



## Bringing Europe to the Balkans – The Europeanization of Croatia and Serbia Compared

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### Abstract

On 6 February 2018, the European Commission published its renewed strategy for the European Union's (EU) enlargement to the Western Balkans, a complex region that only little over 25 years ago provided the scenery for multiple violent conflicts. The Western Balkan states are young states with fragile state structures and limited experience with democracy. The EU's approach to the enlargement round has therefore not only sought to enlarge the EU but aimed at 'Europeanizing' the region. This approach has yielded very different results amongst the Western Balkan countries. Croatia managed to converge with the EU's *acquis* and practices, leading to its EU membership in 2013. It is praised as a model case of Europeanization for the Western Balkans and as a success story. In sharp contrast stands Serbia, the current frontrunner and problem child of the Western Balkans. Serbia's accession negotiations are stuck and are likely to remain so for a considerable time. This thesis seeks to explain why the EU's Europeanization of the Western Balkans through its enlargement policy has yielded such different results in Croatia compared to Serbia. To do this, the thesis employs an inductive case study seeking to uncover what independent variables explain the observed difference in result. The thesis looks at two policy areas in which the EU's enlargement policy has sought to Europeanize Croatia and Serbia: (a) the Third Energy Package and (b) the full compliance with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

To infer conclusions from these cases, the thesis relies on a methodological approach inspired by Laure Delcour.<sup>1</sup> It weighs multiple competing explanations, by setting out alternative hypotheses on the (1) domestic level, (2) EU level and (3) regional level, informed by three theoretical models of Europeanization. These theoretical models are (1) the external incentives model, (2) the social learning model, and (3) the lesson-drawing model. The thesis finds that the difference in success of the EU's efforts to Europeanize Croatia and Serbia is best explained through a combination of domestic-level, EU-level and regional-level factors related to the external incentives model and the social learning model of Europeanization. In the Western Balkans, domestic political elites weigh their personal and party benefits that compliance with EU conditionality offers, against the adoption costs that they would incur from the required reforms. Third-state interests affect this process as they influence the adoption costs for domestic political elites. In Croatia the domestic political elite and society both envisioned a European future. As the EU offered clear and sizable rewards for compliance and there were no third-party interests that hindered Croatia, Croatia's Europeanization was successful. In Serbia, however, anti-Europeanization elites remain in power, the EU fails to offer a clear and realistic perspective on EU membership and Russian interests dominate Serbian economy and politics, blocking it from reforming. As a consequence, Serbia's Europeanization has so far been failing.

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<sup>1</sup> Laure Delcour, *The EU and Russia in Their 'Contested Neighbourhood': Multiple External Influences, Policy Transfer and Domestic Change*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2017.