
Croatia and the Western Balkans in the process of Europeanization

MIREES' open lecture

In the framework of the Workshops of the LM MIREES, the students were given an opportunity to meet and discuss with His Excellency Damir Grubiša, ambassador of the Croatian Republic in Italy, professor of comparative politics and European Institutions at the Zagreb University.

Professor Grubiša talked about the process of Europeanization affecting Croatia and the Western Balkans. He posed the question of what the process of Europeanization meant for Croatia. The beginning of this process he tied to the Strategy for the Balkans in 1997 launched by the EU; then he argued that it was an error accepting Greece as a member in 1991. In his opinion Greece was not mature, the consequence of this being current crisis in Greece. Returning to the strategy of being a member of EU - the first condition was to be a multiparty democracy, having a clear separation of powers: legislative, executive and judiciary. This is still the crucial point for the countries of the Western Balkans. Second condition concerned the economic criteria such as: freedom of enterprise, and freedom of private owners – therefore, a privatization and liberalization of the economy. The third step was and still is the so called “*acquis communautaire*”: 85000 pages of legal documents to be adopted as a regulation in the country’s legal system. It was a big task for the ten countries accepted in the first big enlargement after the fall of communism in 2004. With these ten countries, the first “big bang” was concluded. For the remaining countries, the EU adopted the strategy for the Balkans that meant a gradual adaptation the EU methods.

Nevertheless in 2003 at the Thessaloniki summit for the membership to the Union, the strategy of the Union was to accept any country for an individual accession and furthermore, a new flexible approach had to be applied. In this framework, the transition of Croatia was very difficult. The authoritarian regime of Tudjman was replaced in 1999. It is important to say that his government did consider Croatia as a “Central European” country. However with the death of Tudjman the orientation towards Central Europe ended, and practically Croatia returned to be what it really is: a country at the crossroad of three traditions, including the Balkan one. In 2000, Croatia understood its future, which meant being a country that has to collaborate and cooperate with its neighbors. The negotiations

for the accession to the EU started in 2005 and ended in 2011, the process was specially tailored for Croatia. While the first “big bang” countries had to negotiate thirty-one chapters of the *acquis communaires*, Croatia had to negotiate thirty-five. After the fall of communism, the post-communist countries decided to create the legal framework internally as the EU countries. Croatia didn't do this and didn't accept to enter the Visegrad countries, and so did not enter to the Central European free trade market.

A practical example of how Croatia had to adopt its laws can be seen on the example of the fight against the corruption in the country. The EU wanted Croatia to deliver an anti-corruption strategy. Croatia prepared a project in 2006 but the EU rejected it saying that it was a wonderful plan but too generic. The same was for the project of 2008 this time the motivations were the unclear targets to strike. Finally, Croatia delivered a plan that was considered valid. The result of this plan was that in 2009 the prime minister had to resign and was condemned to 10 years in prison for corruption. This was an effective example of how the EU conditions the decision making. Therefore Croatia accepted the 85000 pages of legislature and implemented them in its own legal framework. This clashed with the financial crisis that affected the Croatian economy. However Croatia decided to overcome the Balkan political tradition by accepting the process of Europeanization, and introducing what professor Grubisa analyzed as de-balkanization.

Professor Grubisa introduced the concept of Balkanization: a political term created at the beginning in the 20th century that describes a negative process of territorial fragmentation and political disintegration of political empires. This process became a link to intolerance, nationalism, ethnic conflicts and wars, economic stagnation, authoritarianism, clientelism and corruption. On the other hand, to de-balkanize is to accept European values and to implement them. New forms of policy making have to be introduced i.e. public policies have to underpin the basic values of the EU. According to him, Copernican revolution is necessary for the Western Balkans - the EU has to be thought as a laboratory of new systems to implement and to develop. The process of de-balkanization started with Thessaloniki in 2003. However it has been stopped by the fatigue of enlargement in 2007 with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria and the wave of migrants that arrived to the western European countries. People and governments were not very willing to pursue further enlargement. Recently, the president of the European commission Jean-Claude Juncker declared that, due to the fatigue, the EU has to wait until 2020 for any further enlargements. He received criticism from the European Parliament. These objections were linked to the thought of Paul-Henri Spaak who said that EU must go forward in enlargement and thus in deepening (more unity) and widening (spreading values) what has already been created. More political, cultural and economic integration is the goal to achieve. Nevertheless, European governments are not willing to overcome the nation state principle.

Professor Grubisa concluded saying that the EU commission is not showing the energy of the past and that the Europe has to be aware of the complexity of the Western Balkans and to integrate them in the Union, avoiding the spread of negative nationalism. It has to be

made as a specially tailored process. “New Balkan Big Bang should be the new goal of the EU. Main problems are the structural reforms and more democratization processes have to be implemented in the Balkan countries. Dayton peace agreement should be replaced by a constitution that would make Bosnia a democratic country”. He suggested finally a third approach: “the Balkan Big Bang”.

The atmosphere was very enthusiastic as professor Grubisa offered a very clear and important analysis of what has been done in the process of Croatia’s EU accession and what remains to be done. Finally, several students raised questions about the political situation in the region, and professor Grubisa concluded by giving advice on what should be done on the part of the decision makers. This Open lecture was very important not only for the students that are specializing in the Balkan area, but also for others especially those interested in the issues of European security and integration.

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