

Macedonia's Stalled Bid for EU Membership: Is the Solution in Sight?

Olivera Kostoska¹

Abstract: *The narrative for Macedonia's EU accession efforts is basically about a stalled process for the best part of the last years. Although the Commission has recommended starting accession talks for several years in a row, Greek objections blocked progress, however, just as they did at the Bucharest NATO summit when Greece prevented Macedonia from joining NATO. In June 2018, following the withdrawal of the Greek veto as a part of the agreement to change the country's name to the Republic of North Macedonia, the European ministers have decided that Macedonia's EU accession talks will start in June 2019, provided a string of conditions are met. While some Member States expressed concerns about corruption and the rule of law in Macedonia (and Albania), the others have decided to support expansion for geopolitical reasons and to counter the rising Russian and Chinese influence in the Western Balkans. The aim of this paper is to critically evaluate the credibility of the EU enlargement process and the overall state of play in the formal accession of Macedonia including, for example, the progress in resolving a decades-old name dispute, and other indicators in alignment with the overall acquis and performance in terms of trade integration.*

Keywords: *Macedonia, EU, Enlargement, accession talks, acquis, trade integration*

1. Introduction: What's in a name of Macedonia?

The Western Balkan countries share a common heritage and history with the peoples of EU Member States and a future defined by shared challenges and opportunities. In the aftermath of post-communist transitions, through which most Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries embarked on a process of thorough economic and political reform and structural change, the Balkans continued to be marked by a series of ethnic conflicts, succession wars and circles of instability. The region's peace and prosperity are an important goal for the EU, whilst the European perspective of the Western Balkans remains a foremost priority to achieving this goal. In order to specify the requirements for progress of the South Eastern Europe (SEE or later, the

¹ **Olivera Kostoska** received her PhD degree in Economics from the Faculty of Economics – Prilep at the “St. Kliment Ohridski” University – Bitola, Macedonia. She has been at the Faculty of Economics – Prilep since 2002, where she is currently an associate professor. Her primary research interests include international trade and investment, productivity, innovation and European integration. She has published more than 40 papers in journals and refereed conference proceedings and has lectured widely on these topics. She has also served as a program committee member and reviewer for a number of conferences and participated in several research projects. E-mail: olivera.kostoska@uklo.edu.mk.