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# Norms of belonging: emotion discourse as a factor in determining future “Europeans”

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## ABSTRACT

This article searches for the existence of emotion norms in the enlargement process of the EU. It argues that there is an appropriate emotion that needs to be expressed through the coordination and communication discourses of the European Commission and of the (European) Council. The article displays these norms through a critical discourse analysis of the enlargement strategy papers of the European Commission and the European Council conclusions in the 1997–2002 round of enlargement towards the Central and Eastern European countries. This analysis identifies the topoi that collectively form these emotion norms of enlargement. Afterwards the article analyses the same type of documents on the Western Balkans between 2014 and 2020 through periods of stalling and reinvigoration to demonstrate the resonance between these institutional discourses. It concludes that progress in the enlargement process takes place if both types of discourses conform to the emotion norms of enlargement.

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## Introduction

The Western Balkans (WB) has been promised a support for their “European” perspective by the Thessaloniki Declaration in 2003. The long-lasting process of the European Union (EU)’s enlargement towards the WB seems to suffer from problems that go beyond just an enlargement “fatigue”. The current enlargement policy of the EU still rests on the main principles that a candidate country first needs to comply with Copenhagen criteria, and needs to conclude the accession negotiations, which start with the fundamental chapters concerning the rule of law. Working on the EU’s long-term approach to the WB enlargement, Sekulic (2020) detects “a kind of uneasiness, even malaise with the idea of widening to areas of the continent considered peripheral ... indicated not only fatigue but something deeper and more serious” (p. 91).

There has been a weaker commitment from EU to this enlargement round. The Juncker Commission, taking up office in 2014, right after Croatia’s accession in 2013 has declared that there will be no enlargement during the term of his Commission.

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Accordingly, DG Enlargement in the Commission was now to include Neighbourhood Policy, which was designated as an area that would not accede to the EU. There are many reasons why the enlargement process towards the Western Balkans has not been functioning seamlessly. Even though there are many local (Dimitrova, 2016; Noutcheva & Aydin-Düzgit, 2012), regional (Dzankic, Keil, & Kmezic, 2019) and EU (Bieber, 2019) level issues that hinder this process, an analysis of the emotional setting of these relations, and a search for how it should actually have been, helps explain the background to the loss of credibility of the current enlargement process. The main arguments explaining the loss of credibility and the current problems of the enlargement process state that “the promise of membership and the threat of exclusion” should be equally credible (Zhelyazkova et al., 2019). As Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2004) have found out long ago, the credibility of the membership prospect is the main driver of undertaking domestic change by the governing elites and in the absence of such credibility, national leaders would be unwilling to bear the costs of transformation. That credibility would be lost if the EU showed unwillingness or ambiguity about whether they would eventually take the candidate in, even in the case of successful fulfilment of criteria. This message of ambiguity does not necessarily have to come from the political declarations by EU leaders, it may also be embedded in the language of the European Commission. The discursive “emotional setting” displayed in the Commission documents may not match what this article calls the “emotion norms of enlargement”.

This article asks whether there are some norms of emotion within the EU’s enlargement process and whether these norms determine, through discursive institutionalist processes of reasoning, which countries belong in the EU and which countries do not. Of course, officially, it is the Copenhagen criteria for enlargement, the successful adoption of the *acquis* and ratification of the accession treaty by all relevant actors that enables a candidate country to become a member state. This article looks beyond this official process and tries to see the impact of the discourses of the European Commission and that of the European Council on the enlargement process, from the EU side, through a discourse-historical analysis, and makes the claim that the enlargement policy of the EU only makes a progress when the institutional discourse of the EU matches those emotion norms of enlargement. The emotion norms of enlargement entail a definition of what the parties to the enlargement process – in this case the EU – is expected to feel about this process, demonstrated through their official discourses.

Discursive analysis of various institutions regarding the EU enlargement have previously been done regarding Turkey (Aydin Düzgit, 2013), the Central and Eastern European countries (Sjursen, 2002), and the Western Balkans (Sekulic 2020), in which the main emphasis has been either on the determining power of the European Commission (Aydin Düzgit, 2013) to limit to the policy options through the Commission’s initiator/executive role in the enlargement process or on the enabling and constraining influences of public discourses in member states on policy choices of EU institutions (Dimitrova & Kortenska, 2017). This article contributes to these discursive institutionalist analyses of the enlargement process of the EU by looking into whether there is a normatively functioning emotional context involved in the way the European Commission frames this policy and in the way the European Council decides on this issue.

This article will first proceed by setting the conceptual framework and explaining the methodology employed. Second, it will look at the period between 1997 and 2002 as the

case of a successful enlargement round and show that in that case the discursive standing of the EU institutions included certain topoi, which together make up the emotion norms of enlargement. Third, the article will look at the annual enlargement strategy papers of the European Commission and conclusions of the (European) Council meetings on WB between 2014–2020 to explain how the coordination discourse of the European Commission resonates with the communication discourse of the European Council and results in a fluctuation between stalling or revitalization of the enlargement process, even when the facts on the ground in the region do not radically change. Being the first “structured pre-accession process”, the 1997–2002 time period is similar in length to the one under study for the WB, i.e. 2014–2020. Both start with a solid date of policy change and end with certain progress being achieved. They are two periods long enough to detect fluctuations in discourse, and short enough for an initial inquiry into the existence of emotion norms of enlargement and the significance of discourse in conforming with them. This article shows that progress in the enlargement process only takes place, when these two institutional discourses match the emotion norms of enlarging the EU.

### **Emotionally communicating norms through discourse: theoretical and Methodological framework**

The conceptual framework of this article lies at an intersection of the literatures concerning emotion norms in International Relations – especially with respect to inclusionary and exclusionary practices between states and also within international organizations – Discursive Institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008) and its application in European Studies with respect to policy outcomes (Aydin Düzgit, 2013; Dimitrova & Kortenska, 2017; Schmidt, 2016; Sekulic, 2020). Each one of these relevant concepts will be operationalized below with respect to how they contribute to the frame of analysis in this article by building on top of each other.

#### ***Emotion norms***

Within the vast literature on emotions in International Relations,<sup>1</sup> it is the eventual normative effect of emotions and emotional settings that is relevant for the purposes of this article. Koschut (2018a) explains that certain uses of emotional words or emotion-generating-referrals delineate social circumstances of belonging, inclusion and in-group affiliations, and others acknowledge animosity, otherness, and exclusion. Normativity with respect to something as subjective as emotions clearly brings in the power dynamics about who should then be able to define these norms. Hutchison and Bleiker (2014, p. 508) state that “power relations play a key role in determining what can, cannot and should, and even must be said about the self and one’s emotions”. The power dimension in a relationship gives the powerful side the “right” to define what is to be felt. In an inclusion/exclusion context, Koschut has (2018b, p. 125) defined emotion norms as “the set-frame for appropriate... meanings of emotional performance among... members” of an international institution that provides “intersubjective patterns of standardized emotional expressions ... and thus constitute a particular community by setting it apart from others”. These expectations of demonstrating the appropriate emotional discourse are linked to an “emotional self-stereotyping” of a group as an accompanying

condition for belonging in a community, which is displayed in the language employed (Graham, 2014). Thus emotions serve social functions of inclusion and exclusion through “institutional and discursive mechanisms” (Koschut, 2018b, p. 126). This article defines “emotion norms of enlargement” within this in-between process whereby outsiders are transitioning to become insiders, and the powerful party, i.e. the EU determines what emotions it expects to feel (or to be felt by the candidates<sup>2</sup>) to belong together with a candidate country. This article aims at finding out what the EU expects to feel itself, in the enlargement process, to be able to conclude it successfully.

### ***Emotion norms and Discursive Institutionalism***

Hutchison and Bleiker (2014) state that “emotions work discursively” and in “invisible ways ... to enable (and also to limit) political circumstances” (p. 508). Bleiker and Hutchison (2008) also state that one of the most convenient and scientifically acceptable ways of studying emotions would be to study how they are communicated in speeches and declarations. It is the coordination discourse of the European Commission in the enlargement strategy papers and the communication discourse of the European Council conclusions that this article looks into.

Schmidt (2008) defines two aspects of discourse that institutions reveal: One is the coordination discourse of institutions that is revealed when policy makers engage with one another to construct policy. This article takes the European Commission’s enlargement strategy papers to display the coordination discourse of the European Commission to present how the situation in the WB is being perceived within a certain emotional setting and what policies are being “reasoned” in this context. The second type of institutional discourse is communicative discourse which is revealed when politicians explain the necessity, appropriateness and legitimacy of the decisions they have taken. In this article, the conclusions of the European Council meetings are taken as representing this communication discourse on how the Heads of State and Government in the EU have “justified” their response to the Commission’s coordination discourse. How these two discourses resonate through 2014–2020 show us the (limits of) influence of the Commission’s coordination discourse on the communication discourse of the European Council.

### ***From discourse to policy outcome***

Significant for the purposes of this paper is then the question to what extent does discourse determine policy? Diez (2001) questions whether policy is an outcome or a part of discourse and Reisigl (2018) and Milliken (1999) focuses on the constitutive power of discourse through constructing realities and operationalizing a “regime of truth”. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with the specific variant of discourse-historical approach is the chosen method of analysis in this paper. As Wodak defines the main significance of CDA is “its concern for power ... not only the notion of struggles for power, access and control, but also the intertextuality and recontextualization of competing discourses” (2009, p. 35). Reflecting on Diez’s (2014) differentiation with respect to the enabling and the delimiting impact of discourse on policy, this article argues that the discourse of the European Commission in the annual enlargement strategy papers sets the

emotional setting that determines the direction of future enlargement policy through enabling or delimiting the options of the European Council that create consequences that the objects of this policy area – candidate countries – have to live with.

The following steps have been taken for the analysis in the article: First, the Commission's enlargement strategy documents and the Council conclusions between 1997 and 2002 were hand-coded to establish what the emotion norms of a successful enlargement process were within the emotional setting of the late 1990s and early 2000s. The topoi on the emotion norms of enlargement are demonstrated within the European Commission's coordination discourse reasoning the enlargement and the communication discourse of the European Council justifying the enlargement. This analysis is followed by an outcome and "lessons learned" section for the European Commission, which becomes the context of the next enlargement round. The second group of documents was the European Commission's enlargement strategy documents on the Balkans between 2014 and 2020. Even though the European Commission continued publishing enlargement strategy papers after 2002, this article focuses on the time frame since the launch of the Juncker commission in 2014. The Juncker commission had announced that there would be no enlargement during their term of office. So the start of the term of office of this Commission was especially selected to be able to determine the influence of a negative discursive stance especially between 2015 and 2016 against an increasingly supportive discourse of 2018-2020, both within their own political contexts, and emotional settings. These documents have then been analysed with respect to the topoi in comparison to the Commission documents and European Council conclusions of the 1997–2002 period, not only regarding what was said, but also what was not said in these documents, thus reading the silences as Koschut (2018a) names it.<sup>3</sup>

While doing this, two aspects will be significant for the discourse historical approach: the relationship between the text and the context (Flowerdew, 2018), and the change of context through history (Reisigl, 2018, p. 52). As Flowerdew states there is a "dialectical relation between text and context" (2018, p. 165). Therefore, for each period analysed a wider context about the political atmosphere of the time will be added as a factor for comparison, together with a category of "lessons learned" from each period for the Commission's upcoming strategy documents. These two aspects will help "disclose the latent power dynamics, the historical sources and background of discursive events" (Wodak, 2009, p. 38).

### **Defining the "Emotion norms of the enlargement process"**

The EU itself has been launched as a peace project reconciling France and Germany. The Eastern enlargement of the EU was presented as the unification of Europe after the Cold War at the Luxembourg European Council in December 1997 by the words that this meeting

marks a moment of historic significance for the future of the Union and of Europe as a whole. With the launch of the enlargement process we see the dawn of a new era finally putting an end to the divisions of the past. Extending the European integration model to encompass the whole of the European continent is a pledge of future stability and prosperity. (European Council, 1997)

Peace, belonging together in a shared, stable and prosperous future, celebration of unity over division has been the main message of European integration.

Even when there were difficulties along the way such as “environmental pollution, fight against organised crime, corruption and illegal trafficking”, the EU maintained the language of collective effort toward overcoming these difficulties by stressing that “enlargement will enhance the international community’s ability to manage transnational issues” (European Commission, 1999). “Political and economic dynamism” (European Commission, 2000); “achieving political stability, economic progress and social justice”; making “Europe a safer place for its citizens ... (contributing) to conflict prevention and control in the wider world” (European Commission, 2001); all these topoi contribute to setting a positive emotional setting in the Commission’s progress reports that prepare the ground a strong communication discourse from the European Council.

The 2002 progress report of the Commission after which the European Council will conclude the accession negotiations with 10 candidate countries counts at least five different points as to the benefits of EU enlargement: “strengthen the unity of the European continent and help create an area of lasting peace and prosperity”; “the solidarity among current and future EU members ...”; “substantial economic benefits ...”; “The political stability ... rooted in common European values: democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and the protection of minorities. Causes of conflict, such as minority issues and border problems, are removed.”; “An enlarged Union will add weight to the EU’s external relations, in particular to the development of a common foreign and security policy. Improved co-operation between current and future Member States will help combat international crime and terrorism” (European Commission, 2002).

Problems that member states could have picked on like potential causes of conflict in the region, or other problems in the world that require the attention of EU are presented by the assertion that the EU is stronger now with the enlargement for resolving these issues. The above quotes show the detailed coordination discourse of the European Commission towards building this positive discursive environment. The below quote from the same document on the other hand is directed at the member states and their upcoming meeting at the Copenhagen European Council, which is expected to conclude the accession negotiations with 10 of the candidate countries. The coordination discourse of the Commission very explicitly tells the member states what is expected of them and how the European Commission has set the stage for their message:

The major role in explaining enlargement to citizens in candidate countries, as in the Member States, should be played by the national governments. The Commission supports this effort and has developed a communication strategy for that purpose. The clear message, which should be given by all actors responsible for the success of the process, is that enlargement is a win-win game, in which the re-unification of Europe will extend the area of peace, prosperity and security throughout the continent. (European Commission, 2002)

Consequently, the conclusions of the European Council of Copenhagen 2002 present the expected “appropriate” communicative discourse in similar language.

- “The European Council in Copenhagen in 1993 launched an ambitious process to overcome the legacy of conflict and division in Europe. Today marks an unprecedented and historic milestone in completing this process ... .”
- “This achievement testifies to the common determination of the peoples of Europe to come together in a Union that has become the driving force for peace, democracy, stability and prosperity on our continent. As fully fledged members of a Union based on solidarity, these states will play a full role in shaping the further development of the European project ... .”
- “The current enlargement provides the basis for a Union with strong prospects for sustainable growth and an important role to play in consolidating stability, peace and democracy in Europe and beyond.” (European Council, 2002)

As summarized and visualized in [Table 1](#), emotional setting for a successful enlargement outcome is present in all of the Commission enlargement strategy documents. Even the issues that could be seen as problems are framed as being resolved more effectively within the enlargement process. The topoi of both of the coordination discourse of the Commission and the communication discourse of the European Council show that that the Central and Eastern European countries are not seen as former members of a rival bloc anymore, nor as sources of instability or threat against European security. Similarly, Sekulic (2020) says these documents represent EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe as “a reparation and normalization process, while the Iron Curtain, dividing the progressive democratic Europe from the communist one is implicitly seen as a historical exception” (p. 90). Looking also at earlier enlargements, Herranz-Surrallés (2012, p. 391) demonstrates that the responsibility of the European Union for “peace, stability, liberty and democracy” in Europe are stressed again and again through decades of enlargement.

**Table 1.** The 2004 enlargement process.

**Context – Post-Cold War instability:**

- Concern about political and economic transition from communism to market economy and from single party rule to democracy.
- Concerns about potential of wars in Eastern Europe due to ethnic minorities and territorial claims.

Official documents 1997–2002	Positive topoi	Topoi on threat perceptions
Commission documents 1998–2002	Belonging together (unity of Europe). Common values, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights. Stronger Europe in the world. Overcoming past injustices (division of Europe). Win-win outcome.	Need for protection of minorities (granted). Macro-economic risks, Corruption, Nuclear safety, (addressed better through alignment with acquis)
European Council Conclusions 1997–2002	Overcoming divisions of the past. Extension of European integration. Success of enlargement policy. Peace, stability, democracy and prosperity in Europe. Historic milestone.	Causes of conflict such as protection of minority rights (resolved with enlargement). International instability, terrorism, organized crime to be tackled more strongly.

**Lessons learned for the Commission:**

- Significance of readiness of candidates for negotiations. Benchmark system to be introduced into the new accession negotiations with the WB candidates and Turkey.
- Launch of Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) for WB.

Source: Author’s own compilation.



Against this background, this article takes the topoi defined in this section as representative of the emotion norms of enlargement and looks into the enlargement strategy documents of the European Commission towards Western Balkans since 2014, when the Juncker Commission announced that there would be no enlargement within their term (Euractiv, 2014) and did not include enlargement policy within their top 10 priorities (European Commission, 2015b). It will look into how the rather different coordination discourses of the European Commission in this period are reflected onto the European Council's communication discourse, facilitating progress only when both of these discourses align with the "emotion norms of enlargement".

## **The Case of Western Balkan Enlargement: the darkest hour of enlargement policy**

The Western Balkan countries of the time were given a promise of support for their European perspectives at the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003 (European Commission, 2003). As of 2021, the pre-accession process is still ongoing for these states, with the exception of Croatia, which became a member in 2013. Kosovo and Bosnia Hercegovina are still not recognized as candidates but as "potential candidates". DG NEAR was created by the incoming Juncker Commission in 2014 through the merger of European Neighbourhood Policy into the agenda of the Enlargement DG. Despite the recent revitalization of the enlargement process, the institutional structure remains the same in the von der Leyen Commission. The European Commission has also changed its approach to enlargement several times, namely in 2014, 2018 and 2020, the latest two being called a "credible" enlargement perspective/accession process, with the "credibility" of the process constantly being emphasized in almost all Commission documents since 2014.

2014 and 2015 Strategy Papers outline the Juncker Commission's starting approach: The region deserves attention due to its problems, and a pragmatic approach is necessary. The "fundamentals first" approach is further strengthened by an accompanying priority on "public administration reform" (European Commission, 2014). This region is too unstable and problematic to succeed in the enlargement process in the next five years, but stable enough so that refugees coming to Europe from these countries can be returned to them. This approach has enabled the EU to designate these countries as safe countries (European Commission, 2015c) and has underlined the importance of the region to secure EU's external borders. Hence the reasoning in the Commission that the enlargement process should enhance the democratic and state reform process in these countries: "Enlargement can only be of benefit to the EU and to partner countries if there is genuine sustainable reform" (European Commission, 2015a, p. 4).

The picture of the region in the Commission's discourse gets worse in 2016. Enlargement Strategy Paper of 2016 mentions "terrorism and radicalisation"; "the phenomenon of fighters from both the EU and enlargement countries ..."; "more needs to be done to counter radicalisation in the countries..." "the migration crisis...": "the effective closure of the Western Balkan route ..."; "lack of attractive job opportunities domestically is pushing many people to migrate ..." (European Commission, 2016). This statement of facts leads the European Commission to underline the utility of the enlargement process to anchor some perspective for future stability in the region by stating "the EU's enlargement policy continues to be strategic investment in peace, security, prosperity and

stability in Europe ...”; “stabilisation through such transformation is in the EU’s own interest ...”: “Cooperation with Turkey and the Western Balkans has been an element in handling the migration crisis with several countries playing a constructive role” (European Commission, 2016).

The frequent mentioning of the migration crisis, the Balkan route and radicalization in the region in the Commission’s strategy paper often reminds the policy makers about the omnipresence of this threat in this region and results in the “crowding out” of the European commitment, identity, or values of these countries in such a report. Within this context, WB enlargement is not an emotionally driven commitment to candidate countries to make good the past injustices or political exclusion. It is disclosed as a strategic choice to escape the evils that may spread from the EU’s backyard. On this background of imminent threat perception from the region, the 2016 enlargement strategy paper states that “public support for future enlargements will depend on the degree of preparedness of candidate countries” (European Commission, 2016), leaving the responsibility of any possible positive remark on their achievements, which is to be assessed by the European Commission, itself. The 2016 Eurobarometer results show that at a time where public opinion is mentioned by the Commission, the public approval rating of enlargement as a policy area has a negative approval rate with 37% for and 52% against, the against camp reaching 71% in some member states (Eurobarometer, 2016, p. 4). Table 2 shows the distribution of positive and negative topoi in the Commission’s coordinative discourse, exacerbated by the wider context, which is reflected on only through a negative communicative discourse on the region by the European Council, and a total absence of any positive remarks on the European perspective of the region.

Even though issues like democracy, corruption, organized crime, and high youth unemployment were still on the Commission’s agenda regarding this region by 2017, the wider atmosphere regarding the Western Balkans started to become more positive. There are several turning points within this year. The 2017 State of the European

**Table 2.** Western Balkans 2015-2016.

<b>Context – Migration Crisis</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salience of the closure of the Western Balkan route of migration into the EU.</li> <li>• Counter radicalization policies necessary.</li> <li>• Growing Influence of rival forces like Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia</li> </ul>		
Official documents 2014–2016	Positive topoi-	Topoi on threat perceptions
Commission documents 2015–2016	Migration route closed. Positive impact of Berlin Process for regional cooperation. New enlargement package in Spring 2018.	Mass migration into the EU, necessity to strengthen Europe’s borders. Growing influence of radical Islam in WB. Corruption, organized crime, state capture. Public support to be gained by success of WB countries themselves. No responsibility of EU or member states to gain public support of this policy area.
European Council Conclusions		No mention of enlargement in 2015–2016 European Council meetings, except occasionally the Western Balkan route, focus on migration, fight against terror.
<b>Lessons learned for the Commission:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundamentals first approach sustained to underline importance of democracy and rule of law in the region.</li> <li>• Need for a Credible Enlargement Process</li> </ul>		

Source: Author’s own compilation.

Union speech by President Juncker stated that the EU had to maintain a credible enlargement perspective for Western Balkans (European Commission, 2017). The fact that the Bulgarian Council Presidency between January and June 2018 also wanted to concentrate on the EU perspective of the Western Balkans, urging to create a new communication discourse on this issue (Republic of Bulgaria, 2018), contributed to a more positive tone from the Commission by inducing an appropriate coordination discourse. Finally, a change of government in Macedonia for a more democratic candidate and a commitment to EU membership (Deutsche Welle, 2017) has also raised expectations in the region. Diminishing salience of migration from the region and of counter-terrorism efforts, coupled with the high profile of the region for European security, contributed to the emergence of a new context that enabled the revitalization of the enlargement process.

### **The Case of Western Balkan Enlargement: some light at the end of the tunnel**

The new enlargement package released in Spring 2018, also titled “a credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans”, started with a more positive language that emphasized the WB as part of Europe, geographically surrounded by EU member states. Mention was made of its common heritage, history and a future defined by shared opportunities and challenges, underlining the EU’s support to the region as an integral part of Europe since the 2003 Thessaloniki European Council (European Commission, 2018). This new start is clearly a turn towards a discourse based on the “emotion norms of enlargement”, defined at the start of this article, despite the fact that none of the problems mentioned in the previous reports had disappeared or were resolved.

This strategy document underlines both European interests and European values in its promotion of the desired (also required) credibility of the enlargement process in the Western Balkan region. Its emphasis is very much on the promotion of human rights, and on the strengthening of economic and state structures in the region to enable these countries to comply with EU benchmarks in accession negotiations (European Commission, 2018). The EU-WB summit in Sofia in May accompanied the release of this document and was hosted by the Bulgarian Council Presidency. It “reaffirmed (the EU’s) unequivocal support for the European perspective of Western Balkans”, showing that the change of language by the European Commission enabled further commitment from the candidates and member states (Council of the European Union, 2018).

European Commission’s (2019) strategy document marks progress by Western Balkan countries and proposes the opening of negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, following its resolution of the almost three-decade-long name dispute with Greece and signing of a treaty on good neighbourly relations with Bulgaria. The Commission states,

This welcome progress achieved now calls for the Union’s concrete and fast action. The EU has the opportunity, and a strong self-interest, to lock-in long term positive momentum across the region. The Union must live up to its commitments and give credit where credit is due. Failure to reward objective progress by moving to the next state of the European path would damage the EU’s credibility throughout the region and beyond. (European Commission, 2019, p. 2)

This quote shows that the emotional setting matches the “emotion norm of the enlargement process”, and the Commission shows a strong support for the enlargement process to progress and also warns the European Council that any failure to start accession negotiations with North Macedonia would damage the process. There is inherent concern on the side of the Commission whether member states in the Council meeting would show the expected behaviour from them. Especially this Communication from the Commission shows how the European Commission’s coordination discourse sets expectations from the member states and not only from the candidate countries. This discourse overturns the tide from the 2016 communication where “the performance of the candidate countries was to build confidence among the publics of member states” to “the political commitment of member states” becoming a “determinant of the European commitment of Western Balkan countries”. There is just one additional threat perception in this document than previously existed and this is the addition of China and its investments in the region. The Commission mentions growing Chinese investments in the region that go “against EU rules of public procurement”, increasing public indebtedness in the region and bearing the risk of “transfer of control over strategic assets and resources” to China (European Commission, 2019, p. 8). Nevertheless, neither the Council in June nor the European Council meeting in October 2019 gave a green light to the opening of negotiations that the Commission proposed, showing the limits of the Commission’s discourse on influencing the member states’ preferences (Council of the European Union, 2019; European Council, 2019). The French veto on the opening of negotiations was seen as endangering the position and the credibility of the EU in the region not only in the eyes of the people of Western Balkans but also with respect to the EU’s rivals in the region (Fouéré, 2019).

In response, the European Commission has produced two documents, one in February (European Commission, 2020a) and one in October 2020 (European Commission, 2020b). The one published in February 2020 was a response to President Macron’s request for a reform of the enlargement process and is titled “Enhancing the accession process” and states that a

- “commitment from the EU member states to share a common future with the Western Balkans as full members of the Union is a significant political ... undertaking”,
- “It is time to put the political nature of the process front and centre and ensure stronger steering and high-level engagement from the member states” (European Commission, 2020a, p. 3),

which shows that this is one of the main problems in the enlargement process that needs to be addressed and is planned to be remedied by the further involvement at “high level engagement of member states”, which not only puts the responsibility of commitment now on the shoulders of the member states (Wunsch et al., 2019), but also potentially risks nationalization of the enlargement process than it already was.<sup>4</sup>

As summarized in Table 3, the Commission’s recommendation of opening the accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia finally bore fruit with the Council’s decision in March 2020 to start accession talks with Northern Macedonia and Albania – with conditions attached for Albania to be fulfilled – before the adoption of the negotiation framework document by the Council (Council of the European Union, 2020a).

**Table 3.** Western Balkans 2018–2020**Context - EU Credibility in the Western Balkans:**

- Growing Influence of rival forces like Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, now coupled with that of China.
- Commitment of the new geopolitical Commission of von der Leyen to zone of influence in Western Balkans.

Official Documents 2018–2020	Positive topoi	Topoi on threat perceptions
Commission documents 2018–2020	Shared European values Common challenges. Reconciliation of Northern Macedonia with neighbours. EU's commitment to overcoming the past.	Fundamentals first still not in place. Previous problems of corruption, state capture still in place. Growing influence of rival powers
Council/European Council Conclusions	Commitment to enlargement in Sofia Declaration 2018, Opening of Accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania in 2020. Zagreb Declaration, 2020 overcoming in the legacy of the past.	Failure to take decisive decision in 2019.

**Lessons learned for the Commission:**

- Need for a Credible Enlargement Process.
- Fundamentals first approach even more significant due to democratic backsliding in the EU.
- Stronger commitment of member states is crucial for any coordination discourse to succeed.

Source: Authors own compilation

The May 2020 EU-WB summit and the Zagreb Summit Declaration by the EU mentions Northern Macedonia's Treaty on Good Neighbourly relations with Bulgaria and Prespa Agreement with Greece and the appointment of an EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue as efforts towards finding “binding solutions to partners’ bilateral disputes and issues rooted in the legacy of the past” (Council of the European Union, 2020b, p. 3) which bring the Western Balkan enlargement policy to finally talk about “overcoming the past”, which is the crux of the European integration project.

## Conclusion

This article has shown the existence of and defined the emotion norms of the EU enlargement policy (from the EU side) toward the Western Balkans through CDA with a discourse-historical approach. It has demonstrated the (limits of) influence of the coordination discourse of the European Commission in determining the emotional setting of the enlargement policy, which is subsequently reflected on in the communication discourse of the European Council. The article has firstly displayed that the previous successful round of enlargement towards the Central and Eastern European countries were based on the topoi of “unification of Europe”, “solidarity”, “shared values/interests”, “perception of threat/instability”, “inclusion in the definition of Europe”, and “overcoming past injustices”. These topoi collectively constituted the emotion norms of enlargement, and showed that for the enlargement process to progress, European Commission's coordination discourse in its strategy papers and the communication discourse of the European Council conclusions should match these topoi.

Taking the 2004 enlargement as the exemplary case on which the definition of emotion norms of enlargement is based, this article then looked at the case of Western

Balkan enlargement since 2014, when the incoming Juncker Commission declared that no new enlargement would take place during their mandate. To facilitate its analysis, the article has divided this period into two: 2014–2016 as the darkest hour of enlargement policy and 2018–2020 as the light at the end of the tunnel.

The period from 2014 to 2016 is seen as the darkest hour of enlargement policy, during which the European Commission's reports as well as the Council and European Council meetings were not talking about enlargement at all, but rather focusing on the dangers emanating from this region like mass migration, radicalization, growth of rival influence from Russia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the region. This context is directly reflected onto the discourse of these texts, where no other topoi were likely to exit. All documents analysed from these years prove the determining force of context on texts adopted by the EU institutions.

The change in the emotional setting of the European Commission's discourse in strategy documents is enabled through the change of context from 2017. These positive changes in the context found its reflection in the coordination discourse of the European Commission as it launched a new WB strategy from 2018 on. From then on, the article finds that the European Commission adopts a very strong discourse on the success needing its reward and that the responsibility lying with the European Union to deliver its promises. The initial failure of the European Commission to force the member states to keep their word shows the limits of the power of the discourse of the European Commission, not being able to push the European Council into policies they do not desire to pursue. The rapid response of the European Commission to pick up the ball, from where President Macron dropped with his demand for a reform of the accession process, shows that once the European Commission has the will to do so, it can further enforce a positive emotional setting through its coordination discourse to pursue the promotion of enlargement policy. The last part of the analysis section on 2018–2020 shows us what these arguments are: commitment to overcoming the legacy of the past, European solidarity, delivering on responsibilities, belief in a shared political European project, which turn out to be not too different from the emotion norms of the 2004 enlargement round.

What is important to underline in this outcome is that the Commission's coordination discourse is powerful with respect to initiating policies. It is even more powerful in setting the limits to policies it is reluctant to pursue – as seen at the start of the Juncker Commission – but limited in its powers to force the European Council. It is also strictly dependent on context as any discourse is.

This article has looked at the EU's enlargement policy towards the WB through the perspective of the EU, which is the main limitation for the findings of this research. The national context<sup>5</sup> within each candidate state may have also triggered certain responses from the Commission and may have contributed to a different contextualization of the EU-WB relationship in candidate countries.<sup>6</sup> Further research should look into the dynamics of interplay between the national context and national discourses in candidate countries and discourses adopted by the EU. It is very likely that there are further “emotion norms of enlargement” from the perspective of candidate countries. This article has only demonstrated those emotion norms required by the EU from its own side of the relationship.

## Notes

1. For a brief summary, see the Introduction of this Forum.
2. For an analysis of how the EU member states decided on what the candidate countries should feel, see Koschut (2018c).
3. Koschut explains “‘reading the silence’, as ‘which emotional terms and connotations are avoided in which contexts and towards which subjects’” (2018a, 285). In the analysis of this article, the silence is the absence of the topoi on emotion norms that facilitated the 2004 enlargement in the coordination and communication discourses of the European Commission and European Council, respectively.
4. For nationalization of EU enlargement debate see Hillion (2010) and Wunsch (2017).
5. For a comparative study on the impact of national identities on the process of accession see Subotic (2011)
6. For an overview of anti-EU sentiments and anti-democratic tendencies in WB see Damjanovski, Lavrič, and Naterer (2020) and Kmezić (2020).

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