

Over time it became clear that the EU's most powerful foreign policy tool for democracy promotion in Europe is enlargement. Hence, through the top-down approach of a conditionality policy the EU decided to pursue democracy promotion in the Western Balkans. However, the democratization of the Western Balkans led by the EU produced very different results across the region. While Croatia managed to advance its democracy and join the Union; other Western Balkan countries fell behind.

Considering that the enlargement process is a top-down process, in which domestic change is to some extent guided from the outside, the effects of the political climate inside of the EU on the democratization of the candidate country need to be researched. While attempting to democratize Western Balkans the EU suffered from more internal turmoil than ever before, which either drew attention away from the enlargement or reinforced negative sentiments about it. Thus, this thesis poses the question of how did enlargement resistance impacted the democratization process in the Western Balkans?

The research looks into the problem through comparative case studies, using the most similar cases design. It focuses on Croatia – the country that managed to successfully democratize and join the Union and Montenegro – the country that in the course of its candidacy and preparations for the EU accession experienced backsliding in democracy. Based on elite interviews the analysis shows that the increasing level of politicization of enlargement inside of the EU hindered the democratization process in the Western Balkans. While the level of politicization was lower during the Croatian accession, the prospects of joining were high and thus domestic costs were low. Meanwhile, in Montenegro due to progressing level of politicization of enlargement the course of action was vaguer, prospects of joining became less probable, and with that commitment to democratization was hindered.