

FROM ENLARGEMENT TO THE UNIFICATION OF EUROPE:

**WHY THE EUROPEAN UNION NEEDS A DIRECTORATE
GENERAL EUROPE FOR FUTURE MEMBERS
AND ASSOCIATION COUNTRIES**

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INTRODUCTION

When the outgoing European Commission took office in 2014, the world surrounding the EU was a very different one from a decade before. In 2003, EU leaders meeting in Thessaloniki held out the prospect of membership to the Western Balkan countries. A year later the EU launched the European Neighbourhood (ENP) Policy for closer political and economic relations with neighbours to the East and South.

In 2014, that same neighbourhood was up in flames. The Arab spring resulted in a period of protracted regional turmoil. Russia started a military conflict in Ukraine's east and annexed Crimea. Turkey, and to an extent the Western Balkans, plunged into a period of serious democratic backsliding.

The review of the neighbourhood policy in 2015 and the 2016 Global Strategy for the EU's foreign and security policy proposed some policy changes to respond to these new realities. And EU leaders recognised that the integration logic of the neighbourhood policy was only suitable in some

contexts.¹ Western Balkan countries were decoupled from Turkey in the 2018 EU Western Balkans Strategy.²

Yet, despite the EU's stated ambition of being a political player in its neighbourhood,³ some member states have been unwilling to respond to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine's aspirations for closer economic and political links out of fear of confronting Russia and aggravating enlargement-weary voters.⁴

In the Western Balkans, the reluctance of member states to open up accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia in June 2019 or to proceed with visa liberalisation with Kosovo, has yet again put the EU's commitment to the region to the test.

In addition, some EU member state actions have become 'overly' politicised and in direct contravention of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The destabilising role that Hungarian state officials and the ruling Fidesz party played during the crisis in North Macedonia is the most visible

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- 1 Council conclusions on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, EU Council, Brussels, 20 April 2015, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/04/20/council-conclusions-review-european-neighbourhood-policy/> Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, European External Action Service, Brussels, June 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-global-strategy_en
 - 2 "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans", European Commission, Brussels, 6 February 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf
 - 3 Federica Mogherini, "Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy: the EU launches a consultation on the future of its relations with neighbouring countries", Brussels, 4 March 2015. Council conclusions on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, *Ibid.*
 - 4 For a discussion of the European Neighbourhood Policy review and the Eastern Partnership after the Ukraine crisis see Iskra Kirova and Sabine Freizer, *Civil Society Voices: How the EU Should Engage its Eastern Neighbours*, Open Society European Policy Institute, May 2015.

consequence of this over-politicisation, or capture of foreign policy by political interests in the EU. The increasing role of political groups in the European Parliament in shaping the 'foreign' policy of the Union has also been detrimental.

The steady rise of populism in the EU and the response of the mainstream political groups to these challenges have added insult to injury. This has left outgoing European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker stuck in the middle – trying to respond to enlargement fatigue in some parts of the Union while catering to the desire of other member states to project meaningful influence in its neighbourhood.

Juncker's efforts to create a more political Commission have not translated into an independent foreign policy by Johannes Hahn, the Commissioner for ENP and Enlargement Negotiations and Federica Mogherini, the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy. Instead,

the EU's activities in enlargement countries and its neighbourhood have remained more than ever piloted or obstructed by member state capitals. Staying united in a more complex world, one of the guiding principles of the 2016 EU Global Strategy was replaced by a post-modern version of the 19th century European balance of power politics.

In the context of the financial crisis, Brexit and the populist response to migration, two driving forces have guided the EU when deciding on the structure of the European Commission. On the one hand, conservative resistance to a swift and meaningful institutional renewal. And on the other, attempts to soothe growing political pressure in some member states to end perceived over-expansionism.

A realistic and effective architecture to lead the EU's external action in the neighbourhood and enlargement countries is now needed to bridge these divisions.

‘FROM THE CIRCLE OF FRIENDS TO THE RING OF FIRE’

EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2009–2014

At the time of Commission President José Manuel Barroso and Stefan Füle as Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Commissioner, the Eastern Partnership remained under the member states’ radar. The Commission-led, seemingly bureaucratic programme brought substantial political influence for the EU by reinforcing reformists in neighbouring countries through the prospect of free trade and alignment with the club’s standards and values. The Commission concluded ambitious Association Agreements with Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, containing nearly 80 percent of EU laws.

It was this new qualitatively different stage of relations that the Kremlin could not accept, forcing Armenia to withdraw from the agreement in 2013 and destabilising Ukraine.

At the height of the EU’s economic crisis Füle unveiled a strategy paper which aimed to ensure the competitiveness and economic sustainability of the six Western Balkan countries. The paper aimed not only for closer economic integration of the six, but finalised the accession process of Croatia, which joined the EU under his watch in 2013. Furthermore, both Montenegro and Serbia started accession negotiations during his period.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2014–2019

The mandate of the Juncker Commission towards the neighbourhood was defined in negative terms. It started with Commission President Juncker’s announcement that there would be no further enlargement over the course of the next five years. This decision delivered a mortal blow to pro-EU reformists in the Western Balkans.

The Eastern Partnership policy was marked by an existential questioning of the EU’s role in the region following the Ukraine crisis and Russia’s ever-looming presence. In the south, the review of the neighbourhood policy brought a sharp turn towards scaling back ambition and a more transactional foreign policy focused on immediate security and trade interests. It was the end of the ‘transformational’ ENP.

DG NEAR was a status-quo institution. It reflected the lack of a new agenda towards the Western Balkans, and oddly enough, continued to treat the entire neighbourhood – east and south – as a coherent region of similar EU engagement. This limited the EU’s resources and ability to invest in deepening relations and projecting its influence, particularly in the enlargement and reform-oriented Eastern Partnership countries.

EU accession negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia suffered as a result. So did the implementation of Association Agreements and relations with the other four Western Balkan candidate countries (Albania and North Macedonia) and potential candidates (Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina).

This had negative effects on the reform agenda in all these countries.

The EU's new Global Strategy aimed to project ambition on a global scale. It introduced concepts and related policies, such as 'Neighbours of the Neighbours,' but it neglected to articulate a clear policy towards its immediate neighbours — the places where EU influence is strongest and its leadership most needed.

Nevertheless, it would not be fair to overlook the significant influence that the EU has had on its neighbourhood — from Albania to Georgia — supporting stable institutions and homegrown democratic transformation. Even less to understate the potential for backsliding and instability that a reluctant EU could unleash in those partners, some of whom have sacrificed greatly including with their security in order to pursue closer relations.

THE ENLARGEMENT AND ASSOCIATION POLICIES IN COMMISSIONER HAHN'S PORTFOLIO — WHERE DO PRIORITIES LIE?

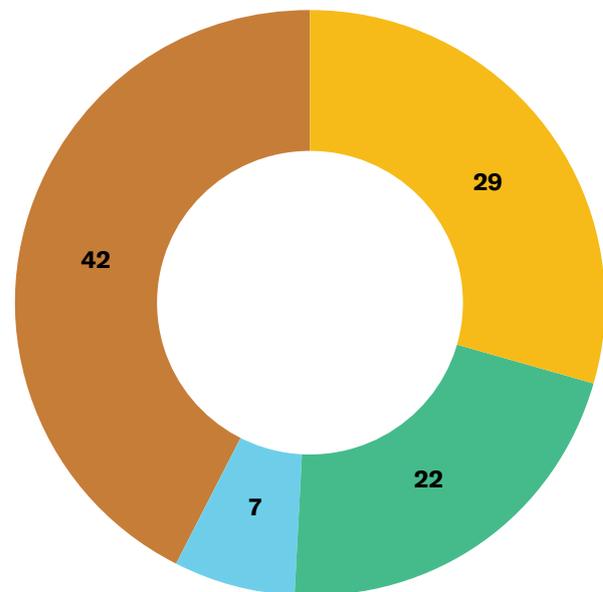
A look at the agenda of Johannes Hahn — the current Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations — paints a picture of clear prioritisation, with a disproportionate part of his attention focused on the Western Balkans and the three association countries.

Data gathered by the Institute of Democracy - Societas Civilis based on Commissioner Hahn's calendar from 2014 to early April 2019 (see tables below) shows an uneven distribution of energy by Hahn, as well as a thin spread across a region inhabited by roughly 380 million people.

In general, significant and equally distributed attention is given to all the countries in the Western Balkans, which received almost 50 percent of Commissioner Hahn's visits. There was also a strong focus on Ukraine, which was the single most prioritised dossier in Hahn's portfolio in terms of visits and other interactions. Crisis-induced negotiations — for example the 2016 refugee deal with Turkey and relations with Tunisia — also received due attention.

FIGURE 1

Commissioner Hahn's interactions with enlargement and neighbourhood counterparts in percentages. Data from 2014 until 4 April 2019⁵



Source: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/index_en

⁵ The data includes interactions by Johannes Hahn with actors from the European Neighbourhood and Enlargement countries. Visits to countries/regions and meetings or events organised on countries/regions but held outside of these regions (in third countries) are included. Two-day visits or similar interactions count for a single entry in the data set. Countries are grouped as follows: Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), Southern Neighbourhood (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia), Turkey and Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia).

FIGURE 2

Commissioner Hahn's interactions per number of meetings, visits and other interactions

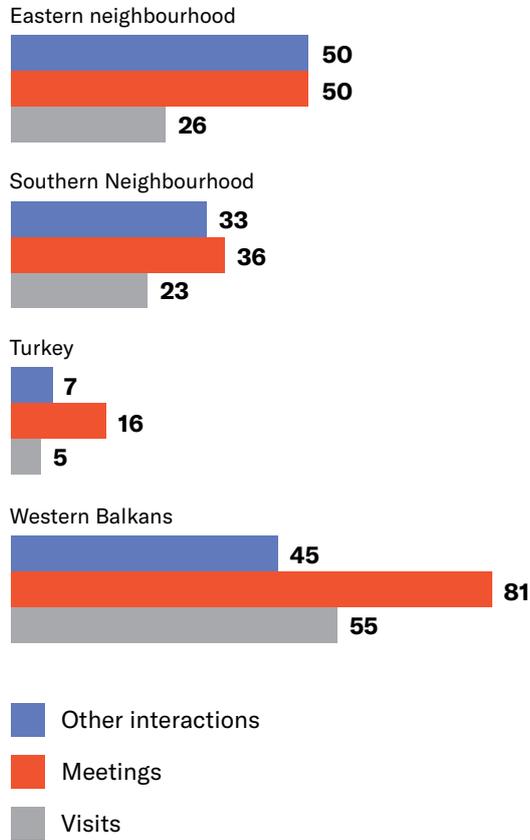
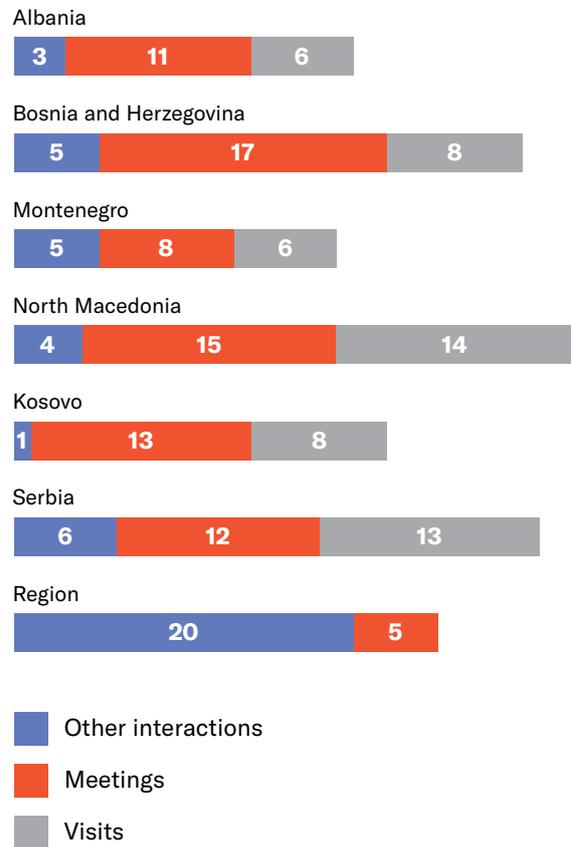


FIGURE 3

Commissioner Hahn's interactions in number of meetings, visits and other interactions per country – Western Balkans



On the macro level, the political energy dedicated to each of the regions was inversely proportional to their size. The largest region of the Southern Neighbourhood (209 million inhabitants) received the least attention per capita, followed by Turkey (82 million). The Eastern neighbourhood (72 million) and the Western Balkans received the most attention, with the smallest region of the Western Balkans (only 18 million inhabitants) by far surpassing all others.

A look at the agenda of Johannes Hahn – the current Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations – paints a picture of clear prioritisation with a disproportionate part of his attention focused on the Western Balkans and the three association countries.

FIGURE 4

Commissioner Hahn's interactions in number of meetings, visits and other interactions per country – Eastern Partnership

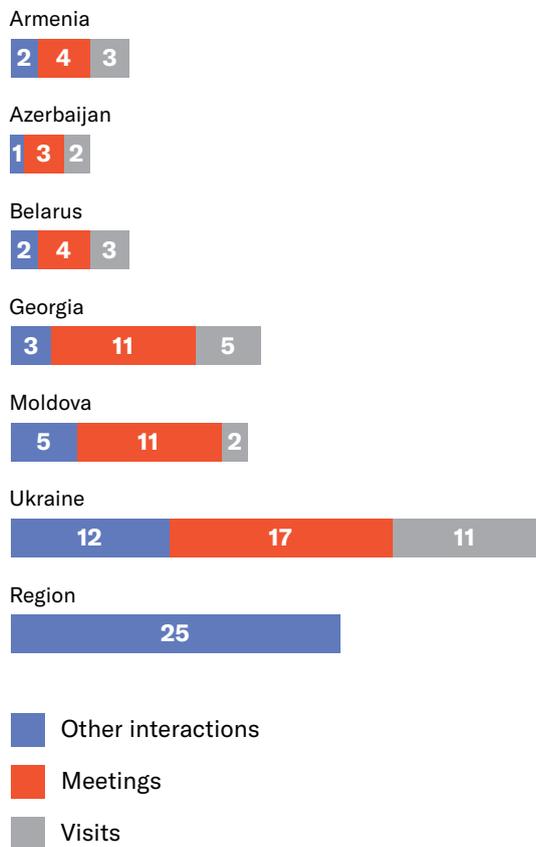
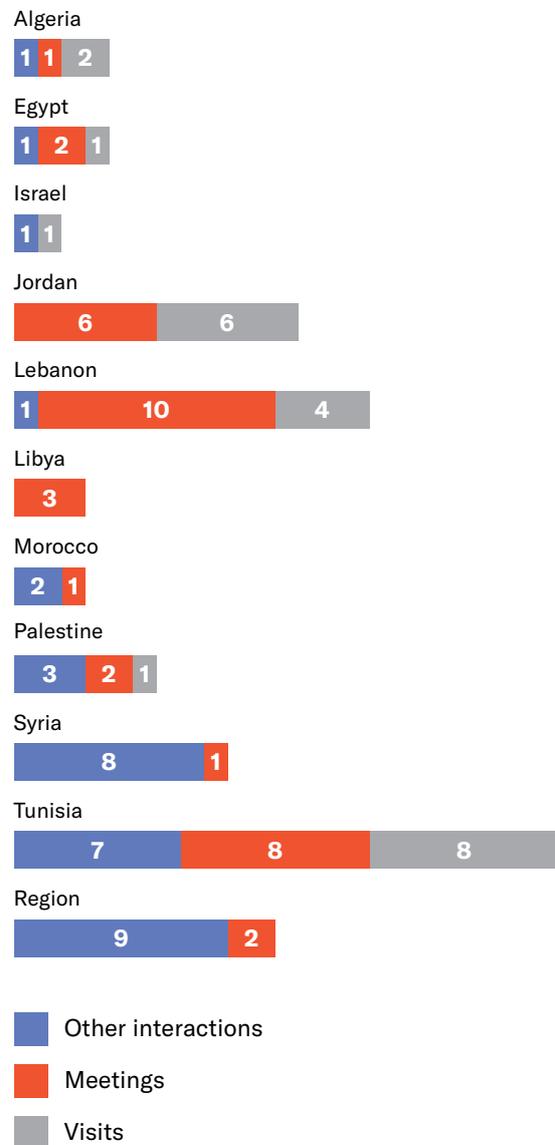


FIGURE 5

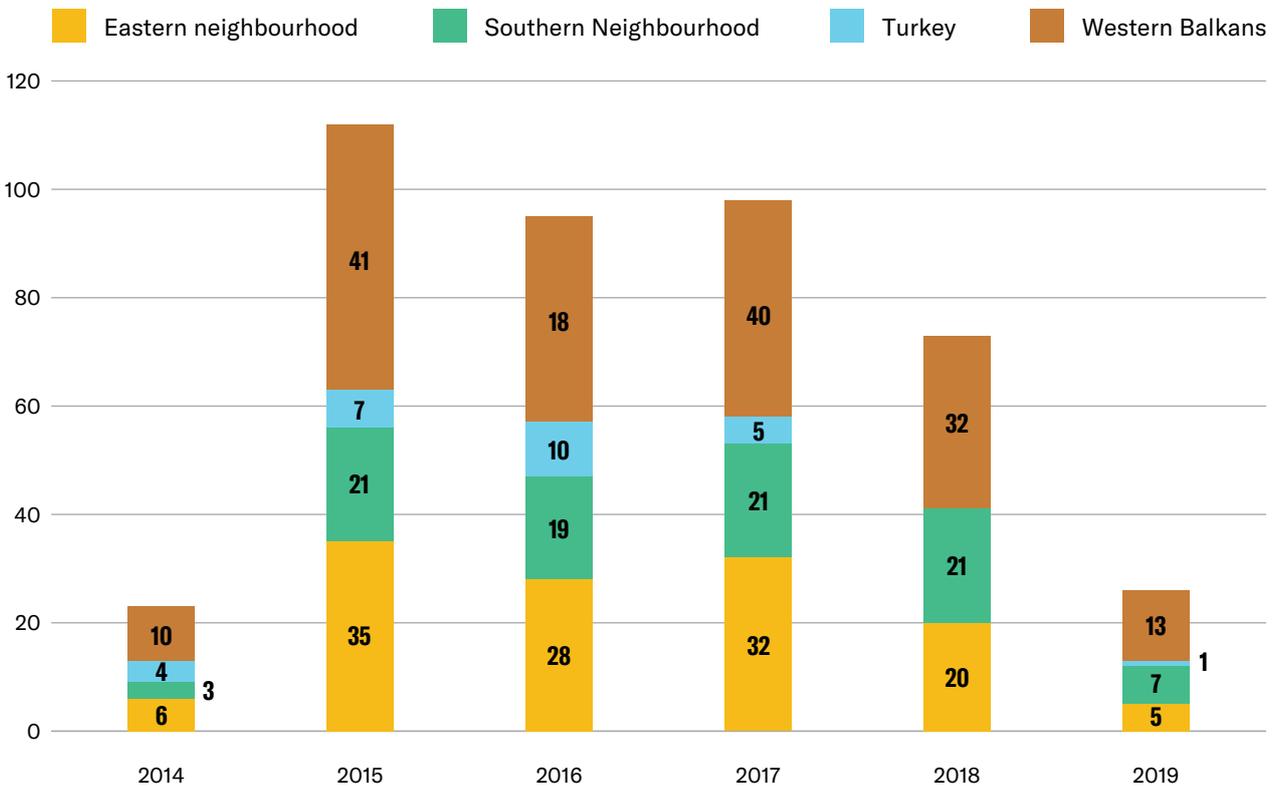
Commissioner Hahn's interactions in number of meetings, visits and other interactions per country – Southern Neighbourhood



A more granular analysis per country (figures 3, 4 and 5 above) introduces important nuance and shows even clearer where priorities lie. Commissioner Hahn spent more time in Ukraine and in interactions with Ukrainian interlocutors than any other country. North Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina follow, with Turkey and Tunisia coming last in the top six. Overall, the six Western Balkans countries, the three association countries, and to an extent Turkey, received the majority of attention, in comparison to the Southern Neighbourhood that remained secondary on the agenda.

Although specific events are the cause of these interactions — such as the post-revolutionary reform agenda and the crisis in Ukraine and the political crisis in North Macedonia — engagement with these countries has remained relatively consistent over time. On the contrary, interactions with Turkey are most frequent in 2016 – the year of the migration crisis and the March EU-Turkey deal (see figure 6 below) — and appear mostly connected to the migration issue and the situation in the regions of Turkey bordering Syria, not with Turkey’s EU accession path.

FIGURE 6
Commissioner Hahn's interactions per year



Hahn's calendar — even if only a quantitative representation — reveals where the EU's bilateral agenda requires frequent high-level political representation. This includes important political, reform and trade priorities that need the added value of a dedicated commissioner.

A commissioner who is constantly dividing his or her time between completely different regions will not be able to give the in-depth attention needed for the demanding political and reform agenda with prospective member states and association countries. This leads to a lack of credibility in the countries embarking upon such ambitious political and economic transformations. And it undermines the commitment to reforms that can be costly in literal and political terms.

To support the complex institutional and administrative reforms, a large legislative agenda and a significant EU aid investment that need to be implemented, the DG dealing with enlargement and the association policy must focus exclusively on these countries.

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If membership negotiations continue as they have, they will lack credibility from all sides and thwart the integration of these states into the EU. And without greater administrative engagement from the Commission, the Association Agreements will not fulfil their potential to deliver stable institutions, rule of law and market integration.

FROM ENLARGEMENT TO THE UNIFICATION OF EUROPE AND CONTINENTAL INTEGRITY

EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2019–2024

The EU after the May 2019 European Parliament elections is more inward-looking. And mainstream parties, afraid of further electoral gains by the populists, are more risk-averse when it comes to enlargement or closer relations with neighbours.

The current environment requires reinventing enlargement as a concept, strengthening the continent's integrity and completing the process of the unification of Europe.⁶

The almost total erosion of the rule of law and democracy that accompanied Erdogan's response to the failed 2016 coup attempt in Turkey already kicked off a process of informal decoupling of Turkey and the Western Balkans in the EU's enlargement policies. In February 2018, the Commission published its Western Balkans Strategy, leaving Turkey out of the picture.⁷

The European Parliament has already voted twice to formally suspend accession negotiations with Turkey — in 2017 and March 2019. The European Commission and the Council have not followed suit.

In the past there was a strong argument against suspending negotiations based on concerns that cutting the formal relationship with Turkey would only embolden Erdogan's authoritarianism and remove any leverage the EU might have in the country. The dramatic annihilation of democracy in Turkey in the last couple of years has demonstrated that the EU's actions have had little effect. Inability to sanction blatant authoritarianism in Turkey has rendered any response to the — relatively speaking — lighter democratic backsliding in the Western Balkans meaningless.

EU citizens are also overwhelmingly against Turkey's EU membership. A YouGov survey of six EU countries in December 2018 found there was less enthusiasm for Turkey joining the EU than Morocco or Israel, which are not even in Europe (see table 1 below).

EU citizens' rejection of Turkey as a candidate country is unwavering since the 2016 coup. Indeed, another YouGov poll in 2016 found that 86 percent of Germans, and 74 percent of French were against Turkey's membership and only 5 percent and 8 percent respectively were in favour. To quote Yougov

6 By continental integrity we intend strict alignment in terms of values and democratic standards (rule of law, separation of powers, free and fair elections, media independence) of member states or those countries aspiring to join or integrate closely with the EU. Strict alignment would include strengthening of the tools at the EU's disposal to enforce these values and norms in the member states or those countries wishing to join in the future.

7 Srdjan Cvijic, "Western Balkans: A new start for Europe", 6 February 2018, *EU Observer*.

from 2016, “Turkey was and remains a less popular choice to join the EU than even Russia.”⁸

There is more of a mixed picture when it comes to the Western Balkans states and Ukraine (respondents were not asked about the other two association

countries — Moldova and Georgia). The 2018 poll found lukewarm acceptance of Montenegro, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as future EU members — apart from in France. Less acceptable were Serbia, Albania and Kosovo.

TABLE 1

Norway, Switzerland and Iceland would be welcomed inside the EU

People in these countries:	UK	Germany	France	Denmark	Sweden	Finland
Tend to think the following countries should (+) or should not (-) be allowed to join the EU						
Norway	+57	+74	+58	+78	+75	+79
Switzerland	+56	+66	+53	+71	+72	+75
Iceland	+46	+64	+47	+74	+74	+78
Montenegro	+4	0	-18	-2	+19	+4
Macedonia	+1	-5	-20	-8	+13	-1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	-1	-8	-34	-2	+20	+1
Serbia	-9	-12	-32	-10	+13	-14
Ukraine	-3	-17	-27	-18	-5	-11
Kosovo	-10	-28	-43	-17	+1	-16
Albania	-12	-34	-43	-22	-8	-23
Israel	-36	-38	-51	-45	-35	-46
Russia	-43	-35	-40	-58	-44	-25
Kazakhstan	-31	-45	-57	-51	-42	-49
Morocco	-31	-53	-62	-55	-48	-57
Turkey	-30	-65	-62	-59	-51	-61

Source: Yougov

8 “Turkey less popular choice to join the EU than even Russia”, 20 - 27 July 2016, YouGov.

The new situation requires reinventing enlargement as a concept, strengthening the continent's integrity and completing the process of unification of Europe

The EU's transformational power has clearly failed in the case of Ankara. Erdogan's Turkey seems to have entirely lost interest in EU accession and the Union has to stop believing that it can continue using the accession process to spur reforms. Moving away from an illusory membership perceptiveness with Erdogan's Turkey towards privileged partnership requires a formal distinction between Turkey and the Western Balkans in both the Commission's architecture and policies.

With regard to the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, realities on the ground have changed significantly over the ten years since their launch. While it is important to preserve the regional dimensions in some aspects of EU engagement, it is also necessary to recognise the very different paths of the countries.

Today, there is a distinct group of three countries — Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine — pursuing political association and economic integration with the EU. The Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) that these countries signed with the EU in 2014 contain the bulk of EU trade law. Estimates vary but are in the range of 90-95 percent of the EU trade acquis.⁹ Despite their potential, the agreements have not

yet been fully used as a clear blueprint for political and market reforms in either of the countries. This is partly due to the limited resources and attention dedicated to their implementation.

Regarding the political and rule of law aspects, the joint Association Agenda based on the agreements is too general for a government priority plan, lacks concrete targets and timelines and is not thoroughly monitored. This is in marked contrast to other reform tools used previously such as the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan and conditionality attached to financial assistance. The quality of EU support for rule of law reforms should be strengthened both in Brussels and at the EU Delegation level. Lack of sufficient and dedicated expertise in this area stretches existing resources and slows down progress.

On the market integration side, the DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine provide for an unprecedented opening of the EU internal market — one that has only previously been offered to European Economic Area and candidate countries. As a group of leading Ukrainian think tanks concluded, with the right support and dedicated work, a significant level of integration with the EU is possible within the association framework. However, three years after the start of the provisional application of the DCFTA with Ukraine there have been no major market openings.¹⁰

One of the reasons for the sluggish implementation of the agreements is the limited capacity of the EU institutions to engage in the domestic reforms the countries have to undertake. This deficit is present even in Ukraine — despite the remarkable increase of resources and important work done through the Support Group for Ukraine.

9 Alexander Duleba, Vladimír Benč, Vladimír Bilčík, *Policy impact of the Eastern Partnership on Ukraine: trade, energy, and visa dialogue*, Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava, 2012.

10 Dmytro Shulga (Ed.), *Integration Within Association: Implementation Dynamics Of The EU-Ukraine Agreement*, Kyiv, January 2019.

As Ukrainian officials report, engagement and knowledge by the Commission directorate generals responsible for the implementation of the DCFTA can be stepped up, as could resources dedicated to lead the association institutions and agenda, and time spent cultivating bilateral contacts. Apart from formal meetings and with a few exceptions, contacts between Ukrainian ministers and MPs with their EU counterparts are few and far between.¹¹

To make these important new agreements a success, the Commission should devote more, not fewer, resources to increase political, administrative and financial engagement. This is not a goal for its own sake but a critical investment in state building and stability on the EU's eastern borders. It is also in the EU's own market and energy interests.

11 Interviews with Ukrainian government officials, Kyiv 2018.

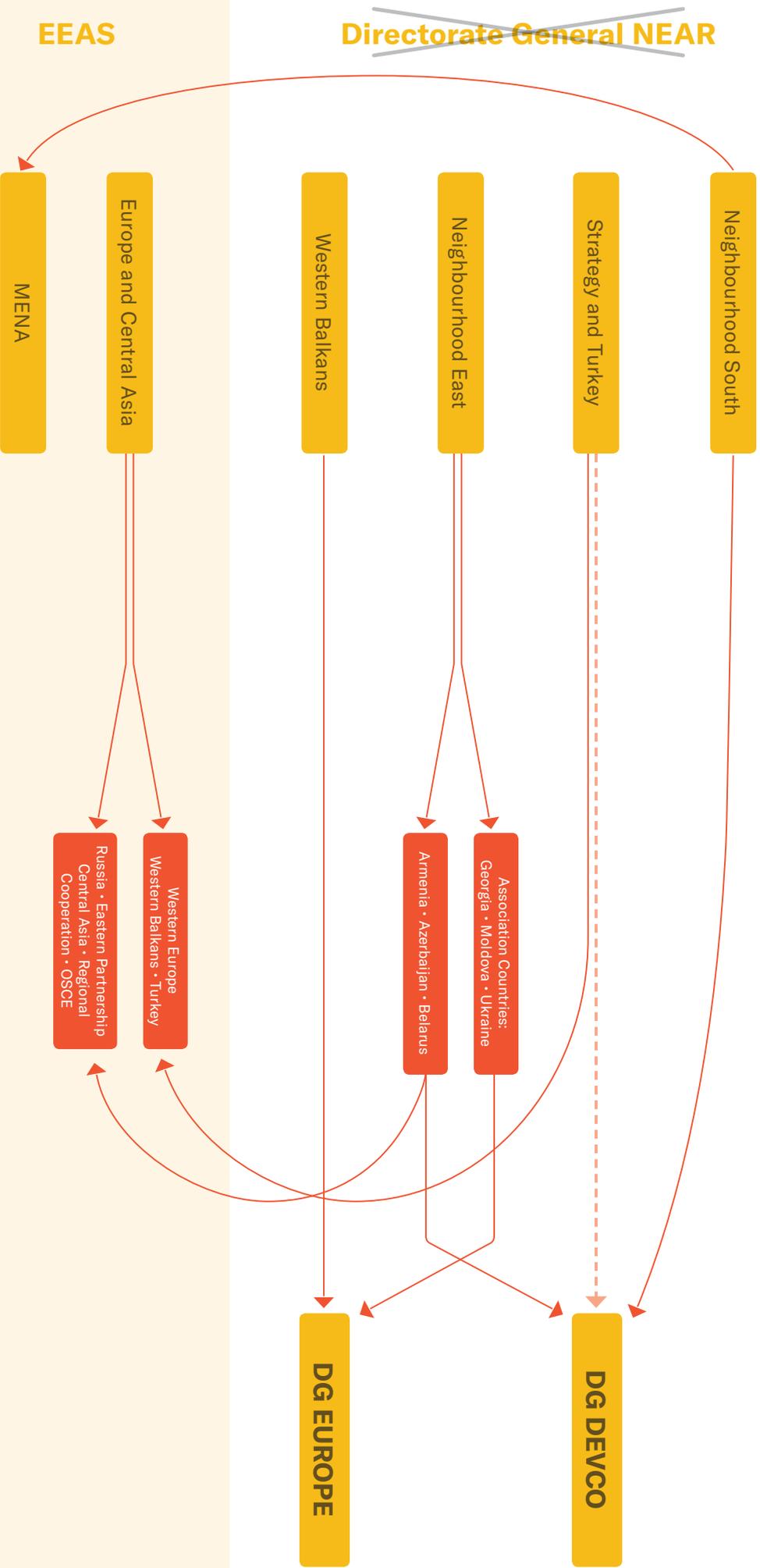
DG EUROPE

The EU should boost the tools of the European Commission to steer the process of the unification of Europe. This means creating a directorate general that would have the resources to drive forward

the accession process with the Western Balkans countries and the ambitious trade and reform agenda in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. This directorate could be called DG Europe.

The current environment requires reinventing enlargement as a concept, strengthening the continent's integrity and completing the process of unification of Europe.

FIGURE 7
From DG NEAR to DG Europe



Creating a DG Europe would present a significant improvement in the functioning of the European Commission in the respective regions and respond to the political realities on the ground and in the member states.

Recreating a separate directorate general only for accession and association countries would send a positive signal to them to fully engage in the reform process. A directorate general with a narrower geographic mandate would have an energising effect for the enlargement countries following the good steps made by the 2018 EU Western Balkans Strategy.¹²

Democratic backsliding in the Western Balkans in the last years has been possible to an extent because of the declining interest of EU member states in enlargement.¹³ In the short term, a DG Europe would address the concerns of some EU countries that oppose formalising the membership perspective and statehood of Kosovo through a separate DG dealing only with the countries explicitly having membership plans.

Given the relatively limited political attention the EU pays to the Southern Neighbourhood, these countries should be separated from a DG dealing with the Western Balkans, EFTA and the three association countries. The most logical choice would be to transfer the previous development-like work of DG NEAR in the Southern Neighbourhood and the remainder of the Eastern Partnership countries

to the development directorate. At the same time, the capacity of the EEAS — in both staff and financial resources — should be strengthened to deal with a classical ‘foreign’ policy portfolio towards these countries. Should other Eastern Partnership participating states or Turkey decide to embark on significant political and economic reforms to integrate with the EU, necessary structural revisions should be made to accommodate a higher degree of support for reform.

Placing the association countries within DG Europe is needed because of the huge administrative burden of implementing the Association Agreements. It is also necessary to make sure the market integration prospects for these countries benefit from the experience of the enlargement countries and the economic integration with the EFTA countries. This should ultimately lead to a shared economic area as envisioned from the start of the association process. It would support the functioning of new trilateral talks on the legislative and trade agenda. Finally, it would bring under one directorate cooperation already taking place within regional groupings such as the Central European Free Trade Agreement (of which Moldova is member together with the Western Balkans countries) or the European Energy Community (where all three are members).

A dedicated DG regrouping these countries would also support the transfer of experience in monitoring and implementing reforms in critical areas such as the rule of law and justice and the fight against corruption. Important work done in this respect by DG Justice to establish a measurable set of indicators and launch a justice dashboard for the Western Balkans could be replicated for the association countries.

¹² “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans”, *Ibid.*

¹³ Srdjan Cvijic et al. *The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. An Anatomy of Stabilitocracy and the Limits of EU Democracy Promotion*, Policy Study, March 2017, Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group.

Providing more dedicated administrative resources to the association countries should in no way result in less attention to the region as a whole. The Eastern Partnership's regional dimension is needed to contribute to the democratic development of all participating countries. The EEAS regional and bilateral divisions should continue to lead these efforts—in particular supporting Armenia's democratic transition. While Yerevan might not, for the time being, have closer integration prospects, its rule of law, justice and anti-corruption commitments under the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) are substantial.

Creating a DG Europe would present a significant improvement in the functioning of the European Commission in the respective regions and respond to the political realities on the ground and in the member states.

DG Europe would have its own commissioner in charge of the unification of Europe and continental integrity. However, to avoid duplication of duties and an unclear sense of hierarchy with the High Representative, the Europe Commissioner in charge of the DG should be elevated to the vice-presidency of the Commission. In this sense two essentially different portfolios: external action (traditional foreign policy) and the unification of Europe and continental integrity would be clearly distinguished.

Attaching the DG Europe portfolio to the vice-presidency of the European Commission would give the respective DG more leverage in relations with other departments, help it play an important liaison function to increase engagement and ensure a clear division of labour with the High Representative.

QUALIFIED MAJORITY VOTING

To jump-start the unification of Europe and continental integrity, both in terms of the process and values, the EU must change its procedure and allow qualified majority voting (QMV) in all intermediary stages of EU accession negotiations. In September 2018, to make the EU a stronger global actor, and in line with the Article 31(3) of the Lisbon Treaty, the Commission proposed extending QMV to three specific foreign policy areas: (1) collectively responding to attacks on human rights (2) effectively applying sanctions and (3) launching and managing civilian security and defence missions.¹⁴

Adding qualified majority voting by the Council—55 percent of member states representing at least 65 percent of the EU population—to approve the progress of a candidate country in all intermediary stages of accession would make the process more fair and effective.

At present, consensual voting in the accession process gives an easy excuse to member states to halt enlargement because of bilateral disputes. As a result, the Commission is unable to demonstrate its commitment to enlargement, no matter how ambitious its strategy is. The re-nationalisation of the enlargement process undermines the Commission's role as well as the EU's credibility as an effective and powerful global player.

To jump-start the unification of Europe and continental integrity, both in terms of the process and values, the EU must change its procedure and allow qualified majority voting in all intermediary stages of EU accession negotiations.

14 “Qualified majority voting: a tool to make Europe's Foreign and Security Policy more effective”, European Commission, Brussels, 12 September 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/soteu2018-factsheet-qmv_en.pdf

If individual members and national parliaments are allowed to impede or even halt the accession of candidate states at any given time, the costs of negotiations could be too high for would-be members to fully commit to.

Individual member states would retain the right to make a final decision on future membership and national parliaments would still have the option not to ratify any Treaty of Accession. However, the political costs to a member of turning a country down at the end of the process when that country

has fulfilled all the membership criteria would be significantly higher and would persuade member states to act more responsibly.

Qualified majority voting is a two-way street. If adopted it would place the Council in a better position to reward but also sanction. A vote by a qualified majority of member states would make it easier to block the accession talks with a candidate country completely derailing from the EU membership path.

CONCLUSION

Moving away from the concept of enlargement towards the unification of Europe and continental integrity will make a crucial contribution to strengthening the EU's role in the world. Succeeding in the Western Balkans, a small region surrounded by EU member states, is an acid test for the Union's ability to strengthen its transformative power in the rest of Europe and project its power and values elsewhere.

In the rest of the region, 2019 provides an opportunity to recognise the changed realities on the ground and give a sharp new focus to a much more effective EU policy in the immediate neighbourhood.

The EU can shape three crucial political transitions on its borders, in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, that will contribute to its own security. Many of the tools it needs are already at its disposal and sharpened in its enlargement and market integration policies.

Nowhere else is the demand for more EU involvement as strong as in the Western Balkans and the three association countries. The EU should not shy away from the political and transformative influence it has and should equip the next Commission with the tools to finally achieve the unification of Europe.

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