

# A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL IDENTITY CONCEPT ON THE EUROPEANIZATION PROCESS OF WESTERN BALKANS: AN EXAMPLE OF SERBIA

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## Abstract

*With the end of the bipolar structure, states wanted to guarantee their places in the system through European Union in the Balkans. Serbia is one of the important states in the Western Balkans that hardly adapted to the changes in the system because of the Serbian nationalism. This article will discuss the reasons for the delay in Europeanization process of Serbia referring to the concept of nationalism, which had the greatest influence on Serbia's EU process. This study will explain why Serbia's path towards European integration has been so much difficult. After analyzing the dissolution process of countries from Yugoslavia, it will focus on the two important theories which are identity convergence and identity divergence mechanisms in order to better analyze the European integration of Serbia. This article will reveal Serbia's reluctance to accept European nationalism by exploring the role of the national identity concept on the Europeanization process. This article concludes that, the transformation of domestic policies that are linked with the EU were failed in Serbia, identity divergence mechanism became a driven force in delaying rapid EU enlargement and political leaders' strategies became unsuccessful to pursue EU norms and standards. In this research paper, a qualitative study was conducted using methodological pluralism and historical comparative research methods.*

**Keywords:** Serbia, National Identity Concept, European Union, Yugoslavia, Western Balkans.

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### INTRODUCTION

The structure of the international system had changed at the end of the 1989. The League of Communists had been in power since the end of World War II and had maintained a strong grip on political power and state institutions. However, by the late 1980s, the party had lost its legitimacy due to a combination of internal corruption and external pressures, including economic crisis and increasing demands for democratization and human rights. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the League of Communists lost its mandate to rule and failed to keep Yugoslavia united. Before the collapse of Yugoslavia, the League of Communists held a monopoly on political power and controlled the government of Yugoslavia. In this context, nationalist movements emerged in different regions of Yugoslavia, seeking greater autonomy or independence for their respective ethnic groups. Nationalist discourse became stronger in the different regions of Yugoslavia, and various nationalist parties emerged to champion the interests of their respective ethnic groups. This trend led to the outbreak of ethnic conflict and violence, which ultimately led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia into several



independent states. The collapse of the League of Communists removed the ideological glue that held Yugoslavia together, and the emergence of nationalist sentiments created a new political landscape, where ethnicity and nationalism became the dominant political forces. The breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s was a complex and multifaceted event that cannot be attributed to a single cause. While economic, political, and social factors certainly played a role, the main reason for the dissolution of Yugoslavia was indeed rooted in the history of the state and the national ideologies of its main groups. Nationalism and ethnic identity played a significant role in the politics of Yugoslavia, particularly in the post-Tito era.

The Western Balkan states consist of Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The Western Balkans was a highly heterogeneous society composed of various different peoples, and these nations developed and emerged under different social and historical conditions, and were at various levels of economic, cultural and political development at the time they merged with each other (Singleton, 1985, p.23) These different historical backgrounds, as well as differences in language, religion, and culture, have contributed to the complex social fabric of the region.


Since the beginning of the 2000s, the European Union (EU) has started to take more responsibilities in the Western Balkans. The EU has started to take more concrete steps towards the countries of the region in order to make permanent transformations in the region. The region has been a priority for the EU due to its proximity, shared history, and the potential for instability and conflict. The EU has been actively involved in promoting stability, democracy, and economic development in the Western Balkans through various policies and initiatives. Each state had followed different path on the Europeanization. For example, Serbia which is one of the important countries in the Western Balkans hardly complied with the changes in the international system. Serbian national identity issue had played a significant role in its path towards joining the European Union (EU). The concept of national identity has been a conflict in the Balkan region for centuries. The country's complex history, ethnic and religious groups have all contributed to the challenge of defining a cohesive national identity. Serbia's internal politics and social dynamics, including debates over the national identity have most if times clashed with these EU values and caused tensions in the accession negotiations. Serbia's ability to resolve its national identity issues and promote social cohesion is crucial to its progress towards EU membership. Nationalism is still a big problem in the EU that delayed the rapid enlargement and also social transformation of states especially in the Balkans.

The main question of this paper tries to answer is, how national identity concept plays an important role on the path to Europeanization of the Serbia? For this to succeed, this paper will focus on the main driven forces behind the revival of nationalism in Serbia. The research strategy is a two-sided comparative study with the same result on the dependent variable. After giving some information about the disintegration process of Yugoslavia, a discussion on the role of the concept of national identity in Serbia's Europeanization processes will be presented. This paper will be divided as follows: the second sections will lay down the theoretical approach of the paper, third section will be historical analysis part of the paper and the section that follows for the paper will examine Europeanization process of Serbia and in the final section an interpretation of the results will be provided. The main output of this paper is that domestic transformation of state is dispensable to establish effective democracy in the state. In terms of Serbia, political circumstances are not eligible for Europeanization. As long as Serbian elites keep supporting their nationalist policies or non transformed Serbian identity structure, comprehensive transformation in Serbian identities or understandings takes a long time in a country. In other words, Europeanization is regarded as a tool rather than a purpose in the Serbia.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1. Theoretical Framework

This paper will focus on the descriptive theory by using comparison methods. This article, a holistic analysis will be carried out by paying attention to the events and facts, each of which is unique to it by inductive analysis method. Qualitative data collection techniques will be used within the scope of



historical developments. When it comes to European Union, different countries in the Western Balkans region, they have gone through a different road to the EU. This article evaluates two main theories in the post-war period and their impact on the development of the European project. National identity divergence and national identity convergence are two grand EU mechanisms that had an impact on states on the Europeanization process of states.

While national identity convergence mechanism provides states to adopt EU requirements quickly, national identity divergence mechanism has a negative impact on states' EU candidacy process. European Union has applied multiple mechanisms on the candidate states on their path to EU process. The main argument of this paper is to understand why similar international pressures on Western Balkan states produce different political outcomes on the path to European Union especially in Serbia. The answer to this question is national identity concept that makes Europeanization process difficult to achieve for states especially for the Serbia.

According to national identity convergence mechanism, political actors in a state are willing to accept the norms and values of the European Union. European identities outweigh more than national identities of the states. More importantly, the changes in the domestic structure of states are mostly related to the EU conditionality mechanism so that states are ready to adopt the EU requirements easily. On the road to Europeanization, European Union provides the sense of common purpose for states that lead to facilitate international cooperation. Since, integration in one area will continue to spill over to other areas among the members of the union. In literature, Europeanization process has been understood as a norm building, identity formation and domestic transformation of states.

On the other hand, states with their own national principles are resisting norms and rules of Europeanization with the national identity divergence mechanism. This is more related to the rationalistic institutionalization mechanism of the EU. According to Andrew Moravcsik, states always protect their own national interests and set strict limits on attempts to transfer their sovereignty in the system. Thus, states have tried to avoid giving high authority to central institutions that could undermine their sovereignty, preferring to work with intergovernmental institutions such as the Cabinet (Moga, 2009, p.802). Their intergovernmental nature has little impact on supranational agents or institution. National policy preferences of states come first and foremost, and expansion into other areas is prevented in the future. Intergovernmental organizations are state-centered, and at the same time, the administration in each society focuses on the internal goals and politics of its country.

Serbia's policies are mostly related with the identity divergence mechanism because of its state centrist position in the international system. Serbia is a country that is more compatible with the identity divergence mechanism which domestic factors outweigh more than international factors in the decision making process. Identity divergence mechanism explains that state power and national interests are determining factors in pursuing goals of the governments. This approach plays a minimal role in opening new topics, reforming decision-making procedures and approving the participation of new projects. The instrumental rationality approach posits that actors make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis of the available options (Börzel and Risse, 2012, p.5). This means that states like Serbia will pursue policies that are deemed to be in their best interests, based on a calculation of the potential costs and benefits of different courses of action. Serbia has followed different paths towards the EU in terms of the adopting to policies or implementing the requirements of the EU. Serbia evaluates how the Serbian state evaluates the European Union process. The transformation of Serbian politics is not driven by the idealized desire to become European, but by the need for EU membership for realistic and practical reasons. If convergence occurs, it will have a pragmatic or utilitarian function (EC, 2014, p.1039). Serbian foreign policy is more related to realism theory in which states take their decisions based on the national interest. Serbian nationality, rather than other nationalities in the region, always comes first. However, Serbia must fulfill a large number of proposals and requirements on the way to the EU, and accept Serbian and European identities in the same package.

Serbian nationalism plays an important role both in the internal and foreign policies of the state. Serbia's leaders may believe that strengthening their national identity will help to protect their

country's interests and enhance its position in the international system. By prioritizing its national interests and identity, Serbia seeks to maintain its position in the international system and protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Needless to say, the interest of the Serbian state comes first, rather than EU policies in the system. Identity convergence mechanism fits well for Serbia in terms of analyzing the role of nationalism on the path to Europeanization. Absence of European idea makes the Europeanization process more difficult than other states in the Balkans. Serbian policies are mostly connected with logic of rationality rather than the logic of conformity. For example, the changes in Serbian politics that facilitated the pro-European agenda were caused by an EU-supported democratizing effect that could make Serbian politics more 'EU-aligned' and lead to a process of 'alignment' under EU pressure (Vachudova, 2014). Although the Europeanization process is perceived in the literature as a value construction and adoption approach, the Europeanization process in Serbia is based on the logic of rationalism. The reason behind the rationalism is the existence of nationalism figures in the politics of Serbia that lays on the history of the state.

## 2. Methodological Review

### 2.1. Historical Analysis of the Revived Nationalism in Yugoslavia: An Example of Serbia

The dissolution of Yugoslavia resulted in several sovereign states that declared their independence in the system at the end of Cold War. The emergence of these national identities contributed to distrust, resentment, and even hatred between different national groups in Yugoslavia. (Ingrao, 2009, p. 3) As a matter of fact, the main reason for the disintegration of the countries lies in the history of Yugoslavia and the national ideologies of its main groups. The trend towards decentralization in Yugoslavia in the latter half of the 20th century can be attributed to several factors, including historical heritage, constitutional factors, and the role of political actors. Historical heritage played an important role in the national question in Yugoslavia. The region had a long history of different ethnic and religious groups coexisting, with varying degrees of tension and conflict.

Nationalism was by no means a new phenomenon in Yugoslavia. The collapse of Yugoslavia is associated with the absence of common interests and the sense of perseverance in national historical narratives where peoples see each other as 'enemy' (Ramet, 2007, p.3) For example, members of different national groups in a multiracial state read different newspapers, books and have alternative sources of information, so it has become more difficult to maintain or establish democracy and unity in Yugoslavia (Ramet, 2007, p.4).

**Map1:** Yugoslavia's Map Before the Break Up



**Source:** The Washington Post, 'World's Balkan Special Report', 1998.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/images/maps/yugoslav2.gif>.



### 2.1.1. The role of the 1963 and 1974 Constitution

Constitutional factors played a significant role in Yugoslavia's trend towards decentralization. Serbia's historical background is certainly make an impact on understanding why its path towards EU membership has been more challenging compared to other countries in the former Yugoslavia. For example, after the changes in the constitution in 1963, an individual was not forced to identify himself as one of the nationalities (Drakovis,2008, p.101) The regime defined itself as a socialist state instead of using any national concept. Above all, mixed marriage was also common among the nations in Yugoslavia. The expansion of the autonomous education and media system caused to miss the opportunity to interpreted in the same way and accelerated the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Ramet, 2007, p.43) The education system also allowed nations to express their point of views freely (Ingra, 2009, p.27). In fact, individuals were free to declare their national identity and also elites did not accept Yugoslavia as their own nationality after the 1963 Constitution. All the amendments to the constitution of 1963 made it clear that the constitutional decentralization of Yugoslavia was taking place at the national level


One of the underlying factors why nationalism concept played a critical role in the history of Serbia was the self management right that was given for society in Yugoslavia. The head of the Yugoslav states, Joseph Broz Tito, passed a law on workers 'self-management', which separated Yugoslavia from Soviet Socialism (Crampton, 2002, p.119). The right to self-government was also extended to the other areas in the states such as education, health, culture and social services. Society was given the right to self-determination from an increasingly unbearable situation (Cohen,2008, p.106). After the 1970s, The Yugoslav republics such as Serbia began to behave if they were independent entities in a united nation. The right to self-government gave the nations independence in many areas and at the same time accelerated the decentralization of Yugoslavia's presence in the Balkans.

The most driven force behind the rising nationalist movements in Yugoslavia was the changes in the 1974 Constitution that provided for the freedom to people and unite nations in accordance with their interests (Gallegner, 2003, p. 27). The 1974 Yugoslav Constitution granted greater autonomy to the republics and provinces within the federation, allowing them to have their own constitutions and legislative bodies. This constitution was the turning point for states that started the decentralization process in Yugoslavia. This constitution reserved most of its provisions on the universal right of self-government in the public, and self-government became an alternative to the state. Republics and states also become independent in carrying out their own actions and gain authority over the decisions taken by the federal state (Ingrao, 2009, p.19). This constitution had established several independent and dissident nation-states in Yugoslavia province (Cohen,2008 ,p.105). In the 1974 constitution, the republic was referred to as states, based on sovereignty of people and communities of the nations (Cohen, 2008, p.106).Serbia is one of the dissident nations in Yugoslavia guaranteed their civic rights and gained political and institutional priorities from this constitution. While nationalism in Yugoslavia was weakening, the nationalism of the constituent nations such as Serbia was becoming more powerful (Jovic, 2001, p.105) The right of self-determination provided an opportunity for Serbia to establish its own domestic structure and to maintain Serbian nationalism movements in the state. This constitutional change helped states to act as more interventionist actors rather than extraversionist in their foreign policies.

### 2.1.2. The role of National Identity Concept: The idea of Great Serbia

Serbia's Europeanization process differs from other states on the basis of the state's identity issue. For example, Serbia did have a national goal of bringing all Serbs together in a unified state and protecting Serbian national interests. This goal was often referred to as the "*Greater Serbia*" project, and it was driven by a combination of historical, cultural, and political factors .Serbian hegemonic nationalism rooted in 1918 and the Serbian national vision was to create "*Great Serbia*" project at the end of First World War. For example, Serbs were a major ethnic group in the former Yugoslavia, and they lived not only in Serbia itself but also in other republics of the federation, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro. Many Serbs believed that these regions were historically and culturally part





of Serbia, and they saw it as their duty to protect and unify the Serbian people. Ethnic differences, differences in the traditions and cultures of the nations in Yugoslavia played an important role in the non-formation of a Yugoslav culture, nation and state. The main underlying factors of this idea was the absence of common political culture and a legacy of authoritarianism combined with channeled nationalism (Akhavam, 1995, p.33). Social and political uncertainty in the state gave impetus to the search for solutions in ethnocentrism. To illustrate that, Although Serbo-Croatian language was taught in Slovenian and Macedonian schools, Slovenian and Macedonian were not taught in Serbian schools in the past (Job, 2002, p. 107). The unfair treatment of the federal structure among the nations led to a lack of political instability in the region. The main drivers of ethnic segregation of states in the past and the rise of the nationalist movement have a major impact on the easy assimilation of European values and identities.


### 2.1.3. The power of the Political Leaders: Slobodan Milosevic's Regime

The role of political actors cannot be overlooked in Yugoslavia's trend towards decentralization. The role of political leaders in the rising national movements was very visible in the region. For example, leaders such as Josip Broz Tito and his successor, Ivan Stambolic, recognized the importance of regional autonomy and the need to address the national question. In the 19th century, Serbian political leaders such as Vuk Karadžić and Ilija Garašanin were instrumental in promoting a sense of national identity among the Serbian people, based on language, culture, and history. Tito's death in 1980 was perceived by many people as the loss of the country's main unifying force. Ethnic clash or tension between parties became more visible after the death of Tito (Dyker, 1996, p.94). It is clear that Tito's regime that tried to keep societies together and its leadership model was very popular in Yugoslavia. At that point, political actors played an absolutely critical role in the dissolution of states from Yugoslavia in the early stage of the states' founding.

In the 20th century, Serbian nationalism took on a more political character, particularly during the rule of Slobodan Milosevic in the 1990s. The rise of nationalist Serbian politicians in the 1980s, such as Slobodan Milošević, contributed to the erosion of Yugoslavia's unity and the eventual breakup of the federation. Serbia was the dominant republic in Yugoslavia, and *under the* leadership of Slobodan Milosevic, it pursued a policy of expansionism and aggression towards its neighbors, which resulted in a series of conflicts and atrocities. Serbian political elites have played a significant role in promoting nationalism and shaping the country's national identity in the modern era.

Milosevic's regime promoted a nationalist agenda that emphasized the importance of Serbian national identity and the need to protect the rights of Serbs living in other parts of the former Yugoslavia. When Slobodan Milosevic took the seat in Serbia in 1989, he declared to the local Serbs that no one would be allowed to beat them. He promised to keep Tito's image alive until 1991, and later joined the nationalist movement in the state. For example, intellectuals had a great influence on the rise of nationalism in Serbia's autonomous province of Kosovo at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1986 (Hudson, p. 71). With the power of Milosevic in Serbia, national homogenization increased, the clash between ethnic groups were encouraged and logistically supported by Serbia's security apparatus (Blitz, 2006, p. 31). He was widely regarded as a nationalist politician who espoused a Serbian nationalist agenda and contributed to the escalation of tensions in the Balkans that eventually led to the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s.

The Serbian government, under the leadership of Slobodan Milosevic, used nationalist rhetoric to rally support for its policies, particularly in relation to the Serb minority populations in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo. The conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, in which Serbs were accused of committing war crimes against Muslim and Croat populations, was fueled by ethnic nationalism. Serbs in Bosnia felt that they were being persecuted by Bosnia and Croat forces, and the Serbian government used this sentiment to justify its military intervention in the conflict. In addition to that, one of the Milosevic's most controversial actions was his support for the Serbian minority in Kosovo, which led to the deployment of Serbian security forces in the region and a crackdown on the Albanian majority. This, in turn, led to a prolonged conflict in Kosovo in 1999, with NATO eventually intervening to end the violence. The conflict in Kosovo, where Serbs were accused of committing atrocities against ethnic Albanians, was driven by a sense of Serbian nationalism and the desire to maintain control over the predominantly Albanian region. Nationalism left Serbia under the big burden such as organized crimes,



violence and intolerance. Although Serbs denials of their responsibility for harm done to others, unpredictable consequences appeared behind the nationalist trauma in the state.

Milosevic's nationalist policies were focused on promoting the interests of Serbs, both within Serbia and in other parts of the former Yugoslavia where Serbs lived. He used a variety of tactics to achieve this goal, including propaganda, repression of opposition voices, and the manipulation of electoral processes. To illustrate that, The NATO bombing of 1999 provided Milosevic further restrictions on the media, such as closing down B-92 radio, anti government radio station. NATO's Kosovo Operation also increased the nationalism and anti-westernism in the country. After the loss of Kosovo war, there was some backlash against Milosevic especially Serbian Orthodox Church (Crampton, 2002, p.279). Since the fall of Milosevic's regime in 2000, Serbian political elites had taken a more measured approach to nationalism, emphasizing the importance of reconciliation and integration with the European Union. Thirteen years of rule was over because of the considerable pressure from the west and especially the United States of America. However, nationalist sentiment remained a powerful force in Serbian politics, particularly among right-wing parties and groups. The need for such help was pressing by the society in 2001 because of the bad conditions in the country. For example, Yugoslavia had an unemployment rate around 40 percent and an external debt of 13 billion dollars (Crampton, 2002, p.283). The disintegration of Yugoslavia could only be prevented by the concerted effort of local political leaders, and timely assistance from the international community.


Overall, Yugoslavia's trend towards decentralization in terms of re-raising the national question was motivated by a complex set of factors, including historical heritage, Self determination right, constitutional factors, and the role of political actors. According to Dean Jovic, the principles of multiethnicity that dominated Yugoslav politics were replaced by a "*return to nationalism*" in order to strengthen the newly acquired statehood (Rupnik, 2011, p.37). The clash of national ideology led to a conflict over the control of territories where different nations claimed for their ideology. However, ultimately, the rise of nationalism and ethnic tensions within the federation proved to be too great a challenge, and Yugoslavia dissolved into several independent states in the early 1990s.

## 2.2. Conceptual Analysis

### 2.2.1. Europeanization Process of Serbia

#### *Definition of Europeanization*

The European Union offers candidate countries the opportunity to promote political stability and economic prosperity in Europe. The process of Europeanization is often used to describe the coherence of an entire political culture of states towards membership in the European Union. Europeanization is the application of EU standards, the independence of the judiciary and the recognition of the EU identity. European administration attaches great importance to democratic constitutionalism (Schimmelfenning, 2010, p. 7). It includes human rights, rule of law, minority rights, freedom of speech and free media right and etc. The EU is a global actor that implements the sanction mechanisms on candidates on the path to EU. The European Union exerts its influence on the candidate states both through soft power and smart power mechanisms, but also economically through hard power (Cierco, 2009, p.177). Soft power mechanisms include promoting the EU's values and norms, offering technical assistance and capacity building, and providing funding for development projects (Nye, 2004). Smart power is a combination of soft power and hard power, where the EU uses a mix of incentives and disincentives to achieve its goals. Economic power, or hard power, refers to the ability of the EU to exert influence through economic means, such as trade, investment, and financial assistance. The EU can use economic power to candidate countries to comply with EU regulations or undertake political reforms. The EU uses a range of mechanisms to exert influence on candidate states, including soft power, smart power, and economic power. The specific mix of these mechanisms may vary depending on the situation and the goals of the EU. Europeanization means the adoption of European governance principles at the union level, which are structured in the field of internal discourse logic, identities, political structures and public policies. (Lavenex and Schimmelfenning, 2009, p. 795)



Concluding this part, Europeanization process consists of two important mechanisms such as logic of consequences and logic of appropriates (Schimmelfenning, 2005, p. 28) According to logic of consequences, states make an decision on behalf of the cost-benefit calculations. In other words, cost-benefit analysis, where the decision-maker weighs the potential benefits and harms of a particular action and chooses the action that maximizes benefits or minimizes harms. One criticism is that states prioritize their short-term gains over long-term benefits. States make a calculation about the cost of execution in the EU in terms of interest based approach (Schimmelfenning, 2010, p. 8). On the other hand, in the logic of appropriates, the normative values or moral issues are more important than material factors. For the logic of appropriates, Europeanization is perceived as a role model for states and they easily accept the norms and rules of the EU. Socialization is the process of incorporating individuals into the norms and rules of a particular community; this ultimately means a transition from the logic of consequentiality to the logic of conformity (Flers and Müller, 2010, p.21). Through socialization, individuals learn to become members of their community and follow the norms and rules that help maintain social order and stability.

While conditionality mechanism is a product of logic of rationality, socialization or social learning model is also part of logic of appropriates. Rationalism sees political actors as detached, selfish beings, while; constructivism or socialization mechanism accepts actors as completely social beings. According to constructivists, the interests of actors are shaped in the process of social interaction, experienced through communication processes. (Burchill, 2013, p.293) Although conditionality is an asymmetric process based on coercion between the target country and the EU in exchange for a reward, socialization is a process in which persuasion, discussion and social interaction are used for behavior change (Checkel, 2001, p. 562) The relevant practices are different in the process of full EU membership of the Balkan countries. According to the EU, the priority for the Balkan countries in question is to develop these countries in the field of structural and democracy, rather than full membership. (Trauner, 2009, p.435)


### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1. Serbia's Path to the EU Membership

Europeanization is an effective mechanism for shift in the domestic politics of the Balkan states. EU membership can indeed provide a strong incentive for candidate countries to adapt to political changes that are necessary for membership. One of the main requirements for joining the EU is that a country must have a functioning democracy that upholds the rule of law and respects human rights. This means that candidate countries must make significant political, legal, and institutional reforms to meet these criterias. The EU also requires candidate countries to have stable and functioning democratic institutions, including independent judiciary, a free and independent press, and an effective system of checks and balances. Europeanization has an impact on both public policies and national institutions (Schimmelfenning and Sedalmeier, 2002, p.7). EU membership provides a strong incentive for candidate countries to undertake the necessary political changes to meet the criteria for membership. Europeanization is improving efficiency in policy and decision making process of states. The perception of the EU changed over time in Serbia. Serbia had realized that peaceful transition to democracy is necessary for the transition of country after the civil war. Civil uprising in the Serbia resulted in overthrowing of legacy of the Milosevic in 2000 and also established a democratic regime in the state. Serbian politics started to change in 2004 because Serbia was isolated by the international arena while most of the Balkan countries had begun to integrate with the EU (Subotic, 2010, 614). As a result of these developments, the Serbian government has designed a policy of '*voluntary surrender*' (Subotic, 2010, p. 615). As a reward, the EU removed the sanctions against Serbia after the transition to democratic regime and also provided 2 billion dollar aid for the reconstruction for the state. EU linked all the rewards to Serbia with its conditionality mechanism.

After Serbia declared its independence in 2006, it signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU which come into force in 2008. Serbia applied for membership to EU on 22 December 2009 (Akçay, 2016, p.75). This agreement confirms the membership of Serbia and regulates the mutual relations between two parties. For example, perception of the EU or the support






for the EU in Serbia rose %65 percent in 2009, but in 2010 %57 of respondent vote yes, %51 would vote yes in 2011, the support failed to only 41 percent in 2012 (Seio, 2016). When EU and Serbia relations are getting more closely, the perception of society to EU is getting failing. While Serbia was fulfilling all the numerous recommendations and requirements by the EU, it also has to accept Serbian and European nationalism at the same time. Serbia has to take important steps in the financial, social and legal areas such as fighting, corruption, improving the judiciary system, providing freedom of rights for its citizens on the path to Europe. Although EU membership provides several benefits for Serbia due to its bad economic situation, unstable political structure and isolated position in international community, this reward could not achieved smoothly (Ron,2003,p.22-25).

As a part of the accession process, Serbia has been required to undertake a number of reforms, including the strengthening its democratic institutions, resolving Kosovo and Montenegro issues and improving the judiciary system. Conditionality mechanism is a part of bargaining strategy powered by reward of EU. One of the most important effects of the conditionality mechanism on the Western Balkans is the de-confliction process in the region. The EU conditionality mechanism became more effective in Serbia's cooperation especially in the ICYF (International Criminal Court for Former Yugoslavia) since 2005. The reconciliation process of Serbia and Kosovo is also the best example of conditionality mechanism of EU.

### 3.1.2. Domestic Politics of Serbia and ICTY

The main problem that is related to EU membership of Serbia was its refusal on requirements of the ICYF which were the submission of the Serbian war criminals and to end the old Milosevic regimes in the areas of the state (Ron, 2003, p.48-50). Serbians rejected to commit war crimes, blamed for others and disregarded the ICTY (Ramet, 2002, p.23). The old regime actors played an obstacle role on the path to EU of Serbia. Old regime's leaders who integrated into official areas of the states created reluctance in accepting the requirements of the ICTY (Gordy, 2005, p.109). In addition to that, Serbian church was an obstacle on the EU process of Serbia. Serbian church had a big impact on the decision of the Serbian political leaders on the foreign policy of states. Serbian elites were reluctant to Europeanize because elites and political leaders believed that Europeans for their own interests had a big influence in the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The existence of the old regime spoilers who are nationalist and old regime supporters delayed the Europeanization process of Serbia. Lack of European resisters or the supports of change in the public were not enough for the transformation of domestic politics rapidly in Serbia. The Criminal Court of the Former Yugoslavia and Serbia's cooperation most of the time had been criticized by the EU. Since, Serbian governments or police staff did nothing for the investigating war crimes or the collection of evidence for the ICTY (Subotic, 2010, p.629) In July 2011, Ratko Mladic, who was held responsible for the massacre in Srebrenica, Goran Hodzic, who was held responsible for the massacres in the Krajina region in Croatia had been arrested and transferred to The Hague. They were regarded as heroes by the most of Serbian leaders and their submission to Hague created distrust in the domestic policies of the Serbia.

Besides the ICFY, the European Commission had made a condition that Serbia has to normalize its relations with Kosovo and Montenegro, which they do not recognize, in order for negotiations with Serbia to begin. The dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo has risen to the level of Prime Ministers in 2011(Sebastian, 2010, p. 47). The shift in Serbian policy towards the Kosovo is a result of the EU incentive procedures on Serbia. Following the high level dialogue in Brussels with EU mediation in April 19, 2013, Serbia and Kosovo reached an agreement to normalize their relations and improve the dialogue mechanisms in the international arena. (Guzina and Marijan, 2014, p. 5) The EU Foreign and Security Policy representatives submitted a report to the European Commission and in this joint report, Serbia's only key priority successfully carried out and the accession negotiations of the European Commission suggested to start (Keil and Stahl, 2014, p.6). Serbia's effort to improve the relations with Kosovo caused negotiations to start with the EU. Efforts to resolve the conflict have been ongoing, including negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia facilitated by the European Union. For the purpose of EU accession, countries in the region can make significant progress even on issues with high political costs. The most important indicator of this is the normalization process between Serbia and Kosovo,



which has started since 2011. However, progress has been slow, and the conflict remains a significant issue for both Kosovo and Serbia, as well as for the wider region.


The relationship between Serbia and Montenegro has been complex and at times contentious since the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. One of the main issues between Serbia and Montenegro has been the question the independence of Montenegro. In 2006, Montenegro held a referendum on independence from Serbia, which was supported by a narrow majority of voters. This move was opposed by many in Serbia, who saw it as a violation of the country's territorial integrity and a threat to Serbian national identity. Another source of tension between Serbia and Montenegro has been the treatment of Serbs living in Montenegro. Serbia has expressed concern over what it sees as discrimination against the Serbian minority in Montenegro, particularly in areas such as education and language rights. Despite these challenges, Serbia and Montenegro have taken steps to improve their relationship in recent years. The two countries have signed agreements on issues such as border control and economic cooperation, and have worked to increase trade and tourism between their respective territories. Thanks to this, Serbia has started to be structured and active in its regional policies (European Commission, 2016). One of the important lessons that Serbia has to take from history is that the pursuit of this national goal had negative consequences, including the violent conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in the 1990s, which were fueled in part by Serbian nationalist ambitions.

The EU and Serbia relations turned to positive way after important obstacles in relations with the EU had removed (European Forum, 2016; Bandovic and Vujacic, 2014, p. 51). There were also voices within Serbia that advocated for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and some politicians pursued a more moderate approach to national questions. The European Commission on the subject candidacy for Serbia was granted due to the progress of the Serbia. Upon the European Commission's positive opinion on this application on 12 October 2011, Serbia gained its candidacy status on 1 March 2012. (Içener ve Phinnemore, 2015, 37; Human Rights Report, 2016) The accession process is divided into several chapters, each dealing with a different area of EU policy. Serbia must complete negotiations on each chapter. As of 2021, Serbia has opened 18 of the 35 negotiation chapter, has closed two. Serbia is a democratic country that seeks to pursue its national interests in a peaceful and cooperative manner, and it has committed to European integration and regional cooperation.

### 3.1.3. Absence of European Idea

Although several nations had declared their independence from Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War, states have followed different strategies on the integration process of the EU in the Balkans. Nationalism and the idea of Europeans can be seen as two competing ideologies. Nationalism focuses on the importance of one's national and culture above others, while the idea of Europeans emphasized the shared cultural, political and economic values or rules of the European continent. Some people argue that nationalism has been on the rise in Europe in recent years because of economic insecurity, immigration or concerns about national identity issues. Nationalism concept is much more ideological instrument for political mobilization.

Europeanization process includes both interest based approach and value based approach for states. Although interest based approach to Europeanization serving mostly for the economic purposes of state, value based approach is helping to chance the political and cultural areas of the state. Interest based approach applied more in Serbian foreign policies rather than value based approach on the road to Europeanization. The transformation of Serbia's policies, values and norms to the EU is not for the desire to be a European, but for the aim of political and economic reasons. From the Serbian point of view, the EU is Serbia's main trade partner in the region. For example, in 2009, exports of goods and services with the EU 4,094 billion Euros, while imports are 10,386 billion Euros. In 2014, exports of goods and services with the EU 10.561 milyar Euro, while imports are 13.512 milyar Euros (European Commission, 2016). With EU membership, Serbia will able to find the opportunity to open a place in the European Union. From the EU points of view, Serbia's full membership to the EU will make a significant contribution to the EU's regional policies. (Türbedar, 2003, p.22) Serbia has gone through




a recession in 2008 and Serbian economy shrank by 1.7% in 2012. Serbian economy started to grow with the impact of EU financial aid which made a significant contribution to the economic and political transformation of the state. (Republic of Serbia Government, 2016) At the same time, Serbia aimed to solve its serious employment problem in the county with the full membership to the EU. For example, while the unemployment in Serbia was 23% in 2013, it has failed to 20% in 2015(The European Sting, 2016). Serbian Europeanization process is much more a tool rather than an aim.

EU also improved intense relations with countries such as Serbia in order to continuation of stability, democracy, rule of law principles in the Balkans. Serbia is in a very important situation due to its strategic and geographical location in the Western Balkans. In other words, the EU has a purpose on forming an all-encompassing political union in the Western Balkans in order to reach EU standards as soon as possible. In this way, there will be no migration, poverty, ethnic conflicts at the same time basic principles such as human rights, minority rights and democracy will be protected. (Ağca, 2010, p.48; IBP, 2014, p. 146-150).For the purpose of promoting democracy or the transformation of Serbian institutions, the driving mechanism for domestic change will be providing financial and political aids in a relation with official requirements of Serbia. Needless to say, Serbia was unwilling to share the authority with the EU institutions or adapting to the EU's norms easily. Some observers are also skeptical about the Serbia, where domestic politics are still being affected by the nationalist nostalgia and the failure of the idea of creating "*Greater Serbia*" (Brien, 2006, p.78). Serbian's EU progress has been slower and more challenging, leading to a delay in its membership. Critics of Serbian nationalism argue that it has contributed to a culture of intolerance and division in the country, particularly towards minority groups such as Albanians, Roma, and LGBT individuals. They also argue that it has hindered Serbia's efforts to integrate with the EU and build stronger relationships with its neighbors.

What appears as an obstacle to Serbia's EU accession is that its nationalist policies had a big impact on the decision making process. Europeanization process of Serbia based on the rationalist approach rather than value based approach. For example, while Serbia is still a candidate state of the European Union, Croatia or Slovenia which are part of the Western Balkans already became a member of EU. Serbia failed to accept the EU legislation process easily but Croatia and Slovenia had supervised their national building process by conditionality mechanism of EU. For example, Croatia has indeed made efforts to keep itself away from the negative label of a "*Balkan country*" and to promote itself as a modern European nation. This had been a priority for the country, particularly in the context of its accession to the European Union (EU) in 2013 (Cierco, 2009, p. 178). For example, most Croatian and Slovene political leaders perceived Yugoslavs as a threat to their own national identity and adapted to the EU norms and values easily. According to socialization model of EU, during Croatia's EU process, the Croatian elite had not considered every requirement that the EU wants as legitimate and appropriate. Croatia had made significant progress in terms of stabilizing its political and economic situation, improving its infrastructure, and addressing issues related to ethnic diversity. The acceleration of political, social and cultural reforms in the country linked with the EU constructivism mechanism. While Croatia may still be geographically located in the Balkans, it had made significant strides in distancing itself from negative perceptions associated with the region and positioning itself as a modern European nation.

Identifying Europeanization process of states can be best explained with identity convergence and identity divergence mechanism of states. Serbian elites or politicians defended strong ideology of Serbian nationalism and are reluctant to Europeanize because they largely refused to commit a war or harm for others. Serbians also distrusted international community or institutions, mostly the ICTY (Ramet, 2002, p. 23-34). What is more, participants of the public elites or the military staff who remained in the power after transition of the domestic structure in the Serbia blocked all the justice projects, approved nationalist projects and increased the idea of European skepticism. Serbian people also consider the civil war crimes as a result of an international war and Serbia's self-defense right. In addition to that, old regime supports were formally or semi-officially integrated into the police force. In addition, many of the paramilitaries became involved in regular organized crime and they protected themselves at all costs against ICTY. Besides that, the role of Serbian political elites in promoting nationalism has been a complex and controversial issue throughout the country's modern history. There



are euro enthusiast consisting of civil organizations and civil societies in Serbia but their role in internal politics of Serbia was very restricted. Although they are real supporters of the Europeanization process, their political, social and economic powers were very limited on the other hand, the EU did not adequately supply them until 2010 (Subotic, 2010,p, 650) Overall, while European identity and national identity concepts are overlapping in some countries, two concepts can be clashed or make an EU process difficult for the candidate states. Serbia is characteristic with its low European identification that caused citizens perceive EU negatively. In assessing the perception of EU, Serbia focused on the benefits and disadvantages of joining the EU.

### **Concluding Remarks: European identity vs. Serbian Identity?**

The demise of the Westerns Balkans resulted in various independent states in the international arena. The resolution of the Yugoslavia related with the rise of nationalism because of the absence of common historical narrative, the role of political leaders and intellectuals, ethnic diversity in the region. Nationalist movements or uprising nationalism from any state played a remarkable role in the central administration of the state. Europeanization process of states differs in the Western Balkans. EU applied both conditional and socialization mechanisms in order to transform the domestic politics of states in the Western Balkans. One of its major effects is the changes in government that took place in the Western Balkans. The conflict process after communism has increased ethnic nationalism in the Western Balkans and brought nationalist and anti-reform political parties to power. The EU has emphasized the importance of democratic reforms, respect for human rights, and the rule of law in the accession process.

Serbia is one the important countries in the Western Balkans had followed path toward European integration different than other states in the region. The reason behind its struggle is its state centric position. The concept of Serbian national identity is closely tied to the country's historical background and its struggle for independence and statehood. The issue of national identity has been a key factor in Serbia's relationship with the European Union (EU), particularly in the context of the country's efforts to join the bloc. This paper focused on the role of national identity concept that had a huge impact on the Europeanization process of Serbia. Serbian nationalism continued to pose a threat both the Serbia's neighbors and European Union.

While dissolved nations from Yugoslavia such as Croatia or Slovenia refrain from their national identities easily and transform their domestic structure linked with the EU requirements rapidly, Serbian statehood problems or the idea of nationalism became a big problem on the path to EU. Serbian nationalism came first than European identity or values. For this reason, Serbia focused on the national interests rather than any normative preferences or requirements of EU. The EU, especially since the beginning of the 2000s, has been experiencing a political change in the Western Balkans. In this process of change, the EU has used conditionality and socialization mechanisms. However, the conditionality or social learning models of EU failed to create a common identity in the Serbia because of the existence of rise of nationalism and high distrust to the EU. The EU's stance on national identity has been a source of tension between Serbia and the bloc, with some in Serbia perceiving the EU's demands as a threat to the country's sovereignty and cultural identity. However, the EU has emphasized that the integration process is not about erasing national identities, but rather about promoting shared values and principles that are fundamental to the functioning of a modern, democratic society.

It is significant to research for the reasons of why Serbia's Europeanization process delayed and its relations with the principles of independent variables of Europeanization. For example, the preferences of the ruling elites, the role of the European skeptics, the role of church and the idea of creating "*Great Serbia*" played a significant role in preventing the changes into practice on the process of EU. Serbian national identity is being characterized by a strong sense of cultural pride, a deep attachment to the Orthodox Christian faith and a commitment to preserving its cultural heritage and traditions. It is visible that the role of political leaders or ruling elites that played an important role on the rising nationalism in the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1990s. Likewise, the preferences of the ruling elites or powers of elites that had played the same role in the failure of Europeanization process

of Serbia and raising the Serbian nationalism in the state. However, the goal of unifying all Serbs in a single state and protecting Serbian national interests forever was not universally accepted within Serbia, nor was it the only national goal pursued by the country. As mentioned above, the Serbian elites who maintains and supports the old regimes played a significant role in the dissolution of Yugoslavia on the path to EU despite the membership rewards to Serbia. Political elites also applied veto powers in the decision making process and use the European norms to advance local political agendas. The lack of transformation in the domestic civil public organization accelerated the European resisters in Serbia and made European membership more difficult than other states.

In conclusion, the main output of this article is that if the “*European Idea*” is not a constitutive part of the state’s policy or it is replaced by other values such as nationality or ethnicity, Europeanization process will be delayed or not achieved easily for states. European identity concept is not absorbed easily because of domestic, factors, states’ geographic position and their historical background. Identity divergence mechanism has derailed Serbia’s EU candidacy. Serbia is characteristic with its low European identification that caused citizens perceive EU negatively. In assessing the perception of EU, Serbia focused on the benefits and disadvantages of joining the EU. The concept of national identity is an important consideration in the EU accession process for Serbia. National identity issue remains an important consideration for both Serbia and the EU as they navigate the complex process of integration. While nationalism had played an important role in shaping Serbian national identity and defending the rights of Serbs, it had also been associated with violence, intolerance, and conflict. In order to overcome these challenges, the EU emphasizes on democratic principles, respects for human rights and also addresses the issues in a constructive and inclusive manner. There have been significant changes in the Western Balkans in the EU process, albeit slowly. This study has reached out that the reason of failure of Europeanization of Serbia since Serbia focused on the interest based foreign policy approach more than value based approach.

In this context, it is important to consider that the idea of European is mostly rooted in the historical background of the Serbia. It is unclear that Serbia will be able to complete the negotiations and become a full member of the EU, but it is likely that it will take longer than expected time. The balance between ‘*Serbian nationalism idea*’ and ‘*European idea*’ is a complex and ongoing issue, different groups have different perspectives on what is best for Europe and its future. As Serbia continues its path towards EU integration, the role of nationalism in the country’s politics will likely remain a contentious and closely watched issue.

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