

## **EU's copenhagen political criteria and the political culture of the western balkan countries: are they compatible?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The European Union considers the establishment of a stable democratic system as a precondition for the EU membership. Political culture of a country is regarded as one of the most important determinants of the consolidation of a democratic political regime in that country. This paper looks at the question of how compatible are the political cultures of the Western Balkan countries with democratic values and in turn with the EU's Copenhagen political criteria. The hypothesis that a a democratic political system requires a democratic political culture has been tested. The individual survey data from the World Values Survey have been analyzed in the paper. Western Balkan political cultures are found to be compatible with democracy in some respects and not to be compatible in some others. However, some countries which seem to have the least demoratic political culture such as Macedonia achieved more progress on democratization compared to other countries which had more democratic political cultures that that of Macedonia.

### **Introduction**

Western Balkan countries strive for the European Union membership. In the process of the EU membership, they have to meet the Copehnagen political criteria in order to become a full member of the Union. However, the

countries of Western Balkans are said to have a different political culture from the other East European countries. Some observers even argued that these countries show the characteristics of Asian countries and cultures different and less democratic than the cultures of European countries. One implication of a such an argument is that these countries are culturally distinct and inherently undemocratic therefore cannot establish stable democracies required by the Copenhagen political criteria. For example Bebler argues that since this region has been very unstable throughout history, it is very different from the northern half of former Eastern Europe. Rather, western Balkans is 'similar in its make-up to the geopolitical fault line stretching from Eastern Turkey all the way to China. Not incidentally, Z. Brzezinski called this fault line the "Asian Balkans" (Bebler, 2008, 7).' Further he asserts that the countries of this region has serious political and security problems including the existence of intolerance, pathological nationalism and xenophobia;- underdeveloped democratic political culture, the lacking art of compromise' (Bebler, 2008, 8). Arguably, 'the Western Balkans represent the most difficult set of prospective accession countries so far encountered by the EU' (Pridham, 2008). The EU Commission recognizes these difficulties. According to a EU commission communication to the European Parliament and the Council: 'Basic issues of state building, good governance, administrative and judicial reform, rule of law including the fight against corruption and organized crime, reconciliation, socioeconomic development, and civil society development, are key reform priorities for the Western Balkans (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Brussels, 5.3.2008, COM(2008) 127 final).

This paper looks at the political cultures of the Western Balkan countries in the second half of the 1990s and at the beginning of this century. It tries to determine if these countries have a democratic or undemocratic political culture. The paper further looks at the level of demoratization in these countries and seek to understand whether undemocratic political cultures hindered the establishment of democracy in some of the Western Balkan countries.

## **Preconditions for Democracy and the Importance of Political Culture**

The transition to democracy and the consolidation of a democratic system depend on a number of factors in a country. Apart from preconditions concerning economic -social development, and a nation's wealth, the content of political culture of a country is also regarded as a precondition for democracy. Political culture is the system of values and beliefs that defines the context and the meaning of political action (Sorensen, 1993, s. 26). Political culture could be related to larger set of values in society such as religious values. For example, Lipset has long been asserted that political culture in dominantly protestant countries is more conducive to democracy than political cultures of Catholic or Islamic countries (Lipset, 1996). According to Fukuyama, culture is the most important level on which the establishment of democratic political system in a country must occur in order for it to be consolidated. He argues that cultural factors operates at the deepest level affecting ideological, institutional and civil societal levels. Although democracy could be consolidated ideologically, institutionally and at the level of civil society, the culture of a country can be the most resistant to democratic consolidation. From this brief discussion the importance of political culture on the process of democratization, we can propose an hypothesis about the process of democratization in Western Balkan countries.

*Hypothesis:* Those Western Balkan countries which has the least democratic political culture will be the least democratically developed countries in terms of the establishment of democratic institutions and democratic processes.

### **Data and Operationalization**

The data from 1994-99 and 1999-2004 World Values Surveys will be used for this study. These survey were carried out national teams in every country sponsored by the University Michigan's World Values Survey center.

A country has been regarded as having a more democratic political culture if this country scored higher on a number of survey questions including support for democracy, political tolerance, active membership in

civil societal organizations. The level of democratization in these countries will be measured in terms of their progress on the EU's Copenhagen political criteria. The EU's Copenhagen political criteria requires that a candidate country secure the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. A country's progress on these criteria is usually accepted as the criteria for recognizing this country as a candidate country and also for opening the accession negotiations with these countries.

## **Political Cultures of Western Balkan Regimes and Democratization**

### **Existence of a Political Society**

The establishment of functioning and legitimate state structure has been regarded as the most important precondition for democracy. Therefore, the degree to which the public's of the Western Balkan countries see the state they live in as legitimate is important first step in these countries' democratization. This is an issue about which many of the western Balkan countries have significant problems. Since most of these countries are relatively new countries established in the process of the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, there could be some problems in terms of these states' collective identity and the constitutional organization. It is important to understand to the degree to which these states achieved a collective political identity. The existence of a political society is seen as crucial for the establishment of a democracy in a country (Rustow, 1970). Therefore, almost all members of a society should view themselves as members of the same political body or the state for a stable democracy to exist. The level of nationalism and patriotism in a society could indicate the degree of its members emotional attachment to the polity. The nationalism is seen here as a positive force uniting the members of a society not the kind of ethnic or micro nationalism as a force of division in society.

**Table 1. % of respondents very proud and quite proud of their nationality and % of respondents willing to fight for their country.**

	Albania		Bosnia		Croatia		Macedonia		Montenegro		Serbia		Srpska	
	1998	2002	1998	2001	1996	1999	1998	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001	1998	2001
Proud of nationality	84,5	92,4	87,8	80,5	79,8	86,3	69,1	78,3	70,0	41,6	70,9	68,2	78	33,0
Willing to fight for country	56,4	54,6	73,9	63,5	66,6	70,6	69,2	71,8	76,7	47,6	70,8	55,0	64,0	56,2

Table 1 shows the percentages of respondents in each western Balkan country who are proud of their nationality and who are willing to fight for their country. These two survey questions could indicate respondents' loyalty to their political societies. Albanians are the most proud of their nationality while Serbians are the least proud of their nationality. While the respondents' attachment to political society remain stable in some countries such as Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia, there are considerable changes in time in terms of the percentage who are proud of their nationality in some countries such as Montenegro and the republic of Srpska. There occurred a significant decrease in the percentage of respondents who are proud of their nationality in the latter countries between 1998 and 2001. It can be argued that political societies in these countries are fragile in respect to the loyalty of individuals to the state. Although they are the most proud of their nationality, the Albanians are the least willing to fight for their country. It could be concluded that the Albanian national identity is strong regardless of a political society. There is not necessarily a relationship between being proud of for one's Albanian identity and to fight for the Albanian state.

### **Support for Democracy and other Types of Regimes:**

**Table 2. Support fo democracy and other type of regimes in Western Balkan Countries.**

	Albania		Bosnia		Croatia		Macedonia		Montenegro		Serbia		Srpska	
	1998	2002	1998	2001	1996	1999	1998	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001	1998	2001
Having army rule	71,8	10,5	14,5	8,0	13,9	5,3	8,8	22,6	8,8	6,0	8,8	9,2	39,5	9,2
Having a Str. Leader	34,8	15,6	44,4	32,6	28,8	11,5	52,2	65,7	27,7	12,9	27,7	17,7	59,8	29,2
Having Experts	77,2	73,7	81,1	66,5	77,2	80,0	65,2	74,4	80,0	77,5	77,1	78,3	58,8	66,2
Having a democratic pol. Sys.	94,3	91,7	91,5	89,9	95,4	92,7	71,7	82,2	82,9	85,3	77,2	82,9	88,5	70,0
Democracy better	88,7	88,9	89,4	89,4	90,0	88,7	62,4	71,5	84,2	80,6	77,0	74,7	71,5	73,0
Satisf. Dem Developm.		26,3		34,6		16,6		17,2		28,9		40,9		30,2
Dem. Indecisive	29,7	25,0	34,4	35,0	40,0	23,2	41	34,5	38,3	21,8	39,5	41,2	44,2	53,5

Democracy can only be stable if a majority of a country's population regard it as better than any other political regimes. The support for democracy and other type of regimes in Western Balkan countries therefore can be indicative of the prospects of democracy in these countries. Richard Rose argued that democracy should at least be viewed a better form of regime compared to other alternative regime types in order for it to take root in a country (Rose et. al. 1998). A significant percentage of respondents in western Balkan countries think that democracy is a better political regime even though it has some problems. Only in Macedonia and in the Republic of Srpska, the support for democracy is lower than 80 percent. Even though the populations of Western Balkan countries overwhelmingly support for democracy, they do not express satisfaction with the development of democracy in their countries. Macedonian and Croatian publics are the least satisfied in this respect. A significant proportion of the respondents in each country also state that democracies are indecisive and have too much squabbling. The population of the Republic of Srpska has the largest percentage of the respondents viewing democracy as indecisive. Serbian, Macedonian and Bosnian publics follow the republic of Srpska population in this respect.

In general, less than 10 percent of the populations of the Western Balkan countries think that having a political system ruled by the army is very or fairly good. Only exceptions are Albania, Srpska and Bosnia in the 1998 survey and the Macedonian population in the 2001 survey, 22 percent of whom think that having a political system ruled by the army is very or fairly good. Macedonian, the republic of Srpska and Bosnian populations again

have the largest percentages of respondents who think that having a political system ruled by a strong leader is very or fairly good. 65,5 percent of the respondents in Macedonia favored a political system ruled by a strong leader in the 2002 survey. 71,1 percent support for the army rule in Albania should be evaluated in the light of the anarchical condition of political system in this country in 1997. Albania was experiencing an anarchical political and economic situation as the state protected economic pyramid schemes collapsed in 1997. Even army barracks and police stations were looted and most people acquired arms. People were extremely dissatisfied with the government and looked for other alternatives that could provide order and security.

The most serious competitor to democratic regime in the Western Balkan countries is the rule by the experts. A significant percentage of the respondents in each country think that having a political system ruled by the experts is very or fairly good. The expert rule is the most desired in Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. It could be concluded that economic problems associated with the transition from communist regimes to free market system convinced the publics of these countries that the economies of their countries could be better run by experts rather than indecisive and squabbling politicians. Still, a significant proportion of the respondents in each country think that even though democracy has some problems it is better than other political regimes. Macedonian public however is the least likely to state that democracy is better than its alternatives. Serbian and the Republic of Srpska populations follow the Macedonian public in this respect. Otherwise almost 90 percent of the respondents in other countries think that democracy is a better regime than others. The Croatian and the macedonian respondents are the least satisfied with the development of democracy in their countries.

### System Support: Trust in Institutions, people and the system

**Table 3. Trust in national and international institutions and people** (Percentage of respondents who have great deal and quite a lot trust)

	Albania		Bosnia		Croatia		Macedonia		Montenegro		Serbia		Srpska	
	1998	2002	1998	2001	1996	1999	1998	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001	1998	2001
Confidence in the army	56,8	53,3	89,0	69,2	77,3	63,9	35,7	53,8	57,5	47,9	59,9	72,4	80,5	41,2
Confidence in the Parties	22,2	28,6	41,8	16,0	21,1		10,7	9,3	21,2	23,9	15,9	13,1	53,0	11,2
Confidence in parliament	56,3	43,7	52,5	21,9	39,9	21,9	14,7	6,9	41,2	30,8	29,1	20,9	59,5	15,8
Confidence in civil service	16,2	35,0	59,4	33,2	35,5	34,0	17,7	16,4	44,6	25,7	29,5	25,3	58,8	21,0
Confidence in the EU	81,1	80,0	72,5	54,4	29,9		33,3	31,6	34,6	46,9	20,5	23,8	41,8	32,2
Most people can be trusted	24,3	23,2	24,8	24,8	22,8	17,9	7,5	13,1	30,4	32,9	28,4	18,3	31,2	13,2
Justice system	57		67,4		49,6		22,6		55,8		43,3		73,5	
The police	71,9	64,3	83,2	51,5	59,4	52,6	25,3	50,4	52,1	37,9	43,1	45,9	69,5	53,5
political system as it was before	90,6	82,9	51,4	39,0	78,6	72,8	47,9	43,2	31,2	67,4	45,2	81,3	61,3	33,5
Current system	57,0	64,4	63,2	76,1	54,6	84,2	76,4	87,5	50,8		77,3		76,2	81,2
Corruption	30,7		19,9		19,9		12,1		45,0		30,8		28	
Big interst	51,5-13	38,7-20,7	51,7-36	71,8-18,6	57,5-30,3		59,6-20,8	87-6,7	52,9-39,6	63,9-22,7	64,1-26	56-24,8	47-42,5	75,5-14,2

Postcommunist societies are described as the societies of distrust (Rose, 1996). The endurance of the single party rule with a strict adherence of an all-encompassing ideology made these societies suspicious of the 'real intentions' of the officials and other members of the society. Individuals had dual identities and lives: private and public. The rise of ethnic nationalism was one of the consequences of this distrust but it also reinforced this culture of distrust in these societies. On the other hand, strong democratic political system requires both horizontal (people trusting other people) and vertical (people trusting institutions) trust in a society.

The most trusted institution in the Western Balkan countries is the army. 89 per cent of the respondents in Bosnian Federation stated that they have great or quite a lot confidence in the army in the 1998 survey. 77, 3 percent of Croatian and 80,5 per cent of Republic of Srpska respondents expressed confidence in the army.

Confidence in political parties is the lowest in Western Balkan countries. Macedonia is the leading country in this respect. Only 9,3 percent



of the respondents in Macedonia stated that they had confidence in political parties in the 2001 survey. Albanian public has the greatest confidence in political parties. Although Bosnian Federation and the republic of Srpska respondents had a significant level of trust in political parties in 1998, there was a sharp decline in the level of political party trust in 2001 in both of these political entities. Western Balkan public's trust their parliament more than they trust political parties. However, the confidence in the parliament is still low in these countries. Macedonian respondents have the lowest level of confidence in the parliament, which is 14,7 percent in the 1998 survey and 6,9 percent in the 2001 survey. The civil service in these countries do not fare any better. Macedonian population again has the least confidence in the civil service. Only 17,7 percent of the respondents in the 1998 survey and 16,4 percent in the 2001 survey expressed confidence in the civil service in Macedonia.

The confidence in the European Union is the highest in Albania and the lowest in Serbia, Croatia and Macedonia. Around 80 per cent of the Albanians had confidence in the EU while only about 20 per cent of Serbians, 29,9 percent of Croatians and about 30 per cent of the Macedonians had confidence in the EU. Interpersonal trust is also regarded as providing a favorable environment for democracy in general. In western Balkan countries, the level of interpersonal trust is low. In 1996, only 7,5 percent of the Macedonian respondents said that most people can be trusted in society. The level of interpersonal trust is the highest in Montenegro, which is only around 30 percent.

Western Balkan publics had considerable level of confidence in the justice system in their countries. 73,5 percent of the Republic of Srpska population and 67,4 per cent of the Bosnian federation population had great or quiet a lot confidence in the Justice system in their countries. The police is viewed in more positive terms by these publics. 83,2 percent of the Bosian population, 71,9 percent of the Albanians and 69,5 percent of the republic of Srpska population had confidence in the police in the 1998 survey. Macedonian respondents had the least confidence in both the Justice system and the police. However, when we look at the level of political corruption

perceived by the public, there is a widespread belief that corruption is common in the public sector. Only 12,1 percent of the Macedonians stated that none or only a few of the public officials involved in corruption remaining respondents thinking that there is widespread corruption in the system. Only 19,9 percent of the Bosnian and Croatian publics think that the level of corruption in the public sector is negligible. Montenegrins are the most optimistic on this matter. 45 per cent of them stated that the number of public officials involved in corruption is not significant.

Western Balkan populations viewed the old communist regime in negative terms. 90,6 per cent of the Albanians thought that it was a bad political system. Montenegrins in the 1996 survey had the most favorable view of the old communist regime, only 31,2 percent viewing it as bad. However, the performance of the current political system also evaluated in negative terms in general. 87,5 percent of the Macedonians thought that the existing political system is a bad one. Monteregrins and the Albanians had the most favorable view of the existing political system.

### Tolerance of Different People and Groups

**Table 4. % of respondents who do not want a neighbor of a differen race or religion**

	Albania		Bosnia		Croatia		Macedonia		Montenegro		Serbia		Srpska	
	1998	2002	1998	2001	1996	1999	1998	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001	1998	2001
Neighbor-different race	7,8	30,4	19,1	8,6	8,4	19,5	26,4	19,0	16,7	19,1	15,0	6,1	35,2	22,5
Neighbor-Different Religion	25,0	---	18,4	---	14,3	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	46,0	---
Political Extremists	66,7	---	63,0	---	54,6	---	51,9	---	68,3	---	56,8	---	45,5	---
Least liked to demons	2,4	---	5,0	---	8,1	---	3,0	---	9,2	---	9,7	---	2,5	---
Respect for rights	---	36,4	---	37,1	---	56,7	---	31,6	---	38,1	---	45,8	---	29,5
Firm party leader	24,5	---	16,5	---	22,7	---	13,6	---	20,8	---	15,9	---	41,5	---

The existence of political tolerance in a society is regarded as one of the favorable conditions for the establishment of stable democratic institutions (Seligson, 2000). When asked about their opinion about which group they do not want as a neighbor, the respondents in Western Balkan countries mentioned people from a different race and religion and those who are political extremists among other groups. Among these three, political

extremists are mentioned by the largest number of people. 30,4 percent of Albanians in the 2002 survey stated that they would not like a person from different race as their neighbour. 35,2 percent of the republic of Srpska population and 26,4 percent of the Macedonians said so. 46,0 percent of the republic of Srpska respondents did not want a person from a different religion as their neighbor compared to only 18, 4 percent of the Bosnian Federation respondents who said so. Only a handful of respondents in every country stated that they would allow their least liked group to demonstrate. 2, 4 percent of the Albanian, 2,5 percent of the republic of Srpska population and 3,0 percent of the Macedonians would allow the least liked group to demonstrate. People who would allow the least liked group to teach or to hold office comprise an even a lower percentage. The respondents were also asked about their opinion if a party leader should stand firm for what he or she believes, even if others disagree or he or she should be prepared to cooperate with other groups, even if it means compromising some important beliefs. The highest percentage of respondents who wanted a firm party leader came from the republic of Srpska, which is 41,5 per cent while only 16,5 percent of the Bosnian Federation respondents wanted firm party leader. The republic of Srpska, Albanian and the Macedonian publics seemed to be less tolerant of different people while the Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian populations seemed to be more tolerant of differences.

### **Political Interest and Civic Engagement**

**Table 5. Interest in Politics and membership in civic associations**

	Albania		Bosnia		Croatia		Macedonia		Montenegro		Serbia		Srpska	
	1998	2002	1998	2001	1996	1999	1998	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001	1998	2001
How often follow politics		55,7		57,9		76,6		75,8		58,7		67,8		53,2
Politics Important	22,0	30,8	48,4	37,6	26,0	28,8	31,3	35,9	28,3	27,7	23,9	24,3	47,2	31,0
Member of a religious Organization		4,8		16,1		16,2		4,4		3,3		2,1		9,8
Member of a political party		13,1		6,0		2,8		5,7		5,0		3,0		21,0
Member of a Sport or recreat. Org.	5,1		11,6		10,6		6		4,6		5,8		17,8	
Member of a Art, music, educ. Org.	3,3				6,6		4,6		2,5		1,9		11,8	
Member of a labor union	1,6		7,5		6,0		4,9		2,5		1,9		16,0	
Member of an Environ. Organization	0,8		2,5		1,4		2,3		0,4		0,5		3,8	
Member of a professional Organization	4,9		4,6		6,1		4,3		3,8		2,8		14,0	
Member of a charitable organization	0,4		3,5		4,2		2,8		0,8		1,3		9,2	

While a significant part of the Western Balkan countries are interested in politics, they do not necessarily think that politics is important. Well above 50 per cent of the respondents in every country stated that they follow politics in the news at least several times in a week. While those who think that politics is important comprised about 20-30 percent of the respondents.

The level of active membership in civil societal organization is low in Western Balkans. Only a small number of individuals in each of these countries involved in civic associations actively, which is usually less than 4 percent. The most important exception is the republic of Srpska, which seem to have the most mobilized population in terms of active membership in organizations. 21 percent of the country's population is a member of political party compared to 6 percent in Bosnian Federation and only 2.8 percent in Croatia. 17,8 percent of the republic of Srpska population is an active member of sports or recreational organizations whereas only 4,6 percent of Montenegrins are actively involved in these kinds of organizations. The active

labor union membership is again the highest in the republic of Srpska and the lowest in Albania. The exceptional involvement of the respondents from the republic of Srpska reminds one of the Almond and Verba's (1963) warning that too much of a participatory political culture is not conducive to democratic stability. There should be a balance between the governmental authority and citizen involvement in a democracy.

## **Conclusions**

The political culture of Western Balkan countries show considerable support for democratic political regime. These publics think that democracy may have problems but it is better than other alternatives such as the rule by the army. The support for a political system ruled by the army or a strong leader is relatively low. However, western Balkan populations favor a political system ruled by the experts. A considerable part of these publics are not satisfied with the development of democracy in their countries and also think that democracies are indecisive and have too much squabbling.

When we turn to people's confidence in institutions and other people, we see considerable variation. While political parties and the civil service do not attract people's confidence, the parliament, the Justice system and the police are trusted by these publics more. The level of interpersonal trust is low in these countries.

Tolerance towards people from different religion, race and political opinion is rather low in these countries. Very few respondents expressed willingness to allow the least liked group to demonstrate, not to mention to teach or to hold office. People's interest in politics is rather high however they think that politics is not important. The active involvement in civil societal organizations is very low in Western Balkan countries.

Croatia is currently a negotiating candidate country, which is expected to join the EU first among the current candidate countries. Macedonia is an official candidate state while Albania is a potential candidate state. Macedonia

could enter the Union after Croatia depending on Turkey's performance. Freedom House ranks Croatia as a free country while Albania and Macedonia are ranked partly free democratizing countries.

### **Explaining the Macedonian Exception**

Macedonia, according to the survey data used in this paper, stood out as having the least democratic political culture in terms of a number of aspects such as support for democracy, confidence in institutions and people, political tolerance and the level of corruption in the system. However the current progress of Macedonia on democratization is accepted to be better than other Western Balkan countries except Croatia. We may conclude that political cultures of Western Balkan countries do not allow us to draw a rosy picture in terms of democratization in these countries. However, the example of Macedonia which seemed to have the least democratic political culture among these countries, suggest that democratization and the stability of democratic regime do not only depend on a country's political culture but rather were affected by a number of more easily changeable factors such as the pacts between elites and international intervention.

Macedonia with its multiethnic societal structure has been unique in avoiding major conflict. Since the Ohrid agreement in 2001 it also achieved considerable success in building a multiethnic democracy (partly free according to Freedom House ratings (Matovski, 2008). The relative success of Macedonia was not predetermined. After its independence from the SFRY in 1992, the republic of Macedonia faced severe domestic and international problems. There has not been a consensus among the political elites of the county. Macedonian majority and the Albanian and other minorities lived an uneasy life without much national identity. Politics was mired with mistrust between different ethnic groups. Economic and social problems of the country were not less serious (Perry, 2001). The European Union played an important role in easing the ethnic tension and encouraging the Slavic

Macedonian and Albanian leaders to sign the Ohrid Agreement in 2001 (Cohen, 2005, 367). Despite some progress on interethnic relations, there remains significant problems between two communities. For example, Cohen quotes an Albanian leader as stating that 'Neither Albanians nor the Macedonians are loyal to the state' (Cohen, 2005, 371). Without international intervention, these tensions could easily turn into violence and separation. Therefore, it can be argued that despite its shortcomings and the difficulties it may encounter (Hoffman, 2005, Pridham, 2008), the European Union policies have had considerable impact on the process of democratization in Western Balkan countries and particularly in Macedonia. Therefore, we need to look at other explanations such as the impact of international environment and the role of elites in explaining the relative success of Macedonia.

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