), London (2018), Poznan (2019), Sofia (2020) and Berlin (virtual meeting) (2021) – at the highest political level, complemented by a long series of meetings at lower ranks. These meetings deal with political, economic and infrastructure issues. This Process was developed outside the framework of enlargement in an ad hoc and restricted multilateral format. This working paper focuses on the Berlin Process during the period 2014-2021, namely prior to the 2022 Ukraine war. The research question is: what is the impact of the Berlin Process on the Western Balkans in the areas of regional cooperation, interconnectivity in the field of transport and reconciliation? The choice of analysis of these three areas in this working paper is explained by the fact that the Berlin Process is based on three main pillars: regional political cooperation in order to settle the bilateral disputes, the improvement of economic cooperation through connectivity agenda in the field of transport, and the youth-oriented people-to-people relations aimed at reconciliation. These initiatives aim to bring irreversible changes to the image of the EU in the Western Balkan states.

This working paper explores the efforts of the Berlin Process to bring the Western Balkans closer to the EU. The main argument of this working paper is that the Berlin Process has played a positive role in regional cooperation and the multiplication of contacts between the Western Balkan states among themselves and with the EU, as well as with some of its member states. However, it also argues that there are limitations of the Berlin Process in the sense of creating a climate conducive towards closer ties between the Western Balkans and the EU.

Until recently, the Berlin Process has received little attention in the academic literature, mainly because it is a relatively recent, changing, and ongoing initiative. Local think tanks, state institutions from Western Balkans, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and newspapers from the Western Balkans have shown more interest by studying and explaining the Process (Musliu, 2021, pp. 85-88). Thus, the contribution of this working paper is to bring answers about the impact of Berlin Process and to deconstruct the official discourses related to this initiative. For this working paper, various written primary and secondary sources are used, like scientific literature (monographs, edited volumes, book chapters, articles), official documents (declarations, speeches, statements, and press releases), grey literature (reports) and press articles. To do this, this working paper is based on content analysis of the key declarations and relevant speeches produced in the framework of the Berlin Process between 2014 and 2021. The first part focuses on the Berlin Process's goals. The second part analyses its impact on regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. The third part assess the Berlin Process impact on interconnectivity in the field of transport. The fourth part examines the impact on reconciliation in the Western Balkans.

## **2. Berlin Process's goals**

The Berlin Process was launched in a particular European and international context which coincides with a questioning of the EU as an international actor speaking with one voice, as well as a catalyst of change in the Western Balkan countries. Closer political and economic cooperation with the Western Balkans has been on the EU agenda for decades. And yet, despite years of effort, the EU has failed to adequately engage with countries in the region in order to achieve their democratic reforms, and deliver on enlargement promises. The EU enlargement process has lost both its effectiveness and its political momentum. Instead of experiencing decisive democratic reforms, Western Balkan states have slowly turned into "stabilitocracies" (Zweers et al., 2022). In the Union's relative absence, other actors like Russia, China and Turkey have stepped in, turning the Western Balkans into a geopolitical battleground. The Berlin Process initiative has also been launched at a time critique emerged in the Western Balkans regarding the EU,



accusing it of failing to keep its promises and neglecting the states of the region.

In the context of Berlin Process, some researchers have focused on regional cooperation, economy, enlargement policy, migration crisis of 2015, geopolitics, or even the growing influence of rising/emerging powers in the region (China, Russia, Turkey) (Grievson et al., 2018). In this sense, the Berlin Process aims to support the Western Balkans aspiration to enter the EU, to reduce Euroscepticism, in particular after the Brexit referendum, to strengthen citizens' confidence in the support of the Union in a regional geopolitical situation marked by the influence projection of Russia, Turkey and China (Hackaj, Madhi and Hackaj, 2015, p. 10). The Berlin Process complements and revitalizes the dynamics of European institutions (Lika, 2021a, p. 68).

The enthusiasm for further enlargement, especially towards Western Balkans, was low in several EU member countries after the 2004, 2007 and 2013 enlargements. The reasons are both specific to the EU ("enlargement fatigue" and economic, political and migratory crisis) and to the Western Balkans (rule of law, corruption, unemployment, immigration, bilateral disputes) (O'Brennan, 2014, pp. 221-241; Bieber, 2018). In this unfavorable context of EU enlargement, then President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, announced on April 23, 2014, that there will be a "enlargement pause" for the next five years:

[w]hen it comes to enlargement, this has been a historic success. However, Europe now needs to digest the addition of 13 Member States in the past 10 years. Our citizens need a pause from enlargement so we can consolidate what has been achieved among the 28. This is why, under my Presidency of the Commission, ongoing negotiations will of course continue, and notably the Western Balkans will need to keep a European perspective, but no further enlargement will take place over the next five years (Juncker, 2014).

In fact, since the European economic crisis of 2008, support for EU enlargement has gradually declined in the EU founding member states, while the percentage of respondents who are against it has increased. Far-right parties within the EU member states have taken a stance strictly in opposition to the European project: they put forward their nationalist aspirations in favor of greater national sovereignty, and at the same time, to denounce the supranational tendencies of the European institutions and to oppose the political construction of the European project (Grandjean, 2016, pp. 407-409).

Following the 2004, 2007 and 2013 enlargements and the several economic, financial and political crises that the EU went through, there was little appetite for further EU enlargement and hence there emerged a search for projects and

processes that could engage the Western Balkan states without opening the door to membership. This was linked with the interest of some powerful EU member states to manage security and migration issues. In this context, Germany has been the catalyst for the Berlin Process. The Final Declaration of the Conference confirms this:

[t]he German Government expressly underlines its support for the prospect of European integration for the countries of the Western Balkans. All of the countries of the Western Balkans will have an opportunity to join the European Union if they meet the conditions for accession. Germany is aware of its responsibility for a peaceful, stable and democratic future based on the rule of law, and will continue to support the region on its path to this future (Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, 2014, p. 1).

Germany's interest is explained by the geographical proximity of the Western Balkans and the maintenance of the German commitment in the various civil and military missions. Further, Germany is the main national economy of the EU and a major partner of the economies of the Western Balkans. Almost one and half million citizens in Germany originate from the region. German businesses are active in the Western Balkan countries and Germany is a significant aid donor (Ker-Lindsay et al., 2017, p. 515). "It has also played a strong role in peacekeeping missions and has taken an increasingly active political role in the region" (Ker-Lindsay et al., 2017, pp. 515-516). The control and management of migratory flows from the Middle East (the Balkan route of 2015) seems to have prompted Germany to launch the Berlin Process.

The Berlin Process relies on the voluntary commitment of Western Balkan leaders, while capitalizing on the EU's conditional or "carrot and stick" approach. This is an initiative which has adopted a fully intergovernmental method of cooperation, aimed at revitalizing multilateral ties between the Western Balkan states and certain EU member states, to improve regional cooperation, bilateral relations, infrastructural and economic development, and to hasten reconciliation in the region. According to Florent Marciacq "[t]his mini-lateral format was to keep the Berlin Process more flexible in advancing ways to keep the political momentum of EU enlargement/integration both within the EU and in the WB6 [Western Balkan six states]" (Marciacq, 2017, p. 8). Therefore, according to this author, even if at the start, several states, both EU members and neighbors of the Western Balkans (Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Romania), wished to join the initiative, they were not allowed to do it (Marciacq, 2017, p. 8). In addition, the aim was to gain flexibility, reach compromises and joint decisions; which is more easily achievable

with a limited number of interlocutors. "The Berlin Process does not have a proper budgetary allocation neither for its functioning, nor for financing 'its projects'. It is the Chair of each Western Balkans Summit (WBS) that covers the Summit costs" (Hackaj and Hackaj, 2018, p. 9). It has no specific institution of its own, nor any steering, control and monitoring mechanism or any body responsible for supervising the strategic development of the Process or monitoring its achievements (Marciacq, 2017, p. 8). It has no secretariat or permanent structure. As a result, the lack of a surveillance or monitoring institution is considered one of its weaknesses (Marciacq, 2017, p. 8) insofar as it is the member state that hosts the summits and sets the agenda. The Berlin Process has become the most visible tool for interaction with the Western Balkans (Flessenkemper, 2017, p. 24), however.

The central objective of this initiative has been to strengthen cooperation and encourage multidimensional transformation in the perspective of future EU membership. According to Marciacq, the Berlin Process has contributed in keeping the issue of enlargement towards the Western Balkans on the EU's agenda (Marciacq, 2017, pp. 9-10). The importance of the Berlin Process in strengthening the EU's presence in the Western Balkans during this period of European and international turmoil seems evident. The launch of the Berlin Process was welcomed by the Western Balkan states. All Western Balkan countries responded favorably and their leaders have, at least officially, expressed their willingness to continue promoting European regionalism and to strengthen the dialogue and cooperation between them and with the EU. This initiative has brought new dynamism and encouraged cooperation. In this regard, it is based on three main pillars: regional political cooperation and the settlement of bilateral disputes between the Western Balkan states; improving economic cooperation via interconnectivity in the fields of transport and energy; youth-oriented interpersonal relations and cooperation with the civil society. Concretely, since 2014, the Berlin Process has focused on regional cooperation, interconnectivity and reconciliation in the Western Balkans (Berlin Process, 2014, pp. 1-4). In order to highlight its impact on Western Balkans in key areas, as underlined in the introduction, this study focuses on regional cooperation, the connectivity agenda and reconciliation through the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO).

### **3. Regional cooperation**

The Berlin Process placed regional cooperation and the settlement of bilateral disputes between the Western Balkan states at the heart of this initiative. The focus on regional cooperation has undoubtedly had the effect of multiplying regional meetings at all levels, constituting a means of strengthening confidence



and interpersonal and interstate relations between the Western Balkan states. In this regard, Marciacq highlights the example of multiplying relations between the leaders of Albania and Serbia (Marciacq, 2017, p. 10). In addition, the number of interactions has steadily increased between EU officials, the member states and the leaders of the Western Balkan states. These meetings focused on bilateral political relations amongst the Western Balkan countries, as well as on the economy, infrastructure and reconciliation.

The Berlin Process has established EU/Western Balkan summit diplomacy which is based on annual summits at the highest political level, supplemented by meetings at lower ranks (Lika, 2020). The multilateral diplomacy practiced there aimed at coordinating the policies of the six Western Balkan countries through ad hoc arrangements by adopting a common vision between the different parties in order to achieve "additional real progress" (Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, 2014, p. 1). Thus, summit diplomacy, through various initiatives – taken at the level of presidents, prime ministers and ministers of foreign affairs and economic affairs – aimed, on the one hand, to restructure the relations of the Western Balkan states to both between themselves and vis-à-vis the EU, and, on the other hand, to establish regular meetings. In addition, meetings between Western Balkan states intended to foster an atmosphere of cooperation between participants and to overcome bilateral disputes. Thus, during these meetings, subjects relating to neighborhood relations and regional cooperation were discussed with the objective of full European integration of the Western Balkan region. Although the initiative remains intergovernmental, other actors, such as civil society and business groups, played a considerable role.

The focus on regional cooperation has improved the planning and preparation of regional projects as well as their monitoring. The meetings, formal or informal, further strengthened contacts and established better regular communication between the political leaders of the Western Balkans. For example, on the sidelines of the Vienna summit (26 August 2015), a diplomatic and symbolic football match has been organized between the "FC EU", made up of EU representatives and the "FC future EU" made up of Western Balkan states leaders. Although such an event represents only a modest step towards regional harmony, it shows that the Berlin Process gathered political personalities from the Western Balkan states, who were enemies during the 1990s, around a sporting and recreational activity. These informal meetings, organized in a relaxed atmosphere, aimed to further strengthen contacts and establish better and regular communication between the political leaders, going well beyond the framework of formal meetings and official protocol.

The formats of these summits aimed to increase the legitimacy of the decisions taken there by spreading a message of peace and dialogue in line with EU values. Above all, these meetings demonstrate the importance that Western Balkan and European decision-makers attach to dialogue and consultation and, in this sense, they have undeniably made it possible to bring points of view closer together, even to establish common positions on a whole series of essential themes for maintaining peace and stability in the region: political dialogue, economic exchange, development of road and rail infrastructure and confirmation of the commitment to European membership (Lika, 2021a, pp. 71-80).

These meetings are therefore of great importance both symbolically and practically. As far as the symbolic aspect is concerned, the regular meetings tend to show the commitment of powerful EU member states (Germany, France, Italy, Austria) towards the Western Balkans. In terms of practicality, the meetings aim to enhance the attractiveness of the EU as well as its standards and values in the Western Balkans. Regarding this political aspect, in order to intensify regional cooperation, attention has been focused on three issues. At the Berlin conference all participants stressed the need to quickly resolve bilateral disputes in the interest of good neighborly relations and increased stability in the Western Balkan region. The final declaration of the Berlin conference, therefore, placed specific emphasis on these three challenges:

[t]he prime ministers of Serbia and Kosovo reiterated their determination to revitalise the process of normalising relations. The naming dispute between the FYR of Macedonia and Greece is one of the outstanding bilateral issues. The participating States agreed that this dispute must urgently be resolved by a willingness to compromise on all sides. Where possible, the countries should make use of the positive influence of regional neighbours on overcoming internal political challenges. This applies in particular to the revitalisation of the reform process in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, 2014, p. 2).

One of the most important results of regional cooperation is the Prespa agreement between Greece and North Macedonia on the latter's name (Final Agreement, 2018). The Western actors have attached particular importance to the conclusion of this agreement and to the consultative referendum on it which took place on September 30, 2018, in North Macedonia. To support the referendum, aimed at approving the new name of the country, namely the "Republic of North Macedonia", influential figures such as the then Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Jens

Stoltenberg, then German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the US Secretary of Defense James Mattis visited this country in August and September 2018. Through an active Western diplomacy, these personalities met with political leaders of this state and simultaneously called on citizens to run for the referendum and vote for the Euro-Atlantic future of the country. The favorable vote won it over with 94 % of the vote, but the referendum was marked by a low turnout of 37 %. The Prespa agreement entered into force after a favorable vote by the parliaments of the two neighbouring states. However, the resolution of the name issue was primarily the result of the two countries' governments readiness (Bechev and Marusic, 2020, pp. 2-3), civil society, the constructive and active role of Albanians in North Macedonia, and the United States (US) and EU pressure in order to speed up North Macedonia to join NATO and to block Russian influence in the Western Balkans (Lika, 2020, pp. 309-318; Nimetz, 2020, p. 209). Indeed, unlike the West, Russia, interested in a situation of instability in the Balkans, opposed the Prespa agreement (Nechev and Nikolovski, 2019, pp. 127-134). Therefore, the Berlin Process has come under some criticism, including significant shortcomings in relation to the North Macedonia case, due to Greece's initial absences from multilateral summits aimed at advancing the European agenda towards the Western Balkans. Nezir Kraki points out that the Greek absence from the first annual summits has hardly contributed to the activation of a direct dialogue between the two countries and, consequently, to obtaining a compromise: "the absence of Greece in Berlin and in Vienna seems strange and can be considered as a failure [...] to concretely address the issue [...]" (Kraki, 2016, p. 10). This finding means that the Berlin Process had little impact in resolving the name issue around North Macedonia.

The full normalization of bilateral relations between the Republic of Kosovo and the Republic of Serbia is also one of the main objectives of the Berlin Process in relation to the Western Balkans. In its opinion of July 22, 2010, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) confirmed that the independence of Kosovo was in full compliance with international law: "[...] the adoption of the declaration of independence of 17 February 2008 did not violate general international law, Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) or the Constitutional Framework. Consequently the adoption of that declaration did not violate any applicable rule of international law" (ICJ, 2010, p. 53). Since 2011, the EU became directly involved in the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, playing the role of facilitator of dialogue between the two states which have already signed more than thirty agreements on the normalization of their bilateral relations. But for more than 12 years of negotiations these two countries have not yet managed to fully normalize their relations and officially recognize each other (Lika and Reka,

2021). In this respect, the Berlin Process has not shown tangible results. In parallel with its participation in the normalization dialogue under EU's auspices, outside the frame of the Berlin Process, Serbia worked against regional cooperation and normalization of bilateral relations with Kosovo (Lika and Reka, 2021, pp. 238-239). However, in the framework of the Berlin Process's summits several regular ministerial conferences took place, such as those bringing together the ministers of Foreign Affairs and Economy of the Western Balkan states, in Belgrade on October 23, 2014 and in Prishtina on March 25, 2015, followed by the Prime Ministers' Summit in Brussels on April 21, 2015. The agendas and the places where these meetings have been organized have been carefully defined. Thus, the establishment of contacts between Kosovo and Serbia has been encouraged. The Western Balkan ministerial conference in Belgrade (October 2014) saw, for the first time in a conference held in Serbia, the participation of the then Kosovar Minister of Foreign Affairs, Enver Hoxhaj, and that of Economic Development, Fadil Ismajli. At the same time, Serbian ministers participated in the Prishtina conference (March 2015). Kosovo and Albania are the most pro-EU countries in the Western Balkans. However, Serbia has pursued a policy akin to hedging by seeking to enjoy the benefits of the Chinese and Turkish economy, and Russian alliance, while continuing its path towards EU membership and maintaining a neutral military policy by refusing to join NATO (Sainovic, 2021, p. 75).

Otherwise, the Berlin Process seems to have little impact on institutional unblocking, reforms and advancement in the path of European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This country still lags behind in the process of joining the EU (Huskic, pp. 101-104).

The Berlin Process risks remaining a project detached from local populations (Frontini and Denti, 2017) and shows the re-nationalisation by the EU member states of the enlargement policy (Delens, 2021). Re-nationalisation negatively impacts the improvement of relations between the Western Balkan states and the EU as a whole (Delens, 2021). The absence of a strategy to oversee the actualization of the commitments made at the respective summits is a challenge for the Berlin Process (Emini, 2016). By the simple fact that the Berlin Process is an intergovernmental process and not initiated by the EU, it has important limitations. This leads Mario Holzner to argue that the Berlin Process aims above all to remind EU member states to the continuation of the enlargement process, rather than directly targeting the Western Balkan states (Holzner, 2016). Some authors states that Germany's approach has been triggered by events such as refugees from the Middle East passing through this region and the growing influence of Russia (Töglhofer and Adebahr, 2017). Erwan Fouéré and Steven Blockmans point out that there has been little regular monitoring at the

intergovernmental level (Fouéré and Blockmans, 2017). While still other authors see the Berlin Process as a warning of death of EU enlargement towards the Western Balkans. In this regard, Vjosa Musliu makes two central arguments about the Berlin Process: first, according to her, the idea behind it appears to be a replacement for EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, even temporarily; second, she underlines that the Berlin Process is being used, once again, to re-establish Orientalist and Balkanist tropes when approaching the EU with regard to the Western Balkans<sup>1</sup> (Musliu, 2021). She mentions “that the Berlin Process is a creative adjustment of the EU to still keep the enlargement spirit alive among and within the countries of the Western Balkans, while at the same time officially not pursuing an accession or enlargement agenda as such” (Musliu, 2021, p. 88). In summary, the Berlin Process has had a limited impact on regional cooperation. It has certainly filled a relative void left by the European institutions, but it has not entirely lived up to its ambitions, namely to solve all bilateral disputes and reconcile the states of the Western Balkans.

#### **4. Interconnectivity in the field of transport**

While the EU has been the most visible player in the Western Balkans since 2000, the recent dynamics of geopolitical influences of rising/emerging powers, such as Russia, China and Turkey are seen as a direct threat to European interests (Lika, 2021b, p. 17; Rrustemi et al., 2019). In the context of multiple crises in and around the EU as well as the tense geopolitical situation in the Western Balkans, the EU and some of its member states (Germany, Austria) have shown new awareness in order to remain the most important players in the region (Lika, 2021b, p. 17). As the EU procrastinated, China, Russia and Turkey were actively projecting their influence in the Western Balkans and trying to compete with the EU in this region (Lika, 2019). For instance, initiated in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) includes the Western Balkan region. As part of the BRI, China has begun to establish a transport and logistics corridor named the Balkan Silk Road (Bastian, 2017, p. 4). As part of the BRI, particularly since 2015, China has provided investments and loans to carry out infrastructure projects in some Western Balkan states (Stumvoll and Flessenkemper, 2018).

Discussions at meetings and summits of the Berlin Process relate not only to political issues connected to bilateral disputes or the inclusive regional cooperation, but also to concrete economic projects of a regional nature and, more

---

<sup>1</sup> The Western Balkans notion is used strategically and geopolitically by the EU and leads to exclusion rather than inclusion. On this subject, see the following article: Liridon Lika, “The meaning of the Western Balkans concept for the EU: genuine inclusion or polite exclusion?”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 2023, pp. 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2023.2170204>.



than ever, the focus is on investments in road, rail, port, river and air infrastructure. The Berlin Process has adopted its own agenda, focusing, in particular, on economic governance and infrastructure connectivity projects. The results achieved in recent years show that progress in this direction has materialized and that the meetings have not been reduced to simple meetings of good intentions but have, on the contrary, led to small tangible results in the infrastructure field. Unlike in the past, where there was no regular communication and joint projects due to mistrust between some Western Balkan states, the Berlin Process was important in promoting infrastructure projects in the region.

One of the greatest achievements of the Berlin Process is the regional coordination of the connectivity agenda in the field of transports, supported by the EU and international financial institutions (Marciacq, 2017). On March 25, 2015, during a ministerial meeting in the context of the Berlin Process, the then European Commissioner responsible for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, in front of his Western Balkan counterparts, proposed an agreement on the core transport network of the Western Balkan states. In his speech, Hahn made clear that a well-developed and interconnected infrastructure is the key to economic growth, which is why the EU called on the Western Balkan states not to act in isolation, but rather to harmonize transport policies: “[t]his is the framework into which we want to connect the Western Balkans, not just a physical connection, through road and rail but a political and legal connection as well. If we add the regional core network to the Transport Community Treaty it will become legally binding for the Western Balkans as well as for the EU thereby further strengthening the credibility of the process” (European Commission, 2015). These investments were intended to stimulate the economy of the Western Balkans by working closely together in the common interest. Emphasis was also placed on the export of European standards to the region through the realization of these various projects: “implementing EU standards of road safety will reinforce the added value of investments in infrastructure and connectivity” (European Commission, 2015). However, according to the former President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, “[t]he connectivity agenda is neither an alternative nor a substitute for enlargement. It is a way to use the time between today and tomorrow more effectively than before, so that our citizens and businesses are not waiting for all the benefits of EU integration. Because I don’t see any other future for the Western Balkans than the EU. There is no other alternative, there is no plan B. The Western Balkans are an integral part of Europe and they belong to our community” (European Council, 2018).

The Western Balkan states welcomed the European initiative with great

enthusiasm, especially since it came in a difficult regional context, namely after a few years of economic and financial crises within the EU which also had repercussions in its surroundings. Thus, a list of specific investment priorities in the core regional transport network was presented to the Vienna summit (2015), where decisions were approved in favor of the extension of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) in Western Balkans. The TEN-T is an EU transport infrastructure development program which aims to facilitate the development of trade in goods and people, through the interoperability of the various constituent networks, thus making it possible to strengthen the foundations of the single market.

The TEN-T is one of the components of the EU's common transport policy, which aims to reduce obstacles to free movement within the framework of an opening of intra-European borders, precipitating the integration of new member states. Its aim is therefore to remove bottlenecks, ensure high-quality infrastructure, promote interoperability and create the missing cross-border interconnections (European Commission, 2014, p. 5). The TEN-T covers transport infrastructure in the sectors of motorways, airports, ports, railways and inland waterways, and inland navigation ports.

The Berlin Process strategy in the field of transport fits into the broader European perspective. Since the Vienna summit, the aspect of infrastructure and connectivity has taken an important place on the agenda. In comparison with the infrastructures of the richest member countries of the EU, those of the Western Balkans are less developed and above all they do not make it possible to effectively link the Balkan states with each other and with the EU. The need to improve and modernize them is considered central within the framework of the Berlin Process. The aim is to interconnect the region to the TEN-T by investing in a number of transport infrastructure projects. For the TEN-T, rail, road, air and sea links are essential not only for better integration between member countries and their citizens, but also for stimulating and increasing economic competitiveness. Therefore, the extension of the EU's core network corridors to the Western Balkans aims to ensure closer reciprocal integration and to mobilize investments in infrastructure, with the support of the European institutions. Concretely, the three corridors which were the subject of negotiations in Vienna are as follows: the Mediterranean corridor, the Orient/East-Mediterranean corridor and the Rhine-Danube corridor (Western Balkans Summit Vienna 2015, Addendum, Annex 1, Connectivity, pp. 2-3).

For the period 2015-2020, the Vienna summit provided through the pre-accession funds (IPA) 1 billion euros, while 6.7 billion have been financed by the European

Investment Bank (EIB) as well as by EU member states and the Western Balkan countries themselves (Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, 2015, p. 4). These multiple infrastructure projects in the field of transport infrastructure, already approved by the various parties concerned, reflect the intentions of the Berlin Process to strengthen EU's influence in the Western Balkans, by promoting European regionalism. Indeed, the greatest achievements of the Berlin Process lie in the regional coordination of the connectivity agenda, supported by the EU and by international financial institutions. The argument here is that the Berlin Process played an important role for the regional coordination in the field of transport infrastructure projects, and expanding the TEN-T network in the Western Balkans.

Several segments of these corridors already exist or are undergoing renovation and modernization or construction (Atoyan and al., 2018, pp. 8-9). Consequently, the extension of the three major European corridors aims to open up the entire region. These projects are considered by the Berlin Process of particular importance in order to promote intra-regional communication and reconciliation between the different Balkan nations and states. The networks, road and rail, are supposed to link all the states of the Western Balkans to each other as well as the neighboring countries already members of the EU: Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Greece and Romania. In doing so, the central network which unites all the capital cities of the member states, the important economic centers and the main ports of the EU, will be able to extend to the Western Balkans, allow them to accelerate political and regulatory reforms and to concentrate the efforts and investments on the main corridors and interconnectors. In other words, through the realization of these different projects, the objective has been to significantly improve the connectivity of the region, to stimulate global competitiveness, to encourage growth, to create jobs and to improve in a tangible way the life of all the inhabitants of Western Balkans (European Commission, 2015). According to Johannes Hahn: "[b]uilding and connecting transport and energy infrastructure is a driver for growth and jobs, and helps attract investments. It creates links and opportunities for businesses and people, as well as contributing to good neighbourly relations in the region. This is why we have put connectivity at the heart of our agenda, to improve links within the Western Balkans and with the EU" (EEAS, 2018). However, many criticisms have been expressed about the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, and the slowness in the realization of these different projects (Lika, 2020, p. 376).

## 5. Reconciliation

Almost twenty years after the wars in the Western Balkans, efforts towards reconciliation and building mutual trust between different nations and states are encouraged by the Berlin Process. Encouraging reconciliation and facilitating the mobility of youth within Western Balkan states is one of the priorities of the Berlin Process; therefore, a top-down policy of bringing together young people was initiated in order to encourage this trend. To achieve this objective, a joint declaration was signed on the Western Balkan summit in Vienna on August 27, 2015, officially launching the idea of the creation of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) (Vienna Western Balkans Summit, 2015). This initiative is inspired and supported by the Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO) and the Franco-German as well as the EU member states reconciliation as a model for the Western Balkan countries.

The RYCO was officially founded at the Paris summit (2016), and with its launch institutionalized the reconciliation process between the Western Balkan states. Until now, there has never been such a regional institutional mechanism in the Western Balkans. The RYCO therefore constitutes a completely new, independent mechanism, adapted to the specific situation and needs of Western Balkans (RYCO website). Its main headquarters were established in Tirana and local branches in all the capitals of the Western Balkan states.

Like the FGYO, the RYCO is an international organization which aims to promote the spirit of peace between the youth in the Western Balkans through the reconciliation, trust, cooperation and dialogue (RYCO website; Article 7 of RYCO Statute). It was precisely on the basis of interaction, socialization and binational exchanges that the FGYO was founded, believing that it was necessary and possible to abandon the preconceptions between young French and German citizens. Friendly relations and reconciling feelings are thus born in the interaction and intercultural encounters between individuals and organizations, such as the FGYO (Weigand, 2012, pp. 102-104). They have played an important role in creating a transnational space that transcends national and state borders. Likewise, the RYCO supports initiatives related to the promotion of reconciliation and memory work, diversity and cultural exchange, regional mobility, citizen participation and rapprochement with the EU, in areas such as education, science and research, culture, sport and citizenship (RYCO website; Article 7 of RYCO Statute; RYCO, 2016). The RYCO is based on close cooperation between the six governments of the Western Balkans and civil societies; it aims to create conditions and organize support activities for reconciliation, mobility, diversity, democratic values, intercultural learning, always keeping in mind the process of

European integration of the Western Balkans (RYCO, 2016). It is therefore a policy of educating young people for peace and its promotion by increasing the number of contacts between human beings and always within a framework of integration into the common European project. The main mission of this institution is to socialize as many young people as possible from the six countries in different forms: school meetings, holiday camps or sports activities (RYCO website).

The creation of RYCO seems to be a sign of the evolution of Western Balkan societies towards peaceful coexistence under the leadership of the EU and some of its member states. However, while formally the RYCO was founded by the Western Balkan states, this happened in the context of the Berlin Process and there have been some nudging by the Western European actors. As with the creation of the FGYO where 18 years after World War II (WWII) (1945-1963) passed, the RYCO was established 17 years after the war ended in Kosovo (1999-2016). As for France and Germany “[...] the idea of creating an organization such as the FGYO would have seemed unimaginable before the First World War or during the interwar period” (Delori, 2016, p. 129), for the Western Balkans, this idea would also have seemed unthinkable during the 1990s. But in 2016, in the framework of Berlin Process, the countries of the Western Balkans managed to come to an agreement and create such a regional institution. Therefore, given that the existence of RYCO only dates from 2016, it is still too early to draw a definitive assessment of its action. However, the mere fact that RYCO was institutionalized is considered by some authors to be one of the greatest achievements of the Berlin Process (Marciacq, 2017, p. 10). Obviously, in terms of concrete results, much remains to be done in the area of reconciliation in the Western Balkans (Szpala et al., 2021, p. 17). Therefore, the call for regional reconciliation is regular in the negotiations for accession to the EU and the meetings of Berlin Process. The progress of reconciliation with peaceful coexistence in the Western Balkans is linked to the perspective of European integration<sup>2</sup>.

In the case of RYCO, it was precisely on the basis of social construction, interaction, socialization and exchanges that RYCO was founded, believing that it was necessary and possible to abandon prejudices among young people (RYCO website). The creation of RYCO and the steps towards reconciliation have been regularly mentioned in the speeches of the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama: “[r]econciliation between Albanians and Serbs must be achieved according to the

---

<sup>2</sup> For example, some similarities can be noted regarding the role of civil society in the Berlin Process and in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF). The EaP CSF “is a unique multi-layered regional civil society platform aimed at promoting European integration, facilitating reforms and democratic transformations in the six Eastern Partnership countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine” (EaP CSF website).



Franco-German model" (Rama quoted in Hoti, 2015). Kosovo's former Foreign Minister Enver Hoxhaj said that "Serbia would have to recognise Kosovo's independence in order for reconciliation to be possible" (Hoxhaj quoted in Çollaku and Saipi, 2015).

The road to reconciliation in the Western Balkans is still long (Çollaku and Saipi, 2015; Hoxhaj, 2016, pp. 196-218; Szpala et al., 2021, p. 17). Moreover, several Serbian political figures, who today occupy key positions in Serbia, such as that of President (Aleksandar Vucic) and Parliament Speaker (Ivica Dacic), were respectively Milosevic's minister and Milosevic's party spokesperson during the 1990s. On September 9, 2018, during his visit in the city of Mitrovica in the Republic of Kosovo, Aleksandar Vucic glorified the former Serbian dictator, saying: "Milosevic was a great Serbian leader whose intentions were certainly for the best, but our results were very poor. Not because he wanted that but because our wishes were unrealistic, while we neglected and underestimated the interests and aspirations of other nations" (Vucic quoted in Ciric, 2018). These statements were criticized and raised alarms in the EU and in all Western Balkan states, as they conveyed the nationalist nature of the Serbian President's ideology and confirmed that he maintained the same hard nationalist line which, during the 1990s, had destroyed many lives in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo (Voice of America, 2018; Radio Evropa e Lirë, 2018; Prishtina Insight, 2019; EURACTIV, 2022). Maja Kociancic, Federica Mogherini's spokeswoman, reacted strongly to Vucic's statements saying: "[r]econciliation, normalisation and good neighbourly relations will only be possible if the policies of the past, which brought a decade of misery and suffering to the Western Balkans region and the people there, are rejected and overcome. We must not leave any room for ambiguity or praise for those who upheld [these] policies or actions" (Kociancic quoted in Gotev, 2018). Similarly, the Serbian political scientist Milos Ciric also criticized Vucic's speech: "[h]is speech in Kosovo could have been the moment for him to divorce himself from the policies that Milosevic implemented during the 1990s and that Vucic supported at the time. Sadly, but not surprisingly, he remained who he always was, the disciple of and successor to Serbian Radical Party leader Vojislav Seselj and to Milosevic himself; a man who never took back anything he did or said" (Ciric, 2018). These declarations of the President of Serbia Vucic are contrary to the spirit of the Berlin Process and the agreement on the establishment of RYCO to which Vucic himself has agreed (Agreement on the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, 2016).

Michel-André Horelt points out that the Parliament and the President of Serbia publicly apologized to Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina for war crimes (Horelt, 2016, pp. 164-187), but neither of them recognized the ethnocidal nature of the

massacres perpetrated despite opinions rendered by international tribunals (European Parliament, 2023, p. 19). At present, Belgrade still refuses to officially recognize the word genocide to qualify the exactions of Srebrenica (1995) despite the recurring appeals of the international community (European Parliament, 2023, p. 19), including that of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe which, in a 2017 report on Serbia, made the following call: “[...] ECRI considers that [Serbian] political leaders should officially recognise that the massacres committed in Srebrenica constitute genocide. As such recognition is an indispensable component of efficient prevention of renewed interethnic hate speech and violence [...] (ECRI, 2017, p. 28). The nationalist chairman of the entity of Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Milorad Dodik, has also repeatedly denied that a genocidal act against Bosniaks was committed in Srebrenica (Perrin, 2017) despite the fact that the genocide has been recognized by several international institutions such as the ICJ, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) as well as by many researchers around the world (Vukpalaj, 2010; Baker, 2015, pp. 74-75; Donia, 2015; European Parliament, 2023, pp. 19-21). The denial by Serbia of genocide and war crimes, committed in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, is hampering reconciliation in the Western Balkans (Vukpalaj, 2010; Vukpalaj, 2021, pp. 45-64; Hoxhaj, 2016, pp. 196-2018; Visoka, 2018, p. 66; Prishtina Insight, 2019; EURACTIV, 2022; (European Parliament, 2023, pp. 19-21).

## **6. Conclusion**

The Berlin Process for the Western Balkans is intimately connected to the evolving geopolitical situation on and around the European continent, as well as it is linked to a stalemate of EU enlargement process. Therefore, in the face of this changing internal and international context, some EU member states have launched the Berlin Process which aimed to export European norms and values, and to ensure and sustain long-term peace and stability in the region. Through multiple formal and informal meetings with the leaders of the Western Balkan states, EU member states participating in the Berlin Process have further strengthened contacts and encouraged regular communication. By setting up a process of socialization, the Berlin Process aimed to influence interests, policies and identities of the Western Balkan states. Although peace has already been achieved in the Western Balkans, bilateral disagreements still remain which hamper progress towards EU membership. The launch of the Berlin Process has been welcomed in the Western Balkan states. The leaders of the Western Balkan states expressed officially their willingness to continue promoting European regionalism and pledged to strengthen dialogue and cooperation between themselves and with the EU (EU-Western Balkans Summit Sofia 2018; Lika, 2023, p. 10). This initiative brought new

dynamism and encouraged the cooperation in the Western Balkans.

However, the Western Balkans face significant regional cooperation, security, economic, infrastructural and reconciliation challenges. Although the state of war is now over, peace remains fragile due to ongoing tensions and bilateral disputes. In other words, there is an environment characterized by strong countervailing norms, historically grown mistrust, and insincere commitment of the EU to integration of the Western Balkan states. Within a realist framework, the Berlin Process constitutes a geopolitical tool used by some EU member states in a strategic competition with rising/emerging powers in the Western Balkans, but that it fails to deliver sufficient incentives and reassurances for the states of this part of the European continent. The Western Balkans are a geopolitical battleground between the EU and rising/emerging powers. In fact, the EU is conditioned by tendencies of the decentralization of the world power in the face of which it attempts to readjust its strategy in order to remain the main actor in the Western Balkans.

However, in terms of concrete impact, the Berlin Process has shown mixed results, both in terms of regional cooperation, connectivity and reconciliation agenda. The Berlin Process has certainly filled a relative void left by the European institutions, but it has not entirely lived up to its ambitions, namely, to carry out deep reforms, resolve bilateral disputes and reconcile the states of the Western Balkans. Firstly, with regard to regional political cooperation, the Berlin Process's focus has been on the North Macedonia's name issue, encouraging the signing of a peace treaty aimed at normalizing relations between Kosovo and Serbia, and internal reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the level of concrete follow-up in the field of regional cooperation, tangible results and notable progress have been recorded in the case of relations between North Macedonia and Greece, but the main merits do not come necessarily from the Berlin Process but from civil society, Albanians in North Macedonia, the governments of North Macedonia and Greece, as well as the US and the EU involvement in the name resolution. The Berlin Process has had no tangible impact on the normalization of bilateral relations between Kosovo and Serbia. It has contributed to the multiplication of meetings and the facilitation of communication between the leaders of the Western Balkan countries, including the representatives of Kosovo and those of Serbia, but it has not had a direct impact in the normalization of relations between the two states. As for institutional reforms inside Bosnia and Herzegovina, the progress is insignificant.

Secondly, regarding the connectivity agenda, several infrastructure projects, aimed at interconnecting the transport network, improving the attraction of foreign capital and reducing the gap between the Western Balkans and the EU,

were approved. These interconnection projects would be difficult to initiate and implement in the absence of the Berlin Process. The infrastructure corridors are supposed to improve the quality of transport for citizens and businesses, ensure faster travel and cheaper services, and strengthen good neighborly relations with a view to fostering better integration of the region and the EU. The priority projects aimed to eliminate blockages, promote interdependence between countries and, in this way, they contributed to creating cross-border links. For TEN-T, rail, road, air and sea links are essential drivers, not only for better integration between member countries and their citizens, but also for stimulating and increasing economic competitiveness. However, the finalization of these various infrastructure projects is proving slow, bureaucratic, laborious and, moreover, there are delays.

Thirdly, the institutionalization of RYCO is a direct impact of the Berlin Process in itself in order to encourage reconciliation and the cause of the EU, but it is nonetheless a young organization just starting its work and, in this sense the results so far remain low. Consequently, the Western Balkans remain fragile as the region continues to suffer from strained bilateral relations, weak social and economic reforms, as well as the emergence, in some countries such as Serbia, of authoritarianism and alternative narratives to EU membership, encouraged in particular by rising/emerging countries such as Russia, Turkey and China.

Initially, it was planned that the conferences related to the Berlin Process should end in 2018, on the occasion of the centenary of the end of the World War I (WWI). However, noting that little concrete progress had been made and as the end of the Process (2014-2018) approached, Germany stressed the need for a Berlin Process Plus with more ambitious objectives. In brief, the Berlin Process reaffirmed the support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans, producing many declarations and promises, but until now with little effect. EU member states such as Germany and France have a great influence on the formulation of EU policies towards the Western Balkans (Ker-Lindsay et al., 2020). The EU and its member states still fail to speak with one voice and to keep its enlargement promises.

This working paper has focused on the period 2014-2021, namely prior to the 2022 war in Ukraine. The war in Ukraine has had political effects in several Western Balkan states. In addition, during the recent period, the EU and some of its member states have increased visits and activities in the Western Balkans.

## References

- Atoyan Ruben and al., Public Infrastructure in the Western Balkans. Opportunities and Challenges, Washington, International Monetary Fund, 2018.
- Agreement on the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, done in Paris on 4th July 2016, <https://www.rycowb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Agreement-on-the-establishment-of-the-RYCO-sign%C3%A9.pdf> (accessed 5 September 2023).
- Baker Catherine, The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, London/New York, Palgrave, 2015.
- Bastian Jens, "The potential for growth through Chinese infrastructure investments in Central and South Eastern Europe along the 'Balkan Silk Road'", Report prepared by Jens Bastian for the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (with funding from the Central European Initiative), Athens/London, 2017, pp. 1-62.
- Bechev Dimitar and Marusic Damir, "North Macedonia on the Threshold of Europe", Atlantic Council, Report, 2020, pp. 1-20.
- Bieber Florian, "Patterns of competitive authoritarianism in the Western Balkans", East European Politics, vol. 34, n° 3, 2018, pp. 337-354.
- Ciric Milos, "Vucic's Kosovo Speech Promoted a Dangerous Fantasy", BalkanInsight, September 10, 2018, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/vucic-s-kosovo-speech-promoted-a-dangerous-fantasy-09-10-2018-1> (accessed 26 February 2022).
- Çollaku Petrit and Saipi Antigona, "Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue 'Only Among Politicians'", BalkanInsight, December 21, 2015, <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/12/21/ex-yugoslav-troubled-societies-far-from-reconciliation-12-21-2015/> (accessed 5 September 2023).
- Delens Antoine, "Le renouvellement stratégique de l'Union européenne dans les Balkans occidentaux: une asymétrie d'approches entre les différentes institutions européennes", The Journal of Cross-Regional Dialogues/La Revue de Dialogues Inter-Régionaux, n° 2, 2021, pp. 103-127.
- Delori Mathias, La réconciliation franco-allemande par la jeunesse. La généalogie, l'événement, l'histoire (1871-2015), Bruxelles, P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2016.
- Donia Robert J., Radovan Karadzic: Architect of the Bosnian Genocide, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015.



Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF), <https://eap-csf.eu/> (accessed 4 September 2023).

Emini Donika, "Berlin Process: Path to Europe or to nowhere?", Prishtina: Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, 2016, pp. 1-16.

EURACTIV, "Srebrenica genocide denial continues in Serbia", 12 July, 2022, [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/srebrenica-genocide-denial-continues-in-serbia/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/srebrenica-genocide-denial-continues-in-serbia/) (accessed 5 September 2023).

European Commission, "Connectivity agenda for the Western Balkans", Speech by EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn at the meeting with Western Balkans 6 Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Transport in Pristina, Prishtina, Republic of Kosovo, 25 March, 2015, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-15-4693\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-4693_en.htm) (accessed 26 February 2022).

European Commission, "Core Network Corridors", Report of the European Coordinators Corridors, Directorate General for Mobility and Transport, Brussels, September 2014, pp. 1-138.

European Council, "Remarks by President Donald Tusk after the EU-Western Balkans summit", 17 May, 2018, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/05/17/remarks-by-president-donald-tusk-after-the-eu-western-balkans-summit/> (accessed 26 February 2022).

European External Action Service (EEAS), "The missing link: infrastructure investments in the Western Balkans connect Austria to Greece; boost trade and growth", 11 May, 2018, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/44410/missing-link-infrastructure-investments-western-balkans-connect-austria-greece-boost-trade-and\\_nb](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/44410/missing-link-infrastructure-investments-western-balkans-connect-austria-greece-boost-trade-and_nb) (accessed 26 February 2022).

European Parliament, "Report on the 2022 Commission Report on Serbia", Committee on Foreign Affairs, A9-0172/2023, pp. 1-27, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0172\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0172_EN.pdf) (accessed 5 September 2023).

EU-Western Balkans Summit, "Sofia Declaration", Sofia, 17 May 2018. [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/34776/sofia-declaration\\_en.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/34776/sofia-declaration_en.pdf) (accessed 20 January 2022).

Final Agreement for the Settlement of the Differences as described in the United

Nations Security Council Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the Termination of the Interim Accord of 1995, and the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between the Parties, Article 1, June 12, 2018, Prespa.

Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, Berlin, 28 August 2014, pp. 1-5.

Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, Vienna, 27 August 2015, pp. 1-8.

Flessenkemper Tobias, "The Berlin Process: resilience in the EU waiting room", in Lange Sabina, Nechev Zoran and Trauner Florian (ed.), Resilience in the Western Balkans, Issue Report, n° 36, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, August 2017, pp. 23-29.

Fouéré Erwan and Blockmans Steven, "The 'Berlin Process' for the Western Balkans – Is it delivering?", CEPS Commentary, 13 July 2017, pp. 1-5.

Frontini Andrea and Denti Davide, "Italy and EU enlargement to the Western Balkans: the Europeanization of national interests?", Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 17(4), 2017, pp. 571-589.

Gotev Georgi, "Commission frowns at Serbian president's praise of Milosevic", Euractiv, September 10, 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/commission-frowns-at-serbian-presidents-praise-of-milosevic/> (accessed 26 February 2022).

Grandjean Geoffrey, "Memory of the political construction of Europe in far right positions", in Jamin Jérôme (ed.), L'extrême droite en Europe, Bruxelles, Éditions Bruylant, 2016, pp. 387-412.

Grievson Richard, Gruebler Julija and Holzner Mario, "Western Balkans EU Accession: Is the 2025 Target Date Realistic?", Policy Notes and Reports 22, The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, 2018, pp. 1-24.

Hackaj Ardian and Hackaj Krisela, "The Berlin Process 2014-2018", Report 'Berlin Process Series', vol° 3, February 2018, Tirana, Albania, pp. 1-56.

Hackaj Ardian, Madhi Gentiola and Hackaj Krisela, "Albania in the Berlin Process: Current achievements and upcoming challenges for the Paris Summit", Cooperation and Development Institute/ShtetiWeb, Tirana, 2015, pp. 5-37.

Holzner Mario, Policy Options for Competitiveness and Economic Development in the Western Balkans: the Case for Infrastructure Investment, Vienna: The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, 2016, pp. 1-13.

- Horelt Michel-André, "Serbia – Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Different apology packages different successes", in Daase Christopher and al. (eds.), *Apology and Reconciliation in International Relations. The importance of being sorry*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016, pp. 164-187.
- Hoti Dritan, "Pajtimi shqiptaro-serb në dritën e atij franko-gjerman", *Gazeta Mapo*, 17 September, 2015, <https://gazetamapo.al/pajtimi-shqiptaro-serb-ne-driten-e-atij-franko-gjerman/> (accessed 26 February 2022).
- Hoxhaj Enver, *Ngritja e një shteti. Politika e jashtme e Kosovës*, Tiranë, Botimet Dudaj, 2016.
- Huskic Adnan, "Bosnia and Herzegovina: Abandoned by the West, embraced by the East?", in Bieber Florian and Tzifakis Nikolaos (eds.), *The Western Balkans in the World. Linkages and Relations with Non-Western Countries*, London and New York, Routledge, 2019, pp. 83-107.
- International Court of Justice (ICJ), "Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo", Advisory Opinion, ICJ Reports 2010, 22 July, 2010, available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf> (accessed 16 September 2022).
- Juncker Jean-Claude, "My priorities – A pause for enlargement", European People's Party (EPP), April 23, 2014.
- Ker-Lindsay James et al. (eds.), *The National Politics of EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans*, Oxon, Routledge, 2020.
- Ker-Lindsay James, Armakolas Ioannis, Balfour Rosa and Stratulat Corina, "The national politics of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 17, n° 4, 2017, pp. 511-522.
- Kraki Nezir, "The solution of bilateral disputes in the region: New challenges after the Vienna Summit", Policy Paper, April 2016, pp. 1-11.
- Lika Liridon and Reka Blerim, "The European Union's Relations with the Republic of Kosovo", in Hajrullahu Arben and Vukpalaj Anton (eds.), *Forging Kosovo: Between Dependence, Independence, and Interdependence*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2021, pp. 229-250.
- Lika Liridon, "La stratégie d'élargissement de l'Union européenne vers les Balkans occidentaux", in Debras François et Nossent Jérôme (eds.), *Questions d'identités. Approches multidisciplinaires*, Liège: Presses Universitaires de

Liège, 2021a, pp. 59-82.

Lika Liridon, "Les Balkans occidentaux à la croisée de l'intégration européenne et de la projection des puissances émergentes. Analyse du cadre triangulaire entre les Balkans occidentaux, l'Union européenne et la Turquie", Thèse de doctorat en sciences politiques et sociales, Liège, Université de Liège, 2020, 472 p.

Lika Liridon, "The European regional order in the Western Balkans facing the disrupting role of middle and great emerging powers", Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, EUCROSS Working paper, 2019, pp. 1-23.

Lika Liridon, "The meaning of the Western Balkans concept for the EU: genuine inclusion or polite exclusion?", Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 2023, pp. 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2023.2170204>.

Lika Liridon, "The Western Balkans at the crossroads of European integration and the emerging powers' projection of influence", The Journal of Cross-Regional Dialogues/La Revue de Dialogues Inter-Régionaux, n°2, 2021b, pp. 7-30.

Lilyanova Velina, "The Western Balkans' Berlin process: A new impulse for regional cooperation", European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), Briefing, PE 586.602, July 4, 2016, pp. 1-10.

Marciacq Florent, "The EU and the Western Balkans after the Berlin Process. Reflecting on the EU Enlargement in Times of Uncertainty", The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Sarajevo, 2017, pp. 1-24.

Musliu Vjosa, "The Berlin Process for the Western Balkans. What is in a name?", Journal of Cross-Regional Dialogues/La Revue de Dialogues Inter-Régionaux, n° 2, 2021, pp. 83-101.

Nechev Zoran and Nikolovski Ivan, "North Macedonia: A fertile ground for external influences", in Bieber Florian and Tzifakis Nikolaos (eds.), The Western Balkans in the World. Linkages and Relations with Non-Western Countries, London and New York, Routledge, 2019, pp. 126-145.

Nimetz Matthew, "The Macedonian 'Name' Dispute: The Macedonian Question – Resolved?", Nationalities Papers, 48 (2), 2020, pp. 205-214.

O' Brennan John, "'On the Slow Train to Nowhere?' The European Union, 'Enlargement Fatigue' and the Western Balkans", European Foreign Affairs Review, 19, n° 2, 2014, pp. 221-241.

Perrin Olivier, "Le génocide de Srebrenica ne figurera plus dans les manuels

scolaires serbes de Bosnie", Le temps, 7 June, 2017, <https://www.letemps.ch/opinions/genocide-srebrenica-ne-figurera-plus-manuels-scolaires-serbes-bosnie> (accessed 26 February 2022).

Prishtina Insight, "Vucic denial of Reçak massacre sparks outrage in Kosovo", 6 December, 2019, <https://prishtinainsight.com/vucic-denial-of-recak-massacre-sparks-outrage-in-kosovo/> (accessed 5 September 2023).

Radio Evropa e Lirë, "Hoxhaj krahason vizitën e Vuçiqit në Ujman me të Millosheviqit në Gazimestan", 8 September, 2018, <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/29479121.html> (accessed 5 September 2023).

Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), "More Regional – More European", RYCO's first press release, Belgrade, 18 February, 2016, <https://rycoblog.wordpress.com/2016/02/18/ryco-presents-itself-to-the-media/> (accessed 26 February 2022).

Rrustemi Arlinda et al., "Geopolitical Influences of External Powers in the Western Balkans", Report, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS), September 30, 2019, pp. 1-165.

RYCO Website, "About RYCO", [https://www.rycowb.org/?page\\_id=152](https://www.rycowb.org/?page_id=152) (accessed 26 February 2022).

Sainovic Ardijan, "Facteurs internes, pressions systémiques et politique étrangère des États des Balkans occidentaux", The Journal of Cross-Regional Dialogues/La Revue de Dialogues Inter-Régionaux, n° 2, 2021, pp. 61-82.

Statute of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, "Mandate of RYCO", Article 7.

Stumvoll Magda and Flessenkemper Tobias, "China's Balkans Silk Road: Does it pave or block the way of Western Balkans to the European Union?", Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE), Policy Paper n° 66, February 14, 2018, pp. 1-4.

Szpala Marta et al., "Polish-German Reconciliation. Lessons for the Western Balkans", Institute for Democracy, Policy Brief, 11/2021, pp. 1-25, <https://idscs.org.mk/en/2021/04/23/polish-german-reconciliation-lessons-for-the-western-balkans/> (accessed 5 September 2023).

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), "ECRI Report on Serbia", ECRI Secretariat Directorate General II – Democracy, Strasbourg, Adopted on 22 March 2017, Published on 16 May 2017, pp. 1-49.



- Töglhofer Theresia and Adebahr Cornelius, "Firm supporter and severe critic – Germany's two-pronged approach to EU enlargement in the Western Balkans", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 17(4), 2017, pp. 523-539.
- Vienna Western Balkans Summit 2015, "Annex 2: Joint Declaration on the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office on the Western Balkans", Done in Vienna, on 27 August 2015, pp. 1-4.
- Visoka Gëzim, *Acting Like a State: Kosovo and the Everyday Making of Statehood*, London and New York, Routledge, 2018.
- Voice of America, "Kosovo Official Says Serbia Deal Must Include Recognition", 11 September, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/kosovo-official-says-serbia-deal-must-include-recognition/4567358.html> (accessed 5 September 2023).
- Vukpalaj Anton, "'No Bodies-No Crimes': The Reburial Operations of the Serbian Forces in Kosovo in 1999", in Hajrullahu Arben and Vukpalaj Anton (eds.), *Forging Kosovo: Between Dependence, Independence, and Interdependence*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2021, pp. 45-69.
- Vukpalaj Anton, *Ex-Yougoslavie, de la guerre à la justice : la Serbie, la Croatie et la Bosnie-Herzégovine à l'épreuve du Tribunal pénal international pour l'ex-Yougoslavie (TPIY)*, Paris, Michel Houdiard, 2010.
- Weigand Gabriele, "L'amitié se fait entre des personnes, pas entre des nations", *L'Europe en Formation*, vol. 4, n° 366, 2012, pp. 102-104.
- Western Balkans Summit Vienna 2015, Addendum, Annex 1, Connectivity, pp. 1-15.
- Zweers Wouters et al., "The EU as a promoter of democracy or 'stabilitocracy' in the Western Balkans?", A report by The Clingendael Institute and the Think for Europe Network (TEN), February 2022, pp.

# THE IMPACT OF THE BERLIN PROCESS ON THE WESTERN BALKANS

Liridon Lika, Postdoctoral Researcher (2020-2022) at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS) of the University of Maastricht (UM) in the Netherlands. Visiting Professor and Researcher at the Center for International Relations Studies (CEFIR) of the Department of Political Science of the University of Liège (ULiège) in Belgium, [Liridon.Lika@uliege.be](mailto:Liridon.Lika@uliege.be)

**Acknowledgments:** the author is thankful to the professors Sophie Vanhoonacker and Thomas Conzelmann for their excellent feedbacks that helped him to significantly improve this working paper

WORKING PAPER – 05/2023

WORKING PAPER SERIES WEBSITE:

<https://studioeuropamaastricht.nl/research/working-papers/>

Studio Europa: [www.studioeuropamaastricht.nl](http://www.studioeuropamaastricht.nl)

## STUDIO EUROPA MAASTRICHT WORKING ON EUROPE PAPER SERIES

